

ENGLISH MONTHLY ISSUE 97 JANUARY 2021

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



The greatest minus point in an individual is arrogance,
while the greatest plus point is modesty.

A MAGAZINE FOR THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

Spirit of Islam monthly...

- ▶ Presents Islam, the religion of nature, in the contemporary idiom to help Muslims rediscover Islam from the original sources
- ▶ Explains Creation plan of God for humankind
- ▶ Enlightens people on the subject of global peace
- ▶ Addresses contemporary issues
- ▶ Assists the readers to deal with life's challenges
- ▶ Offers Spirituality to a wider circle of spiritual seekers
- ▶ Fosters greater communal harmony through religious understanding

United in prayers
SOI Editorial Committee

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 97 JANUARY 2021

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NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE



Dear Readers,

Greetings of Peace!

This is the beginning of the ninth year of the publication of *Spirit of Islam*. We are grateful to God for its continuity in the face of many challenges, the most trying one being the pandemic which made us convert this magazine into an e-magazine.

I feel honoured for the opportunity to share my takeaways from this magazine as a part of the editorial committee.

An aspect of *Spirit of Islam* that fascinates me is that many of its articles are, as if, a commentary on a powerful verse in the Quran: "Those who believe love God most." (2: 165) In his book '*The Vision of Islam*', Maulana Wahiduddin Khan writes that the purpose of religion, its rituals, moral exhortations and injunctions, is for a person to develop a relationship of strong affection with his Creator who fashioned him, brought him into existence and sustains him throughout life. This personal bond with God is brought to life in the pages of this journal.

There are innumerable journals on science, religion and humanities. *Spirit of Islam* is very special in that it fills a void, one so prominent these days. This is a void left deep within the soul that hasn't yet recognized its Creator and has given the special space in its heart meant for the Creator to something other than the Creator, only to be disappointed. *Spirit of Islam* seeks to redirect the attention of the readers to their Creator. It helps them reflect on the wisdom enshrined in God's religion and inspires them to have an experience of nearness to Him. The selection of articles evokes love and awe for the Creator. The feelings that overwhelm a person when he remembers his Lord in solitude find expression in the words of the journal. The paramount feature of *Spirit of Islam* is that it presents the concept of God not as an abstract idea, but as a living force, guiding one through the variety of life's experiences.

There is a certain scientific spirit that the journal strives to instil in the believers. An article that struck me from the December 2020 issue explains that if a religious community accepts or rejects a person's opinions depending on his affinity to its group, it signals its close-mindedness and decline. Believers must cultivate the scientific temperament, which is to objectively ascertain the merit of a person's

point of view and accept it even if he doesn't belong to one's community. Scientists acknowledge the shortcomings of a theory once another advanced theory is proposed to explain the same set of phenomena, irrespective of the reverence in which the previous theory was held.

Spirit of Islam is infused with practical wisdom for life, drawn from the Quran and the life of the Prophet. The benefits of virtues such as peace, patience and tolerance are expounded with such logical reasoning that one cannot but adhere to them. The November 2020 issue teaches: "Whenever you start some work, you will have to face complaints from others. If you give importance to every complaint and hurt caused to you, you will start fighting with people. You will leave aside your real task, being so engrossed in opposing them." In one Q&A section, Maulana incisively says that tension is a natural occurrence, just as the

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rain. When it rains, you don't demand that it stop raining, rather you use an umbrella. When faced with stress, find a solution to it instead of becoming anxious.

An aspect highlighted in almost every issue is how people from different religious backgrounds are assisting one another. An example cited by the Maulana dismantles the rhetoric on "clash of civilizations" of Islam and the West. The pioneering work of western scientists in uncovering the laws of nature and making astonishing discoveries about the universe offers great support to Islam. They make the majesty and intelligence of the Creator mentioned in the Quran so understandable! If Muslims acknowledge the

role of those involved in bringing about this scientific age, they would look upon them as brothers in humanity's journey towards God.

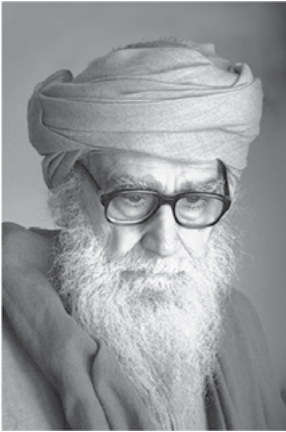
Dear readers, we wish that this Year 2021 be a year to recover from the losses the world has incurred due to the pandemic. Let us sort out our lives with changes in our attitudes towards the blessings of God and become responsible citizens of this planet Earth.

May we be enlightened with knowledge and wisdom to mould our lives according to the creation plan of God!

Thank you ☐

Dr. Maria Khan
Editorial Committee

FROM MAULANA'S DESK



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognized as one of its most influential Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

CREATION FOR WHAT?

ON the night of January 3, 2006, I was at my residence (C-29, Nizamuddin West) in New Delhi. In the last quarter of the night I had a dream. In my dream, the then President of the USA, George Bush Jr. came to me and requested me to teach his son. After this, I found myself in a big house where I went to a room on the upper floor. George Bush's son was in the room. He was around 12 years old. He came up to me and asked, "Why was man created?"

When I woke up I reflected on the dream. I realized that this was a question for the whole of humankind. Today, the whole of humankind, consciously or unconsciously, is facing this dilemma. Every person wants to know what the real purpose of his life is. What is life? What is death? What is a person's status in this vast universe? Which path should man take to reach the desired destination?

The modern world is a unique era in human history. People are born with an ocean of desires, hopes and wishes. Earlier, man could only express these desires in the form of wondrous tales. But despite lifelong efforts to fulfill these desires, man has been unable to achieve them. He

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2020, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

Despite all these luxuries and comforts, as far as true joy is concerned, man has been unable to attain it. Today, you can purchase almost anything in the markets of the world, but you cannot buy peace and happiness anywhere.

dies only in a state of despair and frustration. In the 'modern world', it appears that the objects designed to fulfill man's desires have grown enormously in number and are widely available. In the past, man dreamt of winged chariots, but now this has become a reality in the form of aeroplanes. The means of global communications that man imagined as legendary pigeons are now in everyday use in the form of modern wireless connectivity. The same transformation has occurred in almost every aspect of life. The comforts and luxuries that people could only imagine before are now readily available. Almost all of ancient man's dreams seem to have become a reality.

Despite all these luxuries and comforts, as far as true joy is concerned, man has been unable to attain it. The birds chirping in the trees are joyful, but man is joyless. Today, you can purchase almost anything in the markets of the world, but you cannot buy peace and happiness anywhere.

There is only one reason for this tragic state of affairs. And that is, trying to understand life keeping only the pre-death period of life in mind. Whereas, the reality is that there is a post-death period of life and without taking into account this eternal period, the meaning of life cannot be understood satisfactorily.

According to the creation plan of God, human life is divided into two phases: a relatively short, pre-death phase, and a post-death eternal phase of life. The pre-death period of man's life is the period for sowing seeds, as it were. The post-death period of man's life is the period for harvesting the fruit. According to the law of this world fruits cannot grow without sowing seeds. And without fruits, farming is meaningless. Without knowing this fundamental aspect of life, it is impossible to find a satisfactory explanation for it. □

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Prof. Farida Khanam is an author, editor, translator, public speaker and former professor of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Among her books are 'A Simple Guide to Sufism' and 'A Study of World's Major Religions'. She has translated into English many books authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently the chairperson of CPS International, she is a regular contributor of articles to various publications. Prof. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. She can be reached at hub@thespiritofislam.org

LESSONS FROM 2020

THE year 2020 is not the year that many people would choose to remember. For many, the whole year passed as a blur. For the most part of the year, people all over the world confined themselves to their homes. And then for many of us, this has been the year that brought in pains of illness, death and calamity. We saw our dear ones suffering and we could not offer any help. Sometimes, we suffered and there was no one to offer words of consolation or shoulders to rest our heads on. The coronavirus pandemic forced us to stay separated.

What possible lessons could we glean from such an astoundingly tragic year? The answer, in fact, is not far to seek. Viktor E. Frankl (1905-1997) describes the most enduring aspect of human beings in his groundbreaking work thus:

"Life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable. And this in turn presupposes the human capacity to creatively turn life's negative aspects into something positive or constructive. In other words, what matters is to make the best of any given situation." (Man's Search for Meaning)

If we draw positive lessons from negative experiences, and if we chalk out a proper course of life after passing through a severe affliction, then it would be correct to say that we have made the best use of the situation. When coronavirus began spreading, the best minds were caught unawares. With all claims of subjugating nature to our needs, we had no answer to this new trick of nature. We came to realize just

how formidable nature is! Thus, the first lesson for us, is to know our position vis-à-vis nature. When every country is fortifying its military strength to overpower other countries, it is more important that all nations band themselves together to work for the betterment of humankind.

This year also reminds us that all human beings are part of one family. No member can remain safe if other members of his family are in danger. In the face of unprecedented challenges, the whole human family must stand together to find a way out. The joint venture of the scientific community backed by corporate funds and political will, and prayers of billions of people to find a cure for the coronavirus infection are a testimony of this fact.

If we draw positive lessons from negative experiences, and if we chalk out a proper course of life after passing through a severe affliction, then it would be correct to say that we have made the best use of the situation.

This pandemic signals a historic moment. Like every other aspect of our lives, religion too has been fundamentally affected by it. The religions promulgated by the priestly class as just a set of strict rituals and incantations has proven to be null and void. It was pure narrow-mindedness to differentiate between people as 'us' and 'them'. Every religious community claims to be the chosen people of God. This pandemic proved that all are equal before God. The authors Swami Agnivesh and Valson Thampu made an excellent point in an article published in *The Indian Express* dated June 30, 2020:

'It looks as though the COVID pandemic has come to emancipate us from this subhuman religiosity. (...).The virus has undermined every aspect of priest-driven religiosity. (...). 'Post'-COVID, religion must be God-centered and priest-free, unburdened with places of worship. Worship, free from rituals, dogmas, deception and priestly hypocrisy, must nourish life.'

The pandemic had brought to the fore the essential aspect of religion. Religion should be based on reason, spirituality, universal brotherhood and welfare of humankind. There is no favouritism in religions.

For humankind to survive and thrive on this planet, the most important need is 'peace'. We need peace between human beings and peace between humans and nature. We need to treat with utmost care every object of the universe. Every aspect of nature plays an integral part in keeping this planet human-friendly. In our zeal for luxurious life and

entertainment, we should not forget that our habits are harming the eco-system. It is time to live responsibly.

Through the magazine *Spirit of Islam (SOI)*, we have been emphasizing on the necessity of peace and brotherhood. It is one of the integral aspects of *SOI* to present religion in its truest and unadulterated form. *SOI* highlights the spectacular achievements in the field of science and technology that widen the canvas of God-realization. *SOI* reminds us to be grateful for the amazing planet Earth with its life-support system. *SOI* leads one on the journey of the realization of God, our Supreme Benefactor. □

Prof. Farida Khanam

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Maturity is the ability to live in peace with things one cannot change.

GOD-FEARING SPEECH

Prophetic Model of Speaking

THE Prophet Muhammad used to be very clear in his speech. He would utter words slowly, in a careful and considered tone. He spoke distinctly, clearly and in a way that everyone could understand. This is how the Prophet's widow Aisha described her late husband's manner of speech to those who had not heard him:

"The Prophet would not speak fast as you people do. He used to pause in between sentences, giving people time to memorize what he had said." (*Zad al-Ma'ad* by Ibn al-Qayyim)

She also said that the Prophet used to talk in such a way that one could have counted his words had one so desired. The Prophet never uttered any vulgar expressions. He never attempted to do so. He also avoided speaking loudly in marketplaces so as not to disturb the people. When he had to speak about the unpleasant aspect of something, he used to express it with an allegory. When it was necessary, he would repeat the important sentences three times during his speech.

A believer is restrained in his speech; he thinks before he speaks; he weighs his words carefully before presenting his ideas to his listeners. Fear of God takes away his loquacity.

The Prophet's manner of speech should act as a model for all believers. Who is a believer? He is one who fears God, knows that the angels are recording his every word. Aware of the fact that he will have to answer to God for

everything he says, he assumes a deep sense of responsibility. When he speaks, it is as if he is addressing a divine and angelic company. He is restrained in his speech; he thinks before he speaks; he weighs his words carefully before presenting his ideas to his listeners. Fear of God takes away his loquacity. Fear of the Hereafter, and of being answerable to God for his words, dampen his oratorical zeal.

A person beset by intense feelings of this nature adopts a serious, sober manner of address, like that of the Prophet as described by his wife Aisha. □



CORRECTING PEOPLE'S MISTAKES

The Prophetic Approach

IT has been recorded in the books of *Hadith* (compilation of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet) that the Prophet was once present at the *Masjid-an-Nabawi* (Prophet's Mosque) in Madinah along with some of his Companions when a Bedouin—an uncouth tribesman from the desert, entered the mosque and began urinating in a corner. The Prophet's Companions rushed to stop him forcibly and were about to beat him, but the Prophet forbade them to do so. When the man had finished urinating, the Prophet merely asked his Companions to wash the place clean with a bucket of water. The Prophet then called the Bedouin and explained to him, "Mosques are intended solely for worshipping and remembering God. It is not proper to urinate or defecate in a mosque."

The Bedouin was impressed by the gentleness of this admonition, considering how outrageous his behaviour had been. If, prior to this, his rusticity had been what conditioned his behaviour, now it was his conscience which gained the upper hand. With his conscience thoroughly awakened, he went back to his tribe. He went on telling everyone about how he had desecrated the mosque in Madinah without the Prophet rebuking him or venting his anger upon him. He explained over and over again how all the Prophet had done was to have the despoiled spot washed with water.

When the Prophet Muhammad was presented in such a light by the Bedouin, it paved the way for the whole of his tribe to enter the fold of Islam. Only one member of the tribe had come to the mosque and experienced the gentleness of the Prophet at a time when he was provoked. It resulted in all the members of the tribe coming to the mosque to worship the one God in all humility and submission.

This is an incident from the time of the Prophet. Here are a few incidents from recent history. In 1831 Syed Ahmad Shaheed Bareilvi heard the rumour that certain mosques were being used as stables for the horses of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. Without waiting for confirmation of this rumour and without making any further investigations of his own he gathered a number of Muslims and headed to Punjab to clash with the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Most of his army was killed or captured, while he was beheaded. According to one account, the earth of Punjab was soaked with Muslim blood.

Events took a similar turn in 1857 when it was rumoured that the British rulers had supplied Muslim soldiers with cartridges greased with pig fat (lard), and that English soldiers had desecrated a mosque by entering it on horseback. The immediate outcome was a mutiny, but the ultimate result of the Muslims' reaction to this provocation was that they were massacred in tens of thousands in clashes with the army. And even after the blood of such huge numbers of Muslims had been spilled, the situation, far from improving, went from bad to worse.

For more than two hundred years, Muslim blood has been flowing in torrents but no positive outcome of this can be witnessed.

This process of clash and confrontation, which began in those early days, has continued to this day. Muslim blood has been shed everywhere. If a non-Muslim throws colour on the wall of a mosque on the festival of Holi; if slogans are raised in front of a mosque; if a procession passes in front of a mosque with a band playing music at high volume; or if there is any other such incident which appears to show disrespect to Islam, Muslims are provoked into fighting. This fighting then develops into riots, and the police resort to

firing. Large numbers of people are killed. According to the account of such incidents written by Muslims, Muslim blood could be seen flowing in the streets.

Now let us reflect upon this state of affairs. What is the use of this hot-headedness? Does it induce people to discover their Creator and His creation plan for them? Does it turn the opponents of Islam into friends? Does it bring other communities to respect the Islamic faith?

Obviously, this is not the case. For more than two hundred years, Muslim blood has been flowing in torrents, but no positive outcome of this can be witnessed.

Why has the outcome been so far short of Muslims' expectations? How is it that the blood of latter-day generations has not been able to achieve as much as a bucket of water dispensed in the time of the Prophet? It is because the water poured by the Prophet was the water of love, whereas the blood of present-day Muslims has been shed in hatred. While the Prophet showered on people the water of forgiveness, good wishes, sympathy, love and kindness, the Muslims of today are pouring upon people the blood of hatred, anger, reaction and provocation. This is the difference which accounts for the greater success of the first phase of Islam during which community after community and tribe

after tribe appreciated the religion of Islam. From this early position of predominance, Muslims have, in the modern world, been relegated everywhere to a position of inferiority. This in spite of the existence of more than a billion Muslims.

Everyone at birth is endowed with a conscience and an ego. These faculties lie dormant. If you arouse the conscience of your opponent, you will benefit in your relations with him, because it will be the human part of his personality which will come into play. But if you arouse his ego, it will be the animal part of his personality with which you shall have to deal.

The Prophet always tried to arouse the human part of a man. Moreover, he behaved well not only towards the well-behaved, but also towards the ill-behaved. As a result, the dormant human nature in people would be awakened and would remain so throughout their lives.

The present-day Muslims do not practise this *Sunnah* (practical model) of the Prophet—that is to mete out good treatment in return for ill-treatment. Muslims tend to give in to feelings of reaction. This achieves nothing. It only arouses the ego of the rival. When they should be offering God's creatures the "water of love", they deluge them instead in the "blood of hatred." In this garden of God, it is only the thorns which will fall to the lot of such people. They can never come into possession of the flowers. This is one of the immutable laws of nature. □

The Prophet always tried to arouse the human part of a man. He behaved well not only towards the well-behaved, but also towards the ill-behaved. Thus, the dormant human nature in people would be awakened and would remain so throughout their lives.



ISLAMIC MEDITATION

A Reason-based Approach

THE concept of meditation is found in one form or the other in every religion. We present below the concept of meditation in Islam whose goal is God-realization.

The ultimate reality in Islam is God. God is the Creator of man. Man's purpose in life is to realize God and worship Him.

According to Islam, God is separate from man. He is self-existent. Man's goal in life is to try to seek this separate and permanent God at the level of consciousness.

The method of meditation practised in *Sufism* (mysticism) is generally regarded as representing the method of meditation in Islam. However, this is not entirely true.

The appropriate words for meditation in Islam are contemplation, reflection and the drawing of spiritual lessons from material events and nature. Thus the basis of meditation in Islam is thinking and reflection. The entire cosmos becomes an object of reflection, that is to say, the Creator is realized through pondering over His creations. This verse of the Quran provides an apt illustration of Islamic meditation:

God's universe provides an introduction to God. The existence of creation speaks of the existence of the Creator. The vastness of space speaks of the unfathomably vast power of God.

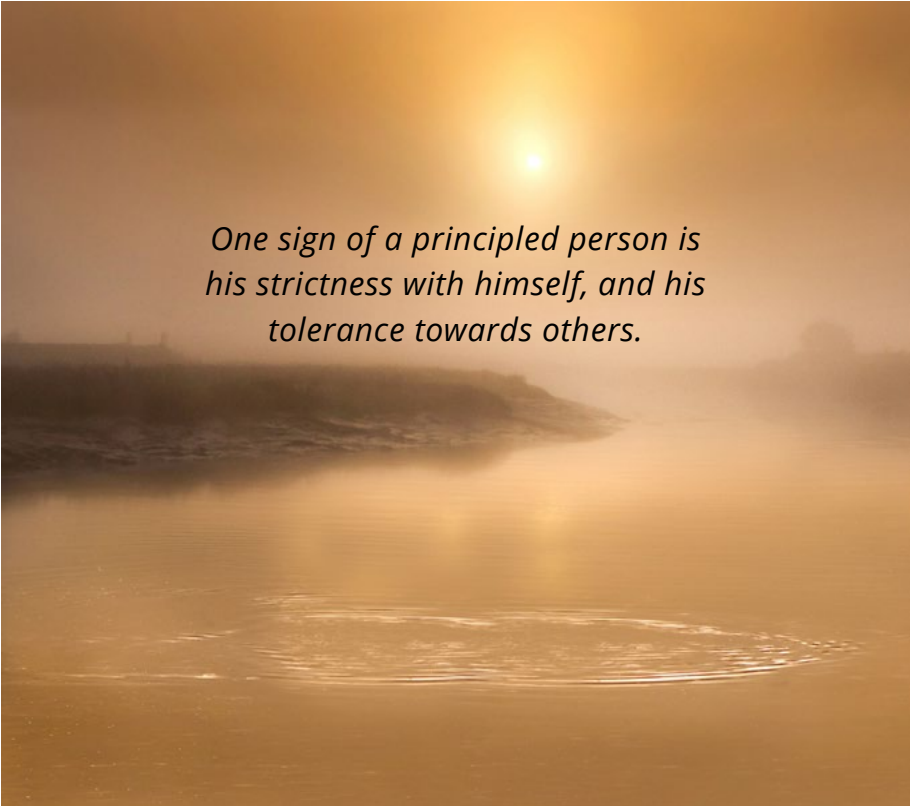
"There are signs in the creation of the heavens and the Earth, and in the alternation of night and day for people of understanding; who remember God while standing, sitting and [lying] on their sides, and who ponder over the creation of the heavens and the Earth, saying, 'Lord, You have not created all this without purpose. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire'. (3: 190-191)

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (d. AD 652), a Companion of the Prophet says: "Even when a bird was seen flying in the air, the Prophet would draw a lesson and teach us".

God's universe provides an introduction to God. The existence of creation speaks of the existence of the Creator. The vastness of space speaks of the unfathomably vast power of God. The co-existence of various parts of the universe is an indication of the successful planning of God. The universe in continuous action is an indication that the Lord

of the universe is a living being. The meaningfulness of the universe is an expression of the meaningfulness of God's being.

The loftiness of the mountains, the brilliance of the sun, the flowing of the river and the blowing of the wind are signs of God's majesty. From the chirping of the birds to the galaxies and black holes in space, all declare the glory of God. Meditation is to ponder over these divine manifestations and attributes in order to get to know them in their depths, because it is through these signs that God can be realized. This is Islamic meditation. □

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange glow. The water is calm, with some ripples in the foreground. The sky is a mix of orange and yellow. The quote is centered over the image.

*One sign of a principled person is
his strictness with himself, and his
tolerance towards others.*

TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



A MISPLACED CALL FOR VIOLENCE

A PERUSAL of the Quran followed by a study of latter-day Muslim history will reveal a blatant contradiction between the two—that of principle and practice. Where recent developments in some Muslim countries bespeak the culture of war; the Quran, on the contrary, is imbued with the spirit of tolerance. Its culture is not that of war, but of mercy.

At the very beginning of the Quran, the first invocation reads: “In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.” Throughout the Quran, God’s name is thus invoked no less than 113 times. Moreover, the Quran states that the prophets were sent to the world ‘as a mercy to all humankind’ (21: 107).

The word ‘*jihad*’ has nowhere been used in the Quran to mean war in the sense of launching an offensive. It is used rather to mean ‘struggle’. The action most consistently called for in the Quran is the exercise of patience. Yet today, the ‘*Muslim Mujahideen*’ under unfavourable conditions have equated “God is Great” with “War is Great.” For them, the greatest reward is to be able to wield a Kalashnikov rifle.

In the light of the ongoing conflict, we must ask why so great a contradiction has arisen between the principles of Islam and the practices of Muslims. At least one root cause may be traced to historical exigency.

Since time immemorial, military commanders have been accorded positions of great eminence in the annals of history. It is a universal phenomenon that the hero is idolized even in times of peace and becomes a model for the people. The collection of biographies in *Plutarch's Lives* is one such example. Plutarch (c. CE 46-119) immortalized the Greek and Roman warriors through celebration and romanticization of their military strength and conquests in his work. It is this placing of heroism in the militaristic context which has been the greatest underlying factor in the undue stress laid on war in the latter phase of Islamic history. With the automatic accord in Muslim society of a place of honour and importance to the heroes of the battlefield, annalists' subsequent compilations of Islamic history have tended to read like an uninterrupted series of military expeditions and conquests.

The word 'jihad' has nowhere been used in the Quran to mean war in the sense of launching an offensive. It is used rather to mean 'struggle'.

These early chronicles having set the precedent, subsequent writings on Islamic history followed the same pattern of emphasis on militarism. The Prophet's biographies were called '*maghazi*', that is '*The Battles Fought by the Prophet*,' yet the Prophet of Islam in fact did battle only three times in his entire life, and the period of his involvement in these battles did not total more than one and half days. He fought, let it be said, in self-defence, when hemmed in by aggressors, and he simply had no option. But historians—flying in the face of fact—have converted his whole life into one of confrontation and war.

We must keep in mind that Prophet Muhammad was born at a time when an atmosphere of militancy prevailed in Arab society, nay in the entire world wherever man inhabited. Man, as yet, knew no other method to resolve differences. It was quite customary to indulge in armed conflict for differences over land, water, cattle, creed, and many other trivial or profound reasons. There being, in their view, no other path to justice. But the Prophet always opted for the avoidance of conflict. In fact, he is the first historical figure to employ peaceful methods to resolve differences. For instance, in the Battle of the Trench (CE 627), the Prophet advised his Companions to dig a trench between them and their adversaries, thus preventing a head-on clash.

Another well-known instance of the Prophet's dislike for hostilities is the Hudaibiya Peace Treaty, which made more concessions to the opponents than to his own people. In the case of the conquest of

Makkah, he avoided a battle altogether by making a rapid entry into the city with ten thousand Muslims—a number large enough to awe his enemies into submission.

In this way, on all occasions, the Prophet endeavoured to achieve his objectives by peaceful rather than by war-like means. It is, therefore, unconscionable that in later biographical writing, all the events of his life have been arranged under the heading of 'battles'. How he managed to avert the cataclysms of war has not been dealt with in any of the works, which purportedly depict his life.

Ibn Khaldun, the celebrated 14th century historian, was the first to lay down definite rules for the study and writing of history and sociology. He followed the revolutionary course of attempting to present history as a chronicle of events centering on the common man rather than on kings, their generals and the battles they fought. But since the heroes of war were already entrenched as the idols of society, the caravan of writers and historians continued to follow the same well-worn path as

The Prophet always opted for avoidance of conflict. In fact, he is the first historical figure to employ peaceful methods to resolve differences.

had been trodden prior to Ibn Khaldun. When people have come to regard war heroes as the greatest of men, it is but natural that it is the events of the battlefield, which will be given the greatest prominence in works of history. All other events will either be relegated to the background or omitted altogether.

In the later phase of Islam, there came into existence a powerful group of *Sufis* (mystics)—many of them great men, who exerted their influence on a multitude of people, their goal being to put an end to this contradiction between the tenets of Islam and Muslim conduct. They at least wanted to strike a balance between the two. But the *Sufis* failed in this, the principal reason being that they expressed themselves in terms of dreams and inspirations. The militant interpretation of Islam, on the contrary, was ostensibly based on history and knowledge. Dreams and personal realizations could, therefore, never adequately counter what had come to be regarded as hard fact. Objective reasoning cannot be overcome by subjective postulations, and so the *Sufis* failed to establish the equilibrium between precept and practice, which they so ardently desired.

In the past when the sword was the only weapon of war, militancy did not lead to the mass-scale loss of life and property as modern

warfare brings in its wake. In former times, fighting was confined to the battlefield. The only sufferers were those engaged in the battle. But today, the spear and sword have been replaced by nuclear bombs and devastating long-range missiles, so that killing and destruction take place on a horrendous scale. It is the entire human settlement, which has now become the global arena of war. Even the air we breathe and the water we drink are left polluted in the aftermath of war.

Hence, people have come to find Islam outdated and irrelevant precisely because of its militant interpretation. Demands for a reform in Islam are on the increase, as the 'old' version of Islam cannot apparently keep pace with the modern world.

But, in reality, what is needed is not reformation, but revival. What is needed is to discard as superficial and erroneous the militant and political interpretation of Islam, and to adopt the original version of Islam based on peace, mercy and the love of humankind.

What is needed now is to discard as superficial and erroneous the militant and political interpretation of Islam, and to adopt the original version of Islam based on peace, mercy and the love of humankind.

The so-called *Muslim Mujahideen* have been exhorting their co-religionists to do battle all over the world. But the Quran says: 'God calls man to the home of peace.' (10: 25) It is up to right-thinking people everywhere to disregard the call of the *Mujahideen*, and to start seeing and accepting Islam as it is truly represented by the Quran. □



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LOOKING BEYOND THE SELF

True Service to Humanity

WHEN the financial straits of one's family spur one to earn money, all one has in mind is to solve the family problems by means of the money earned. Problems concerning the outside world do not matter. Even when more money becomes available than the family actually needs, the excess wealth is considered a possession of the family to spend.

The requirements of the poor and the needy—of relatives and acquaintances—do not take precedence. It does not seem a good idea to spend this hard-earned wealth on catering to the requirements of others.

As the affairs of the family had been the initial stimulus, it is but natural that the problems of the family should be given prime importance. In comparison, all else pales into insignificance.

The intention of the divine message is to save man from eternal doom and to show him the straight path which makes him worthy of Paradise. A divine mission takes into account all communities. It derives its inspiration from God rather than from the community to which it belongs.

In similar vein, Islamic movements and institutions in the present day have received their inspiration from the immediate issues facing the Muslim world. Naturally their outlook and activities have their limitations. Such communal motivation, in fact, accounts for their not attaching sufficient importance to communicating the message of Islam to their fellow beings. Islam, being a religion of peace, it is the responsibility of the Muslims to share the pristine teachings of Islam with the world at large.


The narrow, confined attitude which is reflected in the example of the family is common to the attitude adopted by Islamic movements, which derived their inspiration from their community. Safeguarding the interests and seeking domination of their own community were the issues around which their activities revolved.

Any national movement invariably thinks in terms of the promotion of the interests of its own nation, rather than in terms of the welfare of other nations. All other issues outside the realm of its own community are relegated to a secondary position.

The intention of the divine message is to save man from eternal doom and to show him the straight path which makes him worthy of Paradise. Far from mere concern for one's community, a divine mission takes into account all communities. It derives its inspiration from God rather than from the community to which it belongs.

What makes this matter considerably grave is the fact that the Prophet of Islam was the last of the prophets, and, therefore, Muslims are now the trustees of his prophetic mission. It is for them to perform the task for which the prophets were sent by God. When we keep this in mind, the communication of the divine message to every human being becomes the prime responsibility of every Muslim.

Failure to perform this task, which is of the utmost importance, is certain to incur the wrath of God. No amount of good deeds can atone for this offence. □



*Patience is not inaction. It is the
virtue needed for systematic
and planned action.*

RIGHT-THINKING

Looking at the Brighter Aspect

THE Mojave Desert in California is a place of dust, fierce winds and unbearable heat. The Mexican Indians who inhabit this area lead a life apart and cannot speak in English. Into this situation came Thelma Thompson, a young American soldier's wife. She had decided to start living in a village at the edge of the desert to be near her husband who was stationed, during World War II, at an army training camp in the vicinity.

Within a very short time she began to feel that the environment was too hostile, particularly because of the climate and the impossibility of making contact with the local people, thanks to the language barrier. And it did not help to have her husband away most of the time on military manoeuvres. Finally, she wrote to tell her parents that she would be coming back home. The reply she received from her father consisted of just two lines: "Two men looked out from prison bars, one saw mud, and the other saw stars."

She read the couplet over and over, then, feeling ashamed of her decision to leave, she made up her mind to see 'the stars' in her situation, rather than the 'mud.' It was a decision which was to alter her entire life. Making friends with the natives, she learned their language and culture, and began to see desert life in a new light. She watched the magnificent desert sunsets, and studied the cacti, the yuccas, the scrub bushes and the joshua and other trees growing. She began reflecting upon nature's fascinating diversity. She even hunted for sea-shells that had been left there millions of years ago when the sands of the desert had been an ocean floor.

Gradually the region began to exercise such a fascination over her mind that both she and her husband decided to stay on after he had retired from military service. She later wrote a novel '*Bright Ramparts*' which expressed all the excitement she had felt over her new experiences and discoveries. Her book proved very popular and ran to several editions.

A wretched experience had been transformed into an exciting adventure. But how exactly had this transformation taken place? Neither the desert, nor the natives, nor any other element in the situation had changed. Whatever change had taken place was inside the mind and heart of Thelma Thompson. Her own change of attitude had given her a new life. □



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FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

There is a tree beside my house. I call it the 'Spiritual Tree'. I derive spiritual inspiration from it. A tree is an ever-growing being that was initially a seed possessing the potential of becoming a full-grown tree. A seed takes food from the universe around it and then grows into a tree. The same is true with spirituality, the desire for which is intrinsic to, and an integral part of, the very nature of every human being. To realize this spirituality, man must derive spiritual food from the universe around him. A tree converts carbon-dioxide into oxygen; a spiritual person is one who can take positive lessons from negative situations. From this perspective, a tree is an embodiment of a spiritual personality. —Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



A POSITIVE ASPECT OF ILLNESS

IN a letter written anonymously to the *American Journal of Medicine*, a doctor gives a detailed account of a woman patient's protracted illness when all efforts towards her recovery had failed. He tells of how tired she had become of her life, and of how he brought that life to an end: "I put a patient suffering from terminal cancer to sleep forever to end her misery."

Man considers death to be the end of life. But it is, in reality, the event which launches man on his migration from the temporary to the eternal life. It is the decisive moment when man, after the expiry of his time of trial, is faced with the results. In the words of a *Hadith*, it is the Great Day of Reckoning, when man will appear before his Maker to be judged.

***Illness is a warning.
It is nature's alarm
that awakens the
slumbering individual
to the necessity of
preparing in advance
for what is to come.***

There is no doubt that illness is a great affliction. But if looked at as a reality of life, it should be regarded as more of a blessing. This is because it brings one a timely reminder that the final stage of life is near at hand. It

also alerts one to any laxity of which one may have been guilty. It is, therefore, nature's alarm that awakens the slumbering individual to the necessity of preparing in advance for what is to come. Illness, in that sense, is a warning. But the ignorant ones, who take illness purely as an affliction, remain unaware to the very last, of the lesson that it is designed to bring them. ❏

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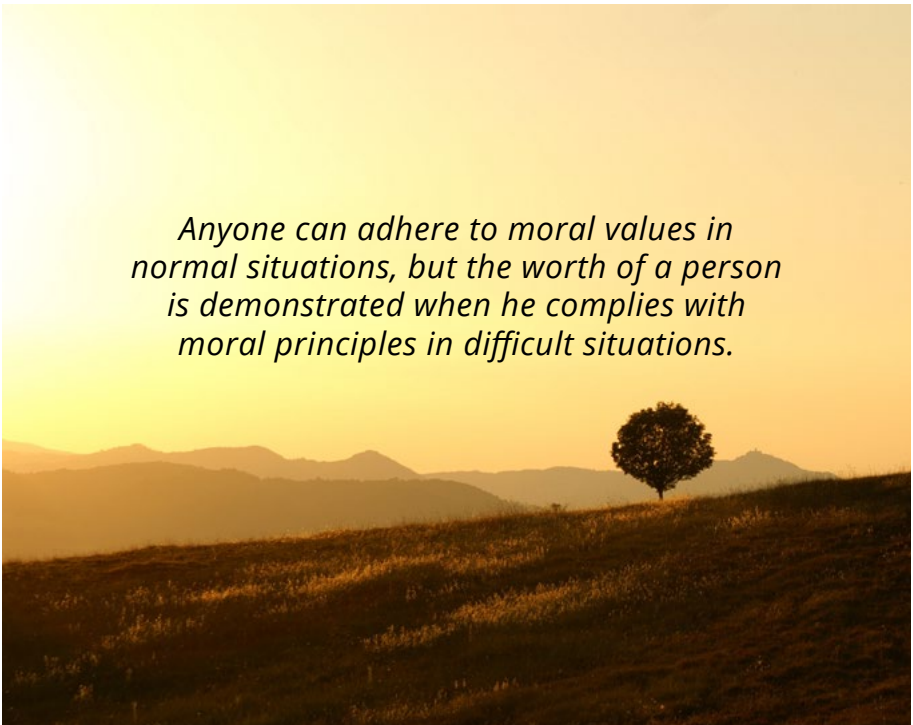
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Anyone can adhere to moral values in normal situations, but the worth of a person is demonstrated when he complies with moral principles in difficult situations.



SECRET TO A THRIVING SOCIETY

Duty-Consciousness, Not Right-Consciousness

IT is a common observation to find human beings fighting tooth and nail for their rights. Much of the strife is a result of man's belief that he is being denied his rights. Then follows his quest for regaining them. Countless hours and days are wasted and property lost or destroyed in strikes and agitations against the government or the management in demand of their rights. The general trend has everybody demanding for their rights, for their share, for fairness in everything in life.

Islam wants us to build a duty-conscious, rather than a rights-conscious society. There is a *Hadith* of the Prophet that says: A believer should be duty-conscious and as far as his rights are concerned he should ask of them from God. (*Sahih-al-Bukhari*)

It is a believer's duty to give to others what is due from him and as far as his rights are concerned he should ask for them only from God.

Instead of being rights-conscious, one should be duty-conscious.

It is a believer's duty to give to others what is due from him and as far as his rights are concerned he should ask for them only from God. Instead of being rights-conscious, one should be duty-conscious.

One person's duty is another's right. So, if we all follow the principle of being duty-conscious, automatically our rights will be taken care of. Nevertheless, complete justice and total fairness are not possible in this imperfect world. God has promised that only in the Hereafter, where He will give to every person every atom's worth of what is due to him. Thus, we must continue to do our duty faithfully seeking God's pleasure and should demand our rights in this world only from God.

One should live a responsible social life. One should be infused with the spirit of giving and sharing instead of wanting to have all for oneself. One should be so imbued with the sentiment to help his fellow beings as to sacrifice one's right to help someone in need. □



THE VALUE OF SUPPLICATION (*DUA*)

The True Status of Man

SUPPLICATION (*Dua*) is the most powerful weapon in the hands of a believer. It bestows upon the believer courage and hope. It offers refuge from the negative experiences in this world.

Here are some sayings of the Prophet Muhammad concerning supplication collected from authentic books containing the sayings and deeds of the Prophet.

- Supplication—that is what worship is.
- It is the essence of worship.
- God becomes displeased with one who does not beseech Him.
- Nothing, save supplication can avert fate.
- As long as one does not ask for an abomination, or for the severing of some bond of kinship, God will grant one whatever one asks Him for, or else with hold evil from the supplicant in like degree.
- There is nothing dearer to God than supplication.
- Call on God asking Him of His bounty, for the Lord loves to be called upon.
- It helps with regard to what has happened, and what has not happened. Have recourse to supplication then, you servants of God.
- Supplication is a means of asking God for the fulfillment of all our needs no matter how mundane or insignificant, even if it be only a shoe lace.

Supplication is a means of asking God for the fulfillment of all our needs no matter how mundane or insignificant, even if it be a shoe lace.

It is an acknowledgement of the supplicant's absolute helplessness on the one hand, as opposed to God's absolute power on the other. The act of beseeching God puts man in his true place, and also gives God His rightful station. Asking God, then is to accept things as they are. It is the supreme degree of realism, and the awareness of reality, in turn, is the most excellent of all actions. For, in this world, where man has been given a choice between belief and disbelief, between acknowledgement and denial, there is nothing greater than acceptance of the true nature of things. □

TRAINING IN RESILIENCE

Learning from Trees

THE tree-trunk forms one half of a tree and the roots the other half. Botanists tell us that there is just as much of a tree spread under the ground as there is standing above the ground. The top half of a tree can only stand erect and verdant above the ground when it is prepared to bury its other half beneath the ground. This is indeed a great lesson which trees show to humankind. This phenomenon teaches man the secret of a resilient and stable foundation for his endeavours. One philosopher puts it this way:

“Root downward, fruit upward—that is the divine protocol. The rose comes to perfect combination of colour, line and aroma atop a tall stem. Its perfection is achieved, however, because first a root went down into the homely matrix of the common earth. Those who till the soil or garden understand the analogy. Our interests have so centered on gathering the fruit that it has been easy to forget the cultivation of the root. We cannot really prosper and have plenty without first rooting in a life of sharing. The horn of plenty does not stay full unless first there is rooting in sharing.”

Trees, in their own way, impart us the lesson of nature that if we seek to progress outwardly, we must first strengthen ourselves inwardly. We must begin from the base of our own selves before we can hope to build society anew.

A tree stands above the ground by burying its roots deep into the earth, spreading them out over a large area. Although hidden from sight, the roots are what ground the tree, continuously growing throughout the nutrient rich soil. A tree grows from beneath, and then upwards into the air. It does not start at the

top and grow downwards. This aspect of trees serves as a model for us to emulate. Trees, in their own way, impart us the lesson of nature that if we seek to progress outwardly, we must first strengthen ourselves inwardly. We must begin from the base of our own selves before we can hope to build society anew. □



A GRAND COMPROMISE

Learn to Live with Differences

PRESIDENT Reagan's visit to Moscow was a prominent event of 1988. Previously, President Reagan had been calling the USSR an 'evil empire.' Then, he thought better to develop amicable relations with this once spurned adversary.

Since the Marxist-inspired revolution of 1917 which was based on the concept of class struggle, the USSR kept on spreading the doctrine of communism—in much the same way as the USA continued to sponsor the ideas of capitalism. This engendered deep fear and suspicion between the two countries, which culminated into fierce rivalry—a rivalry which lasted for over 60 years. This period of tension between the two countries, known as Cold War, lasted more than four decades.

The results, however, demonstrate beyond any shadow of a doubt that this policy was of no utility to either of them. After spending billions and billions of dollars and rubles on war weapons, both countries realized that they could not harm each other without harming themselves.

New ideas began to take shape in both countries. It was this new thinking which compelled Gorbachev to visit the USA, and Reagan to follow suit by visiting Moscow. *Time* magazine (May 30, 1988) called this new tendency in the two countries "a grand compromise." An official of the USSR, pointing out how their respective policies had until recently been aimed at harming each other, explained that a 'solution-oriented' policy has now been adopted.

In modern times, a policy of confrontation is so much of a luxury that not even the superpowers can continue to afford it.

There is great lesson to be learned from this incident. It shows that in modern times, a policy of confrontation is so much of a luxury that not even the superpowers can continue to afford it. This new awareness can teach both India and Pakistan a valuable lesson.

Unfortunately, both India and Pakistan are still bent on following the same policy of confrontation, albeit on a smaller scale than that followed by the great powers. Both these countries need to learn this lesson. These two neighbours should enter into a 'grand compromise' to end all confrontations in the same way that the superpowers have adopted a 'solution-oriented policy'. □

TRUE OBJECT OF VENERATION

From Creation to the Creator

TO believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects. It is to see through superficial irrelevancies to the ultimate reality that lies hidden in all things. It is to acknowledge that all things come from God. It is to see God as the Supreme Being.

A true believer is never enamoured of the external splendour of worldly things. He is not awed by material grandeur, for he knows that it, like himself, is the creation of God. He does not look to other human beings for the fulfillment of his needs, for he knows that they are helpless before their Maker. So absorbed does he become in God's glory that he never loses the smallest opportunity to sing hymns to His greatness.

Man has an innate need to have someone or something to look up to and depend upon in life. This is a strong and instinctive urge. But if, in order to satisfy it, man chooses as the object of his veneration some thing or person other than the Almighty, then he is worshipping something which is false. He thus debases himself in the process. In ancient times, the awe inspired by natural phenomena, such as the sun and the moon permeated every aspect of human life.

In more recent times, however, man has become more materialistic and has chosen to worship wealth and the greatness of other human beings. But whether man worships some aspect of nature, or the purely material in life, he is going sadly astray, for the only Being deserving of his obeisance is God Almighty. In one's search for the truth one must be prepared to pass by the whole of creation until one reaches the Creator and Sustainer Himself. The phenomena of nature offer a believer myriad ways to realize and acknowledge God. The Quran mentions:

In the creation of the heavens and the Earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the ocean bearing cargoes beneficial to man; in the water which God sends down from the sky and with which He revives the earth after its death, scattering over it all kinds of animals; in the courses of the winds, and in the clouds pressed into service between Earth and sky, there are indeed signs for people who use their reason. (2: 164) □



TRUTH NEEDS NO DEFENCE

Truth Prevails

FEW great men have been so maligned as the Prophet Muhammad. Christian scholars of medieval Europe painted him as an impostor, a lecher, and a man of blood. A corruption of his name, Mahound, even came to signify the devil. This picture of Muhammad and his religion still retains some influence. The English author Thomas Carlyle in 1840 was the first notable European to insist publicly that Muhammad must have been sincere, because it was ridiculous to suppose an impostor would have been the founder of a great religion. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

The argument used by Thomas Carlyle to sweep away western misconceptions about the Prophet was simply that if a tree is known by its fruit, so is a man known by his character. Whoever reads the sayings of the Prophet of Islam, whoever learns of what his daily life was like, whoever comes to understand what type of movement was born under his influence, can never believe that his life's mission and achievements were those of an impostor. Carlyle said:

'The word this man (Muhammad) spoke has been the life-guidance now of one hundred and eighty millions of men these twelve hundred years. These hundred and eighty millions were made by God as well as we. A greater number of God's creatures believe in Mahomet's word at this hour than in any other word whatever. Are we to suppose that it was a miserable piece of spiritual legerdemain, this which so many creatures of the Almighty have lived by and died by? I, for my part, cannot form any such supposition.'

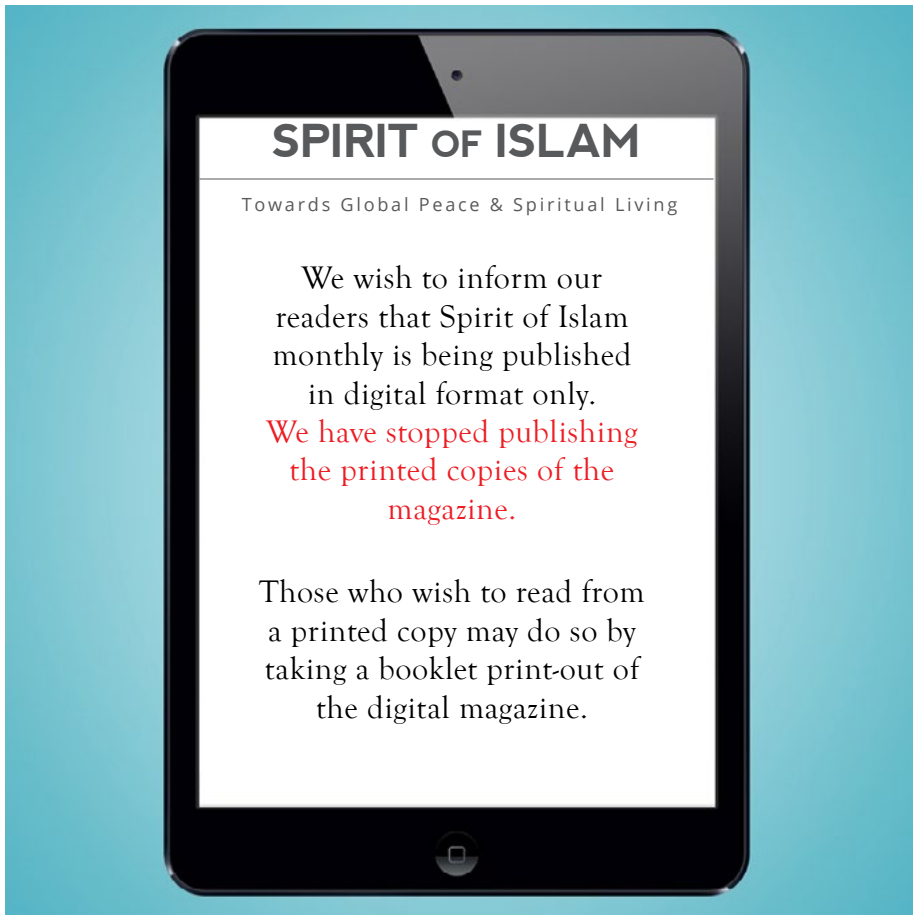
About the assertions prevalent in Europe that Muhammad was a false prophet and an impostor, he says:

(A) more godless theory, I think, was never promulgated in this Earth. A false man found a religion? Why, a false man cannot build a brick house! If he do not know and follow truly the properties of mortar, burnt clay and what else he works in, it is no house that he makes, but a

A man who makes it his mission to bring about a healthy revolution among the people, speaking from the heart, and using words which contain the finest elements of humanity, can never be a deceiver.

rubbish-heap. It will not stand for twelve centuries, to lodge a hundred and eighty millions; it will fall straightway. (*On Heroes and Hero-Worship* by Thomas Carlyle)

A man who makes it his mission to bring about a healthy revolution among the people, speaking from the heart, and using words which contain the finest elements of humanity, can never be a deceiver. A man who is a fraud may succeed in fraudulence, but he will never succeed in launching a divine movement. ❑



MAKING OF THE INDIAN NATION

Quest for a Foundation for Unity

THREE quarters of a century have passed since India gained its independence, but it has yet to join the ranks of the truly developed countries. That is a dream still to be realized. And this is in spite of India being a large country with all kinds of potential.

One reason for this tragic failure is the Indian people's lack of national character. The plight the country finds itself in today can be traced to this basic shortcoming. Bereft of this sterling quality, Indians have fallen short in taking the country towards progress and prosperity.

What is national character? It is, to put it simply, the capacity and the will to hold the interests of the nation supreme in every sphere. If there is a clash between individual and national interests, individual concerns must be subordinated to the greater good of the nation. Whenever a nation has made any progress, it has been due to this spirit of nationalism. Without such a spirit, no nation can advance either internally or externally.

In a period just under 50 years, many countries like Singapore, Korea, Malaysia and Japan have succeeded in fostering a strong, national spirit in their people, and now stand alongside developed countries, while India still lags far behind. The reasons behind this state of affairs must be investigated. There is one basic reason for this: attempting to achieve the possible by means which are impossible. Producing national spirit or character in India is certainly possible. It is just that we have set off on the wrong track, and once on this track, it is difficult to retrace our steps and get on to the right one.

After Independence, an "Indian nation" had come into existence in the political and geographical sense. But, at the psychological level, the level of feelings and emotions, our position was still that of a nation in the making. For the desired national reconstruction to take place, our leaders proposed a recipe based on the concept of a common heritage consisting of three main parts: religious unity, historical unity and cultural unity.

Religious unity implied that all religions were essentially one. It was believed that if this concept could take root in people's minds, it would produce a sense of unity all over the country. Historically, of course, this assumption was wrong; there is a long, sorry record of co-religionists fighting fiercely among themselves. For instance, in the war

of Mahabharata, the warriors on both sides were of the Hindu religion. In the first and second World Wars, the combatants on both sides were Christians. Babur (the first emperor of Mughal dynasty) had armed confrontations with his co-religionists, finally inflicting decisive defeats on them.

The attempt to bring about religious unity in India has had active support right from the time of Akbar (the third Mughal emperor), who bolstered it politically, to present times, when intellectuals such as Dr Bhagwan Das (a contemporary of Jawaharlal Nehru) attempted to solve the problem with his encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. But this goal could never be achieved for the simple reason that the assumption that all religions are one and the same is incorrect; and no durable structure can be erected on false premises.

What is national character? It is, to put it simply, the capacity and the will to hold the interests of the nation supreme in every sphere. If there is a clash between individual and national interests, individual concerns must be subordinated to the greater good of the nation.

It is an undeniable fact that there are differences among various religions. Given these differences, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the adherents of one religion to reach the point of agreeing that the tenets and practices of another religion have an equal value. However, if the adherents of different religions see each other, first and foremost, as human beings, as members of the same human race, they can certainly accord each other equal respect. Through mutual respect, many social benefits can accrue. Attempts at mutual recognition of religious beliefs are futile at best.

Let us now look at how history comes into the picture. It is assumed that even where there are people of different persuasions, a common sense of history will produce a common sense of nationhood. And where this

is seen to be lacking, it is advocated that such a sense be inculcated. But this would again be an attempt to achieve the possible by means which are impossible.

All countries, be they as small as Singapore, or as large as the USA, are inhabited by varied races and ethnic groups. In this respect there are several different strands to their historical heritage. But in none of these countries has there been any attempt to bulldoze people into sharing a common sense of history. Instead, there has been an acknowledgement

of each citizen's individuality. That is why, albeit imbued with different historical feelings, the various groups lead harmonious lives and are engaged in the common cause of nation-building.

The third point concerns the acceptance of a common culture. This is wholly impracticable. Culture inevitably evolves over a long historical process. It can never be imposed upon a group through any external agency. After the Second World War, a movement was launched in the USA to produce a common culture throughout the country by a process of Americanization. A similar movement was launched in Canada, but in both countries, these initiatives failed. Ultimately both had to abandon the idea of one culture society, and come to terms with multi-cultural society. In India, as elsewhere, this is the only possible and achievable solution.

The truth is that the only practicable basis of nationhood is patriotism. That is, the feeling on the part of the individual or group that their future is linked with one country and one country alone; that individual success is inextricably linked with the progress of the country; that the interests of the country must be held supreme, and that if sacrifices are required for the safety or advancement of the country, these must be willingly made. Without such feelings of patriotism, no country can be successfully run.

If the task of constructing the nation is to be successfully accomplished, we must rid ourselves of our obsession with such impracticable concepts as unity of religion, history and culture, and should forge ahead on the same lines as Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Britain, France and America.

Our prime target should be the inculcation of patriotism in our countrymen. And it should be a patriotism which is based not on the past, but on the present and the future. The only way to do this is to instill in each and every individual a deep-rooted love of his country. Instead of wasting time on the impossible, we should concentrate on building the kind of national character to be found in developed countries. If we set ourselves sedulously to such tasks as these, we should, within the span of one generation, be able to create for ourselves the ideal nation. □

Our prime target should be the inculcation of patriotism in our countrymen. And it should be a patriotism which is based not on the past, but on the present and the future. The only way to do this is to instill in each and every individual a deep-rooted love of his country.

WHEN PLANS FAIL

Man Proposes, God Disposes

AN air show is a public event where aircraft are exhibited. Air shows often include aerobatic demonstrations in which pilots climb vertically, perform very tight turns, tumble their aircraft end-over-end and perform manoeuvres during loops. Air shows are held as a business venture, a trade event or in support of local, national or military charities. Military air firms often organize air shows at military airfields as a public relations exercise to thank the local community, promote military careers and raise the profile of the military.

Air shows are generally considered safe. However, like any other venture, these are some air shows which turned tragic. Ramstein air show disaster of August 28, 1988 that killed 70 people, and Sknyliv air show disaster of July 27, 2002 that killed 77 people are two of the deadliest ones in history.

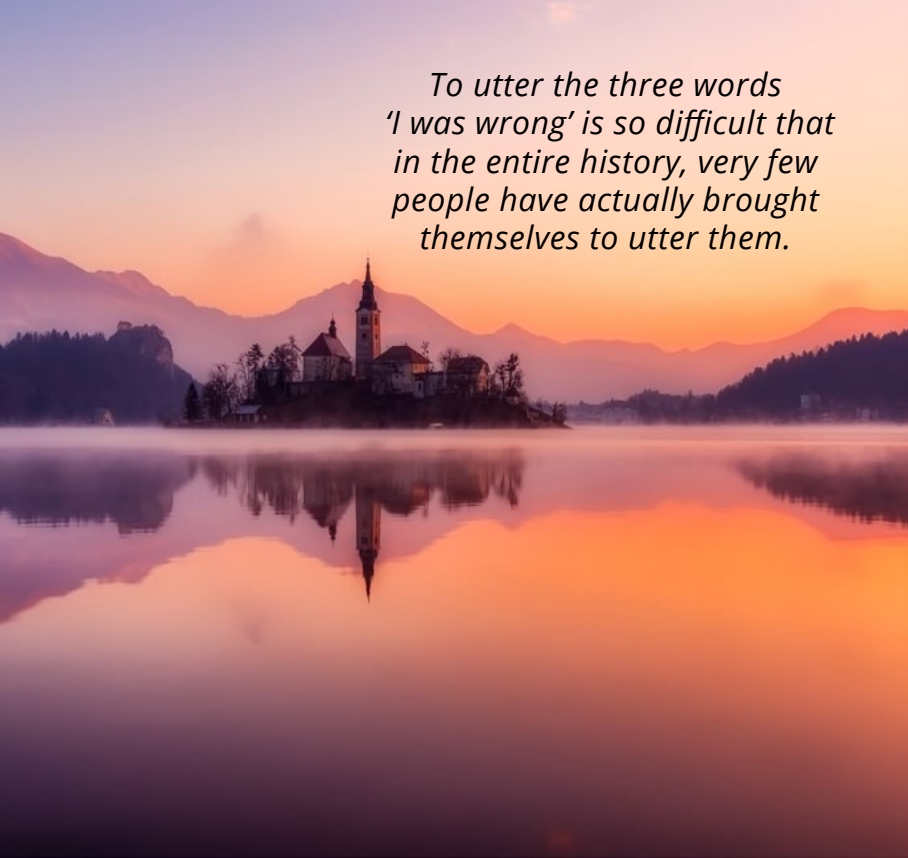
There is an element of surprise and risk lurking at us on every corner. However well prepared we are, we cannot always be content that everything will unfold as planned.

Time magazine of September 12, 1988, published a report with photographs entitled, 'Hellfire from the Heavens' giving details of a tragic air disaster in West Germany on August 28, 1988. It happened during an air show, near the Ramstein Air Base in Frankfurt, in which ten military aircraft of the most up-to-date design were taking part. About 300,000 people had gathered to watch this special demonstration, fancifully titled "Arrow through the Heart."

Ten aircraft flying at about 300 miles per hour—flew high into the sky to create a heart-shaped formation. One of these planes was to leave this formation during the flight in order to pierce the "heart" like an arrow. This tenth jet, piloted by a veteran Italian flyer, Ivo Nutarelli, arched down in a solo loop intended to take him through the lower half of the "heart" as the formations passed beneath him. But Nutarelli arrived too low and perhaps a split second early. The "arrow" was supposed to fly at a slightly higher altitude than the other jets, but levelled out at the same altitude, so that instead of "piercing the heart," it struck at least one of the other planes. Three planes burst into flames. In normal circumstances, this extraordinary display by military jets would have produced tremendous thrills and excitement, but after this terrible accident, all the glamour was blasted

out of it in just a few hellish minutes. All three pilots and at least 67 spectators were killed and 346 people were injured including many children.

At first, many of the spectators did not know what had happened. One of them said "I thought it was just some kind of special effect." There is an element of surprise and risk lurking at us on every corner. However well prepared we are, we cannot always be content that everything will unfold as planned. Our plans are often at odds with the plans of others. Then there is the Supreme Planner. A person should take into account all these aspects before venturing out, and he should know that he can only plan and propose, it is God who will dispose. □



*To utter the three words
'I was wrong' is so difficult that
in the entire history, very few
people have actually brought
themselves to utter them.*

ADVANCEMENT OF MEDICINE

Aided by Belief in Monotheism

JUST as diseases have afflicted man in every age, so has the science of medicine always existed in one form or the other. In ancient times, however, the science of medicine never reached the heights of progress that it did in the Islamic era and also latterly, in modern times.

It is believed that the beginning of the science of medicine—a beginning to be reckoned with—was made in ancient Greece. The two very great physicians who were born in ancient Greece were Hippocrates and Galen. However, very little is known about their lives. The historians of later times have estimated that Hippocrates was probably born in c. 460 BC and died in c. 375 BC. Some historians, on the other hand, even have doubts about his being a historical figure. It has also been questioned whether the books on philosophy and medicine supposedly written by him were not actually written by someone else and later attributed to him.

Galen is considered the second most important philosopher and physician of this period of antiquity. He was born probably in AD 129 and died in AD 199. Galen had to face stiff opposition in Rome, and most of his writings were destroyed. The remainder would also have been lost to posterity had the Arabs not collected them in the 9th century and translated them into Arabic. These Arabic translations were later to reach Europe in the 11th century, where they were translated from Arabic into Latin. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* concludes its article on Galen thus: "Little is known of Galen's final years." (7/850)

It is a fact that ancient Greece produced some very fine brains of high intellectual calibre in this field. But the respective fates of Galen and Hippocrates show that the atmosphere in ancient Greece was conducive neither to the rise of such people to their due eminence, nor to the growth of medicine as a science. Different kinds of superstitious beliefs were an obstruction in the path of free enquiry, for instance, the attribution of diseases to mysterious powers, and the sanctification of many things, such as plants which had healing properties.

The science of medicine came into being in ancient Greece about 200 years before the Christian era and continued for another two centuries. In this way, the whole period extended over about four or five hundred years. This science did not see any subsequent advance in Greece itself.

Although a European country, Greece did not contribute anything to the spread of its own medical science in Europe, or give any stimulus to progress in the field of modern medicine in the West. These facts are proof that the atmosphere in ancient Greece was not favourable to the progress of medicine.

The Greek medicine which was brought into being by certain individuals (effort was all at the individual level, as the community did not give it general recognition) remained hidden away in obscure books for about one thousand years after its birth. It was only when these books were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid period (CE 750-1258), and edited by the Arabs with their own original additions, that it became possible for this science to find its way to Europe, thus paving the way for modern medical science.

The reason for this is before the Islamic revolution, the world had been swept by superstitious beliefs. The environment in those times was so unfavourable that whenever an individual would undertake any academic or scientific research, he could never be certain of receiving encouragement. More often than not, he had to face severe antagonism. Indeed, whenever any scientific endeavour at the individual level came to the notice of the authorities, it would be promptly and rigorously suppressed. In a situation where diseases and their remedies were traditionally linked with the displeasure and subsequent appeasement of gods and goddesses, what appeal could the scientific method of treatment have for the people? Only when the monotheistic revolution came to the world in the wake of Islam did the door open to that medical progress which saw its culmination in modern medical science.

The Prophet said, "God has sent the remedy for every disease in the world except death." This saying of the Prophet was the declaration of the leader of a revolution. No sooner did he announce to the world this truth about medicine than history began to be shaped by it in many practical ways.

Smallpox was considered one of the most dangerous diseases in the world. It was a highly contagious disease, characterized by fever and the appearance of small spots leaving scars in the form of pits. The symptoms include chills, headache, and backache. The spots appear about the fourth day. This is a fatal disease. Even if one survives the attack, the skin is scarred permanently.

According to present records, this disease was identified in Egypt in c. 1122 BC and is also mentioned in ancient Indian books written in

Sanskrit. In the past this disease gripped many countries in the form of dangerous epidemics. Thousands of people fell prey to it. As far back as BC 1156, this disease was taking its toll on human life, there being visible evidence in the pock-marked face of the mummy of the Egyptian Pharaoh, Ramesses V, who died in that year. His embalmed body was found inside a pyramid. Even then, it took thousands of years for this dreaded disease to be investigated scientifically.

Now we know that smallpox is a contagious disease resulting from virus infection, and such remedies have been discovered as can ward off attacks, provided suitable precautions are taken in advance. But it was not until the end of the 9th century, subsequent to the emergence of Islam, that this medical fact was unearthed for the first time. The first name which became prominent in history in this connection was that of the well-known Arab physician, Muhammad Ibn Zakariya al-Razi (CE 854-932) who was born in Ray in Iran. In search of a remedy for the disease, he investigated it from the purely medical standpoint and wrote the first book on the subject, called, *al-Judari wa al-Hasbah*. This was translated into Latin, the academic language of ancient Europe, in 1565 in Venice. It was later translated into Greek and other European languages, and thus spread all over Europe. Its English translation, published in London in 1848, was entitled, *A Treatise on Smallpox and Measles*.

Researchers have accepted that this is the first medical book on smallpox in the whole of recorded history. Prior to this, no one had ever done research on this topic.

Al-Razi's book was read by Edward Jenner (1749-1823), the English physician who later pioneered the smallpox vaccine. It was this which led to his thinking of making a clinical investigation of the disease. He carried on his research over a twenty-year period, ultimately establishing the connection between cowpox and smallpox. In 1796, he carried out his first practical experiment in inoculation. This was a success, and the practice spread rapidly, in spite of violent opposition from certain quarters, until, in 1977, it was announced by the UNO that for the first time in history, smallpox had been eradicated.

Now the question arises as to why such a long time had elapsed between the initial discovery of the disease and the first attempts to investigate it medically with a view to finding a remedy. The reason was the prevalence of *shirk*, that is, the holding of something to be sacred when it is not, or the attribution of divinity to the non-divine.

Dr David B. Werner (b. 1934) author of the acclaimed book *Where There Is No Doctor* writes:

'In most places in India, people believe that these diseases are caused because the goddess is angry with their family or their community. The goddess expresses her anger through the diseases. The people believe that the only hope of a cure for these diseases is to make offerings to her in order to please her. They do not feed the sick child or care for him because they fear this will annoy the goddess more. So the sick child becomes very weak and either dies or takes a long time to get cured. These diseases are caused by virus infection. It is essential that the child be given plenty of food to keep up his strength so that he can fight the infection.'

When Islam came to the world, it banished such superstitious beliefs about disease, announcing in no ambiguous terms that none except God had the power to harm or benefit humankind. The Creator was the one and only Being who had such power. All the rest were His creatures and His servants. When, after the Islamic revolution, such ideas gained ground, people began to think freely and independently of all superstitions. Only then did it become possible to conduct medical research into the disease in order to discover appropriate remedies.

Only after this intellectual revolution had come to the world did it become possible to make smallpox the subject of enquiry. Only then did it become possible for such people as al-Razi and Edward Jenner to rise and save the world from this dreaded disease by discovering a remedy for it.

The real barrier to finding a cure was the generally accepted body of superstitious beliefs, these beliefs were swept away for the first time in history by Islam. This contribution of Islam is generally acknowledged. In the November/December, 2016 issue of *National Geographic History* magazine, Víctor Pallejà De Bustinza, a specialist in Islamic History writes in an article titled '*How Early Islamic Science Advanced Medicine*':

'The growth of Islam in the seventh century sparked a golden age of scientific discovery. Building on the wisdom of ancient civilizations, Muslim doctors pushed the boundaries of medical science into bold new places.' □



FOLLOWING THE MODEL OF NATURE

For Human-friendly Earth

WE live in an unfathomable universe. We are only a miniscule part of a gigantic society. We should adopt the same behaviour in our lives as that adopted by all the other components of the universe. This is the correct natural course, and the secret to our success lies in adopting this course. What is this behavioural model present in the universe? Observe the stars and the planets in the universe. Each star and planet moves in its own orbit with incredible precision and regularity, in accordance with the laws of nature. None of them move out of their own orbits and trespass on another's orbit. Due to this discipline, there is peace and order in the universe. Likewise, we should also adopt this policy of non-interference in society. Everyone should be conscious of the fact that their freedom ends where the freedom of others begins.

The study of the universe shows that everything gives something to others without taking anything in return. Everything in the world continuously conveys the message that we should give, without taking anything in return. We should adopt this culture, and live as givers, rather than takers.

Look at the world of plants. Plants have silently adopted the mechanism of photosynthesis. They continuously supply oxygen that fulfills the necessities of other living things, using up unwanted carbon dioxide. This is a selfless system of profitability. It is essential that we also choose to follow this system in our lives.

Look at the flow of water in a mountain stream. The flow is repeatedly obstructed by stones in its path that appear to be obstacles to its journey. But the spring does not attempt to remove the stones to continue its journey. Instead, it carves its way ahead around and alongside the stones, as if telling us not to collide with obstacles, but to continue on our way by keeping away from them.

Similarly, we see in the world of animals, that now and then, animals quarrel. But it is always for a short time. They quickly become normal as if nothing had happened. In the same way, throughout our social lives, we will go through a lot of unpleasant experiences, but we should make sure they are only temporary.

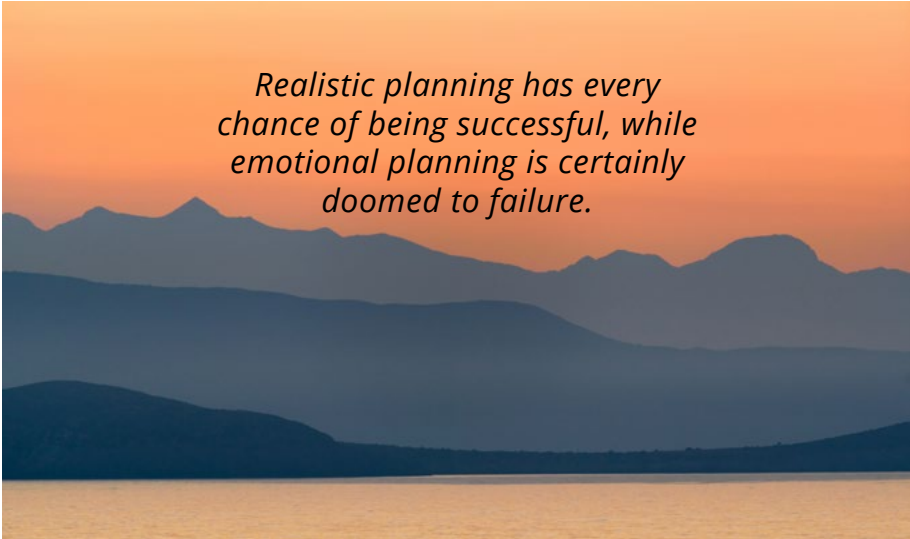
The study of the universe shows that everything gives something to others without taking anything in return. For instance, the sun provides

light and warmth to inhabitants of our little world, but it does not take anything in return. The atmosphere continuously provides life-sustaining oxygen, without taking anything in return. Similarly, all the natural resources of the world serve us without taking anything in return. This entire world is a world that gives, not takes. This is a culture of giving. Everything in the world continuously conveys the message that we should give, without taking anything in return. We should adopt this culture, and live as givers, rather than takers.

The universe around us serves as a vast model. The secret of success for us is to follow this model of submission, but with a difference. In the rest of the universe, the model has been established compulsively, under the laws of nature, while we have to adopt this model in our lives consciously, of our own free will.

We have to bring our free will under the universal discipline, living as though we are following the laws of nature, as though we have no choice. We have to submit to the will of God, which is expressed in the universe in the form of the laws of nature. This attitude of submission is the only right behaviour, which will guarantee us eternal success. □

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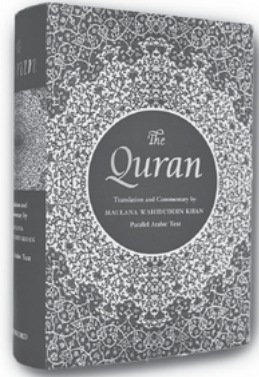
Realistic planning has every chance of being successful, while emotional planning is certainly doomed to failure.

THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



Chapter ABRAHAM

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Alif Lam Ra

We have revealed to you this Book so that, by their Lord's command, you may lead men from darkness to the light: to the path of the Mighty, the Praiseworthy One, to God, who possesses whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on Earth. Woe to those who deny the truth, for they shall be sternly punished! (14: 1-2)

Faith enables man to discover God as a Being who is all powerful and possessed of all the good attributes. Such a mental state is not merely a formal belief. It, in fact, signals the emergence of a man from the darkness of ignorance and his entering into the light of knowledge. It amounts to the observation and realization of the Hereafter, while actually remaining in this world. Faith in reality is a conscious attainment and not the spiritless repetition of certain combinations of words. The Book of God aims to lead man to this higher stage of consciousness.

Receiving guidance at the command of God would appear to attribute the matter of guidance to God. But these words are, in fact, aimed at man himself. There is an immutable law of God, which He has established for the guidance or misguidance of man. According to this law, a man's serious desire for guidance is the only condition which will take him towards it. When a man receives guidance in this world, it is not simply because of the efforts of the missionary, but because it is available to him by the law of God which lays down that only that person will receive the bounty of guidance who himself is desirous of

receiving it. Nobody can receive guidance without his own personal desire to have it.

Woe to those who love this life more than the Hereafter; who turn others away from the path of God and seek to make it crooked. They have gone far astray. Each messenger We have sent has spoken in the language of his own people, so that he might make the message clear to them. But God lets go astray whom He will and guides whom He pleases. He is the Almighty, the All Wise. (14: 3-4)

God has made the path of guidance extremely clear and well illumined; signs are spread all around on the Earth and in the sky; the Book of God provides undeniable arguments in its favour; human nature bears testimony to its veracity; in other words, all the evidence in nature are in its favour. This being so, those who do not seek out guidance certainly refrain from doing so in consideration of their worldly interests and not for any real reason, though such people advance a number of 'arguments' in order to justify their behaviour. But the actual purpose of these 'arguments' is to find something wrong with a straightforward statement. They are intended purely to justify their rejection of divine guidance in the eyes of the people.

In view of this, only that person will be deprived of guidance whose desires of self-interest and worldly inducements have made him completely blind and deaf.

It was the way of God to raise prophets from among the addressees' own community, fully taking into account their mentality, so that they might be able to call upon the people in their own understandable language to accept the truth. But it was very strange that the way adopted for the betterment of the people led to the very opposite effect. When they saw that the prophet was a man like themselves and talked in their own familiar language, they rejected him, considering him to be an ordinary man. The way adopted to make the process of guidance easier was turned by them into a source of misguidance.

It is not the way of God to display magical feats in order to attract people towards Himself, for example, by sending to a community a prophet who speaks a strange language or making the people wonderstruck by discoursing in a magical style. God does not cater to the wonder-loving nature of human beings. God's way is that of simplicity and realism. He has established His world on the basis of realities; therefore, He also carries into effect His scheme for the guidance of man on the basis of realities, not of magic.

We sent Moses with Our signs, saying, 'Lead your people out of the darkness into the light, and remind them of God's Days. In that there are signs for every patient, grateful person.' (14: 5)

Here, 'Our Signs' means those signs of the universe which prove the statements of God to be true. 'God's Days' (*ayyam-ullah*) means those events of history when the decision of God was made manifest and, with the special help of God, truth was victorious over falsehood.

But it is very strange that these things remain almost untraceable in our world. The signs of God have been masked by wrong interpretation and wrong explanation, and the Days of God were not considered worth mentioning, the utmost attention was given to writing instead about 'the Days of the Human Being' (*ayyamul-insan*).

In view of this, the only way for a servant of God to emerge from the darkness of falsehood is to exercise patience and remain grateful.

Modesty is necessary to find the truth. In order to find the truth, one has to lose oneself and this cannot be attained by anybody without the exercise of patience. Then the realization of truth shows a man that the division of resources in this universe is a matter between the giver and the receiver. God is the Giver and man is the receiver. The proper feeling which develops in man after the discovery of this reality is known as gratefulness. That is to say that, in order to reach reality, man has to exercise patience and, in order to assimilate this reality within himself, he has to be grateful. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

The remedy for ignorance is asking questions. (Prophet Muhammad)

The spirit of enquiry is the hallmark of an open society and the above saying of the Prophet aptly illustrates this principle. A culture of curiosity and open-mindedness will foster development in any society by motivating its members to learn enthusiastically and enrich their knowledge. This is because awareness of one's ignorance is half of knowledge, as it becomes a stepping-stone to seeking and finding answers. A questioning mind is like a flowing river that is replenished with fresh thoughts and ideas and continues on its journey.

Why people find it difficult to live with others in harmony?

Generally people are proficient at pointing out others' inadequacies, and that is why they have trouble living with others. If people recognize their own inadequacies, they will realize that they too stand at the same place where others are standing. The acknowledgement of one's own shortcoming develops humility and amiability. Contrary to this, if one can see only the inadequacy of others, they will become proud and arrogant and it will become difficult for such people to live with others. The study of psychology tells us that all qualities cannot be found in a single individual. Each one of us has distinctive qualities. If people have some good qualities, they will also have some other qualities which will emanate from their original good quality. For instance, if a person is brave, he will also be resolute; if a person is intelligent, he might also have a critical attitude. This being so, the best option is to ignore the weaker side of that person and concentrate on the brighter, stronger side if we want to benefit from his abilities. This holds good for all relationships. If we want to have roses, we have to tolerate the thorns.

It is a fact that a single person cannot on his own achieve anything of significance. To do great things, it is necessary to be able to draw upon the strengths of a number of people. To be able to do this one should be practical, not idealistic.

Why do human affairs often descend into chaos?

This is because members of the society flout the principles which bring order into their lives. Social living, if it is to be successful, should be regulated by laws which are as immutable as the laws of nature. These

laws can be effective, however, only if man fully grasps the necessity to adhere to them. One must realize that society without order is like a factory without electricity. It simply will not work.

It should also be realized that the prevalence of certain virtues over their opposing vices is a great contributing factor in maintaining order. Generosity, broadmindedness, forgiveness and politeness must respectively override miserliness, narrow-mindedness, vengefulness and rudeness. Consideration for others must always be one's first response in any given situation.

Certain traits of character are naturally supportive of social order. Knowing what a situation requires of one, whether it is a matter of conscience or discretion, is always conducive to harmonious living. Just knowing what to say, when to speak and when to remain silent are among the greatest social virtues. Knowing whether to adopt a hard or an accommodating attitude, whether to be firm or whether to be pliant is equally important.

People who understand these niceties of social coexistence, and put them into practice, are vital to the solidarity in society. Without them order would degenerate into anarchy. □





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