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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

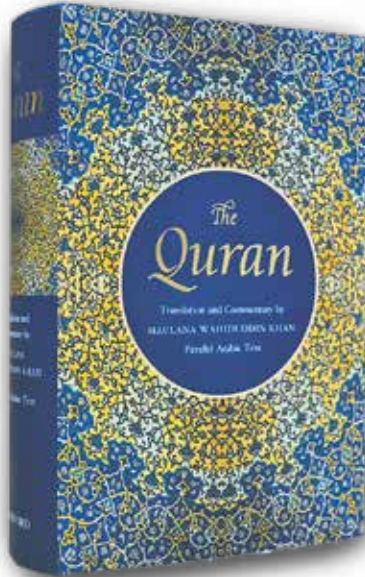


Only after a long period one's efforts reap true rewards.

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

This commentary on the Quran is a concise, easy-to-read guide that enables today's readers to understand the deeper meanings of the Quran and to reflect upon its relevance in the present world. It focuses on the main themes of the Quran, such as God-realization, enlightenment, closeness to God, remembrance, prayer, peace and spirituality. It lays stress on the fact that through reflection, deep thinking and contemplation, divine lessons can be learnt from the signs of God scattered across the world.



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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

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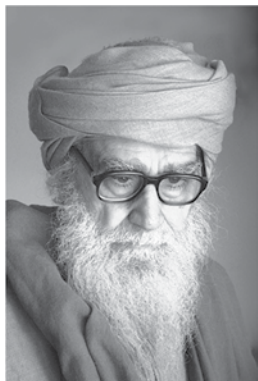
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 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 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.

DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

ONCE, I met a Western scholar and I asked him what he thought was the secret of the West's progress in many fields. He replied that it was the freedom of dissent, which the West has come to consider as sacrosanct. Undoubtedly, what he said is true.

However, this is not something specific just to Western thought. It is actually a law of nature. This law is expressed in a *Hadith* (words of the Prophet) report, according to which the Prophet Muhammad is said to have declared that differences of opinion are a mercy for his community.

Differences of opinion are generally expressed in the form of critique. Ideally, intellectual critique should engender analysis and further study of issues on which differences of opinion exist. Such a critique should seek to facilitate an open exchange of views on these matters. It should help bring different minds together to honestly express what they know about issues and also what they feel about each other's views. This sort of open exchange of views is indispensable for intellectual development.

Knowledge as such is limitless. This is true of knowledge—both of 'Religious' as well as 'Secular' matters. Undoubtedly, differences of

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

opinion are a mercy. There is only one condition for expressing such differences.

Those who disagree with each other should do so on the basis of accepted evidence and must abstain from hurling allegations against others.

Differences of opinion promote creative thinking.

Differences of opinion are immensely beneficial. They help bring to the fore new dimensions of issues under discussion and to uncover hitherto hidden aspects of a subject. They help promote creative thinking. They also enable people to benefit from the intellectual contributions of others. □

Maulana Wahiddudin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org



Miracle of the Mind

*If you discover the miracle of the mind,
you will develop such a thrilling sense
of gratefulness that all complaints and
protests will appear insignificant.
You will always live with feelings
of thankfulness to God.*

Meet the Challenge

*Without challenge man becomes stagnant,
and with challenge he becomes dynamic.
It is challenge that motivates people to
go ahead and achieve on their own what
they did not receive as inheritance.*

PEACE FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE

Unconditional Peace

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

The reason is that people have bracketed together with peace, something that is not directly related to it. For example, people say they want 'Peace with justice', or 'Peace with human rights', or 'Peace with equal sharing', or 'Peace with a problem-free society', and so on. Such definitions of peace are unnatural, and hence they are not practically achievable.

Peace is a subject of 'means' and not a subject of 'end'. Peace only opens up opportunities. It is then upon the people to achieve their goals by availing these opportunities opened up by peace. Peace cannot give a person his goal, it is upon the person himself to reach his goal through planning and struggle.

The only right way to achieve peace is to establish it unconditionally.

According to the law of nature, the only right way is to establish peace at any cost, without mingling any other aspect with it. Once peace is established, then it is everyone's own task to discover opportunities and avail of them through realistic planning.

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

So is the case of peace. Peace is like rain. Peace only provides you with opportunities. It is upon people to avail these opportunities through wise planning. This is why 'Peace for the sake of peace' is the right formula. 'Peace for the sake of justice or anything else' is unnatural, and therefore, unachievable. □

GENDER EQUALITY

Equal Partnership

GENDER equality means equality between men and women. This concept is said to have originated and flourished between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But in fact, it is a natural concept that can be traced back to the beginning of human history, when the first man and woman were born and settled in a place referred to in the Bible as the Garden of Eden, and in the Quran as *jannah*, or Paradise.

According to the Quran, when God Almighty created the first pair of Adam and Eve and settled them in Paradise, He said to them: "O Adam, live with your wife in Paradise and both of you eat freely from it, wherever you may wish." This narration tells us an important fact. Here, "Eat freely" is a symbolic expression. It covers all kinds of human activities. It means: 'Both are allowed free participation without any restriction in every activity of life' that a man and a woman share with each other; both are equal partners in the activities of life. Together, both have to try to fulfil the purpose of life. This proves that gender equality is part of nature. It is a part of the creation plan of God and no one can change this status of the two genders.

Gender equality is a part of the creation plan of God and no one can change this status of the two genders.

As far as the religion of Islam is concerned, it acknowledges that there is equality between the two genders. Two references are mentioned here, one from the Quran and the other from the Hadith which are the sayings of the Prophet of Islam. This equal status of the two genders is mentioned in the Quran in these words: "You (man and woman) are members one of another." Then, the Prophet of Islam has said: "*An-nisa shaqaiq ar-rijal.*" It means that men and women are two equal halves of a single unit.

It is a social fact that life is based on equal partnership. No single man or single woman can perform any meaningful activity alone. In this world any activity takes place through mutual partnership. This is the law of nature, and the law of nature cannot change.

But, there is a point to be noted here. Although, in theory men and women have equal status, when it comes to practice it is impossible that every individual would perform the same task as the other. Demanding that each individual should perform the same task is like having two people sit on the same seat in an office or any other place. Thus, there must be division of labour.

It is a known fact that in division of labour, division is based on ability and not on gender. As a result, a practical difference is created. This difference not only exists between a man and a woman, but also between one man and another man, and between one woman and another woman.

Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit.

Gender equality is an accepted principle of nature. But, in case of every natural principle there exists the possibility of it being misused, because our world is a world of freedom and choice. Similarly, cases of misuse of the principle of gender equality have happened in the past and may even happen in the present. But, misuse of a principle cannot change the principle. The principle remains intact.

The concept of gender equality is based on eternal laws of nature which are not subject to change. For this reason, the real importance in this regard is what is called 'Women empowerment'. That is, we need to provide quality education to girls, give them the best training, create awareness in them about the principles of life and make them well-equipped for leading a better life in society. If we perform this task, then without making any formal demands, women will be able to attain an equal status in society.

In conclusion, what is to be understood is that without any formal declaration, men and women should maintain ideal equality; not in the sense of both doing the same task, but rather with a practical division of labour. Each should enjoy autonomy in their respective domains, without interfering in the domain of the other. The formula should be "Gender equality while maintaining division of labour". □

***The best life partner is one who possesses inner beauty,
not just outward beauty.***

ARGUMENTS AGAINST GOD AND RELIGION — Part III

Argument from History

ATHEISTIC thinkers dismiss religion as being unfounded in fact. They maintain that it springs from man's desire to find meaning in the universe. While the urge to find an explanation is not in itself wrong, they hold that the inadequacy of our predecessors' knowledge led them to wrong conclusions, namely, the existence of a God or gods, the notions that creation and destruction were a function of the godhead, that man's fate was of concern to God, that there was a life after death in heaven or hell, as warranted by the morality of man's life on earth, and that all thinking on these matters must necessarily be regulated by religion. Here we examine the arguments from History against God or religion.

The Argument from History

Modern atheistic thinkers believe that, in the light of advanced learning, man is now in a position to make a re-appraisal of traditional ways of thought and to rectify errors of interpretation, just as in secular matters he has already exploded myths and overturned false hypotheses whenever facts and experience have forced the truth upon him.

All those things, which were formerly attributed to supernatural forces, are now wholly explainable in terms of natural causes, modern thinking having it that the "Discovery" of God was a mere assumption arising from ignorance. With the spread of knowledge, this belief has automatically disappeared.

**That which is a revelation of reality is an ideal in itself,
and its history with all its manifestations
has to be studied in this light.**

Physics, psychology and history have proved conclusively that all those events which man explained in terms of the existence of a God or gods, or some abstract 'Power' had entirely different causes, but that man, steeped in ignorance, continued to speak of them in terms of religious mystery.

Some anti-religionists use an argument from history against the reality of religion. They maintain that it was the particular historical

circumstances in which man found himself which gave birth to religious concepts. In ancient times, before the discoveries of modern science, man had no means of saving himself from natural calamities, such as floods, storms and epidemics. Frequently finding himself in insecure positions, he pictured to himself extraordinary forces which could be invoked in times of need, which could be trusted to come to his rescue in the face of disaster and which would act as a panacea of all ills. In order that society might be well integrated and its members firmly focussed around one central point, a cohesive force was needed. Deities of one sort or the other fulfilled these needs and man, then, began to worship such gods who were considered superior to all human beings and whose favours had to be sought as a matter of religious duty by all individuals. The Encyclopaedia of Social Science has this to say:

Political and civic forces also permanently influence the development of religion. The attributes and the names bestowed upon the gods automatically change in accordance with the form of the State. The God as King is merely a transposition of the human as king, the divine kingdom merely a transposition of the earthly kingdom. Moreover, since the prince or king is supreme judge, the deity is likewise clothed with the judicial function and vested with the final decision as to human guilt or innocence.

Thus the condition of a particular historical period and the interaction of the human mind with prevailing circumstances gave birth to concepts which are collectively known as religion. Religion is a product of the human mind resulting from ignorance and a sense of helplessness in the face of external forces. Julian Huxley sums it up thus: "Religion is the product of a certain type of interaction between man and his environment."

The moral or religious impulse is extraordinarily strong.

Since that particular environment, which was responsible for bringing about this interaction has either disappeared or is disappearing; there is no further justification for the perpetuation of religion. To this Huxley adds:

The concept of God has reached the limits of its usefulness: it cannot evolve further. Man to carry the burden of religion created supernatural powers. From diffuse magic manna to

personal spirits; from spirits to gods; from gods to God—so crudely speaking, the evolution has gone. The particular phase of that evolution which concerns us is that of God. In one period of our Western civilization the gods were necessary fictions, useful hypotheses by which to live.

The Communist philosophy too holds religion to be a historical hoax. Since Communism studies history exclusively in the light of economics, to it, all historical factors were offshoots of the economic situation. It holds that it was the feudal and capitalistic systems, prevailing in the past, which led to the birth of religion. Now that these outdated systems are dying a natural death, religions should also be treated as dead along with it. As Engels puts it, moral concepts, in the last analysis, are the product of contemporary economic conditions. Human history is the history of class wars, in which the ruling classes have been exploiting the backward classes, and religion and morals were invented to provide an ideological basis for safeguarding the interests of the ruling class. According to the Communist Manifesto, laws, morals, and religion—all are the fraudulent innovations of the bourgeoisie under the cloak of which most of its vested interests are hidden.

It is impossible to satisfy those people whose bias, in favour of materialistic reasoning is so strong that they are unable to keep their minds open to self-evident facts.

Addressing the third All-Russia Congress (October, 1920) Lenin had said: of course, they did not believe in God. They knew very well that the church authorities, landlords and bourgeois who spoke with reference to God, were simply interested in safeguarding their own interests as exploiters... They denied all such moral laws which had been borrowed from a Super-human power, or were not based on the concept of class. They called this a hoax, an illusion, the befogging of the minds of farmers and labourers in order to serve the interests of landlords and capitalists. They asserted that their moral code was subject to the class struggle of the Proletariat alone, the source of their moral principle being the interest of the class-struggle of the Proletariat.

This is the case put forward by the antagonists of religion, on the basis of which a large number of people, in our modern age have rejected religion. An American professor of psychology sums it up thus: "Science has shown religion to be history's cruellest and wickedest hoax."

Analysis

Scholars, who study religion in the context of history or the social sciences suffer from the fundamental drawback of not looking at religion via the correct perspective. In doing so, their views become thoroughly distorted. They are like people, who stand in a crooked position in order to look at a square, and, viewing it from an acute angle, decide it is rectangular. The square is still a square, it is just that the viewers' standpoint is wrong, or merely irrelevant.

It was from just such a skewed angle that T.R. Miles asserted that 'The religion is the product of a certain type of interaction between man and his environment.' The basic mistake these scholars make is to study religion as an objective issue, that is, they collect indiscriminately all the historical material that goes under the name of religion, and then form an opinion about religion in the light of whatever material has come their way. Thus they take up a wrong position at the very outset.

Miles' summing up is that 'Religion' like any other subject, can be treated as an objective problem, and studied by the method of science. The first step is to make a list of the ideas and practices associated with different religions—gods and demons, sacrifice, prayer, belief in a future life, taboos and moral rules in life. It is like making a collection of animals and plants. Science always begins in this manner, but it cannot stop at this level; it inevitably seeks to penetrate deeper to make an analysis.

The concept of God began with Monotheism.

This analysis may go further in two directions. It may seek a further understanding of religion as it now exists, or it may adopt the historical method and search for an explanation of the present in the past.

With regard to the historical approach, it is clear that religion, like other social activities, evolves. Further, its evolution is determined by momentum, its inner logic and the influence of the material and social conditions of the period. As an example of the first, take the tendency from polytheism towards monotheism: granted the theistic premise, this tendency seems almost inevitably to declare itself in the course of time.

On one hand religion, consequently, comes to be regarded as a mere social process, rather than as a revelation of reality. That which is a revelation of reality is an ideal in itself, and its history with all its

manifestations has to be studied in this light. On the other hand, that which is only a social process has no inherent ideal. The response of society alone determines its position. Anything that enjoys the status of a social norm or social tradition can retain its position only as long as society gives it a de facto status. If society discards it and adopts any other practice in its place, then only its historical interest can survive and its importance as a social tradition falls into oblivion.

But the case of religion is vastly different from this scenario. As the eminent physician, Fred Hoyle puts it, "This moral or religious impulse, whatever we choose to call it, is extraordinarily strong. When faced by opposition, and even by powerful political attempts at suppression, it obstinately refuses to lie down and die. One often comes across statements that religion is a primitive superstition that modern man can well do without. Yet if the impulse were truly primitive in a biological sense (for instance patriotic loyalty to the group in which one happens to live is primitive), we would surely expect to see it in other animals. As far as I know, no one has advanced any evidence for this idea. The religious impulse appears to be unique to man, and indeed seems to have become stronger in pre-history the more advanced man became in his intellectual attainments. Admittedly the trend has reversed over the recent past, but the change over the past two centuries may well prove to be impermanent...Stripped of the many fanciful adornments with which religion has become surrounded, does it not amount to an instruction within us that expressed rather simply might read as follows: You are derived from something "Out there" in the sky. Seek it and you will find much more than you expect."

The picture of life and the universe, which takes shape in our minds on accepting religion is a very beautiful and gladdening one.

We cannot, therefore, study religion in the same fashion as we take stock of our household goods, modes of conveyance, clothing, housing, etc. This is because religion is an entity in itself, which is either accepted, rejected or accepted in a partial or distorted form by society of its own free will. As a result, religion remains the same in its essence while assuming a diversity of forms which evolve according to the practices of particular societies. It is wrong, therefore, to classify all the different forms of religion prevalent in different societies under the common heading of "Religion". We shall illustrate this with reference of democracy.

Democracy is a system of government by the people, directly or by representation, and a country may be said to be truly democratic only when its political organization abides by this criterion. Now if an approach to the understanding of democracy is made by examining all those countries who call their governments democratic, and then trying by a process of induction to form a clear picture of it on the basis of whatever common denominators present themselves, the image which will emerge, rather than being crystal clear, will be like muddied water stirred up by some floundering animal. Democracy, as a term, will then be meaningless. Consider the democracies of Britain, America, China and Egypt. Do they really have anything in common? In what way is the democracy of India similar to the democracy of Pakistan? The term 'Democracy' becomes even more confusing if all the varieties of democracy in the world today are placed within an evolutionary framework. A study of the development of democracy in France—it's very birthplace—will show that at a later stage of its evolution, it was synonymous with the military dictatorship of General de Gaulle (1890-1970).

The picture of reality which forms in consonance with an anti-religious philosophy is completely out of step with the human mind.

Such a study of religion, in which the process of induction is unlikely to yield correct results, might well bring one to the conclusion that the idea of God can be dispensed with, because the history of religion presents the example of Buddhism—a religion without a God. Today, the idea is widely advocated that religion should be studied, but that God, as a possibility, should be excluded. Advocates of this course tend to argue that even if religion is necessary for the inculcation of discipline, belief in God should not be regarded as compulsory. They feel that a godless religion serves the same purpose. Citing Buddhism, they maintain that, in the present advanced age; such a form of religious structure is more suitable to the needs of society. To such thinkers, society, along with its political and economic objectives is itself the God of the modern age. 'Parliament is the Prophet of this God, through which He informs mankind of His will, and dams and factories rather than mosques and churches are His places of worship.'

The study of religion, by the evolutionary method holds it to be progressing from belief in God to denial of God (e.g. Buddhism). Scholars, who adhere to this view first collect all the material which

has been attributed over the ages to religion, then, independently of those, whose approach is essentially an internal one, they arrange this material in an evolutionary sequence, intentionally omitting any details which might cast doubt on its validity.

For instance, after extensive research, anthropologists and sociologists discovered that the concept of God began with polytheism and, progressing gradually, was developed into monotheism. But, according to them, this cycle of evolution has turned in the reverse direction, turning the concept of monotheism into contradiction. The concept of a 'Multiplicity of gods', according to them, at least had a certain intrinsic value in that, while putting their faith in 'Different gods', people could live in harmony; acknowledge the existence of the gods of other communities. But the doctrine of 'One God' has naturally negated all other gods and their believers, thus giving birth to the concept of a 'Higher Religion' which, in turn, gave rise to unending wars among the various groups and nations. Thus the concept of God, having evolved in the wrong direction, has dug its own grave in accordance with the law of evolution.

The materialistic interpretation of life also dispenses with any definite criterion for the judgement of good and evil.

The fact that the concept of God started with monotheism has been totally omitted in this evolutionary sequence. According to known history, Noah was the first prophet who, it has been established, exhorted people to believe in one God. Moreover, 'Polytheism' does not mean a multiplicity in the absolute sense, as is commonly understood. No nation has ever been 'Polytheist' in the sense that it believed in many gods of the same order. In fact, polytheism implies a hierarchy with one 'Supreme God' at the top and his entourage of demi-gods spreading downwards from Him on the rungs of the divine ladder. Polytheism has always carried with it the concept of a 'God of gods'. This shows how baseless are the claims of this so-called evolutionary religion.

The Marxist approach to history is even more bereft of meaning, being based on the hypothesis that it is economic conditions, alone, which are the real factors which shape man. According to Marx, religion came into existence in an age of feudalism and capitalism. Since these systems were tyrannical and fostered exploitation, the moral and religious concepts which evolved under them had, of necessity, reflected their environment. They were no more than doctrines which condoned and

upheld exploitation. But this theory does not, academically, carry any weight. Nor does experience testify to it. This theory, based on a total denial of the human will, regards man simply as a product of economic conditions. Like the soap-cakes manufactured in a factory, man is moulded in the factory of the environment. He does not act with an independent mind, but simply conforms to whatever conditioning he has been subjected to. If this were an incontrovertible fact, how could it have been possible for Marx, himself the product of a 'Capitalist society', to revolt against the economic conditions prevailing in his time? If the contemporary economic system gave birth to religion, why not believe then, according to the same logic, that Marxism too is the product of the same conditions? If the stand taken by Marxism on religion is correct, why should this not be applicable to Marxism itself? It follows that this theory is absurd. There is no scientific and rational proof to support it.

Experience too has exposed the false premises of this theory. The example of the erstwhile U.S.S.R., where this ideology had been predominant for sixty-five years, will serve to illustrate our point.

Religious thought affords a glowing ray of hope, giving to both life and death a joyous and meaningful radiance.

This half-a-century old experience clearly shows that the systems of production and exchange have nothing to do with the shaping of ideas. Had the human mind been subservient to the system of production, and had ideas taken shape in accordance with it, a communist state like the Soviet Union ought, strictly speaking, to have curbed the tendencies to oppress and exploit. Thus the whole argument of the modern age is nothing short of sophistry in the garb of scientific reasoning—a patchwork, a hotchpotch of discordant elements. Of course, the 'Scientific Method' has been adopted to study these 'Facts', but this, by itself, cannot arrive at the correct results. Other essential factors must be taken into account. That is to say, that, if the scientific method is applied, but applied only to half-truths and one-sided data, in spite of its ostensible bona fides from the intellectual standpoint, it is bound to yield results which are far from being accurate.

The picture of life and the universe, which takes shape in our minds upon accepting religion, is a very beautiful and gladdening one. This, in itself, establishes the truth of religion and the falsity of anti-religious theories. It conforms to the noble ideas of man in the very same way, as the material universe is echoed in mathematical formulae. On the

contrary, the picture of reality which forms in consonance with an anti-religious philosophy is completely out of step with the human mind. On this point, J.W.N. Sullivan has made a very pertinent quotation from Bertrand Russell:

That man is the product of such causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon-day brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system. And that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. All these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.

When religious concepts find a harmonious echo in the human psyche, it is a proof that this was the reality which human nature was in search of.

This extract sums up the irreligious, materialistic school of thought. According to such thinking, our prospects in life are darkened by gloom and despair. The materialistic interpretation of life also dispenses with any definite criterion for the judgement of good and evil. It justifies the dropping of bombs on human beings, the use of flame-throwers and chemical warfare, to name but a few of the scourges of modern times. This is not considered outrageous, tyrannical or bestially aggressive. After all, human beings have to die one way or another. Religious thought, by contrast, affords a glowing ray of hope, giving to both life and death a joyous and meaningful radiance. In this way it fulfils our psychological needs. When a scientist propounds a theory, which is found to conform to a mathematical formula, he is convinced that what he has discovered is a reality. Similarly, when religious concepts find a harmonious echo in the human psyche, this is a proof that this was the reality which human nature was in search of. It gives us such a sense of fulfilment that we are left with no real grounds for denying its truth. To quote the words of Earl Chester Rex, an American mathematician:

I use the accepted principle in science which governs the choice between two or more conflicting theories. According to this

principle, the theory which explains all the pertinent facts in the simplest way is adopted. This same principle was used, long ago, to decide between the Ptolemaic, or earth-centred theory and the Copernican theory which claims that the sun is the centre of the solar system. The Ptolemaic theory was so involved and so much more complicated than the Copernican that the earth-centred idea was discarded.

Our modern minds have a sort of bias in favour of the materialistic explanation of the facts.

Admittedly this argument would not be regarded as fool proof by many. The concept of God and religion will never fit into the narrow frame of their materialistic minds. Yet their dissatisfaction is not really due to any lack of sound reasoning behind religion. No, the actual reason for their disaffection is that their prejudiced minds are not prepared to accept religious reasoning. Sir James Jeans, at the end of his book, *Mysterious Universe* correctly remarked: 'Our modern minds have a sort of bias in favour of the materialistic explanation of the facts'.

In his book, *Witness*, Whittaker Chambers tells of how he was watching his little daughter one day, when he found that he had unconsciously become aware of the shape of her ear. He thought to himself how impossible it was that such delicate convolutions could have come about by chance. They could have been created only by premeditated design. But he pushed this thought out of his agnostic mind, because he realised that the next step in logical sequence would have to be: design presupposes God—a thesis he was not yet ready to accept. With reference to this incident, Thomas David Park, a research chemist, formerly Chairman of the Department of Chemistry, Stanford Research Institute, writes: 'I have known many scientists among my professors and research colleagues, who have similar thoughts about observed facts in chemistry and physics.'

It is impossible to satisfy those scholars whose bias, in favour of materialistic reasoning is so strong that they are unable to keep their minds open to self-evident facts. There is a particular reason for the bias, about which George Herbert Blount, an American physicist has this to say:

Conviction of the reasonableness of theism and the tenuousness of atheism usually in itself does not cause a man to accept practical theism. There seems to be an almost innate suspicion

that the recognition of Deity will somehow rob one of freedom. To the Scholar, who cherishes intellectual liberty, any thought of abridged freedom is especially dreadful.

In much the same vein, the concept of prophethood has been described by Julian Huxley as an 'Intolerable demonstration of superiority'. That is, the acceptance of someone as a prophet implies his elevation to such a high status that his word becomes the word of God, giving him, in consequence, the right to impose his will on the people, the right to make people accept his word as law. But then that is what it means to be a prophet, and when man is the creature and not the Creator, he is in the position of being the humble slave of God, and not God, how can this situation be changed or avoided simply on the basis of concepts which are the result of ignorance or wishful thinking?

There seems to be an almost innate suspicion that the recognition of Deity will somehow rob one of freedom.

Cressy Morrison asks with reason in his book, *Man Does not Stand Alone*, 'How much must man advance before he fully realises the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, grasps His goodness that we exist, assumes his full part in destiny and strives to live up to the highest code he is capable of understanding without attempting to analyse God's motive, or describe His attributes?'

Things are as they are. We cannot change the hard reality: we simply have to acknowledge it, accept it, and bow to it. Now, if we are not to adopt an ostrich-like attitude, our best course is to believe in actuality, rather than deny it. By denying the truth, it is man who loses. His denial of the truth in no way alters, harms, or diminishes it. The truth is the truth.

In the seventh century, God had opened up new possibilities, which were at once availed of by the Prophet of Islam and his companions. As a result, monotheism attained intellectual dominance and the polytheism of that civilization was banished forever. In a like manner, through a modern scientific revolution, God has once again created new opportunities. If alerted to these trends, people of a religious bent of mind can quickly seize these opportunities, and can certainly turn the tide against atheism and set up monotheism in its place. In so doing, they will ultimately be setting history upon one of the finest courses of our human era. □

THE ANSWER IS VERY MUCH HERE

An Explanation for Life

ESTHER FREUD (b. 1963) is a British novelist. She is the great-granddaughter of Sigmund Freud. One of her famous books is *Hideous Kinky*. In an interview to *The Times of India* she said: "The reading world is hungry for experiences of people they've never heard from." (November 28, 2014)

This remark about the present reading world is very meaningful. It is not a simple remark. It has a deeper meaning. The fact is that the reading world is living in a state of bewilderment. They want to know the purpose of their life, but they have not found a convincing answer to it yet. They feel that their education, study, job and various activities have failed to provide them with a satisfactory answer to this question. Now, consciously or unconsciously, they try to find that person who probably may have discovered this meaning and can give them an answer in a manner that satisfies them. They seek to know the unknown, but they feel that the book they are searching for has not been written.

Every person feels that his inner personality wants to know something which it cannot know on its own.

If one ponders over this matter, one will discover that every human being is born as a seeker. Everyone is a seeking being. Every person feels that his inner personality wants to know something which it cannot know on its own. These questions are hidden in every person's nature: who am I, why am I settled in this world, what is the real purpose of life, what is the central principle through which I can explain all the physical and non-physical world. However, no one knows the answers to these questions. It appears that no known writer has been able to provide a satisfactory answer to these questions.

This is a very serious matter. The reason is not the absence of writing, rather the reason is the absence of the right framework among readers by which they can study the available books to discover the truth and adopt it with satisfaction.

The problem lies in misguided obsession. People are obsessed with wrong ideas. Under this obsession they have developed a self-styled

framework. They, consciously or unconsciously, want to find an answer that fits this framework of theirs. When they fail to find such an answer, they say that no such writing exists which can answer their questions.

A historical example illustrates this point. During the early history of mankind, people failed to discover the idea now known as the heliocentric theory. Why? Because during mankind's earlier history, man was obsessed with the geocentric theory, which was based on observations by the naked eye. Everyday people saw the sun rising from the earth and setting in the west of the earth, so they formed the idea that the sun revolved around the planet earth. Only when Copernicus and Galileo refuted this idea, people were able to discover the truth that was hitherto unknown to them.

The fact is that in the library of books there is a book which gives an answer to people's questions. That book was compiled in the seventh century, and because of the printing press it is now easily available. This book is none other than the Quran. The Quran is a revealed book and its authenticity has been academically established over a period of more than a thousand years. It gives us a clear answer to the question of existence. Anyone who reads this book, will certainly find his answers.

But, the fact remains that just like the case of the solar system, here people are obsessed with a misguided notion. This misguided notion is best expressed by the phrase: 'Right here, right now.' Due to this obsession, people want an answer which is world-oriented. But, the answer given in the Quran is other-world oriented. It is this difference in outlook between the reader and the book that has created the problem. If people study the Quran objectively, they will certainly discover that the book they wanted is already available to them.

Here, one should consider a verse from the Quran, which gives a very relevant message to people in search of answers to their questions: "No one can inform you like the one who is All-knowing."

(THE QURAN 35: 14) □



***God's mercy to us is many times more than
that of a mother to her child.***

ELIGIBILITY FOR PARADISE

Example of Adam

ADAM was the first man and also the first Prophet. God created Adam and his spouse Eve, and inhabited them in Paradise. God told them to enjoy freely all the bounties of Paradise except for one forbidden tree which they were not to approach or else they would be wrong doers. (THE QURAN 2: 35)

However, Satan seduced them into eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. After this Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise and were inhabited on the present earth. It was said to Adam and his progeny that only those who proved deserving by their deeds would be admitted to eternal Paradise.

This example from the beginning of creation shows the criterion for admission to Paradise. No one will be given Paradise magically or on the basis of recommendations from anyone. Paradise is not a birth-right even for the Prophets.

Paradise is not a birth-right even for the Prophets.

With the example of Adam, God set this precedent that Paradise will not be given on any self-established belief. There would be no exception in this rule even for the Prophets.

There is another important lesson in this example of Prophet Adam. The most basic yardstick of eligibility for Paradise is the control over one's desires and the development of one's intellectuality to safeguard oneself from the guile of Satan. Man has unlimited desires and every desire opens a door for Satan. Man has an innate desire for eternal success. This is the path from which Satan successfully instigated Adam. Man should remain vigilant at every such door, in order to ensure that Satan will not enter and lure him away from God's benevolence. □



In this world of competition, any success story is a story of struggle.

THE METHOD OF REPENTANCE

Secure Forgiveness

MAN, by nature has been created weak. To err is only human and man commits wrongdoings repeatedly. The solution to this in God's court is known as repentance. Repentance is to turn around in regret and express remorse after wrongdoing resolving to reform oneself. In this connection, a verse from the Quran says:

But God undertakes to accept repentance only from those who do evil out of ignorance and those who repent soon after. God turns towards such people with mercy; He is the All-Knowing and All-Wise. (THE QURAN 4: 17)

According to this verse of the Quran, the right method of repentance is the one that is done without any delay. Repentance done later on is not the correct method. Repentance without delay is in accordance with the law of nature, and repentance at a later stage is in contradiction with the law of nature.

The right method of repentance is the one that is done without delay.

God, the Creator has endowed man with a faculty known as conscience. As soon as man commits a sin, his conscience is aroused. He feels a deep remorse for the wrong committed, but this remorse does not remain at the same level eternally. Initially, this remorse is intense and painful, but slowly it weakens. If repentance is delayed further, this feeling of remorse disappears completely and the strong motivation for reform will fade away. He will be aware of the wrong committed but he will not feel the need to reform himself.

If earlier, his case was one of a live conscience; with the delay, his conscience will become lifeless. Man must understand and acknowledge this law of nature and should openly repent as soon as he commits any wrong. If he delays in his repentance, he will lose all awareness for the need to repent. □

The beauty of a person lies in keeping away from futile activities.

BIG OR BENEFICIAL

A conscious decision

TWO women wanted to do something big in their lives. To fulfil this desire, they underwent an arduous mountaineering training and successfully scaled the highest mountain peak. Further they are continuing to pursue their goal of scaling more peaks.

While It is good to try to do something big in one's life one should also be clear about the criterion of what is considered as 'Big'. One approach to do something big is, to prove oneself as a giver member of the community; give to man that which is beneficial to him in the substantial sense. The other approach is to do something that would result in personal glory; it may seem big to some people but in reality, it might not be beneficial for man.

It is good to have big dreams but big dreams must be creative and beneficial for humanity.

There are several examples of women in history who performed feats that were beneficial for mankind. For instance, Madame Marie Curie did such pioneering work as led to the discovery of radioactivity and has proved to be beneficial for mankind till date. Similarly, Hellen Keller set an example that despite being blind and sight impaired, a person can receive high education and prove to be a good speaker and author.

Likewise there are other creative fields for women where they can leave their mark. For example, establishing an educational institution of high standard, to provide quality education or running a high standard health clinic to provide quality health services etc. There are other fields of this nature where women can accomplish work of similar kind.

It is good to have big dreams but big dreams must be creative and beneficial for humanity. They should not merely be a source of sensational news and personal glory that is of no benefit to mankind. □



Remembrance of God is the greatest of all forms of worship.

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



GOD'S NEIGHBOUR

ONE who has discovered God becomes close to God even in this world. His spirit is bathed in the light of God. If even the sight of flowers arouses finer feelings in a person, how can one discover God and not be moved to a state of sublime ecstasy?

Many people claim to be close to God, but are still in fact a long way from Him. They speak of God, but their actions show that they have not even recognized their Lord.

**One who has discovered God
becomes close to God even in this world.**

They take God's name, but have not tasted the sweetness of the name which they utter. They claim to have found God, but have not experienced the fragrance of His garden. They display religious fervour in public, but there are no signs of their souls being illuminated with the light of God. They consider that God's paradise is reserved exclusively for them, but their lives are not touched by a heavenly breeze.

A strange God it must be who does not cause a tremor in one's thoughts. A strange heaven it must be to which people, who show no reflection of the heavenly in their words and deeds, will be automatically admitted. A strange hereafter it must be which will be inherited for all eternity by people who did not seek life-everlasting and were interested only in ephemeral pleasures.

It is regrettable that there are people who claim to have found God while in truth they have not found Him at all. ❑



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WOMEN IN ISLAM

An Intellectual Role

THE Quran declares that all the tenets and the teachings of Islam rest on the basic principle that Islam is a religion of nature. According to the Islamic belief, God is the creator of woman as well as man. It is God who sent the sacred book—Al Quran and according to its belief, both are the creations of the one and the same God. A woman is a phenomenon of nature and the Quran is a statement of the laws of nature.

According to Islamic belief, both men and women are born as equal partners in life. In a fine-expression of gender equality, the Quran declares:

“Never will I waste the work of any of you, be he male or female: You are members, one of another...”(THE QURAN 3: 195)

We find a similar meaning in the *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet of Islam):

Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit. (*Al Tirmizi*)

We see that both the sacred scriptures of Islam make it clear that neither sex is inferior or superior to the other. However, studies in biology and psychology show that the sexes are different in nature, each being designed for a different purpose. So, the Islamic maxim runs:

Equal in respect, but different in role.

Despite being equal, each has a different sphere of action. That is, in their contribution to social activity, men and women undertake work which is suitable for each, for example tough physical work will be undertaken by men while the women deal with the lighter work.

Women’s role as supporters

In the early period of Islam, both the sexes were fully active in different fields of life, from housework to agriculture, and from horticulture to worship in the mosque. Everywhere women were visible and active. Gradually there came about a division of labour, which is justifiable not

only biologically and physiologically, but also in terms of the ensuing social benefits. One such important benefit is that they can see each other's lives objectively, without that personal involvement which tends to cloud their judgment and lead to a damaging emotionalism. They are better able to counsel each other calmly and wisely, to give moral support at critical moments, and to offer the daily encouragement with which every successful union should be marked.

Examples from Islamic history

Khadijah

In Islamic history, there are many examples of women giving invaluable help to their husbands in critical situations. One of the most notable was Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet of Islam who successfully brought the Prophet back from a state of fear and trembling to a state of normalcy after he received the first divine revelation in the solitude of the Cave of Hira from the Archangel Gabriel. She was able to reassure him that his life was not, as he feared, in danger, as she herself, was emotionally detached from the incident. She observed: "Surely, God will never forsake you. You are kind to your kin; you always help the weak; you take care of whoever crosses your threshold; you give solace to the weary; you speak the truth." The reassurance that Khadijah gave to the Prophet of Islam on this occasion was one of the most significant contributions to the furtherance of Islam.

**According to Islamic belief, both men and women
are born as equal partners in life.**

Then it occurred to Khadijah that she had best make enquiries of some learned Christians, who, well versed as they were in the scriptures, were bound to have knowledge of revelation and prophethood. She went first to a *rahib* (hermit) who lived near Makkah (Mecca). Upon seeing her, the priest asked, "O noble lady of the Quraysh, what has brought you here?" Khadijah replied, "I have come here to ask you about Gabriel." To this the *rahib* said, "Glory be to God, he is God's pure angel. He visits prophets: he came to Jesus and Moses." Then Khadijah went to another Christian called Addas. She put the same question to him, and he too told her that Gabriel was an angel of God, the very same one who had been with Moses when God drowned the Pharaoh. He had also come to Jesus, and through him God had helped Jesus.

Then Khadijah hastened to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian convert who had translated part of the Bible into Arabic. When she had finished telling him of what Muhammad had seen and heard, Waraqah exclaimed, "Holy, holy! By the Master of my soul, if your report be true, O Khadijah, this must be the great spirit who spoke to Moses. This means that Muhammad must be the Prophet of this nation." On a subsequent visit, Khadijah brought Muhammad to meet Waraqah ibn Nawfal. Muhammad related the events exactly as they had taken place and, when he had finished, Waraqah said, "By the Master of my soul, I swear that you are the same Prophet whose coming was foretold by Jesus, son of Mary." But then Waraqah sounded a note of warning: "You will be denied and you will be hurt. You will be abused and you will be pursued." He nevertheless immediately pledged himself to the Prophet: "If I should ever live to see that day, I should surely help you."

The reason that Khadijah was able to arrive at a correct judgment in such delicate situations was that she was detached from it and therefore, in a position to offer objective opinions. If she too had been seriously involved, she might have been too subjective in her thinking.

Hajira

We find from a prayer offered by Prophet Abraham that the culture prevalent in his times (4,000 years ago) had totally corrupted people's minds and they practiced nature worship or *Shirk*. As a result such practices had become a part of their unconscious minds. It had become almost impossible for a person born in these urban centres to keep himself untainted by this corrupting influence (THE QURAN 14: 36).

Studies in biology and psychology show that the sexes are different in nature, each being designed for a different purpose.

At this juncture, God commanded Prophet Abraham to devise a historic plan of founding a new generation of people who would be followers of Monotheism; a step that has no precedent in ancient history. According to this plan, Prophet Abraham was to settle his wife Hajira (Hagar) and son Ishmael in the desert in Arabia at a place now known as Mecca. It was at that time an uninhabited valley far away from the centres of civilization. There, the environment was totally natural. Thus, it was possible to raise a generation, cut off from the atmosphere of corrupt civilization, which would retain its God-given nature intact.

Fulfilling this command of God, Abraham took them to the desert and started to leave. Hajira asked him repeatedly why he was leaving them there in the desert alone. Receiving no reply she asked if God had commanded him to do so. On receiving the reply in the affirmative, she said, "Then God will not let us go to waste". With that one action, she became the main supporter for Abraham in fulfilling God's plan and the entire Muslim community.

The rite of *sa'i*, performed by all Muslims at the time of Haj by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwa—two hillocks near the Kabah—is a re-enactment of Hajira's desperate quest for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant when they arrived in the dry desert. The performance of this rite is a lesson in struggling for the cause of God. It is of the utmost significance that this was an act first performed by a woman. Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman's greatness than God's command to men, literally, to follow in her footsteps.

Aisha

A study of the life of the Prophet of Islam tells us that education, whose actual goal from the Islamic point of view is the arousal of human awareness, is as essential for women as it is for men. Indeed, it is only aware men and women who can conduct the practical matters of life smoothly.

There are traditions which tell us that the Prophet's conversations with his wife Aisha were aimed at educating her. Aisha says that when the Prophet of Islam would get up at night after a few hours of sleep, he would converse with her at length in that peaceful atmosphere. (*Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim*) This course of informal education, continuing uninterruptedly, even while traveling, so benefited Aisha that she became the most distinguished authority on religious knowledge. She survived the Prophet for a full fifty years, during which period she remained a truly valuable source of religious knowledge. Her house served as a school of religious learning.

As in the first era of Islam, academic activity centred mostly on the *Hadith (words of the Prophet)* and *Athar (sayings and deeds of the Prophet's Companions)*, Aisha and a number of the Prophet's women Companions contributed in large measure to the narration and preservation of the Prophet's traditions. It is said that 'Aisha, herself

handed down to posterity a substantial portion (2,210 *Hadith* traditions) of the vast majority of Islamic knowledge.

Among her pupils were such eminent scholars as 'Urwah ibn Zubayr, Sa'id ibn Mussayyib, 'Abdullah ibn 'Amir, Mashrug, 'Ikramah and 'Alaqamah. A jurist of high calibre, she used to explain the wisdom and background of each tradition that she described.

The next generation of women in their turn handed down the traditions, which they had heard, at first hand from the Prophet or his Companions or from religious scholars to whom they were related.

The importance of Education and Teaching

History shows that Muslim women were largely engaged in the field of education. Almost all the Muslim houses functioned as primary schools (*madrassa*). This tradition was practiced in almost all Muslim communities well into the 20th century when the modern system of education took over this function.

Division of labour is justifiable not only biologically and physiologically, but also in terms of the ensuing social benefits.

In the biographies of the narrators of *Hadith* literature, mention is made of the far-reaching effect of the academic services of women. For example, Imam Bukhari (810-870 AD), whose *al-Jaami' as-Sahih* is by far the most authentic source of *Hadith* learning, set off, when he was 14 years of age, to acquire knowledge from distant scholars.

If he was in a position to appreciate the lessons given by the great teachers of the time, it was because his mother and sister had given him a sound education at home.

It is said that Imam ibn Jawzi (1114-1200 AD), the famous religious scholar, received his primary education from his aunt. The noted Arab physician Ibn Abi Usaibia's (1203-1270 AD) sister and daughter were experts in medicine—the lay doctors of their time. And among the *Hadith* teachers of Imam ibn Asakir (1105-1175 AD), several women teachers are mentioned.

An example of a woman making a key contribution to the spread of religious learning is that of the daughter of Imam Abu Ja'far, Tahavi (220-321 A.H) the famous *Hadith* traditionist whose book, *Sharh Ma'ani al-Athar*, is regularly included in the syllabuses of Arabic religious schools. He dictated his book of traditions to his daughter and, as he read out the *Hadith*, he would explain its finer points to her and then she would write it all down. This is one of finest examples of a woman helping her family members in matters of religion.

Women enjoy freedom in Islam

Women enjoy complete freedom in Islam. During the life of the Prophet of Islam, a Muslim lady, Barira, wanted separation from her husband, Mughis. The case was referred to the Prophet of Islam, who counselled: "I would like you to withdraw your case and live with your husband by adjusting with him." Barira asked the Prophet: "Is this your personal request or is it the command of God?" The Prophet replied, "It is my personal request." Barira said, "Then, I do not need it", and the marriage was then dissolved.

Throughout the Islamic period, women were allowed to visit mosques and say their prayers either in congregation or individually. Moreover, throughout the history of Islam, women have been free to perform significant roles, not only demonstrating the vast arena that Islam affords them for the performance of noble and heroic deeds, but also the exalted position accorded to women in Islamic society.

Women's Position in Islam

The Quran says that men are in charge of, that is, they are—maintainers—of women (THE QURAN 4: 34). This does not mean that men have a distinctive status over women. Their being maintainers of women has never been discriminatory. It rather concerns the practical management of the home, for which the man is held responsible. However, this does not mean that a woman is not allowed to shoulder these responsibilities. If she proves capable of bearing this burden, no objection need be raised from any quarter.

When the Judaic era was drawing to a close, a woman had to be singled out who would in every way, be fit to become the mother of one so miraculous in nature as the Prophet Jesus, on whom be peace. As God had ordained that the final prophet of the Jewish people was to be born without a father, the character of his mother had, therefore, to be

one of irreproachable innocence and chastity. Mary, who subsequently became known as the Virgin Mary, was found to have lived her life according to this exacting standard, and, by her extraordinary chastity, had proved herself fit to be chosen as the mother of Jesus.

In one of the most authentic collections of the *Hadith* by Bukhari, the Prophet is recorded as saying, "The best woman out of all of the (the Jewish people) was Mary (mother of Jesus), the daughter of 'Imran, and the best woman out of all of my own people was Khadijah bint Khuwaylid." The special historical status that both Khadijah and Mary enjoyed was due to their both having given themselves up entirely to God: they both subordinated their own wills to that of the Almighty.

Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman's greatness than God's command to men (during Haj) literally, to follow in the footsteps of Hajira.

In the case of Khadijah, she was chosen by God to be the life partner of the final Prophet, Muhammad, because the circumstances of his life were such that he needed someone of superlative virtue, who would put herself and her property entirely in his hands without ever raising her voice in complaint. She did, indeed, give up everything—her life, her property, her leisure and her comfort—for the sake of the Prophet.

The projection of woman as the most honourable human being in the form of a mother (*Al Bukhari, Sahih, Kitab al-Adab, 10/329-330*) makes it quite clear what sort of society Islam wants to create. It is one in which a woman is accorded the maximum honour and respect. A member of such a society, who shows full respect to a woman as a mother will, of necessity, become more and more caring with regard to other women. With the creation of such a mentality, women in general will share the status accorded to a mother at home.

Women in every field

In the later period of Islam, we find a number of Muslim women playing a very important role in the history of Islam. For example, in the 12th century A.D., Chengiz Khan and Hollagu attacked the Abbasid Caliphate and destroyed it from Samarkand to Alleppo. In the aftermath, it was the Muslim women who became active in missionary work among the victors. The result was miraculous. Within 50 years, the majority of

those conqueror tribes had accepted Islam. As one historian said: "The conquerors have accepted the religion of the conquered."

During the Mughal period in India, certain Muslim women played a great role, e.g. Mariam Zamini, the mother of emperor Akbar, Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of the Emperor Shahjahan and Noorjahan, the wife of the Emperor Jahangir.

In Conclusion

Some great women have played an outstanding role in the history of Islam: Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet of Islam energetically promoted her husband's mission, Aisha, a later wife of the Prophet, became a great social reformer, Hajira (Hagar), the wife of Abraham, brought into being a live community which was free of all superstitions and all other corruptions of civilization.

It follows that, in every age, there is a need not only for men but also for women to devote themselves to the mission of God. Ideally, they should be individuals who are willing; in the way that Khadijah was, to involve themselves unstintingly in the scheme of God. Such people are like small cogs, which revolve strictly according to the motion of a larger wheel—in this case, the will of God. This is undoubtedly a trying task; but it is also one that carries a great reward. To perform this task is 'To help God'. There can be no doubt about the excellence and superiority of those whom God chooses to enlist as His helpers. □

***The greater the learning,
the greater the progress in life.***



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WHY HAS GOD GIVEN MAN FREEDOM?

Privileged Responsibility

UNLIKE any other creature in the Universe, man is free in this world. God has not placed any curbs on him. But this freedom is for the purpose of putting man to the test, and is not meant to encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness, like animals do and then just pass away one day. Rather its purpose is that man should lead a morally upright life *of his own free will*, thus demonstrating that he is of the highest moral character.

One who conducts himself in this matter should be reckoned as God's special servant who, without any apparent compulsion, chose to be a man of principle; who, without being subjected to any external force, did of his own free will, what his Lord would have desired. This liberty accorded to man gives him the opportunity to gain credit for being the most superior of all God's creatures.

All the things in this world are God's subjects. The stars and satellites rotate in space entirely at their Lord's bidding. Trees, rivers, mountains, and all other such natural phenomena function according to the unchangeable ways of God laid down by Him in advance. Similarly, the animals follow exactly those instincts instilled in their species as a matter of Divine Will. Man is the only creature who has been given, exceptionally, the gift of power and freedom.

This freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If, on receiving freedom an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, it will mean that he has failed the test.

But if he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's will on all occasions, he will have made the right use of his God-given freedom: he will, without any compulsion, have bound himself by divine principles.

One who chooses this course will succeed in the test of freedom. He will be handsomely rewarded by God as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God, he will remain in an everlasting state of blissfulness and blessedness. □

Dearest to God is one with the best character.

RELIGIOUS IMITATION, POLITICAL IMITATION

Corruption in Religion

FOLLOWERS of the previous Prophets, during the period of their degeneration indulged in a form of corruption that the Quran refers to as '*muzahat*'. (THE QURAN 9: 30)

The literal meaning of '*muzahat*' is 'imitation'. That is to say, adopting irreligious ways and practices by giving them a religious name. For instance, consider the practice of worshipping nature instead of the worship of God. To be influenced by this practice and adopt it by labelling it as following the traditions of one's forefathers is '*muzahat*'.

One form of '*muzahat*' could be called 'Religious imitation'. All the practices of *bidaat* or innovation in religion are a part of 'Religious imitation'. *Bidaat* does not mean the practices that have been created anew. *Bidaat* in fact is to take the irreligious practices of others and adopt them by giving them religious sanction.

Another form of *muzahat* that is apparent in the present times on a large scale, could be referred to as 'Political imitation'. For example, taking some practices of secular parties and organisations and adopting them as a religious obligation by giving them an Islamic name. Thus, for instance Muslims today use the method of protest on a very wide scale. Without any doubt whatsoever, this is 'Political innovation' or 'Political imitation'. To stage protests and demonstrations, to issue statements of protest, to organize conferences to protest against this or that, to take out protest rallies, to call for strikes and to raise slogans in protest; such actions done in the name of Islamic cause, are all forms of 'Political imitation'.

Protesting is a method of secularism. It is not the method of Islam. At the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the Kabah in Makkah had been practically turned into a place where polytheism was practiced. The Prophet did not protest against this. Likewise, for 13 years of the Prophet's life in Makkah, he and his Companions had to face all sorts of oppression. Yet, he did not protest against this either. He was subjected to social boycott, he and his Companions were compelled to leave their homeland, but here also he did not protest.

The fact is that protesting in itself is a completely un-Islamic method. One simply cannot make it Islamic by giving it a beautiful-sounding name—by calling it ‘Peaceful protest’, or ‘Religious protest’, ‘Protesting for one’s rights’, ‘Protesting against the oppression of the Government’, ‘Protesting against insults to the Prophet’, ‘Protesting against the sacrilege of holy places’, ‘Protesting against insults to Islam’, and so on.

What is the psyche behind this imitation of others? The answer to this is found in the Quran, in the following words: ‘their hearts are all alike.’(2: 118) In other words, imitation at the level of thought. When peoples who have been given a divine scripture pass through a phase of degeneration, their way of thinking is no longer based on God’s *deen* or way of life. Their minds are dispossessed of a live God-consciousness. As a result, they get influenced by irreligious thoughts and ideologies of their surroundings. The true divine model as a practice becomes unknown to them. So, they give non-divine models a religious title or label and adopt them as a part of religion.

Present-day Muslims have fully fallen prey to both forms of imitation—to religious imitation as well as political imitation. The many innovative practices widespread among Muslims are all a result of this religious imitation of others. For instance, various rituals and practices among Muslims that they have adopted in imitation of others but by giving them a seemingly ‘Islamic’ justification—such as *Milad un Nabi (celebration of the birthday of Prophet)* and Quran khani (arabic recitation of the Quran by a group of people) are all innovations. The activities that present-day Muslims are engaged in all across the world in the name of Muslim politics are all, and without any exception whatsoever, a result of the ‘Political imitation’ of others. In the name of Muslim politics or Islamic politics, present-day Muslims have sought to ‘Islamise’ things that are not at all Islamic.

This so-called ‘Islamic politics’ is, in reality, the politics of a degenerated community. It was practiced by earlier peoples who were provided divine scriptures but still strayed away from God’s path in their later periods. This ‘Islamic politics’ will bring no benefit to Muslims, either in this world or in the Hereafter.

The task that Muslims must undertake is *dawah*, that is, communication of the message of God to mankind, not politics. Until Muslims abandon this method of ‘imitation’ and adopt the method of *dawah*, they will continue to be deprived of God’s blessings. They will never receive God’s help unless they undertake God’s work of communicating His message to mankind. □

WHERE ALL HOPES END, NEW HOPE EMERGES

Secret of Success

THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1858-1919) was an American politician, author and historian who served as the 26th President of the United States of America. A tragic incident occurred in Roosevelt's life, which has a lesson for everyone.

On February 14, 1884 when Roosevelt was at work in the New York state legislature attempting to get a government reform bill passed, he was summoned home by his family. He returned home to find that his mother had succumbed to typhoid fever. On the same day, his wife died of a severe kidney ailment.

The double tragedy devastated Roosevelt. That day he wrote these words in his diary: "The light has gone out of my life." Burdened by grief, he abandoned politics and became a cattle rancher in western US. He engrossed himself in raising cattle. But, after a blizzard wiped out his prized herd of cattle in 1885, Roosevelt decided to return to New York under compulsion. He re-entered politics as there was no other option available to him at that time. He kept rising gradually in politics until in 1901, at the age of 42, he became the youngest president of the United States.

**Every external loss further stimulates
the mind of a person.**

There are various such examples where a person experienced a situation of total loss. But, history shows that after the loss, the same person re-started his life and became more successful than before. The following true incident stands as a proof of the above phenomena. The owner of a hotel in a city in India which had witnessed severe communal riots was actually re-built in place of the old building which was completely destroyed during the communal riots. Instead of going downhill after this loss, the owner of the hotel with hard work and struggle was more successful and prosperous than before. What is the reason behind this phenomenon? The reason is that when someone incurs a loss, for him it is an external loss. He loses something that was

outside of him. But, what he has inside him is far greater than what he has lost outside of him. It is a law of nature that every external loss further activates the inner asset of a person, which is his mind, given to him by nature.

**Do not grieve over destruction,
rather plan for re-construction.**

A shocking experience leads to brainstorming and enhances a person's power of thinking. He becomes capable of beginning his work anew with better planning. Consciously or unconsciously, his mind tries to undo the tragedy that he has experienced. It awakens in him the power of determination, which enables him to attain super success.

These kind of historical events give us a great lesson—the power of construction is stronger than the power of destruction. Do not grieve over destruction, rather plan for re-construction. Only then, will you emerge as a super-achiever. □



***Either we co-exist or cease to exist.
There is simply no other option.***

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PROPHETHOOD

Divine Guidance

HUMAN destiny, by Islamic teachings, is a matter of man having been placed on this earth by God, so that he may be put to the test—the test of his capacity to make correct moral choices. It is for this purpose that man has been given complete freedom, for without such freedom, the divine test would have no meaning, no validity. It is required of man that he should lead his life on earth following a regimen of strict self-discipline. Wherein should he find the guiding principles for such a course? The true source of guidance, according to Islam, is to be found in prophethood.

God has endowed man with a thinking mind so that he may understand. But this mind can only grasp things that are apparent. It cannot go beyond the perceivable, and there are many things to be apprehended, for which a superficial knowledge is insufficient. The higher realities of this world are beyond the scope of the human mind, and as far as God and the next world are concerned, they must remain forever invisible—beyond the reach of human perception.

The true source of guidance, according to Islam is to be found in prophethood.

What the Prophet does is to enlighten people so that they may overcome the human inadequacy of not knowing things beyond the scope of human mind. He tells of the reality of things here and now, and also gives tidings of the next world. He thereby enables the individual to formulate a plan for his entire existence in the full light of knowledge and awareness so that he may carve out a successful life for himself.

Throughout the history of mankind, God appointed certain human beings—prophets—who would be the recipients and conveyors of His guidance as sent through His angels. The last in the series was the Prophet Muhammad.

The Islamic concept of prophethood is totally different from that of incarnation. According to the concept of incarnation God Himself is re-born in human shape on earth in order to give succour to humanity. Prophethood, according to Islam, is of quite another order. A prophet

is a man, just like any other human being: his uniqueness resides solely in his also being a messenger of God. A messenger is not an 'inspired' person in the simple sense of the word. By Islamic tenets, prophethood is dependent not on inspiration, but on divine revelation. Inspiration is a common psychological phenomenon, of the kind experienced by a poet, whereas revelation is direct divine communication. It was consciously sent and also consciously received by the Prophet.

The Prophet's uniqueness resides solely in his also being a messenger of God.

The Prophet's responsibility was to communicate the divine message to humanity. In doing so, if he received a negative response from the people, or even in extreme cases was persecuted, nevertheless, he had to follow a strict policy of avoidance of confrontation, and had unilaterally to adopt the path of patience and forbearance. He was responsible only in so far as the conveying of the message was concerned. As for the response to, or acceptance of the message, that was entirely dependent on the addressees. But clearly, the greater the number who accepted the message, the greater the sphere in which a practical system of guidance sent by God became established.

God's messengers came in every age and to every region. According to a *Hadith* (words of the prophet)—starting with Adam and ending with the Prophet Muhammad—1,24,000 messengers were sent to different nations, time and again, to guide the people to the right path. The prophets mentioned by name in the Quran are about twenty four in number. The five well known prophets who came before Muhammad were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The Prophet Muhammad, the last in this long line of prophets, was known as the 'Seal of the Prophets'.

All the prophets, according to Islam, brought the same basic truth: that there is only one God and that all human beings are accountable to God for their actions; On the Day of Judgement, they will be judged according to their good and bad deeds. Those who believe in God and His Prophet and do good deeds shall be rewarded in the next world. In contrast, those who disbelieve and do bad deeds shall be punished in the next world.

The prophets who were given divine revelations in the form of books were called *rasul*, while those who did not were called *nabi*. Of the

holy books, four find mention in the Quran: the *Sahifa* or the scrolls given to Abraham; the Torah, the revelations to Moses; the *Zabur*, the psalms of David; the Gospel, the teachings given to Jesus. Each of these was originally a complete revelation, but unfortunately, these books and teachings were not properly preserved. Some, like the *Sahifa*, were lost completely. Others were changed in various ways by human intervention and are no longer in their original form. They could best be described as edited versions of divine revelations, which have been altered from time to time by editors and commentators.

In the past, the need for new prophets had arisen because God's religion was no longer in its pristine form, having been distorted in a number of different ways. New prophets had to come to the world periodically in order to revive the true spirit of religion, and thus restore it to its original form. After the Prophet Muhammad, there was no need for another prophet, for the Book— the Quran— which he gave to the world has been preserved intact, in its original form. The Quran is a collection of the divine revelations which the Prophet received over a period of 23 years.

The records of all the prophets have been rendered historically unreliable by interpolations with the sole exception of Prophet Muhammad. Firstly, this is because the Prophet Muhammad was born in an age when the history of the world was already being extensively chronicled and secondly because of a strong team amongst his followers. This in itself made circumstances conducive to authentic records being kept of God's messages and the Prophet's exemplary life. The relevant facts were passed on from one generation to the next by both oral and written tradition, and with the advent of the printing press, came the modern guarantee that no changes would ever be made in the divine scriptures. This renders unassailable the position of the Prophet Muhammad as God's final messenger. Professor Philip Hitti has acknowledged this in the following words "Mohammad is born within the full light of history".

Prophethood is one of the fundamental articles of faith in Islam. A Muslim should believe in prophethood and in all the prophets sent by God and make no distinction between them. □

The right step is that which is result-oriented.

TIME IS UP

Examination of Life

STUDENTS were taking an exam in a school. They were bent over their desks answering their question papers. Finally, the time fixed for the exam was over. Immediately the invigilator present in the room announced, 'Stop writing. Time is up.'

The larger case of life is the same as what happens in the examination hall. Every man or woman is in a big hall taking their respective exams. Everyone has a fixed time. The moment this time is over God's angel comes and announces in silent language that 'Your time of action has come to an end. Now you have to die and appear before your Creator and Lord to account for your actions.'

The larger case of life is the same as what happens in the examination hall.

From the experience of sitting in an examination hall students can understand the matter of life's test in a larger sense. Life is a state of trial, and death is a means of sending man to the next world where he will reap the reward for his actions. The life before death is, in actual fact, a testing period and life after death is the period when the results will come out. One who leads his life wisely in this period of testing will have a better result in the next stage of his life. Those who are ignorant of these facts will experience nothing in this next stage, but remorse and frustration. The attitude of the student in the examination hall should be adopted by us throughout our lives. Everyone has to make efforts to answer the test paper given by God correctly so that when the time of the exam is over and his result is out, glad tidings of success will be in store for him rather than an announcement of failure. □

Old is Gold

The previous generation bequeaths its wisdom to the new generation. In this way the older generation enables the coming generation to refrain from committing the mistakes which earlier people made.

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 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**

When your Lord brought forth offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' They replied, 'We bear witness that You are.' This He did, lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We had no knowledge of that.' (THE QURAN 7: 172)

This happens in the case of every prophet's community. In the beginning, its individuals are God-fearing and pious. But in later generations, this spirit vanishes. They become just like other worldly people. Religion is still amongst them. The Holy Book is still read and taught. But all this is done in the context of a national heritage and not as a real fulfilment of a pledge to God. They proceed in the way of the world and in practice forget the Hereafter. Being completely unmindful of right or wrong, they make their desire their religion. At the same time they are proud of being the best of all communities. They feel they are the members of the community which is God's favourite; Being the inheritors of the Holy Book, by virtue of their belief in monotheism they feel that they shall certainly be granted salvation.

But the truth is that man should hold fast to God's Word; he should regularly say his prayers.

The sign of holding fast God's Book and of having said his prayers sincerely is that he should have become a maintainer of peace and harmony (*muslihun*).

Communion with God's Book and God's worship are what makes a man opposed to one who disturbs the peace.

Or lest you say, 'Our forefathers associated others with God before our time, and we are only the descendants who came after them. So are You going to destroy us for what those inventors of falsehood did?' We explain Our signs in detail thus, so that perhaps they may return to Us. (THE QURAN 7: 173:174)

If an animal is separated from its father and mother and it is brought up in a strange atmosphere, even after growing up it retains the characteristics of its species. The way it behaves in all its dealings is rooted in its instinct. The same is true of the human being with regards to his 'God-consciousness'. In the soul of a human being the consciousness of a Creator and Lord has been instilled so deeply that he never loses it.

However, there is one difference between animals and human beings. Animals are not capable of going against their nature. They are compelled to do whatever their inner nature urges them to do. But the case of a human being is different. This awareness is embedded in his nature, but he is completely free in the matter of action, even though his mind and his conscience start pointing out to him what is right and what is wrong. A human being has, therefore, the power and the option either to follow his inner voice, or to ignore it and start doing whatever he likes.

It is on such occasions of moral choice that man is on trial and on the basis of its result, decisions regarding heaven or hell are taken. The one who lends his ears to the voice of God and does whatever He tells him to do through the silent language of 'Nature', passes the test. The doors of heaven (Paradise) will be thrown open for him after death, whereas one who ignores the voice of God speaking at Nature's level, will be held guilty in the eyes of God and he will be ignored by God, just as he ignored God's voice. This voice of inner nature is, in itself, evidence of the existence of God. Now, nobody has the excuse of ignorance and nobody can say that he is just doing whatever has been done since ancient times. Man brings the consciousness of God along with him from his birth. This consciousness remains preserved even with changes in his circumstances. In view of this, what excuse has anyone to follow the path of misguidance?

Recite to them the tale of the man to whom We gave Our signs, but who then cast them to one side and Satan overtook him. And he became one of those who went astray—if it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to exalt him, but instead he clung to the earth and

followed his own desires—he was like a dog that pants whether you chase it away or leave it alone. Such are those who reject Our signs. Tell them this story so that they may reflect. How evil is the case of those who deny Our signs. They only wrong themselves: anyone whom God guides has been rightly guided; while those He lets go astray will surely be the losers. (THE QURAN 7: 175:178)

During the period of the Prophet Muhammad there was a man of great moral and intellectual distinction called Umayyah ibn Abi as-Salt. When he came to know that there were predictions in the Holy Books of the Christians and Jews about the coming of a prophet, he felt that he himself was that prophet. Later, when he was informed about the claim to prophethood made by the Prophet Muhammad and he heard the fine discourse revealed to him, he was greatly disappointed, and became an opponent of the Prophet. The proper use of the superior qualities given by God to Umayyah ibn Abi as-Salt would have been to recognise the Prophet of God and then become his companion. But because of the blessings of God already showered on him, he formed the idea that God should have showered the blessing of prophethood on him rather than on anyone else. He saw worldly benefit in the rejection of the Prophet of God while, on the contrary, acceptance of the Prophet would have led to benefit in the Hereafter. Had he gone in the direction of acceptance, he could have made the angels his fellow travellers. But when he walked the path of jealousy and pride, there was nobody except Satan to give him company. This example is applicable to all those people who ignore the Truth or refuse to accept it on the basis of jealousy and haughtiness.

A man's, transformation to this state amounts to falling down from the status of humanity to the status of a dog. A dog pants on good treatment as well as on bad. This is the condition of such a man. When God blessed him, he became arrogant and when He did not bless him, he still remained arrogant. Actually, he should have been grateful and obliged to God for His blessing, and when he did not receive some blessing, he should have reconciled himself to God's dispensation and turned back to Him.

God does not openly appear to guide people, He shows His way to people by means of signs. Those who have the ability to recognize Truth as it appears in the shape of signs and arguments, and are ready to surrender to it, are the ones who avail of guidance in this world. For those who do not attach importance to signs and arguments, there is nothing but eternal destruction. □

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Feedback

The last year was extra special for the reason that I got introduced to your magazine.

It has given a whole new dimension to my thought process. The magazine has evolved from a useful resource, to a friend who always has simple solutions to all my problems. It has helped to understand myself a lot better. I've developed much more profound ideas about life. I've realised that I shouldn't be taking my life for granted...rather should be focussing on the purpose of my creation and try to be fruitful to the people around me.

The articles in the magazine have been greatly inspiring. From a person who mostly indulged in I, me, myself and was concerned with my problems alone, I've gone ahead to include the world at large. This has helped me realise how truly blessed I am and how much I need to be thanking the Almighty.

Every article I've read so far has helped me get closer to God and has gradually been modifying all my negative traits into positive traits. Articles like 'Happiness is a state of mind', 'Culture of peace', 'Art of ego management' have served as rich resources of wisdom. I got to know how important it is to be content with what I have, to thank God for each new day, not to consider myself very important...as there are a lot of other people in this world who require my time and attention.

I cannot thank you and your association enough for the wonderful change that you have brought about in my life.

I wish you another glorious year. May you continue to inspire and spread your good will among many more people. I wish you and everyone associated with you the very best. May God bless you abundantly.

Looking forward to more meaningful and intellectual editions.

Thanks a lot

*Hema Priya
Bangalore.*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Feedback

From

*S. Balasubramanian
Tamil Nadu*

To

M/s. Spirit of Islam magazine

Dear Sir

The January 2015 issue of Spirit of Islam, carried valuable information to the readers. I liked the Article "Starting from Scratch". The words 'Poverty is not deprivation, rather it is a challenge, Deprivation is a great motivator for achievement', are indeed, noteworthy.

I request you to pray for the departed souls in the recent Peshawar incident. Kindly spread the word of 'Ahimsa' and also love and affection, thru' your journal.

The write-up 'Get rid of depression' will be useful to many. Yes, promotion of global peace is the need of the hour. As you observed in your Editorial, albeit the title of your magazine, the articles are of universal significance.

I wish you all the best on the occasion of the beginning of your third year with the Jan.'15 issue. In fact, the term 'Monotheism' or 'Tawheed' is new to me. I welcome the concept of Oneness of God.

You may kindly ask the Govt. to incorporate the important contents in the curriculum syllabus for students. I congratulate your Editorial Committee for the efforts you take to publish it.

With warm regards

Yours sincerely ☐

Creation Plan

*Problems are not created by some person;
they are a part of the scheme of things of the Creator.*

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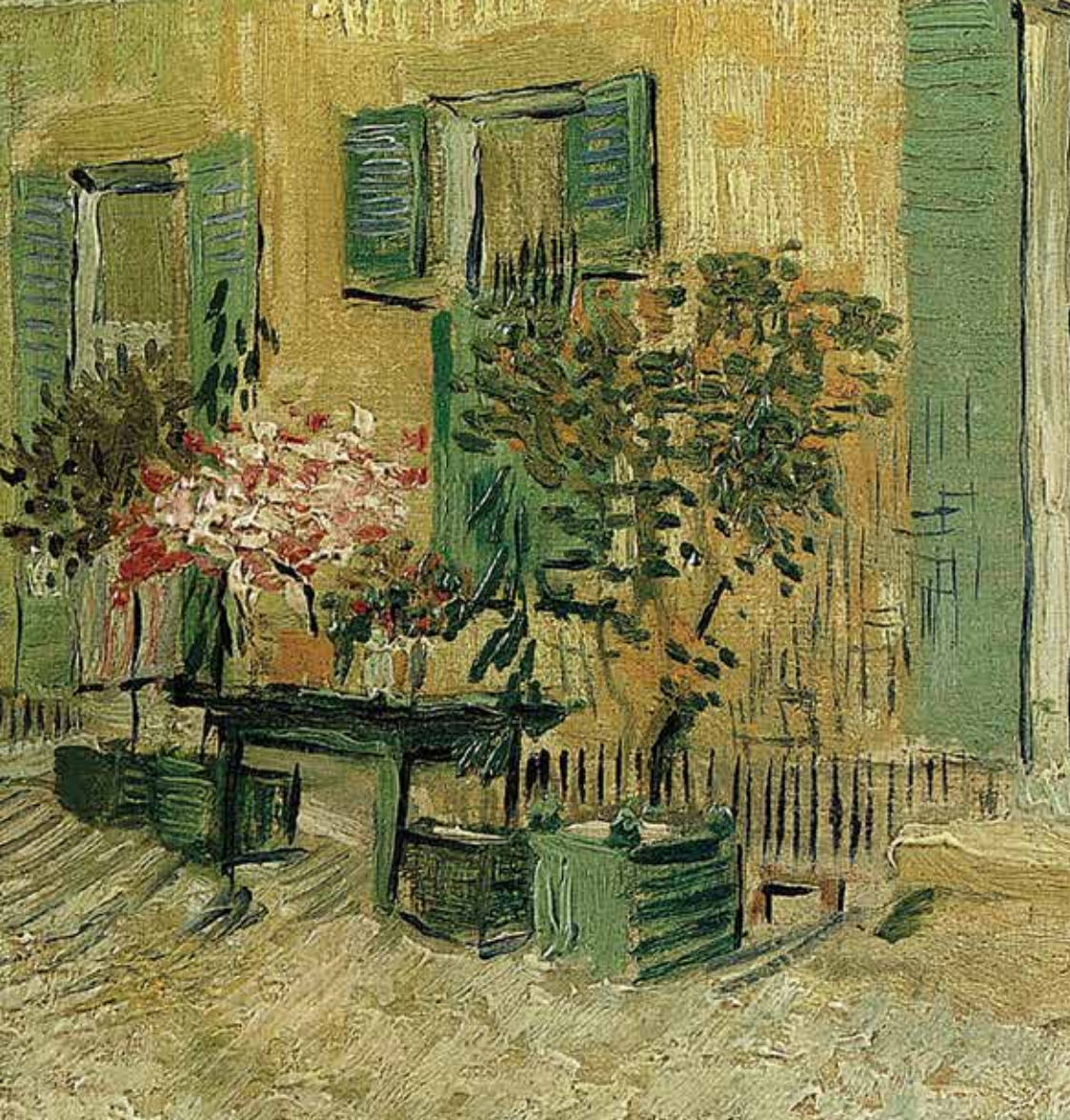
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