

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Fasting prepares a person to follow the path of restraint.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Spirit of Islam is a monthly magazine which is now in its seventh year of publication. The aim of this journal is to present Islam in the contemporary idiom, while at the same time the contents are of universal appeal and of interest to a wider circle of spiritual seekers. It is our desire to help Muslims rediscover Islam, focusing on its message of peace and spirituality as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, and in general we strive towards religious understanding for bringing about greater harmony.

Another purpose of this magazine is to assist its readers to deal with life's challenges, deriving positivity even from negative occurrences, gaining in spirituality and developing themselves intellectually so that they may contribute constructively to society.

The magazine's regular readers will appreciate that the entire thrust of its articles is directed to the individual—a collection of intellectually prepared individuals being the sole foundation on which a peaceful and harmonious society can be built.

As the subtitle indicates, *Spirit of Islam* is working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The articles on peace based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam offer us an ideology of peace—principles which lay down how peace may be established between conflicting groups, controversies resolved and conflicts defused. We believe that violence begins in the mind and so an effective ideology of peace needs to be presented to counter its influence.

We hope and pray that God helps us in this noble endeavour and grants us His special blessings!



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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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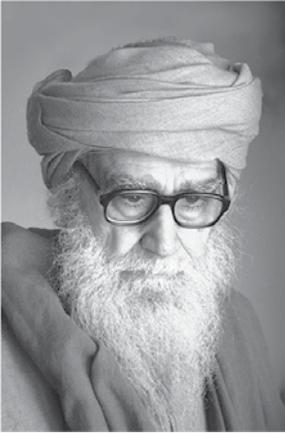
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

RAMAZAN

THE month of *Ramazan* is the ninth month according to the lunar calendar. The month in which the revelation of the Quran began. The first revelation was made to the Prophet when he was in the cave of Hira, and it continued for the next 23 years, finally reaching completion in Madinah.

The guidance given in the Quran is the best blessing to humankind from God, because it shows man the path to ultimate success. It tells man how to conduct himself so that in his eternal life he can gain entry into Paradise. Paradise is the goal of man. The month of *Ramazan* is an annual reminder of this blessing. The celebration of the revelation of the Quran is not observed in the usual way but by abstinence and being thankful to the Almighty. Fasting in this month is acknowledgement of divine blessings. It is like saying, 'O Lord I have heard and I accept.'

This is a month during which the Quran should be read and understood. When the Quran is read during the month of its revelation, it reminds us of the time when divine light from heaven fell upon the earth. Man remembers this and calls out, 'O Lord, fill my heart with Your divine

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2018, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

light and make me among those who are near you'. When he reads about Hell and Paradise, his inner self cries out, 'O Lord, save me from Hell, and let me enter Paradise'.

In this way the Quran becomes a guiding force in man's life. He earns his livelihood according to its dictates, he bathes in the ocean of its message cleansing his soul. The Quran is a reward from God to His servants. And fasting is acknowledgement of the reward. The main aim of fasting is to lessen a person's dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety. Fasting is thus a stimulus for spiritual and intellectual development. Once made aware of his own helplessness as he is deprived of his basic needs of food and water, the fasting person connects to God with sincere prayer.

The celebration of the revelation of the Quran is observed by abstinence and being thankful to the Almighty. Fasting in this month is acknowledgement of divine blessings. It is like saying, 'O Lord I have heard and I accept.'

The practice of fasting is also largely aimed at saving a person from distractions. It produces sincerity. It draws a person's attention away from the external world and into the internal world. Hence fasting prepares one for the study of the Quran. And when a person

studies the Quran with a well-prepared mind, one can understand the teachings and message in greater depth.

Ramazan provides a framework within which devotees may improve themselves. *Ramazan* thus becomes a month of spiritual activism not material activism. The month of fasting is a period of spiritual purification. A time of proximity to the Lord, it is a special month of training meant to engender all those qualities desirable in Islam. The Encyclopedia Britannica has this to say in the chapter on fasting:

The month of Ramazan in Islam is observed as a period of penitence and total fasting from dawn to dusk. Penitence, undoubtedly an important part of Islam, so permeates the entire Islamic system, that no Islamic act, including fasting, is devoid of this spirit.

However, while enjoying fasting, the Quran tells us that its special significance in the month of *Ramazan* is thanksgiving as well as penitence.

Fasting—an experience of powerlessness despite the possession of power is an annual exercise in self-discipline. And only that person has

fasted in the true sense of the word, who emerges from the experience not only a thankful and pious devotee of God, but also a human being in complete control of his thoughts, words and deeds.

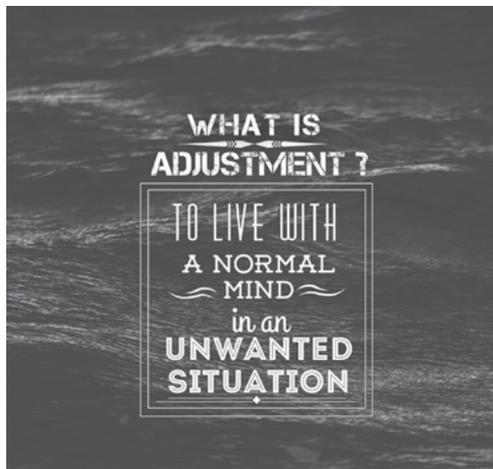
The fasting person repeatedly reads in the Quran that God is the Sustainer, that is, while man is the taker, God is the Giver. Everything that a person receives in this world, right from his existence and the oxygen he inhales to stay alive, to the sunlight necessary for his survival, everything is God's gift. When a person starts to think in this way, he experiences a tremendous change within. He begins living in society as a giver-member. He becomes a creative member of society.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that what one witnesses during the month of *Ramazan* in the present culture is extravagance in eating and shopping which is totally contradictory to what the Quran wants of the believers. Do not judge Islam in the light of Muslim behaviour but judge Muslims in the light of Islam. Fasting, the third pillar of Islam, inclines one to become a student of the Quran and, by seriously studying the Quran, one discovers those principles by which one may develop one's personality and become a peaceful person who contributes positively to society. □

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Dr. Farida Khanam has been a professor at the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. A Study of World's Major Religions, A Simple Guide to Sufism are two of the books amongst others, of which she is the author. She has also translated many books on Islam authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently, the chairperson of Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS International), an organization founded by her father Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, she is a regular contributor of articles to journals, newspapers and magazines. Dr. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. Under Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Peace Foundation, along with the CPS team, she has designed a series of courses on peace-building, countering extremism and conflict resolution.

QURAN AND HADITH

DURING interactions with people in inter-faith programmes, I have come across questions where people wish to know if the Quran contains the teachings of the Prophet. The Quran and the *Hadith* are the two fundamental scriptures of Islam and it is imperative that people have an understanding of their sources if they wish to know Islam.

The Quran is the Book of God. God is the sole author of this book. There are about 6500 verses in the Quran revealed over a period of 23 years. The Prophet received these revelations from God and they were immediately memorized and put to writing. It has been preserved in its entirety for all time to come. The objective of the Quran is to make man aware of the creation plan of God. That is, to tell man why God created this world; what is the purpose of settling man on earth; what is required from man in his pre-death lifespan, and what he is going to confront after death.

The Quran is a book of divine warning. A combination of lessons and admonitions, it would be even more appropriately called a book of wisdom.

Teachings of the Prophet are known as *Hadith* and is totally separate from the Quran. *Hadith* meaning a 'statement' or 'report' is used as an Islamic term for the records kept of the words and deeds of the

Prophet. In English the word 'traditions' is also used to refer to the *Hadith*. The *Hadith* gives a full account of the life of the Prophet, and serves as the commentary to the Quran as the Prophet lived out his life in accordance with the Quran.

The Quran principally deals with basics. It is the *Hadith* that gives the details and necessary explanations of the Quranic injunctions. For instance, the Quran says: 'Say your prayers regularly'. But it does not specify how this form of worship has to be performed. Not even the timings and units of prayers are clearly mentioned. We need the *Hadith* to give us complete information on this.

Even after knowing the details, it may not be possible to follow the divine injunctions contained in the Quran, for not everything can be properly understood by words alone. Therefore God's Prophet demonstrated before the faithful how the practice of worship was to be performed. He said to the believers: 'Look at me, see how I worship, and follow me.'

Thus the Prophet, besides teaching the believers about the divine commandments in a theoretical way, also put these teachings into practice in all matters pertaining to religion. He himself practised the divine injunctions scrupulously. His practice was not a private matter; it had the status of a detailed interpretation and application of the Quran.

The Quran repeatedly reminds us of the importance of *Hadith*, enjoining us to strictly follow the Prophet.

Obey God and obey the messenger...(4: 59)

Whatever the messenger gives you, take it and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it...(59: 7)

You have indeed in the Prophet of God a good example for those of you who look to God and the last Day, and remember God always. (33: 21)

The Quran thus provided the fundamentals of religion while the *Hadith* furnishes us with the necessary details and explanations. It is as if the Quran is the text and the *Hadith* its commentary; the Quran being theory and *Hadith* being the practice. Both the Quran and *Hadith* are equally essential for the understanding of religion. □

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THE WAY OF THE FAITHFUL

Action not Diction

OF the many traditions of the Quran recorded in the *Kitab-al-Tafsir of Sahih al-Bukhari*, the following concerns an incident which explains the revelation of a few verses in chapter forty nine of the Quran.

Once a delegation of the Banu Tamim tribe had come to Madinah to seek guidance on selection of their leader. Abu Bakr, a Companion of the Prophet proposed the name of Qaq'a bin Mabad for being their leader, whereas Umar, another Companion of the Prophet was of the view that Alaq'ra bin Habis was a better choice. Abu Bakr then accused Umar of having said this just to oppose his proposal. But Umar said, "It is not my intention to oppose". Whereupon they began to argue and, in the process, raised their voices. In consequence, a verse of the Quran was revealed:

Believers, do not push yourselves forward in the presence of God and His Messenger. Fear God. God hears all and knows all. Believers, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet...lest your actions come to nothing without your realizing it. (49: 1-2)

After this, Umar changed his attitude completely. He would always speak in a low voice in the Prophet's presence, so much that he could hardly be heard, and the Prophet would often have to ask him to repeat what he had said. This is the way of the faithful. A believer may unknowingly raise his voice above that of God and His messenger, but as soon as he is made aware of it, he immediately lowers it.

This is applicable not only to the period of the Prophet but also to the present day, when it is still required of the faithful that they should not raise their voice. The only difference is that in the time of the Prophet people received such instructions directly from him, whereas nowadays people must instruct themselves by making reference to the Quran and the *Hadith*, Even today, when listening to the commands of God and His messenger, one must lower one's voice like the early Islamic believers.

What is the attitude which can inculcate such behaviour in the present day Muslims? It is to do with making Islam an integral part of one's life as opposed to following it just as a form devoid of spirit. The following

analogy will bring out this aspect. When a stone is dropped into a glass of water, it descends to the bottom and settles to one side. It is in the water but separate from it. On the other hand, if dye is put into the same glass, the dye and water combine. Now the water is no longer separate from the dye. Both have intermingled in such a way that no one can detect any difference between the two.

The relationship between Islam and a Muslim should be like that of dye and water, not of the stone and water. Islam should not just be an accessory to a Muslim's life: it should merge with his whole being. It should enter into his thoughts, moulding his intellect in its own fashion. Islam should become the eye with which he sees, the tongue with which he speaks, the hands and feet with which he performs his day-to-day functions. Islam should so take possession of a person that it excludes all else. Every statement should bear the stamp of Islam and every action should be dyed in Islamic colours.

Islam should not just be an accessory to a Muslim's life: it should merge with his whole being. It should enter into his thoughts, moulding his intellect in its own fashion.

If Islam is like a stone in water, then it is not Islam at all. Faith should be absorbed in a person like dye dissolved in water. Just as the emotions of love and hate are felt by the whole body, so when one adopts Islam in the real sense of the word, it should become an issue affecting one's whole existence. The Muslim and Islam should become inseparably attached and only this will enable a believer to truly follow the Prophet and his Companions. □

It is often said to aim high but the correct approach is to aim realistically high



THE ANGELS

Helpers of Humankind

AMONGST the multitudes of beings created by God in His omnipotence are creatures of great luminosity called angels. They are divine servants of impeccable loyalty who convey God's commands throughout the length and breadth of the universe, attending to the workings of His immeasurable kingdom under His all-seeing eye. Their numbers perforce are legion.

The cosmic machine must run with flawless and never-ending consistency. The earth, moon, sun and stars must revolve in their pre-ordained orbits for all eternity. God has willed this to be so, and His angels are the divine instruments through which He ensures the perfect functioning of the universe.

From time immemorial a water cycle of awesome complexity has continued to support life in its myriad forms. Trees and plants of tremendous diversity emerge from the earth at every instant. A whole host of creatures from man right down to the humblest insect are born and provided for every day. How is it then, that such a great multiplicity of events—all of them extremely complex—can take place contemporaneously?

God's angels are the divine instruments through which He ensures the perfect functioning of the universe.

The prophets in their wisdom have taught that this is all part of a divine order which the Almighty controls through invisible angels acting as His intermediaries. It is they who carry out His commandments and communicate His word to the prophets.

They preserve a record of man's actions by means of which God decides who will be rewarded or punished. It is the angels who take possession of the human soul at the moment of death, and it is they who will sound the last trumpet which shall throw the whole universe into disarray. It is then that the righteous shall dwell forever in Paradise, while the sinful shall be cast down into eternal damnation. □



REMEMBERING GOD

True Zikr

THE Quran repeatedly tells us to remember God. This is what is known as *zikrullah*. One should remember God as often as one can. There may be some distractions in which you are engaged or some work in which your mind is focused, but even these may also lead, in an indirect manner, to the remembrance of God. When your own divine feelings, your remembrance of and love and praise for God, take expression in words, that is *zikr*. These words could be in your own language or in the Arabic language.

It is very simple to remember God—to engage in *zikr*—and it is also quite natural. For instance, when you are walking, you can bring to your mind the fact that you are doing so entirely because of the blessings of God. While outdoors, you see the sun up in the sky, and you remember that it is God who is providing you sunlight. You breathe in fresh air while taking a stroll and you remember that it is He who is supplying you with oxygen. When you set your foot down on the ground and lift it up, you remember that it is He who has created gravity, otherwise you would be floating in the air and would not be able to walk on the ground at all. You bring to your mind the realization that without these divine blessings—of sunshine, of the air, of gravity—you would not be able to go out for a stroll. If you recount all these divine bounties associated with your walk, then you are remembering God, you are engaging in *zikr* while walking. So, in this way, at every moment, no matter what activity you may be engaged in—you can be doing *zikr*, remembering God, praising, glorifying and thanking Him.

This is a way in which you can engage in *zikr*—remembrance of God—throughout your daily life, not just for a few minutes a day, but rather, all through the day.

Remembering God is not alien to your being. It is interwoven in your being like energy. You and energy are apparently separate, but in fact both are one and the same. So, at every moment there are bounties of God all around you which you can remember. If you awaken in yourself this consciousness at every moment, then you are remembering God at every moment. This is a way in which you can be engaged in the constant *zikr* of God.

In a report contained in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the Prophet's wife Aisha reports that the Prophet used to remember God on each occasion

by making it a point of reference for God's remembrance. So, for the Prophet, remembering God, or *zikrullah*, and other tasks were not two separate activities, rather both were intermingled.

The human mind has enormous potential. An American writer, Walt Whitman, has said: "I am large enough to contain all these contradictions." He said this in a different context. However, this saying applies here as well. While being engaged in different tasks throughout the day, we can be engaged in *zikr* as well, reflecting on God's bounties in the context of the tasks we are doing or the things we are seeing. *Zikr* means living with divine consciousness. When you have attained this state of consciousness, at every moment you will be in a state of *zikr*, even though you may not be uttering any specific words.

***Remembering
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remember.***

Sometimes, you may find yourself lamenting the past, experiencing negative feelings and thinking about negative experiences. In this way, your mind is diverted from *zikr* of God. This is a very common occurrence. But you can convert even this into a means to remember and thank God. If you have had some painful or negative experience in the past, when you recall it today you can convert it into something to be thankful to God. You can think of it as yet another reason for *shukr*, or thankfulness to God. You can thank God that He did not make you stay on in that negative moment, and that, instead, He made you reach a better situation today. So, in this way, you can even make the memory of a negative or painful experience into yet another opportunity to engage in *zikr* or remembrance of God. □



Patience

Patience is no retreat. It only amounts to taking the initiative along the path of wisdom and reason as opposed to the path of emotions.

HONESTY AND HARD WORK

Spiritual and Physical Strength

PROPHET Moses was born in Egypt, where he lived for about thirty years. Then, for some reason he had to leave Egypt and after a long journey reached Midian (Syria). When he was resting under a tree on the outskirts of Midian, a very interesting incident took place which has been narrated as follows in the Quran:

And when Moses arrived at the well of Midian, he found around it a group of men watering their flocks, and he saw two women standing apart from them, who were holding back their flocks, so he asked, 'What is the matter with you?' They replied, 'We cannot draw water until the shepherds take away their sheep. Our father is a very old man.' So Moses watered their flocks for them; and returned into the shade and prayed, 'Lord, I am truly in need of whatever blessing You may send down for me.' And then one of the two women came walking shyly up to him and said, 'My father is asking you to come so that he may reward you for watering our flocks for us.' When Moses came to their father and gave him an account of himself, he said: 'Don't be afraid! You have escaped from those wrong-doing people.' One of the girls said, 'Father, hire him! for the best man to hire is someone strong and trustworthy.' (28: 23-26)

According to this story, Moses lived with his Midian hosts for almost eight years. His host, Shuayb, married his daughter to Moses; then after eight years Moses left Midian and returned to his homeland in Egypt.

What the woman said when she asked her father to hire Moses is the best formula for success in this world. It is a two point formula—honesty and hard work. Honesty makes one a trustworthy member of society and hard work means that a man is ready to dedicate himself to his work.

Being strong and being honest are two desirable human qualities. 'Strong' refers to physical strength and 'honest' refers to spiritual strength: both are equally important. One who has these two qualities can be described as a well-equipped person. These two qualities make one a super-achiever in this world.

There is a saying: 'God helps those who help themselves.' What is self-help? Self-help means to prove that you have these two natural qualities—honesty and the ability to work hard. □

LESSONS FROM NATURE

Silent Teachers

THE study of the universe shows that everything gives something to the others without taking anything in return. For instance, the sun provides light and warmth to inhabitants of our little world, but it does not take anything in return. The atmosphere continuously provides life-sustaining oxygen, without taking anything in return. Similarly, all the natural resources of the world serve us without taking anything in return.

Nature is silently teaching us to follow the culture of giving, treating unpleasant experiences as temporary and avoiding colliding with obstacles to continue our journey of life with positivity.

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

This entire world is a world that gives, not takes. It is a culture of giving. Everything in the world continuously conveys the message that we should give, without taking anything in return. We should adopt this culture, and live as givers, rather than takers.

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

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

Thus nature is silently teaching us to follow the culture of giving, treating unpleasant experiences as temporary and avoiding colliding with obstacles to continue our journey of life with positivity. □



THE GIST OF ISLAM

God's Worshipper, Man's Well-wisher

THE study of the Quran tells us that it is individual-based rather than system-oriented. That is, the actual target of the Book is to change the thinking of the individual. Changing the system is not the Quran's direct objective. This is because the system is subservient to the individual and not vice versa. That is why the utmost emphasis is placed on inculcating right thinking in man. Yet, it is not the method of the Quran to set out everything in advance, in detail. It rather encourages individuals to think along the proper lines, so that they may discover for themselves the great truths of life. In educational terminology this is called the 'discovery method'.

Islamic teachings can be summed up under two basic headings—first and foremost is, believing in One God and worshipping Him alone; secondly, regarding all human beings as equal and according equal rights to them.

In brief, monotheism and justice for all—the Quran enshrines these basic teachings, dealing with them in their abstract and practical forms, however for a detailed application of their wisdom, one must go to the *Hadith* (the sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad). As far as social life is concerned, the essence of Islamic teaching is that God has granted freedom to everyone. This freedom in itself demands that people should lead their lives with proper restraint.

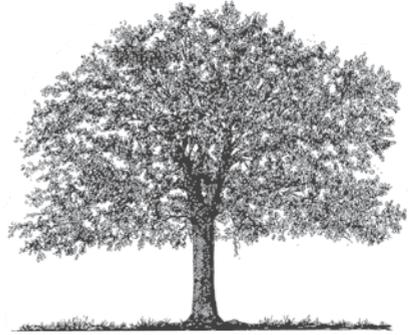
Islamic teachings can be summed up under two basic headings—first and foremost is believing in One God and worshipping Him alone; secondly, regarding all human beings as equal and according equal rights to them.

For if freedom is exercised without restraint, it will inevitably result in friction, outright clashes and the descent of society into chaos. Social equilibrium can be maintained only if conscience prevails over the ego. In social life, our actions elicit good or evil depending upon whether we have activated the ego or the conscience of the person or persons concerned. If the ego is touched, we will face reaction from the other side. However, if we awaken a person's conscience we will see antagonism turn to friendship. □



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



BUILDING THIS WORLD, OR PREPARING FOR THE HEREAFTER?

IF you look around you, you will see that everyone (including probably yourself) seems frantically busy with something or the other. People are so caught up doing their own things that they do not seem to have the time to listen or think about anything else. They know of just one way of using their time and resources—and that is, to spend it on seeking to achieve the numerous worldly goals they have set for themselves.

People's business is geared simply to one thing. And that is, to make their little worlds as nice as possible. By and large they are concerned only with worldly progress.

Death, however, is a bold rebuttal of this worldview. Everyone has to die one day, and so all the worldly wealth you have accumulated will one day be snatched away from you. You will have to leave behind forever the little world that you have spent all your energy, time and other resources in building. You will be taken towards such a world for which you possess nothing at all if you did not adequately prepare for it while in this world.

Every person who is born into this world very soon starts thinking in the same worldly terms as the people around him. Like them, he too gets entangled in all sorts of material pursuits. Because of this, materialistic thinking has become a part of the continuing flow of human history. This sort of thinking has become such an integral part of cultural traditions that it seems almost impossible for anyone to be able to think free from it.

It is here that man's real test takes place. If you want to be truly successful in life, you must extricate yourself from this conventional way of thinking and begin to think for yourself. You must separate yourself from traditional culture and thinking and form your opinions based on reality. Only then will you realize that the real issue for us human beings is not worldly progress, but instead, preparation for the eternal Hereafter. Our real task while in our pre-death period is to prepare for the post-death period of our lives. We must work on developing ourselves in such a way that in the eternal life that will unfold after death, we will be able to attain success. □



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TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



THE MEANING OF JIHAD

JIHAD is regularly misconstrued as war, with all its connotations of violence and bloodshed. However, in the Islamic context, and in the literal sense, the word *jihad* simply means a struggle—doing one's utmost to further a worthy cause. This is an entirely peaceful struggle, with no overtones even of aggression. The actual Arabic equivalent of war is *qital*, and even this is meant in a defensive sense.

According to Islamic teachings, *jihad* is of two kinds. One is with the self (*jihad bin nafs*), that is making the maximum effort to keep control over negative feelings such as—arrogance, jealousy, greed, revenge, anger—in one's self. The psychological efforts to lead such a life of restraint is what *jihad bin nafs* is about. In social life, it happens time and again that all sorts of base, negative feelings well up within a man, causing him to lead his life succumbing to desires and temptations. The internal effort made in such a situation to overcome the temptations of the self and to continue to lead a life guided by principles is the truly Islamic *jihad bin nafs*.

Jihad bin nafs means making the maximum effort to keep control over negative feelings such as—arrogance, jealousy, greed, revenge, anger—in one's self.

According to the *Hadith*, a believer is one who wages *jihad* with himself in the path of obedience to God. That is, at moments when the self (*nafs*), lured by some temptation, desires to deviate from the path of God, he keeps control over it and remains unswervingly on the

divine path. This is his *jihad*—a permanent feature of life of a believer, continuing day and night, and ending only with death.

The other form of *jihad* is to propagate the constructive message of Islam. All those who embark upon this course must first of all study the Quran and *Sunnah* in a dispassionate and objective manner. No kind of conditioning should be allowed to come in the way of such study. Only after passing through this intellectual *jihad* will one be in a position to make a true representation of the religion to the world.

Two conditions have been laid down in the Quran for the communication of the teachings of Islam to others—*nasih* (well wishing) and *amin* (trustworthiness). The former appertains to God and the latter to man.

What is meant by *nasih* is an earnest desire on the part of the preacher of truth for the well-being not just of his immediate interlocutors, but of the whole of humanity. This well-wishing should be so steadfast that it remains undiluted even in the face of injustice and oppression. Overlooking people's negative behaviour towards him, the preacher should continue to remain their well-wisher. The element of trustworthiness (*amin*) is important in that it ensures that the religion God has sent to the world will be presented to the people without deletion, addition or distortion. For instance, if the Islam sent by God is *akhirah* (Hereafter) oriented, it should not become world-oriented; if it is spiritually based, it should not become politics-based; if it confines *jihad* to peaceful struggle, it should not become violence-based. Islam asks us to perform *jihad* by means of the Quran, calling this 'greater' *jihad* (25: 52). But it never asks its believers to do the 'greater' *jihad* by means of the gun.

Two conditions have been laid down in the Quran for the communication of the teachings of Islam to others—*nasih*, well-wishing and *amin*—trustworthiness. The former appertains to God and the latter to man.

This is a clear proof that *jihad* is, in fact, a wholly peaceful activity, carried out through peaceful methods. It has nothing to do with violent activities or violent threats.

Jihad through the Quran means striving to the utmost to present the teachings of the Quran before people. That is, presenting the concept of One God; presenting *akhirah*-oriented life as superior to world-oriented life; principle-oriented life as against interest-oriented life; a humanitarian-oriented life as more elevated than a self-oriented

life and a duty-oriented life as a categorical imperative, taking moral precedence over a rights-oriented life.

According to the Hadith, a believer is one who wages jihad with himself in the path of obedience to God. That is, at moments when the self (nafs), lured by some temptation, desires to deviate from the path of God, he keeps control over it and remains unswervingly on the divine path.

Jihad, according to Islam, is not something about which there is any mystery. It is simply a natural requirement of daily living. It is vital both as a concept and as a practice because, while leading his life in this world, man is repeatedly confronted by such circumstances as are likely to derail him from the humanitarian path of the highest order.

These factors sometimes appear within man in the form of negative feelings. This is something to which everyone must remain intellectually alert, so that if for any reason there is some danger of a negative mindset gaining the upper hand, he may consciously and deliberately turn himself to positive thinking. Even if circumstances repeatedly place him in situations which are depressing and demoralizing, he must never lose course or sight of noble goals. The reassertion of his

ethical sense is the real *jihad* which he has to wage.

From the Islamic standpoint, intention is all-important. Any undertaking carried out with good intentions will win God's approval, while anything done with bad intention is bound to be disapproved of and rejected by God. In fact, intentions are the sole criterion of good or bad actions, in the divine scheme of things. And it is one's intense inner struggle to make all activities God-oriented, which is truly Islamic *jihad*. □

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AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. SANIYASNAIN KHAN

CHILDREN'S AUTHOR | SPEAKER | FOUNDER GOODWORD BOOKS

Saniyasnain Khan is an Indian television host and children's author, with over 100 children's books to his credit. These are on subjects relating to Islam, and a number of them have been translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, Polish, Swedish, Bosnian, Norwegian, Russian, Uzbek, Turkish, Arabic, Malay, Thai, Malayalam, Bengali, Urdu, etc. His most recent books are *365 Prophet Muhammad Stories*, *365 Days with the Quran* and *Bedtime Quran Stories*.

After doing his post-graduation from the University of Delhi, he began assisting his father, the noted Islamic scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, who has translated the Quran into English and Urdu and also written a commentary on it.

Goodword Books

In 1996, Saniyasnain Khan established Goodword Books, which deals mainly with books on Islamic subjects. Realizing the need to educate the younger generation about the message of Islam as a religion of peace and harmony, he began writing stories for children. His first book, *Tell Me About Hajj*, was published in 1999. Afterwards he began to write children's books based on the Quran and *Hadith* which became popular all over Europe and America.

Goodword Quran Project

In 2009, Goodword started publishing the Quran translations in major languages of the world. So far Goodword has published the Quran in 25 languages including English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Sinhalese, Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil, etc. Goodword aims at publishing Quran translations in more than 100 languages and distribute copies of the Quran around the world.

Centre for Peace and Spirituality

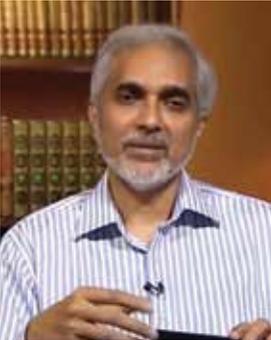
Dr. Saniyasnain Khan is a trustee of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS International)—a non-profit, non-political organization working towards disseminating peace and spirituality.

Awards and Recognition

His book, *The Story of Khadija* has been awarded Sharjah Children's Book Award. He is mentioned in a study done on the World's 500 Most Influential Muslims by the George Washington University, USA. Recently he was recognized by the Limca Book of Records.



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“Writing is the by product of reading. When you read, only then will you write.”

You are a leading publisher of high quality Islamic books for adults and children. How and when did you come into publishing?

In 1976, my father, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, started a magazine, entitled *Al-Risala*. At that time I was in the tenth class. I used to go to the Chawri Bazar to buy paper and would also visit the printers in the Jama Masjid area quite often. Somehow these visits influenced my choosing to make publishing a full time career—which I did in 1983. In 1996 I founded Goodword Books. From 1983 to 1996, I was engaged in publishing books written mainly by my father in Urdu and English.

Did you start the publishing house primarily for your father’s books?

The aim was to print good quality Islamic books. As there was a vacuum in this area at that time, I decided to launch Goodword Books.

You are a postgraduate from Delhi University and belong to a family of Islamic scholars—father, sister, brother. What attracted you to publishing?

I believe I was inspired by my father’s writing, especially his interpretation of Islam in terms of peace and non-violence, communal harmony and mutual understanding. I wanted to spread this message, so I selected publishing as a career.

You publish quality Islamic literature. In the initial stages did you have any difficulty in marketing your books? If so, how did you overcome those difficulties?

I never faced any difficulty as such. People were appreciative of the quality and content of our books. Moreover, the publishing fraternity and book distributors helped me in marketing the books in India and abroad.

You started publishing children’s books in 1999. How is that faring and which are your primary markets?

Our primary markets are the US and the UK. Our books are well received in the western world. But there is a good market in India too, particularly South India.

Your mission is to educate the new generation about real Islamic values. How are you setting about achieving this goal?

I write stories on Islamic subjects and basically they are from the Quran. Every story that I write has a message and a moral value at the end of it. If we can familiarize the younger generation with these values, they will grow up as peaceful members of society.

How far have you been successful in reaching out to people of other faiths in explaining what Islam is?

We regularly organize lectures on interfaith harmony through CPS International. We attend various conferences in India and abroad which helps us in spreading the spiritual and peaceful message of Islam.

Do you participate in international book fairs?

We have participated in some book fairs in the international market—Cape Town, London and Frankfurt—and also we take part in major book fairs in India as well. We provide the translations of the Quran in several languages at a subsidized price, which has attracted a lot of attention and has helped in explaining to people the real message of the Quran.

Do you give the rights of your books to other Islamic publishers or do you prefer to sell your own editions?

We give rights to publishers in other languages, namely French, German, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, Danish, Russian, Dutch, Arabic, Malay, Urdu, Uzbek, Turkish, and Bangla, but prefer to market our English editions ourselves.

How do you find the time to write regularly?

Writing is a *junoon*, a passion, and for your passion you always have abundant time.

Do other members of your family help you with your business?

Yes, my sister, Dr. Farida Khanam and my daughters Sufia Khan and Maria Khan help me in editorial work. My daughter, Sadia Khan helps me in designing work.

What makes your day—a good thought or a good order?

Both are needed for making my day. The best day is when a new book comes out and I feel thrilled and thankful when it is well received.

What are the kinds of books you like to read?

Basically non-fiction, which gives me food for thought. Writing is the by product of reading. When you read, only then do you write.

How would you describe a good book?

A good book should inspire the reader; that is the most important factor. Also a good book in my case should bring me closer to God. It could be on any subject. For example, after reading Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, I was filled with awe and admiration for the manner in which God has created our huge universe. If creation itself is so big, then how big is its Creator?

You have published and distributed the translation of the Quran in more than 25 languages. Please shed some light upon this project of yours.

Yes, we have published translations of Quran in more than 25 languages —international and Indian. With the help of CPS International, the NGO founded by my father, and its Chapters in India and abroad, we are distributing the Quran in schools, hospitals, mosques, museums and other places of tourist interest.

We have devoted teams of Quran volunteers in different countries, who are helping in disseminating the peaceful message of the Quran world wide, so that it reaches every home.

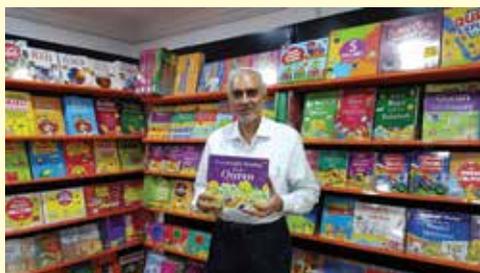
In the present age, we have witnessed, a phenomenal rise in digital books and apps. How will this new digital platform help in spreading the word of God?

Realizing the importance of the internet and social media to take the Quran into each home, we are using every available online opportunity to organize *e-dawah*. We are developing the Goodword Quran App to make the perusal and understanding of the Quran easy for readers. This App will have features and resources to make the reading experience of the Quran very easy and friendly. Besides, we are also focusing on:

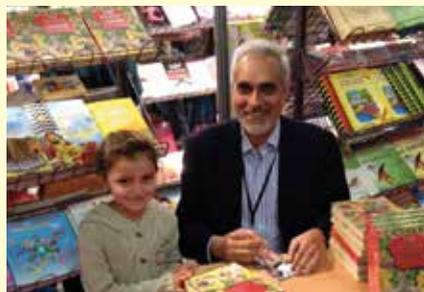
1. Quran e-books and Apps online.
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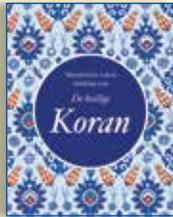
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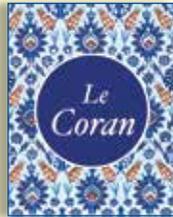
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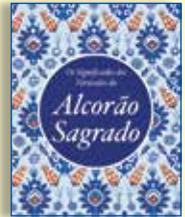
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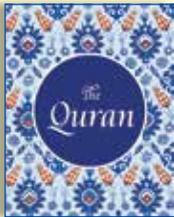
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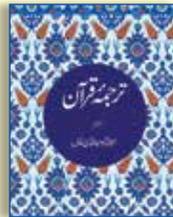
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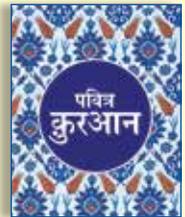
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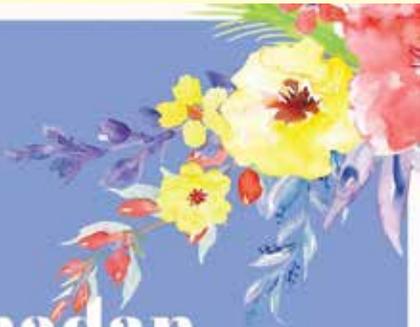
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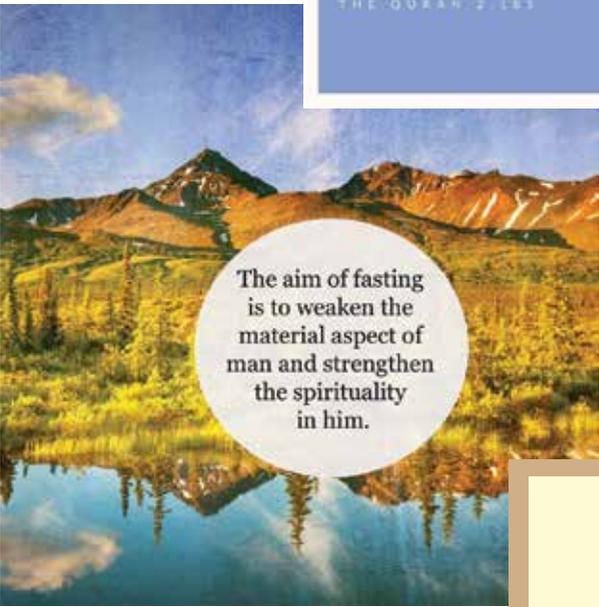
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FASTING
serves as a
method to
increase the
efficacy of
worship.



Ramadan

IS THE MONTH WHEN THE QURAN WAS
SENT DOWN AS GUIDANCE FOR MANKIND,
WITH CLEAR PROOFS OF GUIDANCE AND
THE CRITERION BY WHICH TO DISTINGUISH
RIGHT FROM WRONG.
THE QURAN 2:185



The aim of fasting
is to weaken the
material aspect of
man and strengthen
the spirituality
in him.

FASTING
inculcates
Self-discipline
and promotes
duty-consciousness.

But to fast is better for
you, if you only knew.

The Quran 2:184

FASTING
awakens in
man the
feeling of
gratefulness.

SPIRITUALITY & GRATITUDE

Strongly Connected

THERE is nothing mysterious about spirituality in Islam. It is the direct result of the kind of intellectual development that takes place when a believer ponders over the Creator and His creation: he gains something in the process that may be termed spirituality. The source, therefore, of Islamic spirituality is perusal and reflection rather than any sort of mysterious exercise.

That is why the Quran rejects monasticism, referring to it as an innovation in religion, which God did not prescribe for people. (57: 27)

From the Quran we learn that, in the very creation of the universe, the signs of God lie hidden all around us. A person who is in a state of keen awareness when he reflects upon the things of the world, comes to see the Creator in the creation. The meaning of the creation of the universe is laid bare before him. Ultimately, the universe becomes a permanent source of spiritual inspiration. He is continuously nourished by it during his worldly experience, and his observation of the universe awakens in him latent divine qualities.

This observation and contemplation of the universe does not result in his shunning normal life. Far from withdrawing from the world, he lives in it, participating in all its activities; yet despite his involvement, remaining aloof. That is to say, although he fulfills all his duties and responsibilities, his heart is not attached to worldly affairs.

He appears to live in the world, but he stands apart from it. Thanks to this state of his heart, he acquires tremendous spiritual gains. The Prophet Muhammad says of such individuals:

“God plants wisdom in the heart of one who shows
disinclination for the world.”

It is important to note that the concept of spirituality in Islam is based on the principle of God-realization. God is the treasure house of all virtues. And when man's contact with God is established in the world of his feelings, at the psychological level, an unseen, inner revolution is brought about, which is called spirituality. In this matter the relationship between God and man can be likened to an electric wire and the powerhouse. When the wire is connected to the powerhouse, electricity is produced, and the place is lit up. In this way, spirituality is the result of the connection to the power house of God.

Human nature is like an inflammable element. When an inflammable substance like petrol comes near a fire, it is ignited. Similarly, human nature is awakened when it comes in contact with God. This finds expression in the Quran in these words:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth. His light containing a lamp, the lamp inside a crystal of star-like brilliance lit from a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west. The [luminous] oil is as if ready to burn without even touching it. Light upon light; God guides to His light whom He will. God draws such comparisons for mankind; God has full knowledge of everything. (24: 35)

This is a compound simile. 'Light' here means the guidance of Almighty, 'niche' means the human heart and 'lamp' denotes the capability to receive divine inspiration. Glass and oil elaborate upon this receptivity. 'Glass' shows that this receptivity has been lodged in the human heart; protected from outside influences, and clear oil indicates that this receptivity is very strong and is eagerly waiting to receive inspiration.

This verse makes it clear that, on the one hand, is God, the source of inspiration, and on the other, is the consciousness of spirituality (God-consciousness) with which man is born. In this way when these

When it comes to interactions with people a spiritual person will render service to alleviate the sufferings of humankind.

two things come together, Islamic spirituality comes into existence. This is indeed another name for the awakening of God-consciousness. When it reaches its highest stage, the believer's realization of God comes to that point where he begins to feel consciously in his worship that he is seeing God and if he is unable to come to this stage then he consciously feels that God is seeing him. If the first type of experience is called direct spiritual experience, the second type may be termed indirect spiritual experience.

As the Quran tells us, "Prostrate yourself and come closer to God" (96: 19). For God is always close to us—closer than our jugular vein (50: 16). By total surrender to God, the soul can realize nearness to God.

These spiritual experiences cannot be explained in words. Everything in the universe seems to convey a divine message. The leaves of the tree become a thrilling experience. A waft of air gives a message of truth. Divine music can be heard in the burbling of the river and the chirping of the birds.

Due to this high state of receptivity, he is enabled, in the words of the Prophet: "to see with God's eye, to speak with God's tongue, to walk with God's foot, to hear with the ear of God." Then all limitations vanish and his day and night are spent in God's neighbourhood. All this can be felt, not described in words. This can be explained with the example of a child who has limitless love for his mother. He knows it himself in the full sense but he cannot fully describe it in words. The same is true of spirituality.

When a person is linked with the source of spirituality, he undergoes such spiritual experiences as he himself fully understands, but has difficulty in conveying to others. He may describe some external signs but he cannot describe inner reality.

Although it is difficult to describe the inner reality of spirituality, its method of attainment can be described to a certain extent and followed by others. To attain spirituality, first of all man has to free his mind from confusion. It is difficult for a confused mind to undergo spiritual experiences. The basic reason for confused thinking is that man is not able to differentiate between the real and the superficial, the relevant and the irrelevant, rational thinking and superstition, logical and illogical statements. One who thinks thus will always remain in a state of mental confusion. He will never be able to find the straight path. As a result, his spiritual journey will never start.

The Prophet Muhammad has said that, "One who does not express his gratitude to other human beings will never be thankful to God."

On the path of spirituality, a believer cannot be his own guide. And one certainly needs a guide. This guide is the Quran. It is an authentic and carefully preserved book of God. That is why the Quran can be trusted as a guide by the spiritual traveller. After making the Quran one's guide, one can set one's spiritual journey on the right track.

The spiritual journey demands a change in lifestyle. The lifestyle for a spiritual traveller may be put briefly in these words: 'Simple living and high thinking.'

Simple living means limiting one's worldly requirements to the minimum and assiduously avoiding comfort and luxury. That is why the Sufis used to wear coarse clothes as a symbol of the simple life. It helps the traveller in his spiritual journey. High thinking means that one's thoughts are not embroiled in material things. By engaging one's mind

in higher realities, one becomes a recipient of divine inspiration. This inspiration of divine light comes to his mind uninterruptedly, igniting his whole existence.

The Quran attaches great importance to contemplation, reflection and serious thought. There are a number of verses in the Quran that indicate that innumerable signs of God are extant in the heavens and the earth. The observance of God's signs is the greatest source of spirituality.

According to a *Hadith*, 'Worship God as if you are seeing him', (*Sahih-al Bukhari*). When man engages himself in true devotion; he is linked with God at a sensory or psychological level.

He comes close to God. Through an invisible cord he comes in contact with God; God's light passes through him. His entire existence comes to be pervaded by this indescribable feeling, which is called spiritual experience.

This is called *rabbaniyat* in the Quran (Be devoted servants of the Lord) (3: 79). *Rabbani* means one whose thinking, and whose actions are God-oriented, who has placed God at the centre of his attention. When an individual attains spirituality, his state becomes like a lamp lit all of a sudden. He undergoes spiritual experiences. His heart becomes an ocean of spiritual waves. He appears to live in this world, but he has found another far superior world for himself.

The spiritual journey demands a change in lifestyle. The lifestyle for a spiritual traveller may be put briefly in these words: 'Simple living and high thinking.'

When it comes to interactions with people, he will render service to alleviate the sufferings of humankind. The following incident brings out the concept of service to others in a very profound way. During the British monarchy, one of the British Emperors disguised himself as an ordinary person to inspect his military

establishments. During an interaction when one military officer admonished him in a very stern and harsh manner, the disguised king asked, "Do you know who I am?"

Taken aback at such a question and doubting himself the officer said, "Are you a military officer just as I am?" The king replied, "I am of a greater position than that". The officer said, "Then you must be a Captain." Again to this the king replied, "I am greater than that." "Are you a colonel?" asked the officer. "No, I am greater than that", was the

reply. The officer said, "Then you must be a General". "No, I am even greater than a general", said the king.

Then the officer who was by now in total shock said, "Then you must be the Emperor". He said, "Yes, I am the king". The officer handed his gun to the king and said, "You may shoot me for my crime, I have failed to recognize my king". The king said, "No, you are a good military officer but I have an advice for you. Whenever you interact with any common man think of him as your king and of yourself as an ordinary soldier then you will treat every individual in the best manner and will consider the common man's affairs as the affairs of the king".

To understand the above more clearly the following *Hadith* is very important. On Doomsday, God says to a person, "I was ill, but you did not come to nurse Me." The man will reply, "God, You being the Lord of the universe, how can You be ill"? God will answer, "Such and such servant of Mine was ill. Had you gone there, you would have found Me there with him." Then God says to another person, "I was hungry but you did not feed Me." The person will reply, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You go hungry?" God says, "Such and such of My servants came to you, but you did not feed him. Had you done so, you would have found Me with him." Then God says to yet another man, "I was thirsty, and you did not give Me water to drink." That person will also say, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You be thirsty?" God says, "Such and such servant of Mine came to you, but you did not give him water to drink. Had you offered him water, you would have found Me there with him."

In this *Hadith* the teaching is that you consider every interaction with others as an interaction with God. The words used in the *Hadith* are symbolic and this *Hadith* guides us towards the character of a believer. A person who treats every human interaction as an interaction with God will not commit any excesses in his behaviour.

The Islamic principle highlighted here is that if a person wants to find God, he shall first have to make himself deserving of this by serving others. This paves the way to spiritual progress. Only those who have elevated themselves spiritually will find God.

Now what is the connection between spirituality and gratitude?

If we realize the Unseen God in the above sense then it is impossible that we will be ungrateful to our fellow beings as we are all interdependent to live our life on earth. With this understanding we will move on to the aspect of gratitude which highlights this point with more clarity.

The Prophet Muhammad has said that, "One who does not express his gratitude to other human beings will never be thankful to God."

Thankfulness is a state of mind which cannot be compartmentalized. If it manifests itself in one place, the chances are that it will do so in other places too. If a man shows gratitude to one person, he will surely show it to others likewise. When a man does someone a good turn, it is something quite obvious—a tangible direct experience. On the contrary, God's kindness, being an indirect experience, is not at all obvious. One has to be perceptive, and reflective to be able to realize the favours granted to man by God. While the favours a man does are observable, God's favours can be realized only by thinking about them.

If a person wants to find God, he shall first have to make himself deserving of this by serving others. This paves his way to spiritual progress. Only those who have elevated themselves spiritually will find God.

One who fails to perceive an event which is directly observable cannot be expected to grasp something which can be apprehended only after a great deal of cogitation.

If the recipient of a favour fails to acknowledge it for fear of belittling himself in the eyes of his benefactor, he does himself nothing but harm. It is more a question of being belittled in the eyes of his own conscience than falling down in others' eyes—a course by far the more injurious.

An even greater disadvantage of an ungrateful attitude is that it produces a mentality of non-acknowledgement. Failing at first to acknowledge the favours of one's fellow men leads on to failure to give wholehearted credence to the Lord of the universe. There is no greater loss in this world than one who has failed to acknowledge his Creator.

Thus, Islam inculcates the spirit of gratitude towards one's fellow beings and towards God.

True spirituality is the elevation of the human condition to a plane on which the mind is focused on the higher, non-material realities of a Godly existence. The sign of a person being spiritual for sure is that he will contribute positively towards humanity, will be compassionate, kind to the animals as well and will not harm the environment. He will be self-motivated in doing this. □



A COMPARISON

For Introspection

RAMAZAN—the month of fasting, is a special and blessed month for Muslims. It is a month of restraint and worship; of caring and thanksgiving; of repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of this month inspired the Prophet to exclaim: “Welcome to the one who purifies!”

It is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavour to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings; to weaken man’s dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety. The month which encourages all to ask for higher things from God; to ask for His forgiveness; for His blessings and for success in the Hereafter.

Ramazan is also the month of patience. One has to have patience to live a life of restraint and be self-controlled. The most important thing required to lead an Islamic life in this world is patience. Unlike other months this month provides more time and a congenial atmosphere to help the believer to contemplate on the meaning of the Quran. Therefore it is also known as the month of contemplation. Believers turn away from many activities and spend time in peace and tranquillity which creates an environment for moral rectification.

Ramazan is the month of patience. One has to have patience to live a life of restraint and be self-controlled. The most important thing required to lead an Islamic life in this world is patience.

The month of *Ramazan* serves as a training course in humility. Humility refers to fear of God which means realization of a person’s helplessness *vis-a-vis* God’s greatness. This ensures the spiritual growth of a person thereby cleansing him of feelings of pride and ego which lead to his being distanced from God.

The above aspects of the month of fasting were fully observed by the Prophet and his Companions. Today, if we compare the culture followed in society during the month of *Ramazan* what do we see?

One cannot deny that there are individuals who observe this worship in full earnestness in its spirit. However, the general tendency is more towards lavish food at *Iftar* and *Sehri* time. Spending more time in shopping centres, purchasing material gifts for others and for

oneself. More people begging on the streets, excessive sleeping during the day and continuous activity during the night without taking into consideration the needs of the sick, elderly, children and people of other communities.

Then how about the eve of *Eid-ul-Fitr* and the day of *Eid* itself? A portion of a *Hadith* pertaining to the day before *Eid* is as follows: during the last night of *Ramazan*, the sins of all the believers who have been fasting are forgiven. It was asked, 'O Prophet of God, is this night the one known as the 'night of power? The Prophet replied, 'No, but as soon as the deed is done, the reward for the deed is immediately bestowed'.

The month of Ramazan serves as a training course in humility. Humility refers to fear of God which means realization of a person's helplessness vis-a-vis God's greatness. This ensures the spiritual growth of a person thereby cleansing him of feelings of pride and ego which lead to his being distanced from God.

According to this *Hadith*, on the last night of *Ramazan*, those amongst the followers of the Prophet who have fasted in the true spirit will be rewarded for their deeds, and this will be noted in their records. This night of *Ramazan* is referred to in other *Hadith* literature as the 'night of reward' (*Al Bayhaqi*). God rewards His believers for every good deed. Due to the special significance of worship during *Ramazan*, this reward has been specifically mentioned by the Prophet.

It is so unfortunate that the night before *Eid* is spent by most people in careless indulgence and entertainment. They throng shopping centres and market places. The above *Hadith* is a warning against all such frivolities.

Another *Hadith* regarding the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr* is reported as: When the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr* dawns on them, then God is pleased and proclaims to the angels. 'O my angels, what is the reward for the doer who has completed

his deed, The angels reply, 'Our Lord, such a person should be given the complete reward for the deed done.'

The day of *Eid* is a day of glad tidings and its true spirit is to promote spiritual values among people and create a peaceful environment in society. This day should be celebrated with praises of God, thankfulness, while refraining from causing any kind of inconvenience to fellow citizens irrespective of what inconveniences one faces during celebrations by others in society. □

CLARIFICATION OF A MISUNDERSTANDING

For Better Understanding

MANY Muslims reckon the month of *Ramazan* as the month of victory. What is the basis of this understanding? The answer is that it is a fact that the battle of Badr took place during the life of the Prophet in the month of *Ramazan* in 624 CE. In this battle, the Prophet and his Companions emerged victorious. This was the logic used to regard *Ramazan* as the month of victory.

But this is a flawed assumption. The battle of Badr was not a matter of choice for the Prophet of Islam. It was a war fought to defend against an enemy who had marched towards Madinah in this month to attack the Prophet and his Companions. This armed aggression led to the defensive war at Badr.

None of the other defensive battles in the initial history of Islam were fought during *Ramazan*. This is a clear proof that the month of *Ramazan* has nothing to do with war.

War is never the choice of the believers. Islam states that war can be waged only in defence. And it is more than clear that it is the aggressor who fixes the date according to his choice, leaving no option to the defender.

The Prophet is reported to have said: 'Do not wish for confrontation with the enemy, instead ask for peace from God.' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

This illustrates the basic principle of Islam *vis-a-vis* war. Peace is the rule and war an exception. In Islam war is an act of compulsion rather than an option. The situation of war is not created by the believers but forced on them requiring a response in self-defence.

The month of *Ramazan* is called the month of patience. It is the month of self-control; curbing of desires; not being provoked in spite of provocation; developing spirituality by enduring the pangs of hunger and thirst; and striving to come closer to God by remembering Him

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through prayer and the reading of the Quran. This is possible only when man distances himself from the material world and comes closer to the spiritual world of God.

The following dictums amply make it clear that *Ramazan* is the month of peace. This is the month of awakening one's inner nature, to be engrossed in thoughts of God, rather than in embroiling oneself in worldly matters.

On sighting the new moon of *Ramazan*, the Prophet Muhammad observed:

'O God, let the moon of the month of *Ramazan* appear on us with peace and security'. (At-Tirmizi, Ad-Darmi, Musnad Ahmad)

The above supplication shows the feelings with which the Prophet of Islam welcomed the month of *Ramazan*. These words of the Prophet provide a definite proof that *Ramazan* has nothing to do with war. Rather it aims at building a society in which peace and goodwill flourish.

On fasting during *Ramazan*, the Quran says: Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil. (2: 183). Fasting has been prescribed to enable people to follow the right path; to receive training for a life of righteousness (*taqwa*).

Taqwa, guarding oneself, is explained in the following conversation between two companions of the Prophet. Umar Farooq, the second Caliph once asked Ubayy ibn Kaab, a senior Companion to explain the meaning of *taqwa*.

He replied, "O leader of the believers, have you ever taken a path flanked by thorny bushes?"

Umar replied in the affirmative. Ubayy ibn Kaab wished to know how he protected himself. He said, "I gathered my clothes close to me and went on my way".

Ubayy ibn Kaab said, "It is this cautious attitude which is called *taqwa*." (Al Qurtubi)

Ramazan is the month of *taqwa*; it is the month of guarding oneself against 'thorns'. It would be strange to think of *Ramazan* as the time for embroiling oneself in thorns, instead of guarding oneself from them! □

UNLIMITED REWARD

Patience Unlimited

SAY, [God says] O My servants who have believed, fear your Lord. For those who do good in this world will have a good reward and God's earth is spacious. Truly, those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure. (39: 10).

It may seem extraordinary that God should give an unlimited reward for any deed. But it is only one—that is, patience, that is so singled out.

There are two kinds of actions: in one, very ordinary character is exhibited. For instance, if someone is good to you, he receives good treatment from you in return. People of quite ordinary character behave in this way without feeling it necessary to exercise any patience or forbearance. In the second kind of action a very high level of character is exhibited where even if one receives bad treatment one gives good in return.

However, one inclined to embark on the second kind of action is required to adhere strictly to religious guidelines which enjoin restraint among others, and he must do so whether the circumstances be favourable or unfavourable to him. This is the path of patience.

That is, even when someone is unkind to you, you are good to him. Even if he adopts a provocative stance, you remain moderate in your behaviour. Even if observance of the truth will be detrimental to your interests, you continue to adhere to the path of truth and justice. Even if the adoption of an unprincipled stand appears advantageous, you continue to be a man of principle. It is the practitioners of that aspect of religion which demands patience who will be 'requited without measure.' □

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PARADISE AND ITS INHABITANTS

Qualification Required

WHAT is Paradise? Paradise is the supreme reward which God gives to His special servants for their deserving actions. Paradise is a world of unique blessings, admission to which is reserved for the chosen few in the second stage of life, the Hereafter.

God's special servants are those who have demonstrated in ample measure their ability to live on the plane of realities in this present stage of life—the stage of trial. They are the ones who have discovered God's existence from His signs; who have found that the messenger of God is a human being just like themselves; who, without having seen God, have prostrated themselves before Him in all humility.

These are unique human beings who, having been created with an ego, have nevertheless divested themselves of it in the interests of truth; who, having been given complete freedom of word and deed, have voluntarily placed constraints upon themselves; who, having apparently achieved everything by dint of their own hard labour, have nonetheless given complete credit for all their achievements to God.

These are unique souls who, living amongst human beings, are constantly remembering God. They are the ones who have had power over others, but who now exercise it out of fear of God; it is they who have agitated to take revenge, but who have had the fire in their souls placated by the fear of God's chastisement.

These are the worthy individuals who relish taking the back seats while others scramble for the front rows. These are the people who give their lives to lay solid foundations while others rush to find places right on top of the domes.

These are the people of great spiritual refinement who rise above personal prejudices before sitting in judgement; who, in order to deal with others purely on the basis of principles, eliminate their own selves; who budge not one inch from the path of justice even at the most crucial of moments, when complaints and differences seem insurmountable. They do so by adopting a path for themselves which accords exactly with the path of truth and justice overlooking all worldly considerations.

Paradise is God's garden. Only those human beings deserve it who can live in this world with the blameless innocence of flowers. □

RESPECT FOR HUMANITY

A Foundation Virtue

GOD tells us in the Quran: "We have indeed honoured the Children of Adam, and provided for them means of transportation on land and sea, and given them wholesome food and exalted them above many of Our creatures." (17: 70).

This shows that man by his very creation deserves regard and respect. This respect is man's natural birthright, regardless of the community he belongs to.

According to a *Hadith*: "That person is not one of us who is not merciful to our younger ones and respectful to our elders." According to another *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said, "One who believes in God and the Last Day must honour his neighbours; one who believes in God and the Last Day must honour his guests."

There are a number of such commands to the believers in the Quran and the *Hadith* which lay great stress on showing due respect to the servants of God. Our love and devotion for God find expression in this world in the form of our relations with other human beings. One who is a true lover of God has an inner urge to love God's servants.

Respect for humankind is one of the basic teachings of Islam. Anyone of one's own religion or of any other religious tradition, whether he belongs to one community or another; whether he belongs to a friendly group or the opponents group, in all cases is worthy of respect. According to the teachings of Islam, human beings are to be respected despite their differences. Even where antagonism is displayed, we have to adopt the way of avoidance of conflict and continue to show respectful behaviour. In the eyes of Islam, all human beings are equal and deserve our respect. □

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REFORMED BEHAVIOUR

Maintain the Order

DO not spread corruption on the earth after it has been set in order, pray to Him with fear and hope, God's mercy is close to those who do good. (THE QURAN 7: 56)

Reform means leading one's life in accordance with God-established system. It is not lawful for man to adopt any path other than this.

Human activity was initially designed by God to create no excessive clamour. So, now man should refrain from using modern contrivances which create noise pollution. Here, God has arranged for breathing fresh air, so man must not indulge in activities which may pollute the atmosphere. Vegetation and animals flourish in their separate spheres, so man should remain in his own sphere, instead of encroaching on

those of other creatures. Since everything is functioning in a planned way, man should, refrain from adopting any such emotional, hasty course that will lead to social disruption.

All the things of this world are functioning in complete coordination with one another, so man must also lead his life in harmony with others, wishing them well and seeking what is profitable for his brethren. The benefits of such a world are manifold.

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There are only two possible kinds of behaviour for man on this earth created by God—reformed behaviour and corrupt behaviour. Reformed behaviour is the conscious following of the order already established by God in the universe. As opposed to this, corrupt behaviour is deviation from that

order and the adoption of a self-made system. But the latter course ill befits God's creatures, for the earth has already been reformed by God. This has not been left for man to do. Man has only to follow the path of nature and build his society in the same pattern. This reformed earth of God is not only the best place for human habitation, but is also the best model for human conduct. □



THE WAY OF MODERATION

Beneficial Always

ACCORDING to a *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad observed: The moderate action is the best of all actions. Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's Companion, advised the people: 'Adopt the middle path.' (*Tafsir Qurtubi*)

The middle path means the path of moderation. One instance of it can be seen in the following verse of the Quran:

Be neither miserly nor prodigal, for then you should neither be reproached nor be reduced to penury. (17: 29)

The same point, worded differently, has been made in another verse which characterizes "the true servants of the Merciful" are "those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but maintain a just balance between those extremes" (25: 67).

According to this verse, moderate spending means neither lavishness nor miserliness but rather a balanced expenditure which will make life much easier to lead. In the same way, as regards optional fasts, prayers, etc., a middle path is desirable for man, as this enables him to maintain such a pattern of behaviour over a long period of time.

This middle path—the best path to follow—relates to all spheres of life. Man must shun extreme paths in all matters, for this accords with both the spirit of religion as well as with worldly success.

The middle path, to put it differently, is the non-emotional way. If a man loses his mental balance when confronted with any difficult situation in life, he goes to one extreme or the other. But if he keeps his feelings under control, he will be able to determine the proper course of action by giving it ample thought. A well considered deed is always a moderate one; one who does not follow a moderate path will exceed all bounds both in friendship and in enmity. He will also be given to undue optimism in positive and pessimism in negative situations, and will unnecessarily regard some individuals as too bad and others as too good. However, it is the verdict of nature, that in this world a moderate approach in life always succeeds, while taking the path of extremes inevitably leads to failure. □

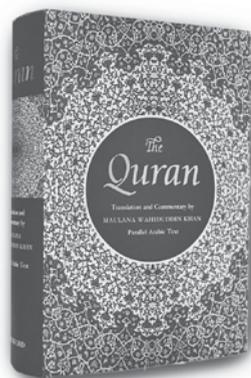


THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



In the name of God the Most Beneficent the Most Merciful

O you who are wrapped up in your mantle, stand up to pray for much of the night. It may be half the night or a little less than that or a little more, but recite the Quran slowly and distinctly. For We are about to send down to you a message of considerable gravity. (73: 1-5)

Literally 'recite the Quran in slow, measured rhythmic tones'. This means 'recite, paying full attention to the import of the content'. When recited like this, a two-way process between Quran and its reciter comes into play. For him, the Quran is an address or speech by God and his heart starts answering this address at every verse. In the Quran where there is any mention of God's majesty, the reciter's entire existence is strongly affected by the realization of His greatness. When God's blessings are enumerated in the Quran, the reciter's heart overflows with gratitude; when God's retribution is described in the Quran, the reciter trembles on reading it; when an order is laid down in the Quran, the feeling becomes intensified in the reciter that he should become the obedient subject of his Lord by carrying out that order.

Literally 'weighty words' refers to that order for giving warning which is mentioned in the next chapter, 'Arise and give warning' (74: 2). This means inform people about the hazards of the Hereafter. Undoubtedly this is the most difficult task in the world. For this, the missionary has to stand by the pure and unadulterated Truth, even if he becomes a stranger to all his people. He has to tolerate being tormented by the people, so that the relationship between him and his addressees remains unaffected till the last moment. He has to be unilaterally

governed by the principles of patience and avoidance of confrontation, so that his status as *da'i* should not be damaged.

Surely, getting up at night [for worship] is the most potent means of subduing the self and most suitable for the word [of prayer]. You have by day prolonged occupations [with Dawah work]. Remember the name of your Lord, and devote yourself to Him wholeheartedly. He is the Lord of the East and the West, there is no deity but Him, so take Him as your Guardian. Bear patiently with what they say, and ignore them politely. Leave it to Me to deal with the deniers, who live a life of comfort, and bear with them a little longer. We have in store for them heavy fetters and a blazing Fire, food that chokes and painful punishment on the Day the earth and mountains shall shake and the mountains crumble into shifting sand dunes. (73: 6-13)

Delivering the call for acceptance of the Truth means initiating the most difficult campaign. One who does so becomes persona non grata in his entire surroundings. In such conditions, the only Being whom the preacher of Truth finds as his sympathiser and supporter is his Lord. He not only goes on remembering his God in his heart, but he also stands before Him during the night. Night time is the time of leisure. In the dead silence of night man finds a better opportunity to turn towards God with full concentration. In the path of the mission of Truth, strewn as it is with difficulties, this is the only real weapon which the missionary has.

It is the way of a true preacher that, when he is troubled by an addressee, he does not inveigh against or argue with him, but rushes towards God. He abstains from negative reaction till the last moment. And to continue to work, rising above such a reaction, is the essential condition which makes a man a missionary of the Truth in the real sense. □



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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Is fasting to do with not eating and drinking for a few hours during the day and then eating as one desires past the restricted hours?

Fasting does not simply amount to observing hunger for a temporary period of time. In fact, it symbolizes a lifelong culture of dedication. The Arabic equivalent of fasting is *sawm*, which means abstinence. Abstinence is the gist of fasting. Abstinence from food and water for a limited period is symbolic training. Fasting reminds a faithful person that if the acts of abstinence were to reach the extent of refraining from food and water for a temporary period, then he would be ready to do so for a higher purpose. Although this training is for a temporary period it enables one to lead one's whole life in accordance with this spirit. Fasting is not a set of rituals. It is the adoption of the well-known principle—simple living, high thinking. Simplicity in one's food habits will be an integral part of a believer's life. One of the teachings of the Prophet is 'simplicity is a part of faith'. Extravagance of any kind will not be the way of a true follower of the Prophet.

Is it true that during Ramazan Muslims are encouraged by their religion to call people for Iftar parties and are supposed to give sumptuous food?

Iftar is an Arabic word, which literally means 'to break'. In the Islamic context, it means to break the fast, to eat and drink in the evening after the daylong fast. *Iftar* is not simply a matter of having dinner. It has great significance. It is a combination of spiritual and physical food. According to the Islamic teachings, *iftar* should be a simple meal and not a lavish affair. Simplicity saves us from distraction and will make us concentrate on the spiritual aspect of fasting. On the other hand, if the *iftar* takes the form of a lavish affair, all attention will be focused on the taste and the physical aspects, and the spiritual benefits will be lost.

These days, organizing *iftar* parties has become a tradition. But this party should not be like any other party. Such a party should give us an opportunity for spiritual exchange, turning our individual experiences into a social experience.

Is the blessed night observed on the 26th of Ramazan by Muslims, a night where everyone gets whatever they ask for from God? Is it to be searched for during the last ten nights of the holy month?

This night is known as *Lailatul Qadr* in Arabic and its English equivalent is the Night of Destiny. Common belief is that the Night of Destiny can be found in the final phase of *Ramazan*. However similar to scientific discoveries, finding it is the result of a long and arduous process of seeking. A scientist spends years studying the subject and researching it, and after a long, gruelling effort, he makes that one discovery. Similarly, finding the Night of Destiny involves years of effort and supplication.

A believer is required to spend a lifetime so that a prepared mind which realizes the supreme greatness of God and one's own humility comes into being, only then can he be hopeful of finding this night and his prayer being accepted by God.

What are the rituals to be observed by Muslims in this night. Is it to be observed collectively or individually?

There are no rituals as such. One has to spend the whole night in prayer and supplication. It could be done in the mosque or in the privacy of one's home. It should be observed in all seriousness and sincerity. Anything serious is not connected to any kind of loud behaviour. Every aspect of such an activity will be sombre and solemn. Each one will be wishing for solitude, peace and quiet to supplicate to God. Seeking forgiveness from God cannot be a public or a loud affair. One can understand the kind of atmosphere one needs to be able to do such worship.

Is there any particular qualification to receive the blessings of this night?

To answer this question it is important to understand the following incident from the Prophet's life. During the month of *Ramazan* the Prophet was in seclusion (*etikaf*) practised in the final phase of *Ramazan*. Then he came out of the mosque but went back in again. He later told his Companions that an angel had come to pass on the knowledge about the Night of Destiny. When the Prophet came out to inform the believers, he saw two of his people quarrelling with each other. Instantly, the knowledge of the Night was taken away from the Prophet's mind. This incident has a great lesson for the believers. The quarrel was not an armed battle: the two believers were merely arguing, but even a verbal fight is enough to have the divine knowledge taken away. Those who adopt the path of violence can never become the recipients of divine blessings.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word. Else the blessings may be showered, but not on him! Positivity is the most important trait that makes a man worthy of receiving God's blessings. A positive mind will not engage in conflicts and would remain free of revenge, hatred, lust and negative thoughts. (*Sahih-al Bukhari*)

Kindly suggest a book where I can get the understanding of other aspects of Islam.

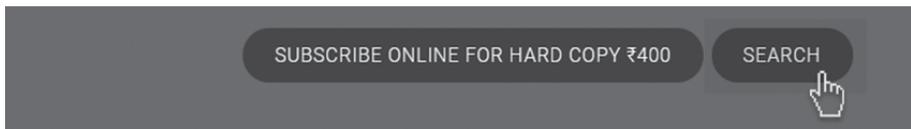
You may read the magazine *Spirit of Islam* which publishes articles about various topics. There is a search option on the home page of the website www.spiritofislam.co.in from where you can read articles of your interest. □



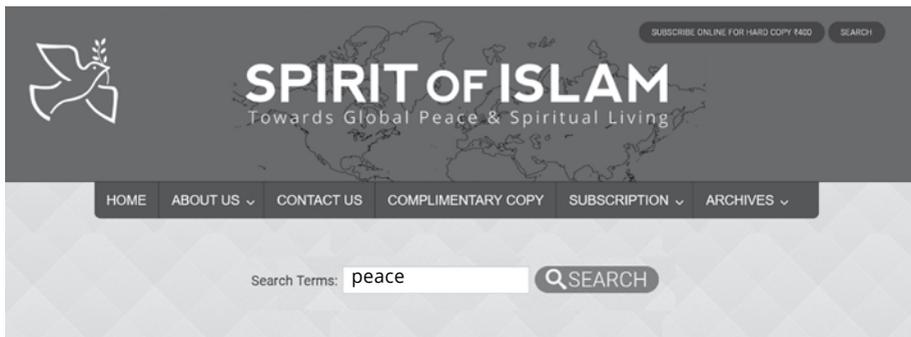
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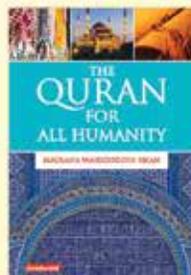
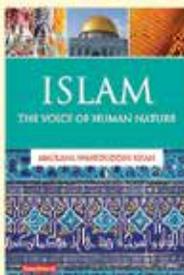
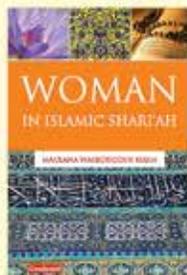
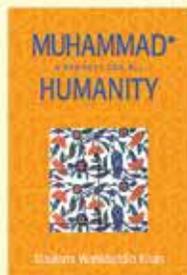
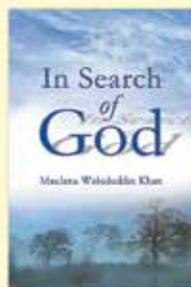
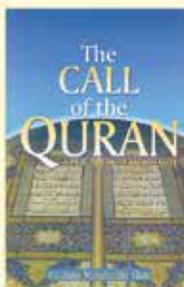
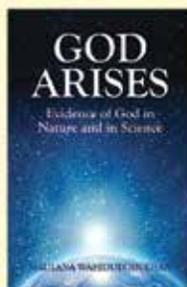
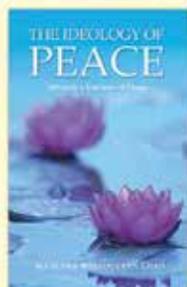
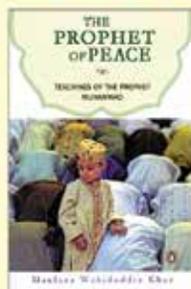
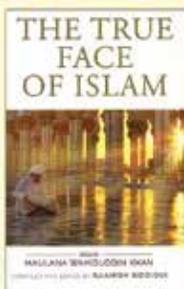
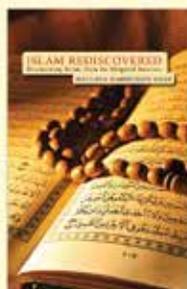
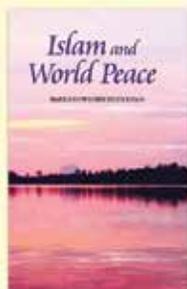
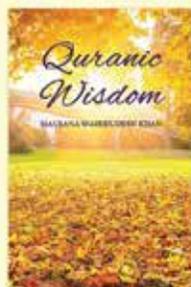
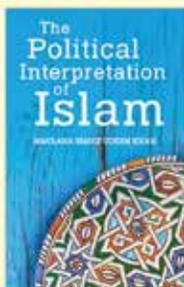
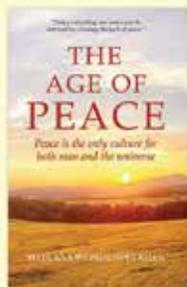
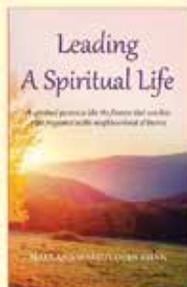
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