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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



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to one's fellowmen is wrong doing.**

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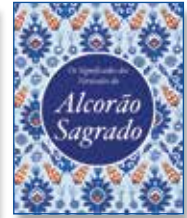
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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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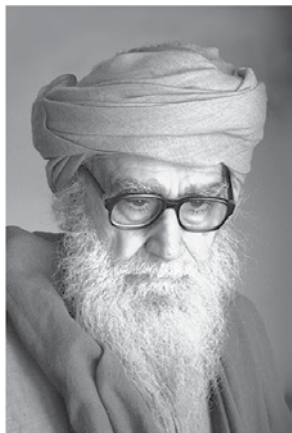
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

ERROR OF THE POLITICAL INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM

MARXISM is referred to as an 'economic interpretation' of history. This is because in Karl Marx's understanding of life, the economic factor dominates everything else. In the same way a few scholars projected Islam in such a way that every aspect of it seemed to acquire a political hue. Accordingly, one can term this ideology as a political interpretation of *deen* or the religion of Islam.

Life is a collection of various parts or aspects. These parts are separate from each other but yet are interlinked. They can also be ranked or placed at different levels.

Ordinarily, they are three broad ways in which we can discuss or describe these aspects:

We can describe a particular aspect in its relation to the totality in exactly the same way as it is in reality or as it appears to be. This is a legalistic sort of description.

We can stress a particular aspect which is the major subject of discussion in a given context.

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

We can make a particular aspect the basis of the interpretation of the totality of a phenomenon. Here, this particular aspect is presented as representing the phenomenon as a whole or as its central point. I have used the term 'interpretation' in this sense.

Let me now clarify this point about these three broad ways that one can describe the different parts of a phenomenon by examining the term 'economy'.

One way to talk about the economy is to say that human beings are made up of body and soul, and that the human body has certain needs that require to be satisfied through economic activity, just as the soul also needs certain things for its nourishment. This is a way of talking about an aspect of a phenomenon in terms of its relation to the whole.

The scholars who have given the political interpretation of Islam expressed their understanding of deen of Islam based on a single central factor—politics.

A second way of talking about the economy is to say that life depends on the economy, and that without the existence of appropriate economic means or resources, life is difficult, if not impossible. This is a way of talking about an aspect of a phenomenon by stressing its particular importance.

A third way of talking about the economy is to claim that economic conditions are the real driving-force of, or power behind history; that it is the economy that determines every aspect of life; and that every human feeling,

all forms of knowledge, and all human institutions are shaped by the prevailing economic conditions. This is a way of talking about an aspect of a phenomenon to be the sole basis of understanding the phenomenon as a whole.

The first of these examples is illustrative of the legalistic sort of description. The second is an instance of a way of addressing an issue in order to stress its particular importance while at the same time not making it out to be the fundamentally determining factor. The third is an example of making a particular aspect or factor the basis of interpreting a phenomenon in its totality.

What we have been discussing here applies to religion as well. *Deen* or religion of Islam has various parts or aspects or dimensions, and there are different ways of explaining and describing them.

Talking about them in terms of *fiqh* or jurisprudence is akin to the first method of description referred to above.

Missionaries and social reformers typically use the second method of description.

As for the third method which is talking about it by taking one aspect as the sole basis of understanding it as a whole. The scholars who have contributed to the political interpretation of Islam are an example of this third approach. They expressed their understanding of *deen* of Islam in such a manner, that it can be called, in the sense I am using the word, a particular interpretation of *deen* based on a single central factor—politics. In brief their understanding of *deen* can be said to be a 'political interpretation of Islam'.

I am aware that no single word can fully represent a complex phenomenon, but the picture of *deen* that emerges from their writings can be said to approximate what I term as a political interpretation of *deen*. In their writings the political aspect appears as the focal point of the totality of *deen*. From this perspective, the reality of belief and prophethood cannot be understood without taking politics into account. Nor can the true significance of worship be comprehended apart from its supposed political underpinnings. Nor, too, according to this perspective, can one progress on the spiritual path. It is as if without politics, the religion of Islam is utterly empty and totally incomprehensible.

The unrealistic and unnatural interpretation of any truth always passes through a historical process and results in total failure for those who follow it.

The unrealistic and unnatural interpretation of any truth always passes through a historical process and results in total failure for those who follow it. Today, we witness the worst manifestation of following such an ideology in the form of terrorism. □

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Loss & Gain

Often we have to lose in order to gain.

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM IN ISLAM

Acceptance of Truth

MAN has been granted total intellectual freedom in Islam. Islam with its message of freedom of expression brought a revolution in human history to all human beings. Earlier in all periods of human history, the system of absolutism prevailed in the world. That is why man was denied intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom is no simple matter. The truth is that the secret of all human progress lies hidden in intellectual freedom.

According to Islam the first benefit of this intellectual freedom is that man receives that highest good which is called 'fear of God' in the Quran (5: 94). It consists of man's recognition and realization of God in full freedom and, of one's own freewill, without any external pressure from God. So long as there is no atmosphere of total freedom, none can experience the indescribable pleasure of spiritual experience which is called fear of God in the Unseen. Hence it is impossible (without freedom) to grant anyone credit for the highest of human actions.

A society having intellectual freedom breeds creative people whereas a society which curbs intellectual freedom will necessarily stagnate and as a result the produce of creative mind and its growth and development will forever be stopped.

Freedom of expression is the thing which saves one from hypocrisy. Man is a thinking creature. His mind necessarily thinks and forms opinions. In such a situation if curbs are placed on freedom of expression, people's thinking cannot be stopped, the only thing that will take place is that their thinking will not come to their lips and pens. Any institution, nation, state which places curbs on freedom

of expression will be ultimately brimming with hypocrites. In such an atmosphere sincere people can never be produced.

In this way intellectual freedom is directly related to creativity. A society having intellectual freedom breeds creative people whereas a society which curbs intellectual freedom will necessarily stagnate and as a result the produce of creative mind and its growth and development will forever be stopped.

The proper stand in the matter of disagreement and criticism is that people shed off their unnecessary sensitivity in the matter of

discussion instead of attempting to put a stop to the act of criticism and disagreement itself. This is the demand of Islam as well as the demand of nature.

The attribute of true believers described in the *Hadith* is: 'Whenever a truth is presented to them, they accept it.' (*Musnad Ahmad*). Here by truth is meant a matter of truth. In other words a believer is one who has full capacity of accepting truth. Whenever a truth is brought before him, whenever any error of his is pointed out to him, no personal complex comes in the way of his accepting the truth.

The highest point of this attribute is that man is always prepared, rather he eagerly waits for someone to point out to him any shortcoming of his, so that he may immediately accept and correct it. He is almost greedy of his own reform and rectification. It is this attribute of a believer which has been expressed by Umar Faruq in these words: 'May God bless the man who sends me the gift of my own shortcoming'.

Acceptance of the truth is the greatest act of worship. It is an act for which man has to make the greatest of sacrifice. This is the sacrifice of one's prestige; of losing one's greatness.

Acceptance of the truth is the greatest act of worship. It is an act for which man has to make the greatest of sacrifice. This is the sacrifice of one's prestige; of losing one's greatness. To lose one's sense of greatness for the sake of truth is an occasion when man earns his entry into Heaven by paying its price.

When does one receive the blessing of having performed this great form of worship? This opportunity comes to man only when there is full freedom of speech. When one can criticise another without any obstacle when such an atmosphere prevails in society where people can speak freely and frankly, and the listeners listen to them without raising any objection.

Freedom of speech provides that conducive atmosphere in which great virtues flourish. It is in such an atmosphere that those situations are created when a person is given the credit of the pronouncement of truth and another rewarded for the acceptance of the truth. □



MONOTHEISM: ONENESS OF GOD

The Creator, Sustainer and Cherisher

MONOTHEISM or *Tawheed* is the essence of Islam. *Tawheed* means oneness of God. It is a fundamental doctrine of Islam referring to the oneness of God in all its meanings. Thus the declaration that 'there is no God but only one God' is called *Tawheed*. God is not an abstract concept. He exists by Himself. He is a living and powerful God with perfect attributes. God alone is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe including human beings. There is no one worthy of worship other than God. No act in the nature of worship is lawful unless directed towards God. He is the one who fulfils our needs. He is always near us; He cares for us and we owe our existence to Him alone.

There is nothing remotely like Him. The Quran thus enjoins us:

Say, He is God, the one, God the Absolute. He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like Him. *The Quran (112: 1-4)*

It is God alone who is behind the functioning of the entire universe. The following verse from the Quran state very clearly the concept of God:

God there is no deity save Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all that is before them and all that is behind them. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; and their upholding does not weary Him. He is the Sublime, the Almighty One! *(2: 255)*

He is the one who fulfils our needs. He is always near us; He cares for us and we owe our existence to Him alone.

Monotheism is to believe in the fact that all power lies in the hand of one God alone;. He is the only possessor of all powers. Nothing can rival Him as a source of power or love. In Islam no mediating power of any kind exists between the Creator and His creation.

Belief in *Tawheed* makes a person humble and modest instead of being proud and arrogant. This is because belief in one Great God implies that man is His humble servant

and that modesty alone befits him. Believers know that they must submit to God, on whom they depend entirely. Submission to one God results in individual freedom and dignity, for, all human beings become equal and all deserve our respect.

Further belief in one Creator gives a sense of oneness with all creation. It gives the believers confidence; for, they trust in God and believe that nothing can happen unless God wills it. Life and death are entirely in His hands. They remain content because they believe that power, wealth and success come from God alone. He gives them to whom He wants and takes them away from whom He wants. *Tawheed* thus brings about a unique blend of submission to God with human dignity and freedom. □

Belief in one Great God implies that man is His humble servant and that modesty alone befits him.



JESUS IN THE QURAN

The Messiah

A MAJOR portion of the Quran is dedicated to the exemplary lives of the prophets. Jesus—one such prophet—is frequently mentioned in the Quran as “The Messiah,” “A Mercy,” “Prophet,” “Messenger,” “Word from God,” “Spirit,” “A Sign,” “One brought near (to God),” “Upright,” “Servant,” “Eminent,” “Blessed,” “A Witness,” and “A Parable.”

As such, he is honoured everywhere by Muslims. Mary, the mother of Jesus, described as “one exalted above all womankind,” has a whole chapter of the Quran (19) named after her, which tells of the miraculous birth of Jesus. The narration begins with an angel announcing the birth of a holy son to Mary, who, being a chaste woman, was quite distraught at this news. But the angel reassured her that this was the will of God, that it was not a difficult thing for Him and that it was a sign and a blessing to all mankind.

When Mary gave birth to Jesus and brought him to her people, they all pointed their fingers at her. But she was told by God to remain silent and to point to the baby. As the people were wondering how they could talk to a child in the cradle, the baby Jesus performed his

first miracle by saying these fine words: “I am God’s servant. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet; He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving throughout my life. He has made me dutiful toward my mother, and He has not made me arrogant or wicked. Blessed was I on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day I die and the day I am raised to life again.” (19: 30-33)

Jesus is frequently mentioned in the Quran and is honoured everywhere by Muslims.

When Jesus attained manhood, God bestowed upon him “scriptures and wisdom, along with the Torah and the Gospel.” He was also given the power to perform a number of miracles, such as creating a bird out of clay; giving sight to the blind; healing a leper and raising the dead to life; he also had the wisdom to inform people what they ate and stored up in their houses.

The Quran also mentions the day when his disciples demanded that he bring down from the sky a table spread with good things. Jesus prayed

for this, but warned them of God's wrath, if they disbelieved in Him afterwards, His prayer was then answered and his disciples happily had their feast.

The Quran further clarifies that his creation was no different from that of the first human being: "Jesus in the sight of God is like Adam. He created him from dust, then said to him, 'Be!' and he was." (3: 59)

The Quran also mentions the People of the Book, especially the Christians with great fondness: "The nearest in affection to the faithful are those who say, 'We are Christians'. That is because there are priests and monks among them; and because they are free from pride." (5: 82)

The Quran goes on to say: "Of the People of the Book there are some who stand by their covenant; they recite the word of God during the night and prostrate themselves before Him, who believe in God and the Last Day, who enjoin justice and forbid evil and vie with each other in good works. These are righteous men." (3: 113-14)

The Quran welcomes them to a common faith, saying: "People of the Book, let us come to a word common to us that we shall worship none but God and that we shall associate no partner with Him and that none of us shall take others, besides God, for lords." (3: 64) □

The Quran clarifies that his creation was no different from that of the first human being: "Jesus is like Adam in the sight of God. He created him of dust and then said to him: 'Be' and he was."



Staying Cool

Often man finds himself amidst highly trying situations. It seems impossible to go on. There is only one way out—that is by not letting oneself be inwardly affected by one's outward situation, and by staying cool.

AVOIDANCE OF CONFLICT

Obstacles to Growth

AVOIDANCE of conflict is an important principle in life. Such avoidance is important in all matters of human existence. Without adopting this principle, no one can satisfactorily achieve anything in this world.

To properly perform our work, it is necessary for us to fully concentrate on our work, totally ignoring the worldly problems we face. We must be fully focused and recognize that the avoidance of friction is of great importance in life.

The truth is that in the present world, every individual, as well as all nations, have the full freedom of action as granted by God Himself. Everyone has the opportunity to make use of his freedom as he thinks fit and it is due to the use of this freedom that differences arise between people. It has to be accepted that, in social life, differences are inevitable, and are an ineradicable feature of normal living.

One who has a mission or a goal in life must understand that while carrying out of his goals, he should not allow differences to escalate into conflict and should do so positively. It is essential to observe this principle if he wants to achieve his goals.

To properly perform our work, it is necessary for us to fully concentrate on our work, totally ignoring the worldly problems we face. We must be fully focused and recognize that the avoidance of friction is of great importance in life. We should stay away from conflict. □



Differences—A test

In this present world everything is designed to put man to the test. Differences also serve this purpose. Man ought to be extremely cautious, particularly at moments of contention. He should continuously strive to be tolerant lest he show some improper reaction, which would be displeasing to God.

RIGHT APPROACH TO LIFE

Acceptance of the Creation Plan of God

ACCORDING to the Creation Plan of God, human beings are placed in situations where they have to face hardships from time to time at every moment throughout their lives as part of their test. Difficulty and sadness are integral parts of the creation plan of the Creator. No man has the power to extricate himself from this life of trial and tribulation. This arrangement is to remind man of the fact that the present world has not been made as a place of luxury and comfort, but rather as a period of trial and as such will help determine whether he is eligible for eternal life in Paradise.

In spite of tremendous development in the present world, adverse conditions are still in evidence. But people, owing to their lack of awareness of God's creation plan, do not understand why this is prevalent. So, they continue to react negatively to situations and by giving such a response, prove themselves—in the eyes of God—to be failures in the examination He has set for them.

It is situations such as these that are the tests for man. Giving negative responses to negative situations leads to failing the test. On the contrary, giving positive responses to such situations leads to passing the test. In short, a soul of Paradise is one who has opted for the way of forgiveness in moments of anger; who has converted sentiments of jealousy into those of well-wishing, who has converted negativity into positivity, who has converted hatred into love, who has diffused tensions, instead of causing them to mount: above all, who has converted material loss into non-material gain, by opting for the course of introspection, when beset by complaints and grievances.

Stress is another major problem faced by people everywhere. Many institutions have been established which claim to be able to eliminate stress. Anyone who, in their endeavor to de-stress people asks them to stop their thinking process, are only bringing on them a kind of temporary anaesthesia. This is, however, not a real solution to the problem of stress. There is only one practical solution to this problem and that is to adopt the correct

Difficulty and sadness are integral parts of the creation plan of the Creator.

No man has the power to extricate himself from this life of trial and tribulation.

attitude to stress—that of managing stress instead of trying to eliminate or react negatively to it. In this way we will pass our test.

It has been generally observed that those who suffer in their lives engross themselves in social service thinking: “Let no other suffer what I have suffered”. Social service, although a praiseworthy task, is against the creation plan of God as it is impossible to free the world of suffering.

A soul of Paradise is one who has opted for the way of forgiveness in moments of anger; who has converted sentiments of jealousy into those of well-wishing, who has converted negativity into positivity, who has converted hatred into love.

Unpleasantness has been put into this world for man to learn the right lessons from it. The true lesson taught by unpleasant experiences is that man remembers the next world of Paradise. His approach thus becomes: “Let me not suffer in the Hereafter what I have suffered in this world.”

Seen in the light of the creation plan, the root of all human problems is that the unenlightened want to make their Paradise in this world prior to death, whereas under the natural laws, the situation here on earth makes this impossible. According to God’s creation plan, man has to be content in this limited world before death, so that he may be sure that in the eternal world after death he has Paradise in store for him. The right and

proper thing for man to do is therefore to acknowledge and accept this law of creation, and plan his life accordingly. His sole aim in this world should be to make himself acceptable in the eyes of God, so that he may be held eligible for admission into Paradise in the eternal world after death.

Successful is the one who has realized the eternal world of Paradise in this temporary world; who has discovered in the failures of the present world, the secret to eternal success in the next eternal world.

How should we live in this world?

In this world everyone suffers frustration and failure. The reason is that everyone wants to find his desired world in this world itself, whereas this present limited and ephemeral world is not created for this purpose. That is why, despite all efforts, one fails to find one’s dream world in this life. This world, in actual fact is not Paradise; it just makes paradise understandable to us. By nature, the world is an imperfect and limited model. It however gives us some glimpses of ‘perfect’ things that give

us an introduction to Paradise. If our eternal life is a journey, it is just a waiting room and not the final destination of the journey. But man often mistakes it for his destination, and his life thus becomes one of missed opportunities.

The present world is a passageway and not the destination. It is the place for preparation, and not for reaping the harvest. The present world is full of limitations. It does not have the means to fulfill the unlimited desires of man. It has all the means of subsistence at the animal level, but does not have the spiritual necessities of the higher level for man.

During this limited life-span on earth, what man needs to do, first and foremost, is to seek the Creator and Sustainer of this universe. Having seen a glimpse of Paradise on earth, he should become its seeker in his heart of hearts. Intellectually, spiritually and morally he should make himself deserving of an abode in the extreme refinement of Paradise. He should devote this present life-span to preparation for an unlimited life in the Hereafter.

The present world is a passageway and not the destination. It is the place for preparation, and not for reaping the harvest.

Every person born in this world is like an 'ore', which has to be refined and fashioned into steel, in order that they may become a part of the consummate world of the Hereafter. Every living being has to awaken their consciousness to the ultimate extent. Human beings are born at the animalistic level. They have to elevate themselves through intellectual and spiritual development. Those human beings who are not able to attain to the human level will be failures in the Hereafter. Those who succeed in reaching that high level of humanity will find a place in the orchard of happiness in the world to come, which is called Paradise. □



Life's Building

Building one's life is not just like building a child's play house. It is a matter of putting down roots, and toiling patiently ever upwards.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS IN LIFE

Discover Yourself

When a believer calls out to God and if that believer is beloved to God, then God commands Angel Gabriel not to make haste in fulfilling the desire of the believer because it pleases God to hear his voice calling out to his Lord. (Prophet Muhammad)

IN this *Hadith*, the word 'voice' encompasses all forms of communion of the believer when he beseeches his Lord. These are the words of the believer who is defenceless in the face of the trials and tribulations that he must endure as a part of the creation plan of God. These trials make his heart tremble in helplessness. All he can think of is God as his saviour and protector. With this experience, he discovers his own ultimate helplessness and the infinite power of Almighty God. These trials and tribulations bring about an upheaval in his soul.

Trials and tribulations for a believer are a divine experience. They enhance the sensitivity of a believer.

In such situations, the words that arise on the tongue of the believer are unique. They illustrate a new discovery of the glory of God. At that moment, the universe becomes envious of such a believer. When he beseeches his Lord in such a manner, the heavens and the earth are humbled. It is a creative, unique and superior form of invoking God.

Trials and tribulations for a believer are a divine experience. They enhance the sensitivity of a believer. At such times, it is not the formal *duas* (supplications) and oft-repeated recitations that appear on his tongue, rather these are original and new supplications imploring God to his succour. At such times, he calls out to his Lord with such exceptional words that he himself had not known before. When this knowledge becomes an experience and when feelings take on expression, the words that emanate from a believers tongue are so magnificent that God Himself loves to hear them. □



Modesty

Modesty is the way to success.

WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO BOUNCE BACK

Continue on our Journey

RESILIENCE is a law of nature. It means the ability to recover quickly from illness, change or misfortune. It can be found everywhere—in the physical world, the plant world, the animal world and the human world.

Resilience in Physics means the ability to return to the original form after being bent, compressed or stretched. The same is true of the plant world and the animal world. Every creature inherently possesses the power of resilience.

Man has the lion's share in this gift of nature. Dr. Bruce McEwen, Head of Laboratory of Neuroendocrinology at the Rockefeller University has researched this subject and has concluded: "The human brain is very resilient. Give it a chance and it will make every effort to repair itself".

We are living in a world of challenge and competition. Due to this, every day we experience something unpleasant. Every day we suffer some kind of damage both intellectually and materially. This is a problem for every person. Such problems are a part of nature. But nature has also provided the remedy for this problem, and that is, the power of resilience.

The only thing that is required is an eight-lettered mantra, that is, patience. When you suffer some kind of damage either internally or externally, keep your patience. This is what Dr. McEwen has called giving the mind a chance. If you give this chance to your mind, it will soon release a strong energy which will provide you the help required in any untoward situation. For example, in the case of anger, the mind will readily manage it; in the case of material loss, it will enlighten you as to how to do new planning; in the case of tension, it will provide you the formula to forget, and within minutes you will become tension-free.

The formula of resilience is also applicable to the problems of nations. One such example is the recent history of Japan. Japan was the first to

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suffer the dire effects of the nuclear bomb. During the Second World War, the Allied powers dropped two atomic bombs that would have ruined Japan. But the Japanese leaders, followed the formula of resilience. They were able to re-plan their national targets and the result was miraculous; after just thirty years, Japan emerged as an economic superpower.

Studies show that our mind has enormous potential, perhaps unlimited potential. And that potential is tapped by the power of resilience. In a normal situation, this potential remains dormant. When one has any kind of unusual experience, the brain becomes active and starts unfolding its hidden energy. And if it is given a chance, it will certainly recover all the losses. The only condition is that you should not disturb its natural process or stop

it by some unnatural activity.

A simple demonstration of resilience is your remaining silent when you become angry. Remain silent and the mind will pacify everything within a minute. Very soon your mind will make you normal. On the contrary, if you become provoked and react negatively, your anger will persist, and will very soon turn into malice and even violence. □



Increasing in faith

Just as the scientist discovers something new in the world of creation every day, so a believer should always be making new discoveries about his Creator—discoveries that increase him in faith.

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.



ISLAM ADVOCATES PEACE

ISLAM aims to build a peaceful society at all cost. It is because higher human objectives cannot be achieved in the absence of peaceful circumstances. The spiritual as well as moral progress of the individual is possible only in a peaceful atmosphere. Hence the atmosphere of peace is essential for the building of good society. Academic research too is possible only in peaceful circumstances. The task of the propagation of truth too can be performed only in a peaceful atmosphere.

That is why one of the teachings of Islam is ‘reconciliation is the best’ (4: 128). In this regard Islam enjoins us to establish peace even at the cost of unilateral sacrifice and patience. An event of the first phase of Islamic history provides us with an example of this unilateralism. This is known as *Sulh Hdaybiya* (Hdaybiya Treaty). This was in actual fact a no-war pact, which was secured by accepting all the demands of the rival group.

To bring about an atmosphere of peace within society, Islam has given a number of commandments. For instance, the Prophet of Islam observed, ‘A believer is one from whom people feel secure as regards their lives and property (At-Tirmizi). Another Hadith has this to say: By God, he is not a believer from whose nuisance his neighbour is not safe. (Sahih-al-Bukhari)

Peace is basic to all religions. Let us all strive then to establish peace in the world, for that is the bedrock on which all human progress rests.

Islam aims at making all individuals peace-loving to the ultimate extent. That is why we are enjoined to greet one another by saying 'Assalam-o-Alaikum' that is, peace be upon you. According to another saying of the Prophet, the best Islam is to greet everyone you come across, whether or not you are acquainted with the person. (*Fathul-Bari*)

The frequent reiteration of this phrase 'peace be upon you' is in actual fact an external manifestation of the desire for peace within. Islam wishes to inculcate such a feeling within every individual that he

The spiritual as well as moral progress of the individual is possible only in a peaceful atmosphere. Hence the atmosphere of peace is essential for the building of good society.

should become a true lover of peace, to the point that this feeling starts welling up in his heart, finding expression whenever he meets a person.

Islam is a peace-loving religion from beginning to end. And it is but natural that it should be so, as all the best results it aims to achieve, can be achieved only when an atmosphere of peace is maintained at both national and international level.

This path of peace is followed by the entire universe. It is known in science as the law of nature, which is imposed upon it by God. Whereas man has to adopt this path of peace

of his own free will. This has been expressed in the Quran in these words: "Do they seek a religion other than the religion of God, when everything in the heavens and the earth has submitted to Him, willingly or unwillingly? To Him they shall all return." (3: 83)

When peace is the religion of the entire universe, it should, therefore, be the religion of man too, so that, in the words of Jesus Christ, 'the will of the Lord may be done on earth as it is in heaven'. (*Matthew 6: 10*)

In a similar vein, the Quran tells us that: "The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outpace the day: each floats in [its own] orbit." (36: 40)

When God created the heavens and the earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

Peace is no external commodity to be artificially imposed upon man. Peace is inherent in nature itself. The system of nature set up by God already rests on the basis of peace. If this system is not disrupted, it will

continue to stay the course set for it by the Almighty. It is true that the only condition to maintain the human system on the path of peace is to keep it free from the elements of corruption. That is why the Quran states:

Do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order. (7: 85)

In order to preserve peace established by nature, two important injunctions have been laid down by Islam. One at the individual level, stresses the exercise of patience, and the other, at the social level, forbids taking the offensive.

Negative reaction on the part of the individual is the greatest factor responsible for disrupting peace in daily life. It repeatedly happens that in social life one experiences bitterness on account of others. On such occasions, if one reacts negatively, the matter would escalate to the point of a head-on collision. That is why Islam repeatedly enjoins us to tread the path of patience. The Quran says: "Surely the patient will be required in full without measure." (39: 10)

Islam aims at making all individuals peace-loving to the ultimate extent. That is why we are enjoined to greet one another by saying 'Assalam-o-Alaikum' that is, peace be upon you.

The reason for the rewards for patience being so great is that patience is the key factor in maintaining the desired system of God. In the words of the Quran the patient man is the helper of God. (61: 14)

The other injunction, designed to maintain peace in human society is to forbid the waging of an offensive war. No one in Islam enjoys the right to wage war against another. There are no grounds on which this could be considered justifiable. (2: 190)

There is only one kind of war permitted in Islam and that is a defensive war. If a nation by deviating from the principles of nature wages war against another nation, then, a defensive war, with certain conditions, may be waged by the country under attack.

To sum up, Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic root of Islam is 'silm' which means peace. The Quran states: '...Gods calls to the home of peace' (10: 25). It is thus God's will that men and women should jointly establish a society of peace in this world.

Peace is basic to all religions. Let us all strive then to establish peace in the world, for that is the bedrock on which all human progress rests. □

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DISSENT IN ISLAM

Purification

THE principle of non-coercion mentioned in the Quran (2: 256) has not been confined to religious freedom alone. Rather, it has been extensively elaborated upon and widely applied to all social, cultural, and political spheres of society. This has led to the development of a new culture in which individuals enjoy freedom of expression, dissent and criticism without any fear or restriction. Two examples may suffice to explain to what extent this essential human right was observed in earlier Muslim societies.

Once Caliph Umar came to a well of the Banu Harithah where he met an outspoken person named Muhammad ibn Maslama. "How do you find me?" he asked Muhammad "By God, I find you just as I would like you to be and just as it would please any well-wisher to see you. You are good at accumulating money, I see, but you keep your hands clean of it yourself, distributing it equitably to others." "But," went on Muhammad ibn Maslama, "If you adopt a crooked course, we will straighten you, just as we straighten swords by placing them in a vice." At these aggressively critical words, Umar, the second Muslim Caliph, exclaimed:

Praise be to God, who has put me among a people who will straighten me when I become crooked. (Kanz al-Ummal)

With the advent of Islam in the seventh century, however, it was declared for the benefit of mankind that all greatness was the exclusive prerogative of God, and that in the eyes of God, all human beings were equal.

In another example when Muslims at Madinah, with their increasing affluence, began to settle huge dowers (*mahr*) on their daughters, Umar, in his capacity as Caliph, ordered that no one should demand or pay a dower that exceeded four hundred dirhams, and that anything in excess of this amount would be confiscated and deposited in the public treasury. (*Baitul-Mal*)

After the proclamation of this ordinance, when he came down from the pulpit, a tall, old woman stood up and confidently said:

"The Quran has set no restrictions on this

matter: Umar has no right to set an upper limit to the dowers.”

To back up her contention, she loudly recited this verse of the Quran:

If you decide to replace one wife with another, do not take any part of her dower back: even if you have given her a treasure. (4: 20)

Umar’s immediate reaction on hearing this was to say:

“A woman has quarreled with Umar and has bested him.”

According to another account, Umar said:

“May God forgive me, everyone knows better than Umar, even this old lady.” (Tirmidhi/Ahmad)

With the advent of Islam in the seventh century, it was declared for the benefit of mankind that all greatness was the exclusive prerogative of God, and that in the eyes of God, all human beings were equal. The Prophet Muhammad declared not once, but on many occasions that all were alike, all were brothers.

The Prophet not only stated the truth but also made it a reality by bringing about a total revolution based on the idea of human equality. On achieving political domination in Arabia, he was able to put this theory into practice in his capacity as ruler of a state. In this way, Islam put an end to discrimination between human beings on the basis of race, colour, status, etc. People were assigned a high or low status according only to their moral worth. □

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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



PRAYER FROM THE HEART

ANY person who has become conscious of the existence and presence of God has experienced the most important and heart-shaking of experiences. Suddenly, the world and that individual's place in it takes on a completely different aspect and meaning. In fact, maybe for the first time, that individual realizes that the universe and his place in it actually have a meaning.

So many people wander through their journey of earthly life without discovering what that meaning is—they are born, grow, eat and drink, mate, age and die, without ever realizing that their physical components of atoms are as minute and insignificant as those of one tiny ant lost on a huge planet; but these atoms are only the temporary belongings of a soul which inhabits a vastly different plane of existence.

The realm of *al-Ghayb*, that which is unseen and unknown to us within the limitations of our human lives, is vast indeed. A believer becomes a believer when some inkling of that reality enters his conscious mind. This awareness may steal in gently as the invisible air we breathe, or it may break through our envelope of ignorance like a flash of lightning. The person may never have thought about God at all, or realized that the faith of others was relevant; or that person may have prayed

routinely and out of familiar duty for years. The moment of realization, if it comes, is different for each individual.

But once it comes, life has changed forever for that individual. It is not only the overwhelming realization that there really is a God, an Almighty and Supreme Being, but that the power and 'heart' of this Being created and now maintains all that exists, encompasses the entire vastness of all the universes, and yet at the same time is aware not only of each person as an individual, but of each ant, and of each microbe that may live within the body of that ant.

When believers pray using the physical movements of their bodies, they are acknowledging certain things. Firstly, as they stand quietly before God, shutting out 'the world' they are realizing their absolute helplessness and insignificance in the light of their Creator's presence, and they are overwhelmed with the need to ask forgiveness for their shortcomings that took place in those moments when they were not aware. Then, in humility, they bow as they draw closer to consciousness of that Great Being's almightiness and power. Then as they feel the divine love and compassion flood their souls, they kneel with their faces on the earth, and love Him in response.

Prayer is an acknowledgment of our absolute dependence on God on one hand, in contrast to God's absolute power on the other. The act of prayer puts us in our true place, and also acknowledges God's rightful station.

Prayer is an acknowledgment of our absolute dependence on God on one hand, in contrast to God's absolute power on the other.

Prayer, then, is not the wishful thinking or illusions of the pious but is actually acceptance of things as they are; in prayer, consciousness is the ultimate degree of realism; and the apprehension of reality, in turn, is the most excellent of all actions. For, in this world, where we have been given a choice between belief and disbelief, there is nothing greater than acceptance of the true nature of things which lies beyond the consciousness of those who are merely living on the animal level.

Although He is the Great Almighty Lord of all that is, God declares of Himself in the Quran that He is One Who hears all prayers and is so close to us that He uses the image of running in our own bloodstream, closer to us than our own jugular vein. He urges us over and over again to pray to Him, to place our trust in Him, to turn over the motivation of our lives to Him, that we may prosper both in this world and in the life to come. □

NO HALF MEASURES

Secret of Success

A NOTED western writer after studying the lives of great men, attempted to pinpoint the special qualities that were common to all of them. He came to the conclusion that all of the men he had studied had been filled with curiosity and discontent. Curiosity had kept them in hot pursuit of things, ideas and ideals which had at first eluded them, and discontent had never allowed them to indulge in the thought that they had reached the final peak of achievement. These qualities had proved to be the mainspring of their inspiration.

Curiosity had kept them in hot pursuit of things, ideas and ideals which had at first eluded them, and discontent had never allowed them to indulge in the thought that they had reached the final peak of achievement.

A similar comment is made by Mrs. Anita Straket, a mathematics adviser from Wiltshire, in an educational report she had compiled for the school's council. Evaluating certain traits in talented children, she says, "Pupils who are impatient with anything that is second best are probably gifted."

A demanding temperament of this kind compels one to go on seeking absolute truth. It prevents one from being content with half-truths and paltry successes, and one is continually spurred on to higher and greater things. Such a temperament demands that duties should be carried out in an ideal way and indeed, anyone so inclined can never

know happiness unless and until things have been done in the best possible way. A man endowed with such a temperament will never stop until the highest good has been achieved. There can be no half measures for him and he will never be content with things of lesser value. □



Progress

*You can make progress only step by step.
You have to go up by the stairs and not the lift.
There are no buttons you can push and
automatically reach your goals.*

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Exalted amongst Women

MARY or Maryam was the mother of Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that the Quran mentions about Mary several times, whereas it does not do so for any other woman by name. By this fact, we can estimate the eminence of Mary in Islam. Here below is the translation of the references to Mary in the Quran.

Remember when the wife of 'Imran said, 'My Lord, I have dedicated what is in my womb entirely to Your service. So accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all.' When she gave birth, she said, 'My Lord, I have given birth to a girl' God knew very well what she had given birth to: a male is not like a female 'I have named her Mary and placed her and her children in Your protection from the rejected Satan.' Her Lord graciously accepted her and made her grow in goodness and entrusted her to the care of Zachariah. Every time Zachariah visited her in her chamber he found some provision with her. He asked, 'Mary, where did this provision come from?' She replied, 'This is from God. God provides for whoever He wills without measure.' (3: 35-37)

What was this provision that God provided for? It was the provision of wisdom and the knowledge of realities of life. Mary had dedicated her life to the service of God, so God had opened for her the doors to the treasures of wisdom and truth. The Quran further says:

The angels said, 'Mary, God has selected you and purified you. He has selected you over [all] the women of your time. O Mary! Remain truly devout to your Sustainer, and prostrate yourself in worship, and bow down with those who bow down [before Him].' This is an account of the unseen, which We reveal to you. You were not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary's guardian and you were not with them when they disputed with one another. When the angels said, 'O Mary, your Lord gives you good news of a Word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, honoured in this world and in the next and one of those who are granted nearness to God. And he shall speak to men in his cradle, and as a grown man, and shall be one of the righteous.' 'Lord,' she said, 'how can I have a child when no man has

Quran mentions about Mary several times, whereas it does not do so for any other woman by name. By this fact, we can estimate the eminence of Mary in Islam.

touched me?' [The angel] replied, 'Thus it is: God creates what He wills: when He wills a thing He need only say, "Be," and it is. (3: 42-47)

In a similar manner, the Quran says:

Recount in the Book how Mary withdrew from her people to an eastern place and kept herself in seclusion from them. We sent her Our angel, who presented himself to her as a full-grown human being.

When she saw him, she said, 'I seek refuge in the compassionate God from you; [do not come near] if you fear the Lord.' 'I am only the messenger of your Lord,' he replied.

'I shall bestow upon you the gift of a son endowed with purity.' She said, 'How can I have a son when no man has touched me; and neither have I been unchaste?' [The angel] replied, 'So shall it be; your Lord says, "This is easy for Me; and We shall make him a sign to people and a blessing, from Us. This has been decreed."' (19: 16-21)

So she conceived him and withdrew with him to a distant place. The pains of labour drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said, 'Oh, if only I had died before this and passed into oblivion!'

God chose such a woman to be the mother of Christ. A mother, who would have no husband and whose son would have no father.

But a voice called out to her from below, 'Do not despair. Your Lord has provided a brook that runs at your feet, and if you shake the trunk of this palm-tree, it will drop fresh ripe dates on you. Eat and drink and rejoice. And if you see any human being say, "I have vowed a fast [of silence] to the Gracious God, and will not speak with any human being today."' (19: 22-26)

Carrying her child, she brought him to her people. They said, 'O Mary, you have indeed done something terrible! Sister of Aaron, your father was not an evil man, nor was your mother an unchaste woman!'

She pointed to the child. They said, 'How shall we talk to someone who is a child in the cradle?' [But] he said, 'I am God's servant. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet; He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving throughout my life. He has made me dutiful toward my mother, and He has not made me arrogant or wicked. Blessed was I on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day I die and on the day I am raised to life again.' (19: 27-33)

The Quran further says:

We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign and gave them shelter on a peaceful hillside watered by a fresh spring. (23: 50)

And likewise:

[God gave another example in the story of] Mary, 'Imran's daughter, who preserved her chastity and We breathed Our spirit into her; she testified to the words of her Lord and His Scriptures, and was truly devout. (66: 12)

Mary or Maryam is a word derived from the Aramaic language meaning exalted. Mary the mother of Christ was born in a Jewish family. God dealt with her miraculously in every respect. Her birth was answer to a special prayer made by a righteous woman. Her upbringing and learning were done in the Jewish temples. From childhood itself, she was consigned in service to the temple. During her days in the temple, because of her spiritual life and her knowledge of realities, she was known by all as a pious and saintly woman. It was impossible to have any doubts on her chastity.

God chose such a woman to be the mother of Christ. A mother, who would have no husband and whose son would have no father. She conceived by a direct commandment of God and after the full term of her pregnancy, she gave birth to a pure and healthy child. For a chaste woman such as Mary, it was an extremely sensitive issue for her to be a mother of such a child who would have no father. Because of this very sensitivity, God sent His angels to Mary who reassured her and saved her from grief due to this matter. Together with this, God made miraculous arrangements to provide food and drink for her in her retreat, outside the city. □

Mary had dedicated her life to the service of God, so God had opened the doors to the treasures of wisdom and truth.

A NEGLIGENT
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GOD-ORIENTED LIFE

True Focus for Man

THE earth is the sun's satellite. It constantly orbits around the sun. It takes one year to complete such a revolution. This movement of the earth around the sun is essential for the healthy functioning of life on earth. If the earth did not revolve around the sun, its existence would have no meaning, and life would come to an end.

This is a practical example of how we should lead our lives in this world. This example is indeed a physical demonstration that shows how man must revolve around God, just as the earth revolves around the sun. It means that all of man's activities should be focused on God.

The earth revolves as compelled to by the laws of nature. But man, of his own free will, should surrender to God. He should build a life, which is based on the concept of God. This consciousness is the real ascension of man. In this consciousness lies the secret of all success.

Discovery of God

The God-oriented life begins with the discovery of God. When individuals, whether men or women, discover God, it means that they have found the truth. And this truth pervades their whole being. This feeling of having discovered the truth becomes such a thrilling experience that it fills them with everlasting conviction. This everlasting conviction removes all frustrations from their lives. Therefore, losses are no longer such, for, in spite of them, they never lose the feeling that their greatest asset, i.e. God, is still with them.

Man experiences this realization by pondering upon God's creations. The truth is that the universe is an expression of God's attributes. In this respect, the universe is a complete introduction to God. God is visible in His creations, just as a human being sees his own reflection in the mirror, without having any doubts about it.

The vastness of space tells man that God, its Creator, is boundless. The observation of the sun and the stars shows us that God is all light. The heights of the mountains show us the greatness of God. The waves of the sea and the flow of the river tell us that God is a storehouse of boundless blessings. We see God's bounties in the greenery of the trees. Man's existence becomes a proof of God's existence. In the waft of air he experiences a divine touch. In the chirping of the birds, he hears God's songs.

Remembrance of God

The God-oriented life for man starts by his remembering God. He begins to feel the presence of God. Everything serves to remind him of God. God's remembrance is never absent from his heart and mind. His mornings and evenings are spent as if he is living in God's neighbourhood. Just as rain replenishes the crops, so does he remain ever immersed in the remembrance of God.

God: A Source of Spiritual Awakening

God is a spiritual focus for man. One whose heart is attached to God undergoes spiritual experiences at every moment. Belief in God becomes a source of spiritual development for him. Filled with the love of God, he does not need anything further. God becomes a vast ocean for him to continue to swim in without ever experiencing any limit. In the form of spiritual awakening, he receives such great wealth that he does not feel the need for anything else. For one who discovers God, the entire universe becomes an open book of God. Every leaf of a tree becomes a page of the divine book. When he sees the sun, he feels as if God is lighting His heavenly torch so that he may read His book clearly. The universe becomes, as it were, a supernal university and he its student.

Finding God is to find his centre of love. Man by birth is a seeker of a Supreme Being who is far above him, who is free from all limitations and who may form the centre of his feelings, in short, a Being after finding whom the grown man becomes as satisfied as a child after being held in the embrace of his mother.

The earth revolves around the sun as compelled to by the laws of nature. But man, of his own free will, should surrender to God.

This discovery of God saves one from regarding something other than God as God and mistakenly and unrealistically thinking it to be the answer to the urge inherent in his nature. The discovery of God is to fulfil his or her real urge to find God. And the failure to discover God means failing to find man's greatest need. One who fails to find God is compelled by his natural urge to give the place of God to something other than God. This place is sometimes accorded to a certain human being, sometimes to a certain animal, to a phenomenon of nature, to a certain material power, to a supposed concept and sometimes just to the self.

Even if one fails to discover God, or becomes a denier of God, it is not in one's power to stifle the urge in one's nature to find God. That is why those who have not found God inevitably come to hold something other than God as God. And this supposed God is always some creature or the other of God. By nature, it is possible for man not to accept the real God as God, but it is not possible for them to prevent themselves from granting the status of divinity to something or someone in their lives. Making God one's object of worship raises man's position. On the contrary, regarding something other than God as God amounts to descending from the level of humanity.

God is indispensable to man. His life is incomplete without God. A philosopher has aptly remarked that had there been no God, we would have had to invent one. Fortunately, God exists in reality. We can believe in God with conviction, not as a supposition, but as a fact. And we can accord Him the place He deserves in our lives.

The universe is a complete introduction to God. God is visible in His creations, just as a human being sees his own reflection in the mirror, without having any doubts about it.

Accountability to God

It is essential that man should have within his reach, a super formula for life's management. God provides just such a formula—a complete principle for life's management.

Human beings are not like machines controlled by a mechanical system, nor are they like animals who are governed by their instincts. Human beings enjoy freedom. They take decisions about their actions of

their own free will. Now the question arises as to how to keep man on the right course, how to make him consistently disciplined in his behaviour. History shows the ineffectiveness of all worldly measures in this connection, whether social pressures, enforcement of the law of the land or the appeals of reformers.

Experience shows that the pressure of society is limited, if not totally ineffective. There are so many loopholes in law that it is not difficult for wrongdoers to find a way out. The reformers' bid to reform people are nothing but appeals and appeals alone cannot bring about a revolution in human life.

The truth is that for the attainment of disciplined behaviour, it is essential for one to be convinced of the existence of a power far superior to

himself, a Being who is aware of man's activities at every moment; who can reward and punish man, and from whom it is impossible to escape.

There can be only one being of this nature and that is God. Belief in God functions at two levels at the same time. On the one hand, man finds in God a guardian who is aware of all his activities and who has unlimited power to chastise him. It is not possible for man to escape God's chastisement. Belief in God compels man to steadfastly adopt a proper attitude in all situations, privately as well as publicly. Only then can he save himself from the wrath of God. Another point is that belief in God is a storehouse of limitless hope. Man can lead his life in this world with the conviction that if he incurs any loss because of treading the path of truth, or if he suffers from any other adversity, he will be able to endure it. For if he adheres to the path of truth, God will grant him a reward in the form of eternal Paradise, and there can be no reward greater than this.

It is not possible for man on his own to bind himself to moral values or adhere to justice. This is possible only when he is convinced of the fact that he is under a super power—a super power who observes justice to the extent of perfection; for whom it is fully possible to guide man to the true path and also punish those who deviate from this true path.

This present, limited world is totally inadequate for punishing a criminal. Similarly, this world is also inadequate for granting great rewards for one's good deeds. The concept of God tells us that God can create a far better world free from all the limitations of the present world, where reward and punishment both can be satisfactorily awarded.

The concept of a living and powerful God is necessarily accompanied by the concept of accountability. And the concept of accountability guarantees right thinking and right actions on the part of man. It makes man cautious by reminding him of God's chastisement. Moreover, this gives him the conviction of receiving God's reward if he adheres to the right path at all costs and in all situations. The concept of God provides man with an ideology in which loss is turned to gain and in which adversity brings with it good tidings. It is therefore submission to God that is the only way of life for both man and the universe. □

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ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM, THE ISLAMIC WAY

Seek the Gardens of Paradise

ACCORDING to Islam, the virtuous are to be rewarded by God in the after-life by being admitted "to gardens watered by running streams" and lodged in "pleasant mansions in the Gardens of Eternity." (61: 20). The very fact that Paradise is represented in the Quran as a beautiful garden shows the importance attached by Islam to vegetation: indeed, frequent mention is made in the Scriptures of green and growing things as being a blessing from God to mankind.

Referring to the initial stage of creation, the Quran states that "and the earth which He spread out, after that bringing forth from it its water and its pasture land."(79: 30-31) Nowhere in the vast expanses of universe is there any similar vegetation, which explains why it is that living things, including man, exist only on this earth and on no other celestial body.

In another verse, which is more admonitory in tone, man is enjoined to "reflect on the food he eats. We let the rain pour down in torrents and then We cleaved the earth asunder. We make the grain grow out of it, and grape vines and vegetables, and olive trees and date palms and burgeoning enclosed gardens and fruits and fodder as provision for you and for your cattle to enjoy." (80: 24-32)

It was ever the desire of Islam that man should make his surroundings verdant, even if in the next instant his handiwork were to be destroyed by an earthquake.

This shows that God has made vegetation a special food for both men and animals, from which they receive all the nutrients essential for the sustenance of life. The different fruits and vegetables have also been endowed with prophylactic and curative properties, and perhaps to show that life is more than mere biological existence, each food item

has its own distinctive flavour to appeal to the human palate. Honey is specifically cited as a valued foodstuff produced from plants. Its therapeutic qualities are also emphasized in the verse, which says, "therein lies healing for mankind." (16: 69). Many effective medicines, from ancient times to the present day, have been produced from plants. The healing powers of plants are indeed so great that even that great carnivore, the tiger, will resort to eating grass when it falls ill.

People are urged in the scriptures to engage in farming and gardening to provide both physical and spiritual sustenance for themselves, but—despite their Creator’s largesse—are cautioned against waste. After asserting that “it is He who has produced gardens, both trellised and untrellised, and date palms and field crops, all varying in taste, and the olive and the pomegranate” and exhorting mankind to “eat their fruits when they bear fruit”, goes on to admonish: “Do not waste anything. He does not love the wasteful.” (6: 141)

Perhaps the most telling references to plant life made in the Quran and *Hadith* fall within the realm of the metaphor. The Prophet has been recorded as saying: “The believer is like a gentle plant. When the winds blow, it does not show haughtiness: instead, it sways to and fro with the wind, and when the winds are not blowing, it reverts to its position once again.” This simile is intended to show how the true believer, the worshipper of God, lives among others. He displays no arrogance, holding that adjustment is better than clashes and confrontation. He follows the principle of persuasion and avoids the path of violence.

In the Quran, the creation most favoured in God’s eyes, the believer, has been likened to a tree. Just as the tree benefits mankind by its offerings of shade, fruit, flowers and a loveliness to gladden the eye, so should human beings live in society, giving comfort and bringing joy to their fellow men. Just as the tree affords the coolness of its shade to God’s creatures, so should God’s servants give respite and relief to all those around them.

Just as the tree benefits mankind by its offerings of shade, fruit, flowers and a loveliness to gladden the eye, so should human beings live in society, giving comfort and bringing joy to their fellow men.

Again, the tree is used in verse 24 of the 14th chapter in the Quran, to symbolize the expression of good intentions towards others. “Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky, it yields its fruit each season with its Lord’s permission, God makes such comparisons for people, in order that they may take heed.” Conversely, the verse explains, “But an evil word is like an evil tree torn out of the earth; it has no foothold.”

Such traditions show what great importance—both physical and metaphysical—is attached to vegetation in Islam. To emphasize this point, the Prophet once observed: “If you have a plant in your hand, and you can see Doomsday approach, even then, without any further

delay, you should embed it in the soil.” It was ever the desire of Islam that man should make his surroundings verdant, even if in the next instant his handiwork were to be destroyed by an earthquake. Perhaps the insight of the Prophet on this subject, which has as great a resonance in modern times as it had 14 centuries ago, is contained in his observation that he who plants a tree, whose fruits will eventually be eaten by birds and human beings, performs an act of charity. □



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CLEANLINESS IN ISLAM

Mirror of Reality

ISLAM, as we learn from the Quran and *Hadith*, is a religion of nature. Islam and nature being indeed each other's counterparts. Nature loves cleanliness and abhors pollution: that is why this highly desirable feature of human existence—cleanliness—is one of the basic tenets of the Islamic faith.

What is the nature of the Islamic faith? It is to lead a life in total consonance with the will of God. And such a life can have its beginnings only in a condition of exemplary personal hygiene.

According to a *Hadith*, the keeping of oneself clean is one half of faith; this indicates the emphasis laid upon hygiene in Islamic practice. The cleanliness factor is thus a major segment of the very essence of Islam.

This is clearly in evidence at the appointed times of worship—the most sublime form of worship being *salat (namaz)* or prayer which is engaged in five times a day. Each time the hour of prayer arrives the first thing the good Muslim must do is perform his ablution. Ablution (*wudu*) entails the washing of all the exposed parts of the body. As a cleansing process, *wudu* is the equivalent of a half-bath. In this way, the devout Muslim takes a half-bath five times daily.

In the first phase of Islam, it was common practice for Muslims to take a bath daily before the *fajr* (dawn) prayers. Bathing thus, became a regular daily feature of every Muslim's life.

The servant of Uthman, the third Caliph, tells of how the Caliph used unflinchingly to take a bath once or twice daily. If Muslims have always attached great importance to cleanliness, it is because of the explicit commands on this subject in the Quran.

When the Quran began to be revealed, one of its signal injunctions was: "Cleanse your garments and keep away from all pollution." (74: 4)

The cleanliness of clothes is a necessary concomitant of the purity of the body. Without that, the body is not one hundred per cent clean. Indeed, as much stress is laid on cleanliness as on the avoidance of

If Muslims have always attached great importance to cleanliness, it is because of the explicit commands on this subject in the Quran.

wearing showy apparel. In Islam, the devotee is required, ideally to worship in clothes which are simple, and above all, clean.

In the realm of spiritual development, one of the principal elements is purification through penitence. As the Quran says "God loves those who turn to Him in repentance and purify themselves." (2: 222)

Just as repentance frees body and soul of worldly moral duress, so does water remove impurities from body and clothing. Islam accordingly, exhorts one to turn in remembrance to God, thus purifying the soul.

***Just as repentance
frees body and soul
of worldly moral
duress, so does water
remove impurities
from body and
clothing.***

The mosque, the focal point of Islamic life, is called in a *Hadith* the "home of the pious people."

As the Quran puts it: "There you shall find men who would keep pure. God loves those who purify themselves" (9: 108). We are asked, therefore, to clean the mosque, ridding it of noise and dust, just as Abraham and Ishmael were enjoined "to cleanse our House (the Kabah) for those who walk around it, who meditate in it, and who kneel and prostrate themselves." (2: 125)

Following the examples of the sanitising of the mosque, Muslims are urged to keep their bodies pure by ablution and bathing, their clothes clean by regular washing and their houses and their surrounding spotless. These practices are incumbent upon every Muslim.

According to a *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said, "God is pure and loves purity," which means that cleanliness and purity are on the highest scale of cardinal virtues. What God loves is undoubtedly of supreme value. Every Muslim must, in consequence, lead a life marked by cleanliness and purity in order to earn the approval of his Creator. □



Peace of Mind

Peace of mind can be attained by making all efforts to change what we can, and learning to live with the things which we cannot change.

UNIVERSALITY OF THE QURAN

Global Personality of Believer

A STUDY of the Quran shows that its aim is to produce a universal approach in human beings. Universality means high thinking and an unbiased and unconditioned approach. We find an example of this quality in the Quran. It addresses us thus: 'O man,' and 'O mankind'. This shows that the approach of the Quran is based on universality. The very first chapter of the Quran begins with these words: "Praise be to God, the Lord and Sustainer of all mankind." Similarly, the Quran introduces God as the 'Lord of the worlds', and not just the Lord of the Muslims or the Lord of the Arabs. He is also called 'the Lord of the East and the West.' (70: 40)

Similarly, the Quran cites the Prophet of Islam as a messenger sent for all mankind and not just for the Arabs. The Quran says: "We have sent you forth as a mercy to all mankind." (21: 107)

This universality of Quranic revelation brings about a universal approach in its believers. In another place the Quran says: "Blessed be He who has revealed the criterion [the Quran] to His servant that he may warn all mankind." (25: 1)

This universal approach can be seen in all the teachings of Islam. For instance, at the end of *salath* the faithful turn their heads towards the right and left and utter these words of greeting: '*Assalam-o-Alaikum wa rahmatullah*' which means, 'May peace and blessings of God be upon you.' This is meant for all mankind inhabiting the lands towards the east and the west, the north and the south. This is, in fact, a universal greeting.

In this way one of the aims of *salath* (prayers) is to instill in believers, feelings of well-wishing for the whole world. The whole world should share in one's prayers. This is a lesson in universal thinking, which is daily given to the believers. Similarly, *Hajj*, one of the five pillars of Islam takes the form of a universal gathering. Muslims belonging to all the nations of the world meet one another on this occasion. It is in fact an annual attempt to produce universality in believers.

This universality of Quranic revelation brings about universal approach in its believers. Universality means high thinking and an unbiased and unconditioned approach.

One who adopts the Quranic way will start thinking at the universal level. His personality will be linked with the entire human brotherhood. In spite of being located in a particular region, he becomes a citizen of the universe.

Conveying this universal divine message to all the nations of the world (*dawah*) is another important teaching of the Prophet. As a requirement of Islam this turns every believer into a universal ambassador for *dawah* activity. Coming out of the limited sphere of one's self, one is made to think at the level of all humanity. As a result, an activity like that of *dawah* produces universal thinking among the faithful. The responsibility of *dawah* takes the believer out of the local sphere and turns him into a global personality.

The truth is that universality is an inseparable part of Quranic thinking. One who adopts the Quranic way will start thinking at the universal level. His personality will be linked with the entire human brotherhood. In spite of being located in a particular region, he becomes a citizen of the universe as far as his thinking is concerned. In this respect, it can rightly be said that Islam or the Quran promotes universal citizenship. □



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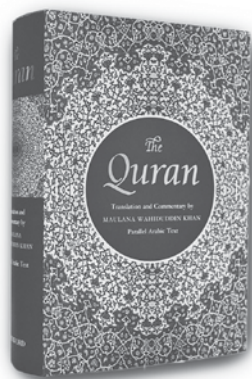
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THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

The Quran is the book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety since its revelation to the Prophet of Islam between 610 and 632 AD. 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



Everything in the heavens and on the earth belongs to God and so He will requite those who do evil in accordance with their deeds and will reward those left with that which is best, for those who do good. (53: 31)

The universe with its extremely stable system makes manifest the fact that its Creator and Lord is extremely powerful. This suffices to make it clear that He will sooner or later seize hold of man and when He does so, there will be no escaping His grasp.

As for those who refrain from committing grave sins and indecent acts, though they may commit minor offences, your Lord is unstinting in His forgiveness. (53: 32)

Man has been created with human weaknesses. So, it is not required that he be as pure as the angels. Almighty God has given full guidance to man as to what he should do and what he should not. However, man may be pardoned in the case of lesser offences (*lamam*), i.e. indulging in some mischief because of fleeting emotion, on the condition that he should immediately realize his lapse and, being ashamed of it, seek pardon of his Lord.

He knows you when He brings you out of the earth, and when you were embryos in the wombs of your mothers; so do not make claims to be pure. He knows best who is truly righteous.

Have you [Prophet] considered the man who turned away, who at first gave a little, then later held back? Has he knowledge of the unseen, so that he sees? (53: 33-35)

There are many who become inclined towards the Truth, but only to a certain extent. Then the compulsions of their interests become too

strong for them and they revert to their original position. In order to justify and explain their wrong behaviour, such people devise different types of engaging 'beliefs'. But this only increases their guilt because this amounts to adding insult to injury.

Has he not been made acquainted with what was written in the scriptures of Moses? And with Abraham who kept his word: that no soul shall bear the burden of another; and that man shall have only that for which he strives; and that [the fruit of] his striving shall soon be seen; and in the end he will be repaid for it in full; that all things in the end shall return to God; (53: 36-42)

The sum and substance of the reality revealed by Almighty God through His prophets is that every man has to receive the reward befitting his deeds. Nobody can save himself from the fate attending his deeds and nobody else can be his saviour. There is nobody more foolish in this world of God than those who are not affected by this prophetic warning.

That it is He who brings laughter and tears; that it is He who causes death and gives life; and that He Himself created the two sexes: male and female, from an ejected drop of sperm; and that He will bring about the Second Creation; that it is He who gives wealth and possessions; that He is the Lord of Sirius. (53: 43-49)

Every event in this world arises from supernatural causes and nobody but God is capable of causing them to occur. Happiness and sorrow, life and death, the procreative system, riches and poverty—all these are the feats of a superpower. Ancient man used to consider the stars as the determining factors in life, while in the present age natural law is considered to govern all happenings. But the fact is that there is a Cause over and above these causes and factors and that is God, the Lord of the universe. Then, how is it legitimate for a man to make anything other than Him the centre of his attention? □



Past & Future

*Re-assess the past, replan
the future.*

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

How were Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Abraham interrelated?

Prophet Abraham was born in Ninevah (Iraq). His sons, Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) and Prophet Ishaq (Isaac) were ancestors to two streams of Prophets. Prophet Ishaq was the forefather of the line starting from Prophet Jacob till Prophet Jesus. Prophet Muhammad belonged to the Quraysh tribe, which traced its origin to Prophet Ismail.

The years of gap between the age of Abraham and the age of Prophet Muhammad is over two thousand. But all the prophets from Ismail and Ishaq to Muhammad (including Jesus and Moses) share a common lineage going back to Prophet Abraham. This is why Judaism, Christianity and Islam are called Abrahamic religions.

Except Prophet Muhammad, which were the other prophets who took political positions?

In the modern sense of 'politics', Prophet Muhammad did not occupy any political position. He was only the chief of a tribal system. It was Prophet Dawud (David) and Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) who held positions of heads of state during their prophethood.

Even in the case of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), he was only in charge of the food and agricultural 'ministry' whereas the Hyksos king prevailed upon the law. It is clearly outlined in the Quran and Torah that Prophet Yusuf did not have the system of law under him:

He could not have detained his brother under the King's law (12: 76)

Why do Muslims only respect Prophet Muhammad?

A believing Muslim is bound to respect all Prophets. He cannot differentiate between the messengers of God.

God has sent a prophet or messenger to every group and community of people in this world. All the messengers of God enjoy an equal status. In the chapter entitled *Al-Baqarah* (The Heifer), the Quran says: "We do not differentiate between any of His messengers. We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, Lord, to You we shall all return!" (2: 285)

The Prophet is recorded to have said, "Do not give me superiority over other Prophets." (*Sahih al Bukhari*)

This Quranic verse and the *Hadith* relates directly to the messengers or

the prophets of God, but it also has a broader application, according to which everyone is worthy of respect, regardless of his creed or culture. Such belief promotes a culture of equal respect among mankind. Difference in belief is necessarily subject to discussion, but it is not a reason for discrimination. If your belief system is different from that of others, you have every right to engage in discussion and dialogue on the subject, but in the process you have no right to show disrespect to others. This holds true even if you feel that your personal ideology enshrines the supreme truth. The culture of discrimination is, after all, quite alien to a divine religion.

What was the character of Prophet Muhammad really like?

The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, was born in Arabia on 22 April AD 570, and died on 8 June AD 632. He grew up orphaned and his childhood gave indications of the sublime and dynamic personality that was to emerge. As he grew up, the nobility of his personality, soft-spoken and genial disposition made him a benevolent member of the society. A perfectly balanced personality—tolerant, truthful, perspicacious and magnanimous—he presented the highest example of human nobility. According to Daud ibn Husayn, he became known as the most chivalrous among his people, tolerant and forbearing, truthful and trustworthy, always an epitome of good behaviour. He would stay aloof from all quarrels and quibbles and never indulged in foul utterances, abuse or invective. People even left their valuables in his custody, for they knew that he would never betray them. His unimpeachable trustworthiness won for him the title of "*al-Amin*," an unflinching trustee and of "*al-Sadiq*", the truthful.

As a Prophet, he was an embodiment of virtues a true believer must imbibe and uphold. A Prophet is a well-wisher for mankind and the entire life of Prophet Muhammad is a testament to this fact. He never discriminated among people on the basis of their colour, creed or social status; in the heydays of slavery, he advocated freedom of slaves; in an environment full of resentment and staunch opposition, he always adopted a forgiving approach, never avenging any wrong done to him.

His experience at Taif is an example where the leaders of the Thaqif tribe had refused to extend their support to his mission and their street urchins pelted stones at the Prophet till the cover of night made him invisible. Despite being humiliated, injured and wearied, the Prophet did not resort to cursing the tribe of Taif; rather he prayed for their guidance (*Sahih al Bukhari*). His wife Aisha said about the Prophet Muhammad, "He would not follow an evil with an evil, rather he would pardon and forgive." (*Ahmad*)

He preached, "A Muslim does not want for others what he does not want for himself." He once was asked by the people to curse an aggressor and he replied "I have not been sent as the invoker of curse, but I have been sent as mercy." (*Sahih Muslim*)

Prophet Muhammad taught the believers to become conscientious members of society. He advised that, "A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the people are safe." (*Sunan An-Nasai*)

He encouraged caring and supporting the sick, feeding the hungry, being kind, and no-problem persons for the neighbours, refraining from using offensive names and caring for the animals. He encouraged responsible living and judicious utilization of natural resources like water even if we have limitless access to them. Once the Prophet passed by a Companion when he was performing ablutions and said to him, "What is this extravagance?" The companion asked, "Can there be extravagance in ablutions as well?" Prophet replied, "Yes, even if you are on the bank of a flowing river!" (*Sunan ibn Majah*)

Prophet Muhammad exemplified peace and tolerance throughout his life. Once, on being asked for a master advice, he replied 'Don't be angry'. He said that the strongest among us is the one who can control his anger. He propagated the pursuit of the easier choice of peace and tolerance as against following intolerance or violence.

During the course of his lifetime, there were certain defensive skirmishes that took place. Even during these, Prophet Muhammad strictly prohibited ill treatment of non-combatants and the prisoners of war. For example, the Prophet did not approve of any ill treatment of the prisoners of war that were taken after the Battle of Badr. He instructed Muslims to share equal food with the prisoners (*Majma ul Zawaid*) and declared that any prisoner who could teach ten children in Madinah to read and write shall be set free (*Musnad Ahmad*). It is also worth noting that in future battles, no prisoners of war were taken in by the Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad taught believers to be virtuous and compassionate towards fellow human beings. He preached selfless service and development of piety and modesty amongst individuals. He said "A Muslim is soft, simple and lenient". He cautioned Muslims from falling into extremism, "Those who go to extremes are doomed." (*Muslim*)

In an American publication entitled *The 100*, the author mentions the one hundred people whom he believes to have exerted the greatest influence on human history. The author, Dr. Michael Hart, was born

into a Christian family, and received a scientific education. But at the top of his roll of honour he has placed Prophet Muhammad. There was one person, he believes, whose achievements excelled all others: that person was the Prophet Muhammad. No one else has had such an impact on the history of man. "He was the only man in history," he writes, "who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels." Just as to the American, Michael Hart, he is the most outstanding figure of human history, to the English historian, Thomas Carlyle, he is "the hero of the Prophets." □



**Money swallows one's
mind. When one focuses
more and more on
money, one has no time
to acquire knowledge of
higher realities and
become intellectually
developed.**

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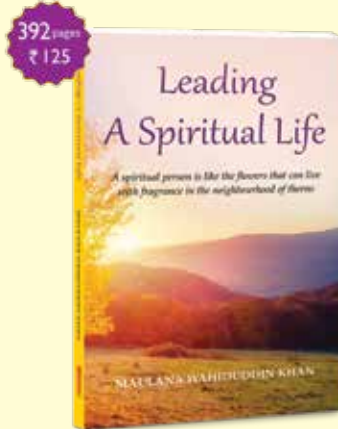
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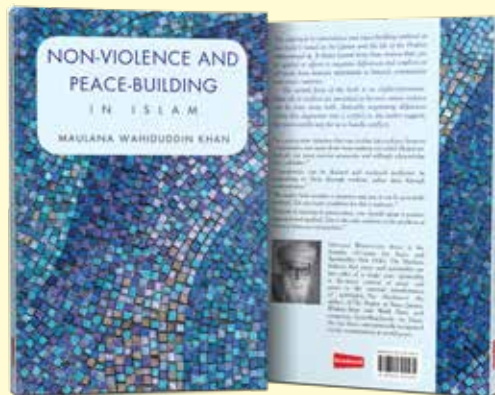
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