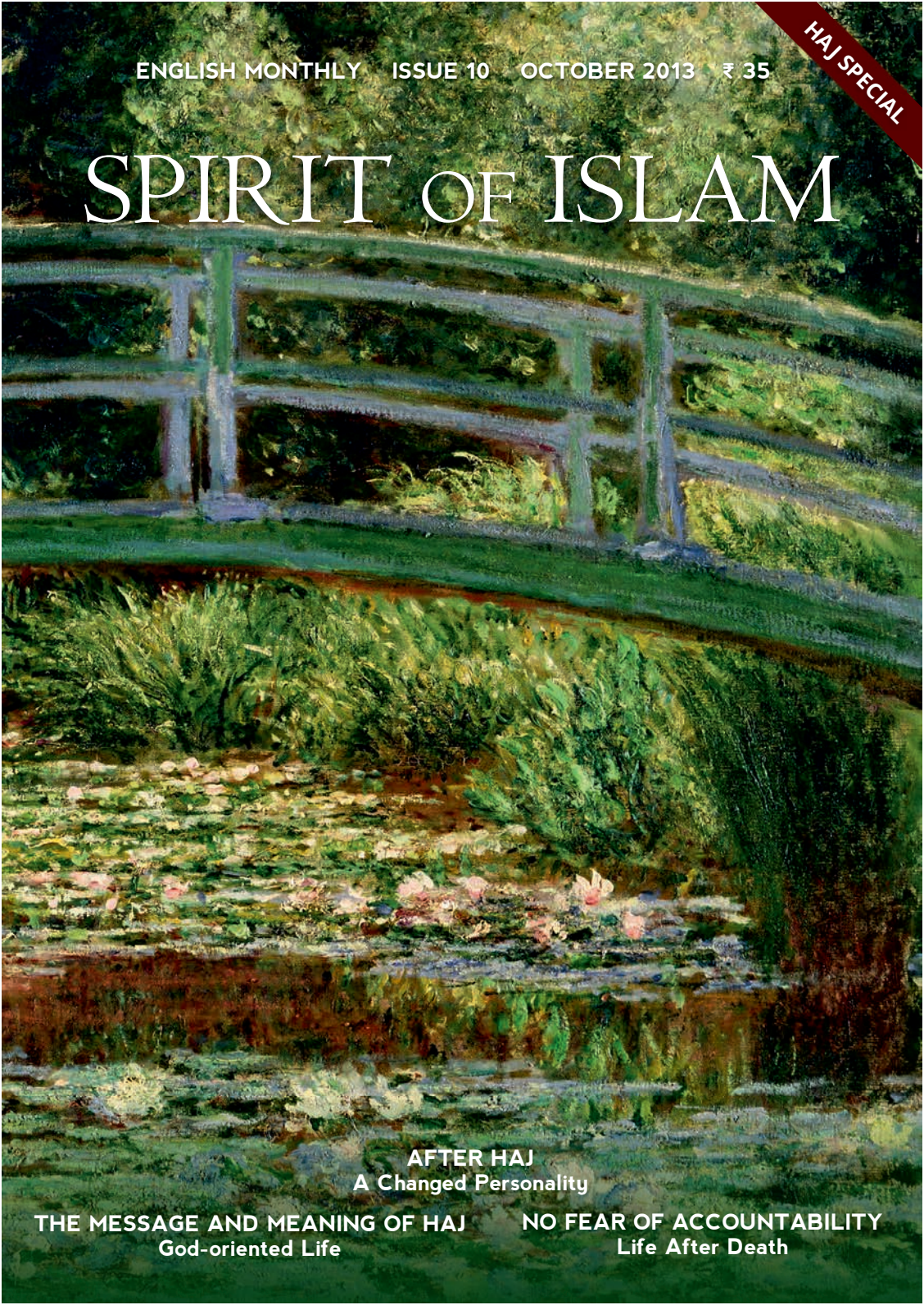


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HAJ SPECIAL

SPIRIT OF ISLAM



AFTER HAJ
A Changed Personality

THE MESSAGE AND MEANING OF HAJ
God-oriented Life

NO FEAR OF ACCOUNTABILITY
Life After Death

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 10, OCTOBER 2013

CHIEF EDITOR

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

DR. FARIDA KHANAM

NAGHMA SIDDIQI

AIJAZ AHMED

SUB-EDITORS

MARIA KHAN

SADIA KHAN

DESIGN

AMEEN AHMED

COVER ART

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FATHIMA SARAH

OFFICE

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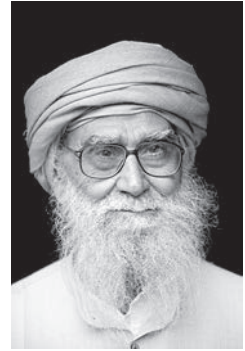
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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



WHERE THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD WENT WRONG

THE present situation in Egypt reaffirms the veracity of the Islamic formula in this regard. The Prophet of Islam has said: "*Kama takununa kazalika yuwallu alaykum*" ('As you are, so will be the government upon you'). According to this prophetic saying, the government always emerges from society. It cannot be imposed from outside. No slogan whatsoever justifies the theory of imposition of a government. Muslims must adopt a two-point formula in this regard. In terms of government, they must accept the social verdict, and in terms of personal mission, they must adopt *dawah* as a peaceful activity. So, the Islamic formula in this regard is — *dawah* activism and political status-quoism.

This is the only formula that is a permanent guarantee for peace in society. This formula nullifies the politics of opposition, and it also abolishes all kinds of protests, conflicts and violence. If people adopt this formula they will be able to enjoy peace in every situation. Peaceful activism enables you to avail the opportunities, while violent activism destroys the opportunities — and opportunity is the greatest asset for a person as well as a party. The mistake of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' was that they tried to impose their cherished system by force. However, according to the above-mentioned *hadith*, first of all they should have prepared the society before imposing their cherished system. If your

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

society is not ready to accept your system, you have to wait and engage yourself in the task of preparing the minds of people.

The Muslim Brotherhood started the politics of opposition in Egypt in 1952. In spite of great sacrifices, this led to confrontation and violence, and, finally, bloodshed. Thousands of people were killed during this period. But in terms of positive gain, nothing was achieved. The 'Muslim Brotherhood' started their political activism in the name of Islam. However, in terms of results, it generated only hate, infighting, and destruction.

At the same time, there were and still are enormous opportunities in the field of *dawah*. Had the 'Muslim Brotherhood' adopted peaceful *dawah* mission, today they could have been highly successful in bringing people within the fold of the Truth. But due to their wrong policies, and in spite of great sacrifices, they achieved nothing and, instead, destroyed everything.

The British anthropologist Sir Arthur Keith wrote a book titled *A New Theory of Evolution* (1948). In this book, referring to the history of Egypt, he observes how Egypt was Islamized during the *Khilafat* period commenting: "*Egyptians were conquered not by the sword, but by the Koran.*" (p. 303)

If we compare this experience of the history of Egypt with the present failure of the 'Muslim Brotherhood', we will discover that the power of the Quran is greater than the power of the gun. But it is very strange that in the same land of Egypt, the 'Muslim Brotherhood' is trying to achieve through the power of the gun what was achieved through the power of the Quran.

The Quran is not a political manifesto of Muslims. The Quran is a book of ideology. The Quran is a power when it is used for peaceful Quranic activism. It is with regard to this point that the 'Muslim Brotherhood' has failed — it takes the name of the Quran as a political agenda, and not for the basis of peaceful *dawah*.

The best advice for the 'Muslim Brotherhood' can be given in two words: reassess your policies and re-plan your activities on the basis of the Quran. The former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi was deposed from his office on July 3, 2013. He delivered a long speech on June 26, 2013 where he said: "*Asabtu ahyanan wa akhtatu ahyanan*

ukhra" ('Sometimes I was right in the actions I took, and sometimes I committed mistakes.')

I would like to add that he and his party were wrong in the target they had opted for. They opted for a political target, while they should have instead opted for *dawah* as their target. They did not gain anything from their political target, while by making *dawah* their target they could have gained both — political power and *dawah*. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org

Formula for Strength

*Every tree is known to be
a composite of two parts,
half of it being below the
surface of the earth,
and the other half
standing up in the air.*

*This is the formula for strength.
Strength can only be achieved
from the inside and not
from the outside.*

*If you want to live as a strong person,
you have to develop a firm base,
and then you will be able to live as a
worthy member of your society.*

Overcoming Handicaps

*One may be beset by the most grievous handicaps in life,
but it is always possible to rise above them. However,
this can be done by one who is willing to endure
some "initial pain"; and put in some
"extra effort" to achieve
one's goal.*

DESIRE TO SEEK GOD

WHEN the Russian astronaut Andriyan Nikolayev returned to Earth after a journey in space, he addressed a press conference in Moscow and said:

When I arrived back on Earth, I wanted to kiss the ground.

For human beings, there is nothing like the Earth — filled as it is with unlimited favourable conditions—anywhere else in the entire known universe. When this Russian astronaut went away from the Earth and far into space, he found that there was nothing in outer space that was suitable for human life to exist. In the vastness of space, there was nothing that could provide peace and comfort for mankind.

The difference between a believer and one who does not believe is that the latter is besotted by creation, while a believer rises above creation and discovers his Creator.

After this experience, when he returned to Earth he was able to truly appreciate the value of the Earth, just as a severely thirsty person realizes the value of water when he finally gets some to drink. The Earth, along with its wonderful life support system, appeared so precious to Nikolayev that he wanted to embrace it and express his love for it.

This is what is called false attribution in the language of the *shariah*. People are unable to see the Creator, and so they take created beings as their deities, devoting all their emotions to them.

The true believer is one, who can see beyond the visible to comprehend the invisible; who realizes that whatever he sees is all bestowed by Someone Else; that everything in this world has been created by a Superior Being. Observing the creation, he acknowledges the Creator, and takes the Creator as his sole concern. He surrenders all his lofty emotions to God.

The sort of emotions which the Russian astronaut experienced on his return to earth are also felt in a much more intense form by the one who discovers God. A true believer is one who, when he sees the sun, finds in its light the light of God. In the vast expanses of the heavens he

appreciates the infinite power of God. In the scent of a flower he finds the fragrance of God. In the flow of water he sees God's bounty.

**The true believer is one who can see beyond the visible
to comprehend the invisible.**

The difference between a believer and one who does not believe is that the latter is besotted by creation, while a believer rises above creation and discovers his Creator. The one who does not believe thinks that the beauty of created things is actually intrinsic to these things, and so he gets obsessed with them.

On the other hand, a true believer sees the beauty of the Creator in the beauty of creation and surrenders himself to their Maker. The one who does not realize this prostrates before created things, while the one who realizes the truth prostrates before the Creator of all things. □



Ease after Hardship

*There is no doubting the fact
that failure in life usually results
from the quest for immediate success.*

*The word "short-cut" may be applicable
to the world of roads and footpaths, but
there are no short cuts in the struggles of life.*

Such is the order of nature.

*In this world just as ease
always follows hardship,
so fruitful results come only from
arduous, painstaking processes.*

RITUAL MUST ARISE FROM THE SPIRIT

ALL religions give, through rituals and ceremonies, a definite form to the act of worship. Islam, too, has specific rites but emphasises the spirit in which these are to be carried out. Form is an external manifestation of the spirit. The latter is the vital and indispensable element of every sincere religious act, while the former is a mere ancillary.

A *hadith* on fasting shows how this act must be illumined by spirit: "One who did not forsake telling lies while on a fast, God has no need of such a person forsaking food and water." Numerous statements in the Quran and *hadith* make it clear that in Islam the form of ritual practices and their spirit are not equal constituents of worship. In relation to one another, one is the crucial and the other, a sub-ordinate element. Each act of worship may or may not — depending upon its nature and circumstances — have an external form, but, whether ritualised or formless, what is truly important is the spirit that underlies it.

Form is an external manifestation of the spirit which is the vital and indispensable element of every sincere religious act.

While rituals serve partly as palpable identifiers of religious acts or acts of worship and partly as physical reinforcements of or prompters to religious ardour, the essence of Islam is the inner spirit, eternal and unassailable, unlike its outer forms. Whenever this reality is lodged in the recesses of the individual psyche, its effects are outwardly reflected. Sincerely performed ceremonial acts are but concrete expressions of the incontrovertible inner truth.

When, near the end of his life, Prophet Muhammad went on his pilgrimage, he laid down specific ways of performing Haj. More than 100,000 of his companions went with him. Then the Prophet seated himself in the courtyard of the Kabah and his companions queried him on the procedures of this important part of worship, especially concerning rites and their proper forms. (Haj involves the performance of a series of rites, and since this was the first proper Haj, there was uncertainty about their correct order.) The Prophet allayed their fears, saying: "There is no harm. There is no harm. Real harm lies in

the dishonouring of a person.” This saying throws light on how form relates to spirit in Islam: the spirit is the essential factor, while the form or ritual is a matter of externals. If the believer is not lacking in spirit, any deficiency in the form of his worship is tolerable.

The converse of this is illustrated by a tradition set down in the books of *hadith*. Once, the Prophet was seated in the mosque in Medina when a worshipper came to meet him after performing his ablutions and saying his prayers with full observance of their form. The Prophet sent him back to say his prayers again as, he said, he had not said his prayers. Here, a distinction was made between form and spirit. The Prophet sensed that this worshipper’s performance of the rituals of prayer had been mechanical and not imbued with religious spirit. Indeed, the true spirit of *salath* is modesty. But this individual’s behaviour showed that while he was praying, modesty was far from his mind. The Prophet told him to go back and say his prayers so that he should concern himself with the kernel of prayer, not its outer shell.

However punctilious the worship in form, without the true spirit the performance of the ritual is invalid. The mere observance of the form of worship does not make worship acceptable in the eyes of God.

The word 'ritual', in fact, has the same connotation as 'form'. The only difference is that 'form' is a term of general application, and 'ritual' has become a religious term.

A *hadith* report tells us that the value of an act depends upon the doer’s intention. That is, a practice must be evaluated on the basis of the motivation behind it. Here is an example from the Prophet’s migration from Makkah to Medina, known as the *Hijrah*. This emigration was for the sake of Islam, wherein people abandoned hearth and home for God. It was an act of great religious significance. One of the emigrants, however was not pure in intent. He left Makkah for Medina with the ulterior motive of marrying a girl from Medina, who had agreed to marry him only if he came to Medina as she could not go to Makkah. The Prophet told his companions that, since this individual had migrated not for the sake of God but for his own private benefit, he would not be rewarded.

This makes it clear that rituals are of relative value in Islam. The true value of an act in Islam depends entirely upon the spirit in which it is carried out, and not on the trappings of its outward form. □

FROM PROPHET ABRAHAM TO PROPHET MUHAMMAD

THE Prophet Abraham was born about 2000 years before Christ, in the Sumerian city-state of Ur, which is located in present-day Iraq. He lived for more than 175 years. Ur was the capital city and the centre of Mesopotamia.

Those were the times when polytheism was the predominant thought. Whatever appeared great to human observation was considered either as God or was attributed as something divine. This culture was prevalent everywhere, from individual homes to political fields. The old world order was established on these false assumptions, known in religious terms as polytheism and in rational language as superstition. The negative fall-out of these assumptions was that nature became a subject of holiness and worship. All the prophets, including Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad, came with the sole mission of conveying the message of the worship of the one God to humankind. As far as nature was concerned instead of making it an object of worship one should make it a subject of contemplation and explore ways of harnessing it for our real benefit.

Instead of making Nature an object of worship one should make it a subject of contemplation and explore ways of harnessing it for man's benefit.

Prophet Abraham started his mission with this same message in ancient Iraq. At that time, his father enjoyed the position of a priest in society. Hence, Prophet Abraham began his mission from his own house, as a result of which he was soon homeless. After this, he continued to convey the message of worship of the one Creator to his people in various ways. But his people also turned against him and his message.

Another serious matter of this age was that kingdoms flourished based on divinity of the rulers, and this was linked to the worship of nature. Such superstitious beliefs were a means used by rulers to maintain their hold and their domination of the people. Hence, they used all their powers to put down any movement that they felt was against these superstitious and false beliefs.

This was the case with King Nimrod of ancient Iraq, who was a

contemporary of Prophet Abraham. Nimrod had established his kingship claiming to be an incarnation of the Sun God. Prophet Abraham called on Nimrod to the worship of the One God. Nimrod rejected this call and instead resorted to violence against Abraham. Despite his best efforts, Prophet Abraham was forced to leave his homeland. At this time, there were only two people with him. One was his wife Sarah and the other was his nephew, Prophet Lot.

Prophet Abraham then married Hajira (Hagar). He settled his nephew Lot in the land of Sodom, where he started his mission of conveying to humankind the message of God. He settled his first wife, Sarah, in Palestine, and, along with Hajira, went through different lands finally reaching Makkah. These journeys were undertaken by Abraham with the guidance of God through the Angel Gabriel (Sahih Bukhari).

**For the mission of conveying God's message,
such individuals were required who would be
uncorrupted of any cultural conditioning.**

Prophet Abraham left his wife Hajira and his infant son Ismael in this desert land with a bag of dates and a pouch full of water. His wife Hajira went behind him, seeking an explanation on why he was leaving them alone in this place. When he did not answer she herself asked if it was the commandment of God. He replied in the affirmative. Then, Hajira said, "If it is God's will, then surely He will not let this go fruitless."

Prophet Abraham had to do this as the people of those times were so conditioned in their culture that they were unable to accept the message of truth which now appeared alien to them. They refuted all attempts to change their beliefs and system of life so much so that it became obvious that their false beliefs and cultures would remain for centuries. Prophet Abraham had settled his family in the barren desert of Arabia because this uninhabited place, being far from urban settlements, was ideally suited for the development of a new and pure generation that would be uncorrupted by the influences of city life and culture.

Prophet Abraham then dreamt that he was sacrificing his son. This was an injunction from God that he should dedicate his son to a divine mission; one such mission which would begin from the parched deserts of Arabia. For the new mission of conveying God's message,

no other place was suitable as wherever there were people, they were under the influence of superstition and false beliefs and were unable to think different to their cultural conditioning. At that time, there was not a single house that in the world of God that had been made for the remembrance of God. For such a House of God also, this very place in the desert of Arabia was the most suitable. Here, Prophet Abraham, with the help of his son, Ismael, constructed a house dedicated to God which is known as the Kabah or the House of God.

The efforts of Prophets Abraham and Ismael culminated some 2500 years later in a new generation that is referred to in the Quran as '*qair-e-ummah*' (3: 110). In the days of Prophet Abraham, his followers numbered just a handful, but by this time a team had been created that would reflect the supplication of the Prophet, '...make of our descendants a nation that will submit to you....' (THE QURAN 2: 128).

The Islamic scholar-historian Philip. K. Hitti, referred to them in his book, *History of the Arabs* (1937), as a 'nursery of heroes'. English scholar and orientalist, David Samuel Margoliouth has described them as a 'nation of heroes'. This kind of acknowledgement was nothing but acceptance of an established fact that was well recorded in history. Quranic words are a prediction about the companions of the Prophet, which no one knew about at the time of revelation of these verses.

It was in this generation that Muhammad-bin-Abdullah was born in 570 A.D. God chose him to be a prophet in 610 A.D., and when he breathed his last, in 623 A.D., his companions numbered over 125,000. This was the team that was the culmination of a historical process that had started 2500 years before. Through the generations of Prophet Abraham and Ismael, a group of precious individuals were selected who would devote their lives to God and who for the first time in history would take the message of the Oneness of God towards an ideological revolution.

The pilgrimage of Haj is an annual reminder of this great mission that was originated by Prophet Abraham. □



DE-CONDITIONING THE MIND

‘NO man is an island entire of itself’. Every man is born in a particular society, and it is this society that creates the mindset of an individual. We imbibe the affects of our surroundings and the prevailing culture. Every man and woman is a product of the environment or society he or she lives in. These societal effects that are cultivated in one's mind is what is referred to as the conditioning of the mind. Everyone possesses a mind that is conditioned in some way or the other, and this is the biggest issue we face.

It is this conditioning that is responsible for turning us away from our original pure nature. In this respect, every one is a sure case of a conditioned mind. It is very important that this unnatural effect is eliminated; that is the conditioned mind is de-conditioned. Hence, it becomes imperative that each one of us de-condition ourselves and bring ourselves back on to our pure original nature. This process of de-conditioning of the mind can also be called as the re-engineering of the mind.

Every man and woman is a product of the environment or society they live in.

In society, various activities are undertaken with the aim of purification of the mind. Despite diverse activities, this goal is far from being realized. This is because all these activities are attempted without first de-conditioning the mind. It is as if everyone is on a journey which has yet to commence. It is only after de-conditioning the mind that one can have a truly well-prepared mind. Without such a well-prepared mind, one will be unable to accept anything with an open mind, and will, instead, understand things based on preconceived notions.

We are all born in a pure natural state. Due to the conditioning we receive from society and family, our nature is influenced. This conditioning is like a series of coverings over our true nature, similar to the peels of an onion. De-conditioning is a process that can be symbolically explained as a removal of these layers, one by one, until the true, pure nature is uncovered. In this respect an onion is a material example of the de-conditioning process.

All efforts to purify the mind are unproductive until and unless a de-conditioning of the mind is first undertaken. And the biggest thing that requires de-conditioning is the total elimination of negative thinking. *Tazkiya* is the Islamic name for this process of de-conditioning and purification of the mind, which has to be undertaken continuously, till the end of one's life.

The Process of De-conditioning

De-conditioning of the mind can only be done by one process alone, and that is introspection. This is a continuous, merciless examination of our own selves in order to improve. This improvement can come in two ways. One is to accept the harsh criticism of others by acknowledging their external 'hammering' with an open mind. Without being offended, one should take on board harsh criticism from others, and, after an objective analysis, carry out a complete re-assessment of oneself.

**Every man is born in a society and it is this society
that creates the mind-set of an individual.**

The other method of de-conditioning can be called 'self-hammering'. This is to look at ourselves with a critical eye, to evaluate ourselves day and night; to perceive every mistake with severity and then introspect by mercilessly 'hammering' ourselves without giving ourselves any concessions in any matter. Instead of accusing others, we should carry out an objective analysis of ourselves and find our own faults.

These are the only two possible ways of de-conditioning. Either one accepts the 'hammering' of others or one becomes one's own worst critic by 'self-hammering'. The one who likes to hear good things about himself from others and makes excuses to himself for his mistakes will always remain a conditioned person and will never be able to de-condition or purify his mind. □



THE MESSAGE AND MEANING OF HAJ

THE significance and message of the pilgrimage is for man to turn towards God, making God the central focus of his life. Although the Haj lasts for just a few days, the lessons it provides have a much broader significance. Haj is a comprehensive guide for the whole of one's life.

When we take leave of our homes and families and set off for Haj, we feel that we are journeying towards God. It is as if we have left our world and are entering the world of God. We feel we are heading towards the House of God, to the abode and place of experience of God's Prophet and his companions — to the historically significant places of people who had devoted th

eir entire lives for the sake of God, and who gave their lives in God's path. With this, the pilgrim also realizes the fact that he is setting off for that place which God specially chose to reveal his final guidance to humankind.

**The significance and message of the pilgrimage
— is for man to turn towards God, making God
the central focus of his life.**

In this manner, Haj leads to the pilgrim becoming a God-oriented person. He recalls and remembers God. His mind is filled with thoughts of God. If earlier he used to think principally about himself, now he thinks mainly or wholly of God.

A man's psyche is moulded in accordance with his thoughts. If we think about and act only for ourselves, we become self-centered. But when we set off towards God, our mind turns towards Him. We begin to think of God. We now remember that it was God who created us. That it is God who gave us so many different opportunities. That it was He who made us capable of doing many things in this world. That it was because of His blessings that we are able to journey towards His house. That, finally, the day will dawn when we will die, after which we will have to directly appear in His court. All this makes the pilgrim's journey into a truly spiritual one. Although, the Haj is in the form of a

physical journey, due to its internal spirit it becomes a meaningful one that takes the pilgrim to a high spiritual plane.

During the journey, the pilgrim calls out the following words:

God is the Greatest! God is the Greatest! There is none worthy
of worship other than Him! And God is the Greatest!
God is the Greatest! And all praise is for Him!

By constantly repeating these words, a consciousness develops in a *haji* (Haj pilgrim) that all greatness is for God alone. In comparison to God, everything else pales into complete insignificance. The greatness of everything else is only so that it can be drowned or surrendered in this greatest of all glory — the glory of God. This is the real secret of social consciousness. You cannot have unity and harmonious collective living where every person thinks that he/she is greater than the others. On the other hand, when everyone surrenders their sense of individual greatness, you will find unity and harmony. Disunity is a result of the dispersal of greatness and unity is a result of the acknowledgement of a single greatness. People can live harmoniously together only when everyone surrenders their sense of greatness before a single being.

When people from different parts of the world arrive close to the place of pilgrimage, they remove their distinctive dress and don the same sort of simple, unstitched white clothes — a uniform known as *ihram*. This symbolizes that they have now entered a new world. By removing their national costume or personal dress, it is as if they are shedding the lifestyles that they had been conditioned into. They are now stirred by a powerful God-consciousness, being dyed in the hue of God.

**As we set off for Haj, we feel that we are journeying
towards God. It is as if we have left our world
and are entering the world of God.**

Putting divine clothes on their bodies, the pilgrims begin to utter divine words. *Labbaik! Allahuma Labbaik!* 'Here I am at Your service! Here I am at Your service!', they cry out, as if God had called them and they are rushing towards Him. The cries of *Labbaik! Labbaik!* 'Here I am at Your service! Here I am at Your service!' resound continuously from the pilgrims all around. When the pilgrim cries, *Labbaik!* 'Here I am!', he doesn't mean to say that he has come to settle in Makkah.

It isn't a declaration of his having left his homeland and arriving in Makkah. Rather, it is a declaration of having left his previous conduct or behaviour. It is an announcement to say that, 'I am here with a complete willingness to obey You (God), and do whatever You (God) command. To submit my life and soul to Your command.' Although the pilgrim declares, *Labbaik*, 'Here I am at Your service!' at the place of Haj; he must stand by this declaration in practice in his personal life on his return from Haj.

On reaching Makkah, the first thing that the pilgrim does is to circumambulate the Kabah. This is an important ritual of Haj known as the *tawaf*. The Kabah is a historical structure originally built by Prophet Abraham in the centre of a large courtyard also called the House of God. In the courtyard, the pilgrims go around the Kabah seven times, symbolizing their willingness to have God as the centre of their lives. They affirm that they will consider God as the focus around which their lives will revolve. It is as if scattered bits of iron are being pulled towards a divine magnet.

Although the pilgrim declares, *Labbaik*, 'Here I am at Your service!' at the place of Haj; he must stand by this declaration in practice in the personal life that he leads on his return from Haj.

The *tawaf* is symbolic of making all one's efforts constrained around a single focus. This is akin to our solar system, where all the planets revolve around a single sun, making it the focus around which they revolve. In the same way,

Haj essentially teaches us to lead God-centric lives; to make God the focus of every aspect of our lives and to spend our lives according to His will. This is the same with all the other rituals of Haj that in different symbolic ways impart the lesson of a God-conscious life.

Believers all over the world turn towards the Kabah every day, offering their five daily prayers. Ordinarily, this is just a notion in the minds of people, but when they gather together during the Haj, it becomes an astounding reality. When believers from all over the world pray together facing the Kabah, they experience an amazing sense of unity

when they realize that they are facing the same Kabah of the believers of the whole world.

During the *tawaf*, the orderly circumambulation of the Kabah provides the pilgrims another invaluable lesson — of working together, of doing things together and in harmony. Here, differences between rulers and subjects are eliminated completely, as are ethnic differences. It is as if every single person has just one status: as a servant of the one God. At this time, they have no other status but this.

After the *tawaf*, the pilgrim runs seven times between the hillocks of Safa and Marwah. This too, is a symbolic declaration — an expression of the pilgrim's determination to devote all efforts in God's path. This running between the two hillocks is not simply a mere physical act. Rather, in the form of repetition of a historical act, it stands for the pilgrim's willingness to spend his whole life running in God's path. It is symbolic of making all activities throughout one's life to be contained within certain boundaries. Such regulation is necessary for a well-ordered life. If our activities are not bounded or regulated in this manner, it would lead to chaos.

**Disunity is a result of the distribution of greatness
and unity is a result of the acknowledgement
of a single greatness.**

One of the most important acts of worship during Haj is the heading to and staying in the plain of Arafat. This presents a truly astonishing sight. Vast numbers of people, from across the world, assemble here, wearing the same simple clothes and uttering the same words, '*Here I am at Thy service O Lord, here I am.*' It is a worldly rehearsal of the Day of Judgment, when all people will be brought before God. It is a reminder of this great truth that one day we will all have to stand before God, accountable for all our actions. If one realizes this significance of the assembly at Arafat, one's life can be totally transformed. It is as if all the differences among human beings have suddenly vanished, and that, setting aside all their conflicts, they have surrendered themselves to the one God. It is as if they have all become one, just as their God is one. Despite their differences of language, colour, status and gender, they have become identical and one. Different nationalities, it appears, have all turned into one single nation or community. Haj is a glorious

and unparalleled expression of human unity and collectiveness. One cannot find anything similar elsewhere in the world.

Another part of the rituals of Haj is the stoning of the *Jamarat*. It symbolizes preparation for warding off the evil whispers of the devil. By stoning the *Jamarat*, the pilgrim refreshes his determination to repel evil and cause the devil to flee from him. He announces his enmity against, and opposition to, the devil. If one converts this symbolic act into actual practice, one can truly expel all evil and negativity from oneself.

After this, the pilgrim sacrifices an animal in God's path. In the Quran it is considered as a divine symbol. Sacrificing an animal stands for sacrificing one's own self. By sacrificing an animal, the pilgrim symbolizes his willingness to sacrifice everything in God's path, including even his own life if need be. He expresses, thereby, his commitment to offer his everything for God's sake.

**Haj teaches us to lead God-centric lives; to make God
the focus of every aspect of our lives and to
spend our lives according to His will.**

Although the rituals of Haj are completed in Makkah, many pilgrims go to Medina after finishing their Haj. The ancient name for Medina is Yathrib. Towards the end of his life, the Prophet of Islam made it his centre, and that is why it came to be known as *Madinat ul-Nabi* or 'The City of the Prophet'. Medina is a short form of this term.

In Medina is a mosque built by the Prophet, where his grave is also located. Here also one finds the footprints of his prophetic life. When *hajjis* arrive in Medina, they are reminded once again of the collective unity of mankind despite its diversity. The mosque of the Prophet reminds them that their one true guide is the same Prophet. They return from here with the feeling that despite their geographical or national differences, they have to follow the same path, the one shown by the Prophet.

This is another powerful symbol of their unity. They return from Medina inspired by the understanding that no matter what their differences—of nation, ethnicity and so on—they must all walk on the path of their same prophet, that they must take as their guide the same blessed figure, and that their God is the One God. □

IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE THINKING

ABOUT 4000 years ago, Prophet Abraham had to leave his wife Hajira and his son Ismael in the deserts of Arabia and returned to Al-Sham in present day Syria. When Ismael grew up, he married a woman from the tribe of *Jurham*. After some time, Prophet Abraham visited this place where he met his son Ismael's wife. She complained to him of the severe conditions of life. While leaving, Prophet Abraham told her to pass on a message to Ismail when he returned — "to change the 'threshold' of his house". On his return, Ismail divorced his wife and married another woman. A few years later, Prophet Abraham returned once again to visit his son's family. When he met Ismael's wife, she did not complain about anything, and, instead, expressed gratitude at the conditions. On hearing this, Prophet Abraham told her that when Ismael returned she should give this message to him: "Maintain the 'threshold' of your house."

For any great mission the people who are suitable are only those who have the highest level of positive thinking and who are free from all complaints.

Prophet Abraham had settled his family in the deserts of Arabia. The purpose of this was to begin a new generation in a pure and simple uncorrupted environment. A generation that would devote themselves to the mission of *Tawheed* (Oneness of God), spreading it throughout the world. From the above incident we can understand that for the great mission of spreading the message of the oneness of God the people who are suitable are only those who have the highest level of positive thinking, and who are free from all complaints and negative thinking.

We also understand from this that in the process of purification of our minds, the most important aspect is for us to develop a personality free of all types of complaint. Despite what one might want to see as causes for complaint, one should have a completely positive personality. Negative thinking destroys the purity of the mind, while positive thinking is a necessary condition for the purification of the mind. A negative thinker becomes prey to evil tendencies. On the other hand, a positive thinker begins to live in the company of angels and it is not possible for purification of our minds without divine help. □

THE REALITY OF SACRIFICE

SACRIFICE is about giving up all that you have, and, in return, receiving that which you do not have. Sacrifice teaches us that if we want to acquire something, we first need to have the courage to give up what we have. If we want to truly live, we should first be ready to face death. Sacrifice is not a soulless ritual. Rather, it is a living reality that is intertwined with life in the same way as the laws of Nature are inextricably linked with the entire cosmos.

Sacrifice is not the end, but, rather, the beginning of true action. Sometimes, a seemingly small thing turns into something of great significance. What may appear small may actually symbolize something of enormous importance. So is it with sacrifice on the day of *Eid ul-Azha*. On the face of it, the sacrifice involves offering an ordinary animal in the name of God. But it actually is a symbol of something really big, rather than an occasional, spiritless and meaningless custom. By sacrificing an animal on this day, we symbolize our determination to sacrifice everything, including even our lives, for a higher purpose.

Sacrifice teaches us that if we want to acquire something, we first need to have the courage to give up what we have.

Here is an example of how an apparently small act can indicate something very big. This is about an incident that happened in November 1962, when the aggression of a neighbouring country had caused grave danger to India. The whole country was stunned. At this time, about 25,000 young men in Ahmedabad got together, determined to do something to protect the country, even if they had to sacrifice their lives. After deciding this, each of them contributed one paisa. In this way, they collected a sum of 25,000 paises, and presented this money to the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. While giving this money, they said that they were actually giving themselves to him.

On the face of it, each of these youths gave just a single paisa to the Prime Minister, a sum which ordinarily didn't have much value. But their single paisa was actually of enormous value because it symbolized a human being who was offering himself. Thus, the 25,000 paises that

they donated was a symbolic expression of the 25,000 lives that they had determined to offer for the country.

In the same way, sacrificing an animal is a symbolic expression of Man's determination to sacrifice his all, even his life, for the sake of higher, divine, purposes.

God has made this world in such a way that he who effaces himself alone is crowned with success. The sacrifice of an animal on the day of *Eid ul-Azha* is an annual event that reminds us of this divine law. It is not something that has no connection with the mainstream of life. Sacrifice is, in fact, a universal law.

**If we want to truly live, we should
first be ready to face death.**

This can be clarified with the help of an analogy. If you keep a seed in a cold storage, it will remain as a seed. But if you plant it in the ground, then something really astounding happens. In a while, the seed transforms into a tree. The tree adds colour to its surroundings and brings joy to the beholder, besides proving to be useful in many other ways. It produces a great many seeds, which, in turn, soon turn into trees. And so on.

What is the reason for the difference of the fate of the seed that lies in the cold storage and the one that is planted in the earth? It lies in this thing called sacrifice. The seed that is planted in the soil sacrifices, as it were, itself. It effaces itself. This is how it is transformed into a sturdy tree. In contrast, the seed that lies in the cold storage doesn't make any such sacrifice of itself. And that is why it remains of no use or importance.

A seed becomes a tree only when it effaces itself. The tree produces a beautiful flower. When the flower effaces its beautiful self, it is transformed into a fruit. In turn, the fruit agrees to efface itself — and then it is eaten by human beings and becomes part of their blood and flesh.

In this world, the root to success for everything is one and the same: sacrifice. Whether it be in the field of knowledge, commerce, politics, social welfare or ethics and morality — in every sphere, success is

possible only through sacrifice. The Creator of this world has made the world in such a way that no success is possible without sacrifice.

If you think that you can achieve great success simply by mouthing a few slogans or doing some superficial activities, without making any sacrifices, you are simply fooling yourself. It just cannot happen in this God-created world. How, then, can God be pleased with someone if he or she doesn't want to make any sort of sacrifice? When God has established a principle — that success is possible only if one undergoes sacrifice — it is as if God has also made it known to us the way to find Him, is through sacrifice. Sacrifice — the condition for getting anything in this world — is also the condition for finding God. If we want to please God, we will have to sacrifice ourselves for Him. God bestows His all on those who give Him their all. Without sacrifice, one cannot get anything in this system that God has made.

Sacrificing an animal is a symbolic expression of Man's determination to sacrifice his all, even his life, for the sake of higher, divine, purposes.

The principle for success in this world is the same as that in the life after death. Life after death is much more valuable than life in this world. That is why the sacrifice that is required for success in the life after death is much greater than what is required for success in this world. According to Islam, our life is divided into two parts. One, extremely small part is our existence in the world in which we presently live. The infinitely bigger part, which lasts forever, is the life that we will face after death. Success in the life after death, like success in the present world, is dependent entirely on sacrifice. The world of heaven is like a colony of excellent, selected people who, while on earth, excelled in terms of belief and actions. Those who do not measure up to this standard in this world will be pushed into the fires of hell.

What does it mean to become a good human being? It means to begin to live on the divine plane, to cultivate divine attributes within oneself. For this, we have to fight with the evil inclinations inside us. We have to work throughout our lives to keep away from negative influences. This is a path of continuous sacrifice. Only those who have cultivated the courage for this sort of sacrifice will find a place in God's heavenly realm. For this, one needs to cleanse one's mind of all false ideas and beliefs. We must engage in this 'intellectual operation', no matter what

the cost, even if it demands that we have to slaughter some of our deeply-cherished beliefs. This requires that we mould our character on the basis of the Truth, even if this means sacrificing our worldly interests. We must bow our heads before the Truth, even if this means having to lose our so-called superiority. We must make love and commitment to the Truth the manifesto of our lives, even if this means that we have no status or position in this world.

Success in the life after death, like success in the present world, is dependent entirely on sacrifice

In every age, certain practises become popular, certain social bonds become deeply cemented, and certain beliefs become deeply cherished. One gets used to these things and strongly believes that they are right, true and proper. And so, when one is faced with the call of the Truth, it is often the case that one instinctively takes it as a threat to one's interests. We might construe this call of the Truth as a challenge to our social relations, and as a negation of our beliefs that we cling to in the hope of a blissful future. Because of this, to accept the call of the Truth entails great sacrifice. It is tantamount to offering one's very life at the sacrificial altar of the Truth.

But it is this sacrifice that makes human beings beloved in the eyes of God. It is this sacrifice that leads to the opening of the doors of eternal bliss in heaven. The only price of heaven is the sacrifice of one's self. Without this sacrifice, no one can gain entry into God's paradise. ❏



Greatest Sacrifice

It is a fact that acknowledgment of truth is worship, nay; it is the greatest form of worship. It is an act for which man has to make the greatest sacrifice.

What makes it such a great sacrifice is that it involves the setting aside of one's prestige.

THE DUTY OF MUSLIMS TO MANKIND

THE mission of Muslims is *dawah* or the communication of the Word of God. It is in its performance that they will be held deserving of being raised in the Hereafter as the followers of the Prophet of Islam. This is expressed in the following verse of the Quran:

O Messenger, deliver whatever has been sent down to you by your Lord. If you do not do so, you will not have conveyed His message.

THE QURAN 5: 67

Although this verse is addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, his followers are included in it. The first thing that this verse tells us is to convey the divine revelations to the people. This is the task which God wants Muslims to perform. According to the Quran, God has made the Muslims a middle nation, so that they may act as witnesses over mankind, and the messenger may be a witness for them. (THE QURAN 2: 143). This status of Muslims has been explained thus in a *hadith*: "You are God's witnesses on this earth."

All the problems which Muslims face in this life have a common solution — in the form of calling people to God.

It is a known fact that when a person is appointed to any position of responsibility, his future depends on how well or badly he carries out the duties which that post entails. If he satisfactorily performs the duty for which he has been appointed, he will be held deserving of all kinds of rewards. But if he neglects his duty, no other work done, even if it is on a larger scale, will make him deserving on any honour in the eyes of his Creator. In this matter, Muslims must pay heed to this warning which was given to the previous people of the Book, when they stopped conveying God's message to mankind:

God made a covenant with those who were given the Book to make it known to people and not conceal it. But they cast it behind their backs and bartered it for a paltry price:
what an evil bargain they made!

Those who exult in their misdeeds and love to be praised for

what they have not done should not suppose that they are secure from punishment; they shall suffer a grievous punishment.

THE QURAN 3: 187-188

The mission of Muslims is dawah or the communication of the Word of God.

A sect which is the bearer of the Divine Book becomes valueless in the eyes of God when it fails to convey the Divine revelation to the people. Engaging in other activities at the cost of preaching God's word and wrongly designating other activities as *dawah* work is adding insult to injury. No such group can ever be held deserving of any credit for carrying out the Divine task.

***Dawah* work — the solution to all problems.**

Muslims face many problems but they do not need to devote their energies to solving those problems (THE QURAN 5: 67). God has given them a master-key, and that is, *dawah* work, which can solve all their problems. For instance, man needs a number of things in his life, but, rather than pay attention to them separately, he sets about making money, because he knows that if he can make money all his needs will be fulfilled on their own. The same is true of spreading God's word. All the problems which Muslims face in this life have a common solution — in the form of calling people to God. This is what the message of Haj is. □



Mind at Peace

*Spirituality is the result of a peaceful mind.
And, living with a mind at peace lies within
your own domain. No one can interfere with it.
Your mind is your own exclusive property.*

*Do not allow anyone to rule your mind
– by remote control as it were. This is the only
practical formula for the attainment of spirituality.*

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SACRIFICE

THE sacrifice of an animal on the occasion of *Eid ul-Azha* every year has a great bearing on human life. It symbolizes the moulding and making of a pure life. Today, however, this sacrifice has become an annual ritual. It remains alive only as a soulless religious tradition, as something to be done as a ritual on a particular day. It seems to have no impact whatsoever on people's lives. However, if the sacrifice were done in its true spirit, our entire society would have been very different.

Referring to the sacrifice, the Quran says:

Their flesh and blood do not reach God:
it is your piety that reaches Him.

THE QURAN 22: 37

Flesh and blood are present in the bodies of the animals that are slaughtered, while piety should be present in the heart of the person who slaughters them. From the above-mentioned Quranic verse it is clear that while it appears the animals are being presented before God, in reality it is human beings who are presenting themselves before Him. In other words, the actual sacrifice is not the slaughter of an animal, but, instead, the slaughter of one's self.

Today, sacrifice has become an annual ritual. It remains alive only as a soulless religious tradition.

Sacrifice, understood in this way, is more about the one who engages in the act of slaughter rather than the being that is slaughtered. On the face of it, this slaughter seems an external or outwardly act. But, in actual fact, it is — or should be — an inner action. That person's sacrifice alone is proper who converts his outwardly act of slaughter into an inwardly one.

By slaughtering an animal, we express our determination to slaughter our egos for the sake of God, to sacrifice our own personal interests and be firmly established in the path of righteousness, to ignore all personal interests whilst obeying God's commandments. In this way,

we express our readiness to slice off with a knife our egos if they become a hurdle in our journeying on God's path.

In another verse that mentions sacrifice the Quran says:

Pray to your Lord and sacrifice to Him alone.

THE QURAN 108: 2

In a sense, this verse speaks about two aspects of faith: one, humility and modesty, and the other, selflessness and sacrifice. Prayer symbolizes humility, while slaughtering an animal symbolizes sacrifice. It is on these two fundamentals — humility and sacrifice — that the entire edifice of the faith stands.

While it appears that the animals are being presented before God, in reality it is human beings who are presenting themselves before Him.

It can, in a sense, be said that we should relate to God through humility and to God's servants — our fellow beings — through sacrifice. God is Great, and we are small. God is the Giver, and we are recipients. God is the Master, and we are His slaves. In this sense, the only appropriate way to relate with God is through humility. Here, the excellence of the slave is to accept his insignificance before God. In this context, we accept our utter insignificance before Him and express our humility and complete surrender and obedience to Him.

The act of sacrifice has much to do with our relations with fellow human beings. It is linked to morality and appropriate behaviour in society.

The Quran tells us that when the Prophet Abraham wanted to sacrifice his son, Ismael, the latter said:

O my father, do as you are commanded;
and God willing, you will find me steadfast.

THE QURAN 37: 102

From this we learn that patient steadfastness or *sabr* is the underlying basis of sacrifice. Unless we become truly steadfast and able to persevere and patiently face things, we really won't have made any sacrifice at all. In sacrificing an animal, we express our resolve to

become as steadfast in our lives as the Prophet Ismael.

Patient steadfastness is the sole foundation of a healthy society. Without patience, such a society is impossible. This is because when many people live together, it is inevitable that things will repeatedly arise that people regard as unpleasant. This happens even in a family situation or in a small locality. And, so, naturally, it will happen in a large community, too. If a room is full of statues, of course the statues won't ever come into conflict with each other. But things are different when human beings live together. It is but natural that they will have their differences and complaints.

**To slaughter the animal inside us that comes to life
when faced with differences and complaints,
is the real sacrifice that God desires.**

In such conditions, the only way to prevent conflict and chaos in society is for people to embody the virtue of *sabr* or patient determination. They must learn to patiently face the unpleasantness of others. They must rise above complaints whilst forging relationships with each other.

Patience always demands sacrifice. It is impossible to steadfastly face difficult situations without sacrifice. In life, one repeatedly faces situations when, because of someone else's actions, we feel insulted. Our egos are hurt by the behaviour of others. We get provoked and driven to anger. In such situations, the animal in us is rudely awakened. At such moments, we need to slaughter this 'animal' inside us. The sacrifice of this 'inner animal' alone is the true sacrifice. Only through this sacrifice can we build and lead a truly God-oriented life. Only then can we go on to build a truly healthy society.

To slaughter the animal inside us that comes to life when faced with differences and complaints is the real sacrifice that God desires. By offering this sacrifice, we offer proof of that exalted quality that is called *taqwa* or piety in the Quran (THE QURAN 22: 37).

Only after we sacrifice this 'psychological animal' does the great virtue of *sabr* or steadfastness begin to appear in us. Steadfastness, patient toleration, forgiveness and avoidance are indispensable for a healthy society. These qualities can only emerge in the true sense of the term

only when we slaughter the 'inner animal' that resides within each one of us.

The Quran says:

Call mankind to the Pilgrimage [...] so that they may witness its benefit for them and, on the appointed days may utter the name of God over the cattle He has provided for them. Then eat their flesh, and feed the distressed and the needy [...]

THE QURAN 22: 27-28

From this verse we learn about two more aspects of sacrifice. One is that whenever we use anything given by God we have to take God's name. Taking the name of God when using something is an acknowledgment that it, along with everything else, is a direct gift from God. God has given human beings countless things to fulfill our needs. And so, we must recognize them as gifts from God and use them accordingly, rather than thinking them to be a product of our intelligence or power.

By slaughtering an animal, we express our determination to slaughter our egos for the sake of God.

When an animal is slaughtered, we are commanded to eat its meat and to share it with others. In this way, this sacrifice enkindles in us the spirit of generosity, compassion and mutual help and sharing. It teaches us to share our food with others, to recognize that our food and our earnings are not ours alone to enjoy, but that others, too, have a share in them. It teaches us not to be concerned only with our own affairs and with solving our own problems, but to also make efforts to help others solve their problems, too. It teaches us that we cannot live as isolated and unrelated individuals, and that, instead, we need to learn how to live as useful members of society, thereby, becoming a good 'part of the whole' of mankind.

If we keep these aspects in mind, we can better appreciate that the sacrifice is not just a soulless historical tradition but a live act with a message and meaning. The message of sacrifice is this: Slaughter the 'animal' within you and bring to life the humanness that also resides inside you. This is what sacrifice really means. This is the real message of sacrifice. □

AFTER HAJ

THE personality that should emerge after performing Haj is one in which a two-fold activity is set in motion, one form being external; and the other, internal.

‘External activity’ here refers to the *dawah* work which a person undertakes after having seen the places where Prophet Abraham, Ismael and Prophet Muhammad with his companions spent much of their lives or in this divine task. Until then, the pilgrim had just heard about these places, but when he physically goes to those places, he receives a great inspiration to continue this prophetic mission.

Haj removes one completely from one’s worldly environment so that one can completely concentrate on God.

‘Internal activity’ here means a heightened sensitivity and awareness towards piety, self-control, the avoidance of violence and aggression and the need to lead life devoted to God, instead of one devoted to self-glorification. In other words, during and after Haj, the *haji* undergoes a continuous process of de-conditioning.

Lesson of Piety

In a verse about Haj, the Quran says:

The pilgrimage is in the appointed months. Whoever intends to perform it during them must abstain from indecent speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarrelling while on the pilgrimage. Whatever good you may do, God is aware of it. Make provision for yourselves — but surely, the best of all provision is God-consciousness.

Always be mindful of Me, you that are
endowed with understanding.

THE QURAN 2: 197

Haj, for the Arabs, was an ethnic festival, not an expression of the worship of the one God. In pre-Islamic times, Haj was associated with all sorts of practices that are characteristic of tribal or ethnic festivals.

Islam put an end to these. In this context, the Quran, as the above-verse tells us, forbade things like indecent speech, wicked conduct and quarrelling during Haj, things that are forbidden even in ordinary circumstances but which are to be avoided with particular care during Haj. One major reason for this is that because when an occasion demands travel and a large number of people coming together, the chances of such misbehaviour are greater. If a person is not fully conscious of such matters, it is possible that he may indulge in such activities, willingly or unwillingly. Since Haj involves travel and a large gathering, such misbehaviour is clearly and explicitly forbidden as these things destroy piety.

A true believer is one whose life is driven not by lust, but, rather, by a higher purpose. He takes every care not to disobey God in any of his dealings. He abstains from conflict with others. This is how a true believer should always behave, but during Haj when a person exemplifies these traits, he shows himself to be a true *haji*. If he has really imbibed these values of piety that he should possess during Haj, he will desist from the sort of misdemeanour that above-quoted verse of the Quran refers to.

Additional Precautions

Things that are forbidden during Haj are also forbidden at other times, too. They are to be particularly abstained from, during Haj, but they must be avoided at other times as well. By stressing that we should be particularly careful about avoiding them during Haj, it is so that we are more conscious of such activities and develop the special capability to abstain from them at other times also.

One of the most dangerous things that constantly threaten to undermine harmonious collective living is one's tongue.

When we are in our homes or in our workplaces, we are deeply engrossed in our personal affairs. We forget the realities that exist beyond these levels. That is why people are encouraged to go to mosques every day to pray — so that for at least some time they come out of their personal environments, free their minds from irrelevant affairs, and focus, with deep concentration, on God. Travelling for Haj is also like this. During Haj, one is taken out of one's limited environment and is taken to

various places in Arabia over a period of several days. In this way, Haj removes one completely from one's worldly environment so that one can completely concentrate on God.

There are several religious traditions associated with Arabia. The Kabah is in Arabia — and a great many religious traditions, accumulated over several thousand years, are associated with it. Stories of the sacrifices of prophets have been written here. Here are memorials testifying to the divine blessings received by pious servants of God. Here are also signs of the lives of God's last prophet and his companions.

The *ihram* worn in Haj is a practical expression of the Islamic principle of human equality.

Historical connections of this sort have given the places associated with Haj a unique sanctity and respect. As soon as one enters this area, an entire religious history comes to life in one's mind and one's religious spirit is enkindled. One begins to abide by one's religious duties with greater seriousness and commitment. Because of the special historical importance of this area, God selected it to be an arena where people come to rehearse the Islamic way of life, so that when they go back to where they came from they can be better equipped and inspired to lead God-oriented lives.

Among the things that are forbidden while on Haj are hurting anyone through one's tongue and killing or wounding any animal. One is also to abstain from certain comforts and indulgences, such as wearing stitched clothes, using perfume and engaging in sexual relations.

Being Careful While Speaking

One of the most dangerous things that constantly threaten to undermine harmonious collective living is one's tongue. The greatest hurt you can do to someone is through your tongue. Vast numbers of people gather together on the occasion of Haj, and hence situations which hold the possibility that people may lose control over their tongues and use them to hurt others. So, the training and instruction of being especially watchful of what one says is given emphasis to by people during Haj. Although not hurting others in words is an Islamic value during all times, during the Haj, it is made a mandatory condition. It is made into a necessary part of an Islamic act of worship, despite it being a general Islamic teaching that applies at other times, too.

The Prophet said that he who performs Haj in such a way that others are safe from his tongue and hands, will have all the sins that he has committed till then, forgiven.

If we speak something indecent, it can hurt others. So also when we say bad and disrespectful things about others. It isn't good to speak harshly, too. All these things are totally forbidden while on Haj. In this way, people will appreciate the need to abstain from such speech at other times as well, when they return to their homes after Haj.

Abstaining From Violence and Aggression

After donning the *ihram*, it is forbidden for pilgrims to hunt animals. Also forbidden for the pilgrim are accepting as a gift, the meat of animals that have been hunted, plucking the feathers of birds, assisting others in hunting, giving someone a knife to slaughter an animal that has been hunted and so on. All these are forbidden.

During Haj, one can kill a pest or an animal such as a snake, and also the sacrificial animal that is part of the Haj rituals. But besides these, it is strictly forbidden for the pilgrim not only to kill but also to hurt any animal. Hunting animals under normal conditions is allowed. However, during Haj, this is completely forbidden.

**A true believer is one whose life is driven
not by lust, but, rather, by a higher purpose.**

This, in actual fact, is reiteration, in a stronger sense, of a general commandment of the *Islamic law*. Humans are expected not to kill fellow humans or to torment animals. These are general *shariah* laws that every Muslim is expected to follow at all times. But during Haj, these laws are expanded to include a ban on hunting. In this way, the pilgrim experiences a heightened awareness of these laws, and so when he returns to his home after Haj he will be more mindful in observing them. He will also become more mindful at all times not to oppress others.

A Life of Self-Control

A concise way of describing the Islamic way of life is to say that it is a life of self-control. The various controls and the code of discipline that one is expected to observe during Haj can be seen as a training for

such a way of life. This is reflected in the *hadith* report that we earlier quoted, in which the Prophet said that he who performs the Haj in a way that Muslims are safe from his tongue and his hands will have all his earlier sins forgiven.

So, while performing Haj the pilgrim must be very careful not to hurt anyone with his tongue and his hands — by his words and deeds. In this way, his earlier sins can be forgiven. The Haj where all of a person's sins are forgiven, is the Haj after which the *haji* returns with such a tongue and such hands.

Avoiding Self-Importance

During Haj, luxuries and indulgences are discouraged. Haj begins with the donning of the *ihram* — which is a very simple white dress. Every pilgrim must wear the *ihram*. It is, in a sense, a dress that denotes humility and simplicity. It is an announcement, in a way, through which God teaches His servants that all of them are equal. Outwardly or external things, on the basis of which people claim superiority or inferiority vis-à-vis others, are all hollow and false in the eyes of God.

The Prophet said that he who performs Haj in such a way that others are safe from his tongue and his hands, will have all the sins that he has committed till then, forgiven.

God sees everyone with the same eyes. It is like during Haj, when vast numbers of people, wearing the same sort of dress, appear to be identical to each other. It is as if the *ihram* worn in Haj is a practical expression of the Islamic principle of human equality. Those who truly want to become dutiful servants of God must remove every other 'dress' and, instead, don the same divine 'dress'.

The Prophet was asked who a *haji* is, and to this he replied, 'Unkempt hair, dusty clothing.' These words describe a true pilgrim. Unkempt hair and dusty clothing are symbolic of a man with purpose. When a person devotes himself with total seriousness to a certain cause, he will have no time for lavish grooming and beautification. During Haj, voluntarily abstaining from such activities is an instruction in leading a purposeful life. This means that we should immerse ourselves so deeply in the Divine cause that we lose all concern with the temptations of the

external world and forget all temporary enjoyments. In seeking higher purposes, we should forget our own personal desires and demands.

While referring to Haj, the Quran says:

Make provision for yourselves — but surely, the best of all provision is God-consciousness. Always be mindful of Me, you that are endowed with understanding.

THE QURAN 2: 197

In pre-Islamic Arabia, it was thought that making material provision for Haj reflected a materialistic outlook. If a person did not make such arrangements and set out for Haj, it was thought that he was very pious. Such a person would say about himself that he relied only on God. But the Quran does not consider this sort of external or exhibitionist religiosity as true piety. Religiosity has to do with the heart and mind, not with external demonstrations of this sort. True piety is not the mere lacking of material provision; it is a cleansing of the mind and heart of the fear of everything and everyone other than God. □



Accept, Introspect, Make Amends

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

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

NO FEAR OF ACCOUNTABILITY

THERE are very few people who believe that their lives will end after death and that life will not continue in one form or another. About 99% believe that death does not put an end to life, and that there is life after death which will continue eternally.

Despite this belief, there is almost no one who has any fears about the next stage of life. People accept life after the present life as a belief, but it has no bearing on their everyday lives. There are few exceptions to this rule.

What is the reason for this? It is because everyone has devised a self-made belief regarding life after death which has placed this concept within the framework of ritualism.

**People accept life after the present life as a belief,
but it has no bearing on their everyday lives.**

Jews believe in the concept of life after death. But they believe, in addition, that they are the 'chosen people of God' (THE QURAN 5: 18); that they will all go to heaven after death. This concept of a certain salvation has made Jews fearless about the Hereafter.

Christians also believe in the concept of life after death. But they believe furthermore, that Christ allowed himself to be crucified to atone for their sins and, in this way, he assured the salvation of his followers. This concept has relieved Christians of any fear of the Hereafter.

The same is true of Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. They also believe that human life is not ended by death but, rather, continues after death. Moreover, these religions have a common belief that man is repeatedly born into this very world after death, sometimes in human form and sometimes in non-human form. But, after this new birth, man's memory mysteriously vanishes. For instance, if a person in his previous life was healthy but led an immoral life, in his next life he will be born disabled. But he will have no memory of his previous life and will not realize that he has been born disabled due to the bad deeds committed by him in his previous life. Since he is not conscious of his past actions, he

neither feels repentance nor has he any urge for introspection. He lives on in unawareness and dies in unawareness.

In this matter, exactly the same is true of the Muslims. Almost all Muslims accept the concept of life after death and the belief in heaven and hell. But if you go deeper, you will find that almost all the present-day Muslims have no fears either about the Hereafter or about hell. They have, likewise, devised self-made concepts according to which salvation in the Hereafter appears certain to them.

For instance, all Muslims consciously regard themselves as being a special class. Any man or woman born into a Muslim family is surely entitled to paradise — so, many of them wrongly think. This concept is undoubtedly self-made, having nothing to do with either the Quran or the *hadith*. But it has become so common that it has become a part of Muslim thinking. All Muslims, whether scholars or commoners, rich or poor, intellectuals or laymen, have accepted this as an alleged established fact.

The belief in life after life acts as a powerful deterrent to man when he is about to commit evil, but when other self-made beliefs are added to this belief, then believing in the life after life is almost as good as not believing in it at all. □



Not yielding to frustration

*By forgetting what is lost,
one reorganizes one's work
on the basis of whatever
one still possesses.*

*Planning anew replaces getting frustrated
and this makes it possible to set oneself to
starting one's life's journey all over again.*

OPPORTUNITIES WILL NEVER CEASE

Voltaire (1694-1778), the well-known French philosopher, once commented:

Life is a shipwreck, but we must not forget
to sing in the lifeboats.

THE truth is that in life, opportunities will never cease. When one opportunity gets exhausted, another opportunity at once emerges. A person who loses an opportunity and does not discover the next opportunity will almost definitely meet with failure.

Life is replete with unexpected circumstances. One repeatedly experiences things that one has never even thought of before. And because of this, the plans we make show themselves to be faulty. That is why one should repeatedly re-examine one's plans.

To compensate for this, the Creator has filled the world with possibilities and opportunities. And so, when faced with failure, one must consider it as an experience and then move on to a new path and carry on with one's journey.

Failure is often a means for the evolution of one's personality. Failure can make you wiser. Failure can make you more serious. Failure can make you a stronger person. Failure can open even bigger doors of success for you.

Man's intellect is his greatest strength. He can solve all problems using his intellect, even the most apparently insoluble ones. If you remain courageous, your intellect will guide you in every circumstance. □



ON OLD AGE

In the Quran, God tells us:

But He will answer, 'Did We not make your life long enough to take warning if you were going to? [...]'

35:37

ACCORDING to a Hadith, the one who has reached old age or who has lived long will have no excuse to present before God. Human beings pass through various stages. Firstly, childhood; then, youth; and then, old age. Old age is the last possible stage in this world for anyone, because it is followed by death.

In this sense, old age is a prior notice of one's death. In old age, all of the organs of the body become weak. Some of them even stop functioning. This is an indication and a mandatory reminder of one's impending death. Old age leads one to stand at the edge of one's grave.

If a person's mind is awakened, when he reaches old age he will think, 'Now, very soon, the time will come when I shall die and shall appear before God so that I may be held accountable for my life. In this way, old age can shake up a person and make him conscious of the Hereafter.

Old age reminds him that his journey in this world is almost over, and that now he has to enter the next period of life and face the Divine court on the Day of Judgment.

Without doubt, he is the most unfortunate person who lives to see old age but fails to draw lessons from it about what will soon follow. He remained heedless of this, and died in the state of heedlessness. There could be nothing more tragic than this. □



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 pilgrimage is in the appointed months. Whoever intends to perform it during them must abstain from indecent speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarrelling while on the pilgrimage. Whatever good you may do, God is aware of it. Make provision for yourselves — but surely, the best of all provision is God-consciousness. Always be mindful of Me, you that are endowed with understanding. 2: 197

You will be committing no sin if (during the pilgrimage) you seek to obtain any bounty from your Lord. When you return from Arafat, remember God at the sacred place, and remember Him as He has guided you. Before this you were surely astray. Then press on from where the pilgrims stream forth and ask God's forgiveness. God is ever forgiving and most merciful. 2: 198 -199

When you have performed the acts of worship prescribed for you, celebrate the praises of God as you celebrated the praises of your fathers, or even more fervently than that. There are some who say, 'Our Lord, give us abundance in this world.' These shall have no share in the world to come. 2: 200

Fear of God is the basic element of worship. As long as one remains in this frame of mind, it does not matter if the order of a rite is changed by mistake in performing the rites of pilgrimage, or if one attends to some private business while in the holy land. What is important is that one should enter into the spirit of pilgrimage—fear of God, remembrance of Him, prayerfulness, thanksgiving and wholehearted submission to God. While on pilgrimage, one should make sure not to do anything which runs counter to this spirit. There should be no

feeling of superiority over fellow pilgrims, that is, one should 'press on from where the pilgrims stream forth.'

Making too much of one's forefathers and praising their great deeds is also against the spirit of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is for the glory of God, not for praise of the self. What place can such attitudes and activities have in Haj, the very lesson of which is the equality of man before one, supreme God? If one does not learn this lesson during the pilgrimage, what chance is there of one applying it throughout the rest of one's life?

But there are others who pray, 'Our Lord, grant us good in this world as well as good in the world to come, and protect us from the torment of the Fire.' 2: 201

Prayers, especially those offered during the pilgrimage, are an outward manifestation of an inward state. Whatever one cherishes in one's heart, one expresses in prayer. One who has set his mind on worldly riches and grandeur will concentrate on little else when he prays to God, whereas one who seeks the next world, with its infinite happiness and blessings, will make this the central theme of his devotions.

This prayer on the part of the believer is not a request for worldly riches. Material gain and worldly wealth are only parts of a 'test paper'. And no one would like to pray to increase the difficulty of his 'test paper'. This prayer is more like asking God to give him what is best for man in the eyes of God in this world and what is best for man in the eyes of God in the Hereafter.

Therefore, the best prayer for man is to say to his Lord, 'O my God, give me in this world whatever You see is good for this world, and give me in the next life whatever You see is good for that world and save me from eternal doom.'

They shall have a good share from what they have earned. God is swift in His reckoning. Remember God during the appointed days; for one who hastens to leave in two days, it shall be no sin; and for one who stays on, it shall be no sin for him either. This is for one who fears God. Have fear of God, and know that you shall all be gathered before Him. 2: 202 - 203

'You shall be gathered before Him' is the greatest lesson of pilgrimage, given in the plain of Arafat where millions of pilgrims gather annually.

This gathering symbolizes the final gathering of all human beings on Doomsday. Practical results are always produced by actions, not by words. □



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Glossary

Allahuma Labbaik, Here I am O God, Here I am.

Arafat, Plain about 9 kms east of Makkah. It is a major focal point for Haj. On 9th Dhul Hijjah (12th month of the lunar calendar) all pilgrims must present themselves here for the main rite called "the standing".

Dawah, Calling people towards God.

Dua, Supplication.

Eid-ul-Azha, The feast of the sacrifice. The third day of the Haj which is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a great festival.

Hadith, Sayings and deeds of the Prophet of Islam.

Hagar (Hajira), Name of the wife of Prophet Abraham.

Haj Lit., 'to set out for a place'. Pilgrimage to Makkah, which is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Haji, A person who performs Haj.

Hijrah, migration or the journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Medina. It marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Ihram Lit., 'Prohibiting'. Pilgrim's robe.

Jamarath, The three stone pillars in Mina where the pilgrims throw small pebbles, this being a rite of Haj.

Jurham, The name of an Arab tribe.

Kabah, the sacred house of God built originally by prophets, Abraham and Ismael.

Madinatul Nabi, City of the Prophet.

Sabr, Patience.

Safa and **Marwah**, Two small hills in Makkah near the Kabah between which pilgrims go back and forth seven times to re-enact Hagar's search for water for her baby, Ismael.

Sahih Bukhari, Most authentic Hadith collection by Muhammad bin Ismail Al-Bukhari (810-870).

Salath, Five obligatory prayers performed daily.

Tawaaf, A rite of Haj which is performed by going around the Kabah seven times in an anti-clockwise direction, having the Kabah on the left-hand side.

Tazkiyah, Purification of the soul.

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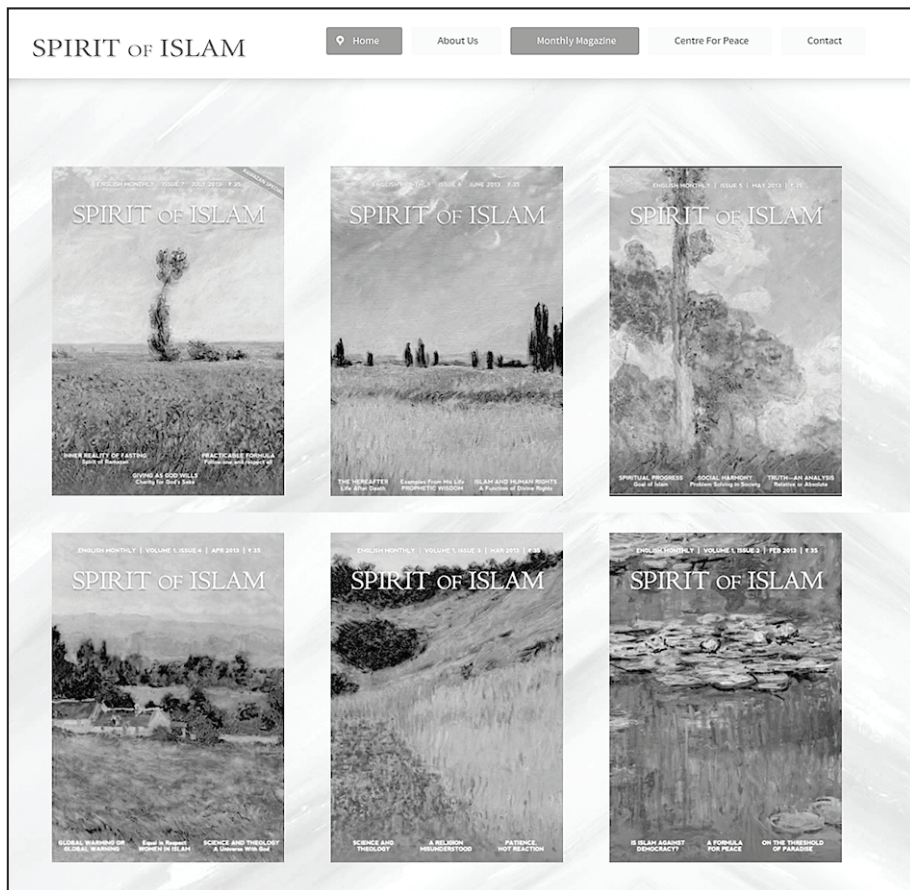
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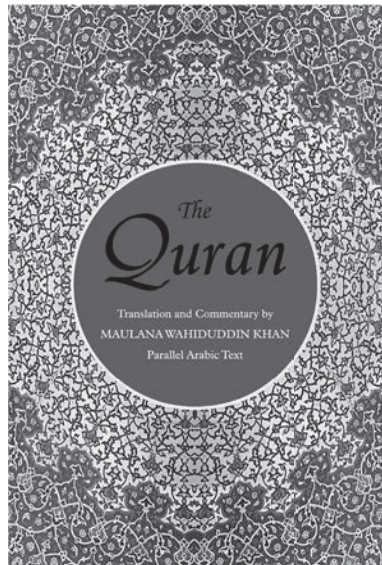
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