

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Wisdom lies in knowing what is possible and what is not possible according to the circumstances.

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!



SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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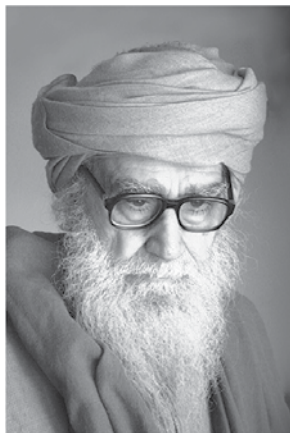
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

THE SPIRIT OF MODESTY

A SUPERIORITY complex is present in everyone, in varying degrees. This gives one courage and confidence. If a person has no ego, he will be deprived of self-confidence and in the absence of self-confidence no one can perform any worthwhile task. But it is necessary that one's feelings of self-confidence or superiority complex should be bound by limitations, that is, it should be reined in by the feeling of modesty.

In the absence of such pressure, a person will lose his utility and viability in social life. He will suffer from *ahankar* or excessive pride. And without doubt, there is nothing more destructive than excessive pride in this world. There are two things in this world which make a person modest. One is a scientific bent of mind; the other is being God-fearing. A scientific bent of mind results from the realization of knowledge. And, a God-fearing mind is the result of the discovery and realization of God.

When excessive pride builds up in a person, it could be because he sees himself in relation to others, and since there are many people he

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

finds less accomplished than himself, the feeling of ego or appreciation of his own greatness begins to grow. But one who has a scientific bent of mind in the real sense, sees himself and his issues in relation to knowledge rather than in relation to the person who has knowledge. A person can be limited, but knowledge is unlimited. In relation to the person who has knowledge, one can think of oneself as greater than others but in relation to the vast world of knowledge, everyone is less in stature. This feeling naturally produces modesty in a scientific or learned person.

One who has fear of God will see his affairs in relation to God, the Almighty. When one sees oneself in relation to God, everyone becomes small, in relation to God.

Similarly, one who has fear of God will see his affairs in relation to God, the Almighty. When one sees oneself in relation to God, everyone becomes small, in relation to God. No one is great. In this way the belief of a God-fearing man makes him a balanced person. The spirit of Islam may be called the *Allah-u-Akbar* spirit. The expression *Allah-u-Akbar* is repeated several times during *Salath* or prayer. *Allah-u-Akbar* means God is great. It implies that, 'I am not great'. In this way, every day, all believers

refresh their minds repeatedly with the idea that greatness pertains only to God: there is no greatness for them. Congregational prayer is a practical demonstration of this reality. In congregational prayer, all believers make one person a prayer leader and the rest stand behind him. This is a social form of expression of the *Allah-u-Akbar* spirit.

The purpose of saying *Allah-u-Akbar* is to develop the spirit of modesty. When the spirit of modesty develops in a person in the real sense, it does not stop at any point; just as this spirit manifests itself before God during prayer, it manifests itself in like manner in relation to other human beings. The spirit of modesty becomes part and parcel of his everyday life.

Those who are imbued with this spirit will never display egoism or pride. They will never distance themselves from others on minor provocations. Working under others will appear to them as an act of worship. Their spirit will find happiness in surrender and modesty rather than in making others surrender to them. They will accept their mistakes. They will be totally free from any desire for leadership. □

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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.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN ISLAM

"My Lord! Increase my Knowledge." (THE QURAN 20: 114)

THE MISSION of the Prophet of Islam has been introduced in the Quran at more than one place as an instructor of the Book and a teacher of wisdom. Here is a verse from the Quran:

"It is He who has raised among the unlettered people a messenger from among themselves who recites His revelations to them, and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom." (62: 2)

Similarly, on another occasion the Prophet of Islam presented himself before the people saying, "I have been sent only as a teacher."

The first word revealed in the form of the Quran was '*Iqra*' or 'Read' (96: 1). The fourth verse of the first revelation forming part of the chapter *Al-Qalam* says:

"God has taught man by the pen." (96: 4)

We find more than 1500 derivatives and synonyms of the word *Ilm*, that is, knowledge in the Quran. In this light, it becomes easy to understand how the revelation of the Quran, in this almost illiterate nation of

Arabia set off such a wave of receiving and imparting education which can rightly be called a learning explosion.

The revolution brought about by this learning explosion ushered in a new age of highly developed culture and civilization not only in Arabia but all over the world. This is a fact that has been acknowledged by historians. For instance, the Indian historian, T. Rama Rao, begins his biography of the Prophet of Islam with these words:

When he appeared, Arabia was a desert—a nothing. Out of nothing of the desert a new world was fashioned by the mighty spirit of Muhammad. A new life, a new culture, a new civilization, a new kingdom, which extended from Morocco to India and influenced the thought and life of three continents—Asia, Africa and Europe. (*Life of Muhammad*)

Merit of the Learned and the Learners

The Quran and *Hadith* both hold men of knowledge preferable to the ignorant (39: 9). The books of *Hadith* have a whole lengthy chapter devoted to the importance of knowledge, and the rewards of teaching and learning.

For instance, there is a saying of the Prophet that, one who treads a path in search of knowledge has his way paved to Paradise by God as a reward for this noble deed. (*Bukhari, Muslim*)

The mission of the Prophet of Islam has been introduced in the Quran as an instructor of the Book and a teacher of wisdom.

According to another saying, angels in heavens, fish in the water and ants in their dwellings pray for the well-being of a seeker of knowledge. (*Tirmidhi*)

In another *Hadith*, the Prophet of Islam observed, those who learn virtues and teach it to others are the best among humankind. (*Al-Bayhaqi*)

At the time of the revelation, few people could read and write. They made the maximum use of their abilities to memorize their learnings, preserving their entire literary heritage in their memory. There was no trace of any systematic or organized activity of learning or teaching in Arab society of the time. But soon after the revelation of the Quran, the trend of education set in. Everyone who accepted Islam learnt the Quran from the Prophet, and after learning taught others who desired to learn. In this way, the

homes of the early Muslims—Abu Bakr Siddiq, Al-Arqam bin Al-Arqam, Fatima bint Khattab—turned into centres of learning.

From the very outset, the Prophet appointed scribes who were assigned to write down the Quranic portions as soon as they were revealed. This motivated others as well to learn writing so that they might make their own copies of the holy textbook. It is to be noted that even under life-threatening circumstances, the Prophet had appointed twelve people who were most learned amongst them as teachers of the Quran. These teachers were so sincere and enthusiastic that within a short period of three years they spread the knowledge of the Quran to almost each and every home of the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. Hence when the Prophet arrived at Madinah in the 13th year of his prophethood, he found all the young and old people of these tribes well versed in the teachings of the Quran.

At the Battle of Badr between the Muslims and the Makkans, 70 people were taken prisoner. After consultation with the senior Companions, the decision was taken that on a ransom payment of 4000 dirhams each, they would be set free. Most of the Makkans being businessmen, knew how to read and write. But the Muslims in Madinah were mostly farmers, who did not know how to read or write. Owing to the importance of education in Islam, it was decided that those prisoners of war who were not able to pay ransom, should be asked to teach 10 Muslim children in order to secure their freedom. This was the first proper school in Islam established by the Prophet himself. (*Tabaqat, Ibn Sad*)

***Wisdom is the
believer's property,
he should try to
take it wherever he
finds it. —Prophet
Muhammad***

The learning explosion produced by the first divine word *Iqra*—Read!—continued non-stop. It initially began at Makkah and gradually spread throughout the world. After the demise of the Prophet, the Companions spread out in the neighbouring countries with the same spirit of seeking knowledge and imparting it to others. From Makkah to Madinah to Abyssinia to Iraq to Egypt to Baghdad, this revolutionary educational movement gradually passed on to Central Asia and the East, then to Spain and the West.

As a result, there spawned international centres of learning, education and medicine that served towards multidimensional development in all spheres of life.

Women were not kept away from these activities. Starting with the Prophet's own household, Muslim families provided equal opportunities to the female members to learn to grow and play a constructive role in the progress and development of society. A large number of learned women have found mention in history as authorities on various Islamic sciences such as *Hadith*, Islamic jurisprudence, biography of the Prophet, commentary on the Quran, etc. The Prophet's own wife, Aisha, imparted the knowledge and wisdom she received from the first educator—Prophet Muhammad—for almost half a century. She has

Starting with the Prophet's own household, Muslim families provided equal opportunities to the female members to learn to grow and play a constructive role in the progress and development of society.

narrated more than two thousand sayings of the Prophet, and according to Muslim jurists, these sayings are the source of two thirds of Islamic laws relating to social, political and cultural issues.

Biographers such as Ibn Khallikan (author of *Waqeya-tul-Ayan*), Ibn Sa'd (author of *Tabaqat*), Khatib Bhaghdadi (author of *Taarikh Baghdad*) and Al-Miqrizi (author of *al-Khutal-wal-Athar*) have mentioned the names of thousands of women and their outstanding contribution in the field of education and development in the Muslim world. Noteworthy among them, for instance, are the two sisters of Al-Fahri of Morocco, Fatimah and Maryam, the daughters of Muhammad ibn Abdullah, who

founded the Qayrawan University and the Andalus University in the historical city of Fas in 859 CE.

The Development of Natural Sciences

The emphasis of Islam on learning and teaching was not confined to the Quran or the teachings of the Prophet. The Quran, in fact, has given a new outlook, a new perspective or paradigm as coined by Thomas Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1955). According to this Quranic paradigm, man's most important activity being intellectual contemplation or reflection, he was not supposed to blindly follow any idea or notion just because it was attributed to his ancestors or some other authority. He had to ponder on it critically and realistically. That is why we find that the Quran is replete with hundreds of inspirational and motivational verses that invite man to reflect on the wonderful creation of God. For example:

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people with intelligence, those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying) "Our Lord! You have not created all this in vain (without purpose), Glory be to You!" (3: 190-91)

This, we can say, was the intellectual seed which in academic circles is referred to as the spirit of enquiry. According to Arnold Toynbee and other world historians, this spirit of enquiry was the first and foremost prerequisite for the inauguration of the scientific era and the elimination of a superstitious outlook on nature and life. So, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is the Quran that has laid the foundation of modern science.

The Quran and Hadith both hold men of knowledge preferable to the ignorant.

On the other hand, the Prophet himself has dealt with day-to-day problems of life in accordance with this realistic approach taught by the Quran. Consequently the same realistic approach became an integral part of the frame of mind of his Companions. They all became curious, inquisitive and realistic in all matters of life.

For example, once the Prophet passed by an oasis where he found the farmers, who were date planters, at work. When he asked what they were doing, he was told that they were pollinating the clusters of dates in order to produce a better yield. The Prophet expressed his disapproval of this process. Knowing this, the farmers immediately stopped it. Later on the Prophet was told that due to lack of proper pollination, the yield had been very low as compared to the previous years. On hearing this, the Prophet replied: "You know your worldly matters better." (*Sahih Bukhari*). In other words, experiment and observation should be the final criterion in such worldly matters.

The invitation of the Quran to enquiry on the one hand, and the encouragement of the Prophet to engage in direct observation and reflection on the other, led the Muslims to study everything objectively. They started learning eagerly from everyone irrespective of their religious and cultural origins. This trend of insatiable curiosity and open mindedness motivated the succeeding generations during the Umayyad and Abbasid times to enthusiastically learn and translate the cultural legacy of other nations, particularly the Persian, Greek

and Roman. Abu Jafar Mansur (714-775 CE) established *Bayt al-Hikmah* (*The House of Wisdom*) where highly paid multilingual scholars were appointed to translate into Arabic, books on Persian literature, Greek philosophy, medicine, and other sciences available in those times in different parts of the world.

This was an actualization of the Prophet's inspiring words: "Wisdom is the believer's property, he should try to take it wherever he finds it."

Man's most important activity being intellectual contemplation or reflection, he is not supposed to blindly follow any idea or notion just because it was attributed to his ancestors or some other authority.

Of the Abbasid Caliphs, Harun ar-Rashid, Al-Mamun and Mutadid Billah, are reported to have invited doctors, philosophers, and scholars from various parts of the world to settle in Muslim cities and help in these activities. They even bought some books by paying for them in gold equivalent to their weight.

This generous appreciation and support of the state accelerated research work, and cultural exchange through translation which reflected on the general progress and development of the entire Muslim world of the time. Spain, under Muslim rule, witnessed a similar progressive and developmental process.

A number of world renowned historians of science and civilization (e.g. Hughman) have pointed out that Muslims' contribution in the development of natural sciences and philosophy were not merely confined to translations from Greek, Persian, Indian, etc. For in view of their inquisitive and critical mind-set, it was not possible for them to accept Greek philosophy or any other sciences without an objective analysis. The fervour shown in authentication of the Prophet's words was also in action in the field of natural science. Therefore, Muslim scientists, doctors and other experts were able to remove so many superstitious notions about nature and life that prevailed among the Greek philosophers. On the other hand they proved to be creative and innovative in the widest sense of the term. They sent missions for exploring new lands. They established observatories. They corrected many false concepts in astronomy, medicine, chemistry and physics. It was the legacy of the Islamic civilization that reached Europe via Spain after the fall of Granada in 1492 CE, which laid the foundation of the Renaissance in the West.

Islam attaches such great importance to learning that the Quran says: "Only those of His servants who possess knowledge, fear God." (35: 28)

Scholars are considered to be like angels (3: 18), in view of their potential for discovering the oneness and the glory of the Creator. To inculcate this importance of knowledge in the minds of the believers, the Prophet observed that the worship of a learned man is a thousand times better than that of the ignorant worshipper (*Mustadrak al-Hakim*). By way of encouraging reflection on the universe and nature in order to explore divine glories, the Prophet is reported to have said: "An hour of reflection is better than a hundred years of worship without reflection." (*Al-Bayhaqi*)

It was this interrelatedness of knowledge and worship that made the early Muslims seek and impart knowledge wholeheartedly and religiously.

But knowledge for the sake of knowledge as such may not be an acceptable notion according to Islamic ideology. Instead, a Muslim is supposed to seek knowledge for the pleasure of his Lord on the one hand and for the rendering of better services to the welfare of humankind on the other. In other words, the motto of education in Islam, would be knowledge for the sake of serving God and His creatures. That is why from the very beginning almost equal attention has been paid to the learning of both the religious sciences and the worldly or secular sciences.

The spirit of enquiry was the first and foremost prerequisite for the inauguration of the scientific era and the elimination of a superstitious outlook on nature and life.

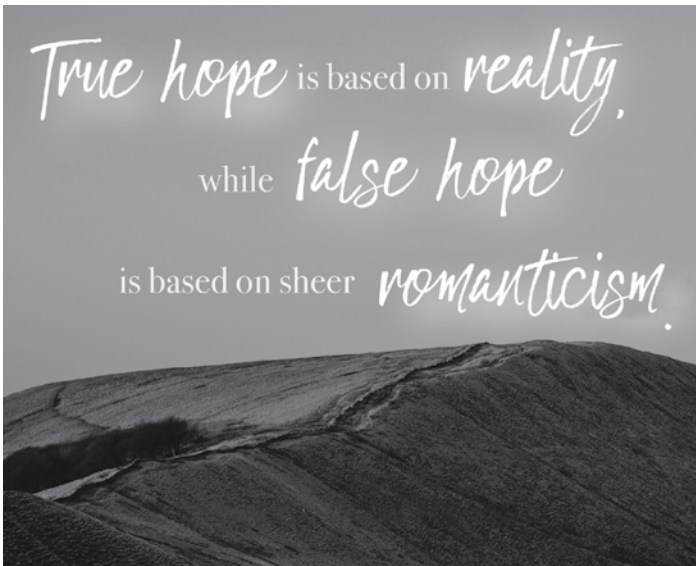
Imam Ghazali, noticing a lack of interest among the youth of his times in learning medicine and other useful crafts and skills, issued a *fatwa* that doctors, craftsmen, and experts of other human skills are not less important than the scholars of *fiqh*, *Hadith* and pure religious sciences. (*Al-Qadimwaal Hadith*, M. Kurd Ali). If the two-fold purpose of life is to worship God and serve humankind, a believer cannot succeed in achieving it unless he devotes all his potential to the acquisition of religious and non-religious knowledge. Thus we may conclude that:

- *Iqra* being the first word revealed in the Quran, an intellectual process was simultaneously started which we have called the learning explosion.

- The commandment of *Iqra* has been linked with the name of God (Read in the name of your Sustainer). This connection has provided at the very outset the Islamic concept of education, that is, knowledge should not be sought for the sake of knowledge, but for the sublime purpose of the realization of God and the welfare of man.
- This two-fold purpose of life naturally calls for Muslims to strive hard in seeking knowledge both related to their religion and to the progress and development of the human condition in general. Since the Quran and *Hadith* have made no discrimination between men and women concerning their rights and duties, the commandment of *Iqra* is equally inspiring and motivating to womenfolk. Consequently, they also did their best and contributed to this noble cause with the same spirit, fervour and dedication.
- The Quranic paradigm based on the concept of *Tawhid* has changed the traditional approach to the universe and human life. An intellectual revolution took place; superstitious thinking was replaced by rationalistic, realistic and objective analysis. Thus in the words of Henri Pirenne, *Islam changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of human history was overthrown.* □

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MISSIONARY ZEAL

Purpose in Life

Having a purpose in life makes one overlook all other considerations. One is willing to endure every hardship to achieve one's goal.

IN NOVEMBER 1922, a thirty-four year-old Spanish priest Fr. Henry Heras (1889-1956) landed in Bombay harbour. The land of India fascinated him. He was sure that it would be fertile ground for Christian missionary work. He decided to settle in the country and pursue his missionary activities here.

But India was not Fr. Heras' motherland. He needed a base if he was to work in the country; only after he had established himself here would he be able to start preaching among the Indian people. He decided that he would practise as a teacher in India, and then plan his work from there. In a teaching capacity, he felt, he would be able to work both inside the college campus and outside.

A few days later, he met the principal of St. Xavier's College, Bombay. The young priest was a historian, and had a degree in history from his own country: "Which branch of history would you like to teach?" the principal asked him after going through his testimonials. "Indian History," Fr. Heras replied at once. "What do you know about Indian History?" the principal asked him: Fr. Heras said that he knew nothing. "How, then, are you going to teach it?" "I shall study it," Fr. Heras answered.

If one has a purpose in life, then one will overlook all other considerations and concentrate on achieving one's goal.

Fr. Heras realized that he was not going to teach history as a profession. If he had been adopting it for his career, he could have taught European history or any branch of history that he was acquainted with and remained content with a pay-packet at the end of every month. He had a special aim in his mind, and that was to establish a base for his missionary work. For this purpose, Indian history was the most suitable topic available to him. He was in India, and would be in a better position to communicate his religion to the youth of the country as a teacher of Indian history. That was why—despite his unfamiliarity with the topic—he chose Indian history as his subject.

He studied Indian history so diligently that he not only became an accomplished history teacher; he also established himself as a historian

of the same class as Sir Jadunath Sarkar and Dr. Surendra Nath Sen. The *Heras Institute of Bombay* stands today as a living memorial to Fr. Heras and his life-work.

If one has a purpose in life, then one will overlook all other considerations and concentrate on achieving one's goal. Everything one does will be aimed at that end. One will not act on the basis of mundane and temporary profit; one will undergo loss, and endure hardship, if it serves to bring one closer to one's goal. There are many Muslims in the world today who say they would like to accomplish "missionary work", but are they ready for the selfless struggle that this work entails? □



AN ISLAMIC PRINCIPLE

Patience and Tolerance

THE PROPHET advised, "It is not proper for any Muslim to disgrace himself." People enquired as to how someone might disgrace himself? The Prophet replied, "By challenging an evil he is not competent to fight with." (*Musnad, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal*)

This *Hadith* of the Prophet reveals an important principle of Islam, that in a composite society, whenever an evil or unpleasant situation arises, it is not prudent for the law-abiding person to have an impulsive confrontation with the wrong-doers. Instead, he should decide pragmatically as to which of two options would be appropriate.

One is that he should see whether he has enough strength to fight the miscreants and compel them to desist from their wrong-doing. If so, he must fight with great determination so that the trouble is eradicated and social uplift becomes possible.

The second option is to make a cool and realistic assessment of the comparative strength of the two sides. If it is found that the odds are too great for any favourable result to be achieved through confrontation or that any initial disadvantage could turn into a major setback, it will become necessary to adopt the policy of patience and tolerance avoiding any confrontation with the wicked.

The policy of avoidance does not mean cowardice. It simply means refraining from wasting time and energy in a futile conflict. By following this course, one gains the respite to prepare oneself adequately for future action. It provides the opportunity to become strong and dominant so that no one would dare do any harm. And in the event of attempted injustice, there would be enough accumulated power to effectively repulse any wrong-doer.

The approach of patience, tolerance and avoidance is undoubtedly one of the most important principles of Islam. □

The policy of avoidance does not mean cowardice. It simply means refraining from wasting time and energy in a futile conflict.



MAN AND HIS MIND

Thinking Capacity

*By space the universe encompasses and swallows me as an atom;
by thought I encompass it.*

—Blaise Pascal, (1623-1662)
French philosopher and scientist

MAN has been created by God with two opposing yet complementary qualities: the spiritual and the physical. On the one hand is his mind, in respect of which he finds himself limitless. He can think anything he wishes; there are simply no boundaries to his thinking.

Yet, in his physical existence, man is extremely limited. He is bound by innumerable kinds of constraints. The greatest limiting factor which man faces is death. Death nullifies all greatness in man.

In all his apparent greatness, man must acknowledge how humble his condition is. This is man's severest test.

This is man's severest test. In all his apparent greatness, he must acknowledge how humble is his condition. Passing from a limitless to a limited environment, he must acknowledge the confines within which he lives. He must accept restrictions in an atmosphere of freedom.

Man is constantly under trial in this world. To pass all tests, he must learn his practical limitations *vis-à-vis* his intellectual limitlessness. By doing so, he can save himself from all misapprehensions, and can exercise his free will in the sphere of reality.

So far as animals are concerned, their thinking capacity barely goes beyond the immediate needs of survival. They are, in this sense, like living machines. By contrast, the area of man's thinking is vast. The greatest test of humanity is to discover a balance between thinking and action. □



REASON AND REVELATION

Guidance from God

Reason is a precious blessing from God. Referring to reason, God has said that there is no creation superior to reason.

ALL OF THE TASKS a human being does are dependent on reason. No development or progress can happen without the application of intelligence. Without the mind, a person would be reduced to a statue, being unable to differentiate between right and wrong. Reason is in itself not a criterion which determines good and evil, rather it is the ability to understand and discern. By definition, reason is the intellectual ability by which conclusions are drawn from premises. Thus reason is not an objective judge by itself.

Reason and revelation are not contradictory to each other. Revelation is a source of knowledge while reason is not so. When a person believes in what has been revealed, he does so by application of his God-given reason to reflect and determine with certainty the truthfulness and veracity of the knowledge he has gained through revelation. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to say that reason supplements the understanding of revelation and is not opposed or inconsistent to it.

Reason is an ability granted by God, it is not any person's own invention. In this matter, deviation happened when some people came to believe in an extreme version of reason, that is, they began to regard reason as a means of acquiring knowledge. Certain religious groups reacted to this conception of

Reason is the intellectual ability by which conclusions are drawn from premises. It is not an objective judge by itself.

reason and began to consider reason-based discussions as inimical to religion. Due to this mind-set they wrongly started claiming that the spheres of reason and revelation were separate, and that the domain of revelation begins where reason reaches its limits. The truth is that there is a difference between utilizing reason to understand realities and considering reason as the only source of knowledge.

The word *aql*, or reason, has been used in the Quran about fifty times. The Quran repeatedly enjoins the reader to discover the credibility of revelation by putting to use reason and rationale. For example, a verse in the Quran instructs: "We have sent down the Quran in Arabic, so that

you may understand [by applying reason].” (12: 2) Similarly, in another verse a Prophet urges his people to reflect and determine the integrity of his claim to prophethood (10: 16).

Reason supplements the understanding of revelation and is not opposed or inconsistent to it.

A human being has been given various kinds of capabilities: the hands to hold, legs to walk, eyes to see, and ears to hear. Similarly, humans have been granted reason so that they may ponder over issues and comprehend by doing rational analysis. Along with this, humans have been given total freedom which means that they can either make proper use of their reason or put it to improper use.

The real purpose of reason is for man to collect data or information and then through examination and deliberation, arrive at useful knowledge. However, reason in itself is not an authority which is why one can be either right or wrong in taking support of reason in one’s pursuit of knowledge. Those who see reason as the source of knowledge belong to an extremist school of thought, a phenomenon observed everywhere including within the sphere of religion. □



THINGS CHANGE
FOR THE BETTER
WHEN ONE HAS
THE ABILITY TO
ADMIT ONE'S

M I S T A K E

A HAPPY ENDING TO THE TRAGEDY OF LIFE

The World Hereafter

THE CAPITAL of British India was initially Calcutta. In 1911, King George V announced the transfer of the capital to Delhi. The British architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens (1864-1944) was commissioned to design the new capital. Construction work commenced in 1913, and eventually the magnificent city of New Delhi came into existence.

This was a time when the whole world was being swept by a new political wave: nationalism. Progressive trends in political thought had rendered the colonial system of government untenable. The freedom movement in India was fast gaining momentum. It was apparent that British rule in India would not survive for long. The completion of New Delhi thus coincided with the decline of the British Raj.

After the construction of New Delhi, a French political leader visited India. When he saw the glittering palaces and spacious mansions of the new capital of British India, he expressed his reaction in the following words: *"What a magnificent world they built to leave."*

This is not only true of the British in India; it is true of all of us in this world. We come into this world full of desires and aspirations. We exert all our efforts on constructing a "magnificent world" for ourselves on earth. Then, just as our dream world begins to take shape, the angel of death visits us and takes us away from the world we have worked hard to construct for ourselves. We are then taken to what British author, Arthur Koestler called an "unknown country".

Life is a tragedy when seen without the Hereafter. This tragedy can only be given a happy ending with the addition of the life to come.

Life is a tragic story indeed if that is all there is to it. But this world, like everything else in the universe, can only be complete with its counterpart. The counterpart of this world is the Hereafter. For those who have forgotten the next world, this life is certainly just a tragedy; but for those who look forward to the life to come, and build for the Hereafter in the present life, this world will become an invaluable step towards a new, more successful existence in the next world.

Life is a tragedy when seen without the Hereafter. This tragedy can only be given a happy ending with the addition of the life to come. □

SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

Made in Heaven

THE COMING together of a man and a woman in marriage is one of the most unique events in the universe. All the things created in the universe are created in pairs, but the compatibility that exists between a man and a woman cannot be found in any other created thing. When a man and a woman come together as partners for life, it is evident that they have been made for each other through a conscious plan.

Marriage is not simply a social institution. In Islam, it has an importance far greater than this. According to the Islamic concept of life, God Almighty created an ideal world, Paradise. Paradise is a perfect and eternal world. God wants to select those women and men who may qualify to settle in this highly refined colony of Paradise. For the purpose of this selection or test, God provided men and women with free-will whilst settling them on Earth.

All the things created in the universe are created in pairs, but the compatibility that exists between a man and a woman cannot be found in any other created thing.

Nature demands that men and women lead their lives together. The ideal way of leading such a life according to the Islamic law is within the bounds of marriage. In Islam, marriage is both a social contract entered into by mutual consent of the bride and groom, and a sacred bond to which great religious and social importance is attached. As an institution, it is a cohesive force in society, and worth protecting and preserving for that reason. To that end, detailed injunctions have been prescribed to maintain its stability and promote its betterment.

However, in the knowledge that an excess of legal constraints can lead to rebellion, such injunctions have been kept to a realistic minimum and have been formulated to be consistent with normal human capabilities. Moreover, their enforcement is less relied upon, and importance is placed upon the religious conditioning of the individual to ensure the maintenance of high ethical standards and appropriate conduct in marital affairs and family life. It is said that the heart of the believer is the custodian of the law.

The state of marriage not only lays the foundations for family life, but also provides a training ground for individuals to make a positive

contribution to society. When a man and woman prove to be a good husband and wife, they will certainly prove to be good citizens in the broad spectrum of their social group. This has been aptly expressed in a *Hadith*:

“The best of you is one who is best for his family.”

The family being the preliminary unit for the training of human beings, its disintegration has an injurious effect on society. Human beings must individually make a positive contribution, if collectively they are to form a good and just nation. If the family no longer exists, it is the whole of humanity which suffers. Once a man and a woman are bound together in the bonds of matrimony, they are expected to do their utmost, till the day they die to honour and uphold what the Quran calls their firm contract, or pledge. To this end, the full thrust of the Islamic law is levelled at preventing the occurrence of divorce; the laws it lays down in this regard exist primarily, therefore, as checks, not incentives. Islam regards marriage as an extremely desirable institution, hence its conception of marriage is the rule in life. Divorce is only an exception to that rule. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Marriage is my tradition; Then whosoever does not favor my tradition is not with me." (*Ibn e Majah*)

In Islam, marriage is both a social contract entered into by mutual consent of the bride and groom, and a sacred bond to which great religious and social importance is attached.

After having presented the Islamic view about marriage, it would be pertinent to discuss the injunctions of Islam regarding the threats to a stable married life. Islam gives guidelines which prevent all such evils. ‘Prevention is better than cure’, is an old maxim that we all know. Let us now understand the principles which should govern one’s married life as derived from the Quran and the life of the Prophet.

We are living in a world created by God Almighty. He has made this world and sustains it according to a definite plan. This is known as the creation plan of God. Any deviation from this by humankind will result in disorder in the smooth functioning of life on earth.

The principles from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet lay a foundation for a pure society. A society where there is sanctity about all relationships, interactions and dealings. Fear of accountability to God makes a person view every interaction as an interaction which is

being witnessed by God Almighty. With such an understanding we will know what is to be accepted in the society and what is to be strictly shunned.

The following teachings of the Quran if followed ensure that either of the spouse will not fall into the evil ways which threaten their marriage. One will not misuse one's freedom and feel a great sense of responsibility towards maintaining the sanctity of married life.

Tell believing men to lower their gaze and remain chaste. That is purer for them. God is aware of what you do. Say to believing women that they should lower their gaze and remain chaste and not to reveal their

Once a man and a woman are bound together in the bonds of matrimony, they are expected to do their utmost, till the day they die to honour and uphold what the Quran calls their firm contract, or pledge.

adornments save what is normally apparent thereof, and they should fold their shawls over their bosoms. Believers, turn to God, every one of you, so that you may prosper.

(24: 30-31)

Live with them (women) in accordance with what is fair and kind, if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something which God might make a source of abundant good. (4: 19)

Do not look at the good things which God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall be rewarded according to their deeds and women shall be rewarded according to their deeds. You

should rather ask God for His bounty. God has knowledge of all things. (4: 32)

Lord, grant us joy in our spouse and children and make us a model for the righteous. (25: 74)

Bear in mind all that is recited in your homes of the revelations of God and of wisdom. God is all pervading and all aware. (33: 34)

Let the man of means spend in accordance with his means; and let him whose resources are restricted, spend in accordance with what God has given him. God does not burden any person with more than He has given him. God will soon bring about ease after hardship. (65: 7)

If you fear any breach between a man and his wife, appoint one arbiter from his family and one arbiter from her family. If they both want to set things right, God will bring about reconciliation between them: He is all knowing and all aware. (4: 35)

To those who have attained to faith We shall unite their offspring (families) who have also followed them in faith, and We shall not let any of their good deeds go unrewarded. (52: 21)

The gist of the above teachings is motivation towards modesty and being contented with what one is blessed with. It is calling people towards seeking joy in what has been granted to them and not to look at what is given to others. There is a commandment to make the home a place for learning and intellectual development instead of following a materialistic culture. People are advised to live according to their means, which inculcates frugality. On the other hand, vying for more wealth to live a luxurious life is sometimes a cause for one of the spouses to indulge in extra-marital affairs. God promises His rewards to those who live with faith in Him and live as per His commandments.

The following teachings of the Prophet further show the way of living harmoniously with one another.

Only a man of noble character will honour women, and only a man of base intentions will dishonour them.

No believing man should hate a believing woman, for if there is any habit of hers that displeases him, there will be some other habit of hers which pleases him.

Beware, your women have rights over you and you have rights over your women.

They have found all the good of this world and the Hereafter who have a heart that gives thanks, a tongue that remembers God, a body which is patient in the face of hardships, and a wife who can be trusted to remain chaste and refrain from misusing her husband's wealth.

A woman is married for four things: for her wealth, for her lineage, for her beauty or for her piety. Select the pious, may you be blessed.

Virtuous men and women are considered a great treasure for each other. They are helpers in the management of life, trustworthy partners, and friends to each other who are available all the time. All this is possible only within the framework of a marriage. Any other arrangement does not have a congenial atmosphere for such companionship to flourish.

Virtuous men and women are considered a great treasure for each other. They are helpers in the management of life, trustworthy partners, and friends to each other who are available all the time.

A marriage to be successful requires trust and loyalty and this has to be nourished continuously by both husband and wife.

Islam regards marriage as an extremely desirable institution, hence its conception of marriage is the rule in life. Divorce is only an exception to that rule.

Islam is also very strict about preventing free mixing of men and women in an atmosphere of partying and entertainment as it is a cause for promiscuity which leads to permissiveness. In such a society one's loyalties keep changing. In a segregated society, where interaction between men and women is restricted and strictly work related one associates with one's spouse which keeps them away from forming new loyalties while in a free society one comes upon new faces every day, one better than the other. In such a scenario loyalties keep shifting.

Extramarital affairs, adultery, using women as an object of entertainment by men and women initiating the same evils from their own choice are to be looked at objectively in terms of its negative results and steps for reformation should be taken towards building a better society. In this regard the Islamic approach is to address individuals to change their mind-set, not by holding demonstrations or protests. "Win the mind and you will win the battle". After all it is a group of upright individuals who make an upright society. □



Islamic Spirituality

*Islam is a scheme of spiritual development.
Its goal is to establish direct communion
between God and man
in order that man may become
the recipient of divine inspiration.
In such a religion
it is moderation
which is of the utmost importance,
not extremism or fundamentalism
It is peace
which is of the utmost importance
and not violence.*

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



TURNING TO GOD AT TIMES OF CRISES

EVERY individual faces crises in life, sometimes big and at other times small. It is thus of relevance to every person to know how to manage these crises. The only successful way of dealing with such situations is that whenever one has these experiences one should turn to God and entreat Him to resolve it.

This teaching has been stated by Ali ibn Abi Talib in these words: "Goodness lies in whatever happened." That is, one should consider every situation that befalls one as coming from God and thus one must develop acceptance for it. The same lesson has been expressed in a Persian saying: "If the enemy is strong, the saviour is stronger."

The truth is that everything that happens in this world has been directly brought about by God Himself. The circumstances in which one finds oneself have been put in place by God. The role of the individual lies in either giving a positive response or a negative response to the situation he is confronted with. If a person responds positively he does so to his own credit while if he reacts negatively he discredits himself.

The right course of action for a person in such a situation is to refrain from behaving impatiently and continually pray to God for a better outcome. □

A PHENOMENON OF DEGENERATION

Prophetic Model or Communal Model

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was an upright man, one who had surrendered himself to God. He was not one of those who associate partners with God. (QURAN 3: 67)

THIS verse does not seek to clarify which religion the Prophet Abraham followed. Rather the purpose of this verse was to dispel the claim of the groups of people who considered the Prophet Abraham as their elder and believed that they were following his religion.

These groups, in their period of degeneration, had developed a self-styled version of the original religion brought by Prophet Abraham. These people were in reality following a self-styled model of the Abrahamic religion and were wrongly attributing it to the Prophet Abraham. This way they were trying to portray that the religion which they were claiming to follow was the same religion that the Prophet Abraham had originally brought.

The tendency of associating with the Prophet only in name develops in a community in the later periods of its degeneration in order to provide religious justification for its communal behaviour.

When a community undergoes degeneration, it develops the above kind of psychology. There is no exception to any community as regards this principle. In the present times, the Muslim community is going through a similar phase of degeneration. They have created a self-styled edition of God's true religion which had been originally revealed to Prophet Muhammad.

Their self-styled version of religion is based on the communal model and not the prophetic model. Only in name have the Muslims attributed their religion to the Prophet, although in reality the present formulation of their religion has got nothing to do with him. This tendency of associating with the Prophet only in name develops in a community in the later periods of its degeneration in order to provide religious justification for its communal behaviour. The purpose of such tendency in a community is to portray its communal conduct as prophetic conduct. □



CAN THE UNIVERSE HELP A SEEKER REACH THE TRUTH?

Spiritual Lessons from Nature

GOD created a perfect and complete world as an eternal abode for man called Paradise. Then, He wanted to know who was worthy of inhabiting that eternal world. For this purpose, He created the time-bound and imperfect abode in which we are now living. This life, therefore, is only a test. Man is constantly under the observation of his Lord. With every utterance and movement, man is writing his own eternal destiny. One who, during his pre-death period proves deserving through his conduct will in his post-death period, be rewarded with admission into the perfect world of Paradise. Others, however, will be flung into the universal junkyard, that is Hell, condemned for eternity. So, they will lose both the worlds, the present incomplete world as well as the next perfect and everlasting world.

God has revealed Himself in two books—the Quran and the universe. The Quran is a literal version of God’s word, while the universe, or nature, is a practical demonstration of it. These two are the basic sources of spiritual inspiration for a man who seeks to live a life according to the divine scheme. This dual source of divine inspiration is mentioned in the Quran in the following verse:

It was God who raised the heavens with no visible supports, and then established Himself on the throne; He has regulated the sun and the moon, so that each will pursue its course for an appointed time; He ordains all things and makes plain His revelations, so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord. (13: 2)

The universe is a manifestation of the attributes of Almighty God. It is a source of spiritual nourishment for those who want to lead a divine life on earth.

So, the Quran is like a guidebook. It prepares the mind so that one may properly understand the universe and live in it as desired by God. A true believer (*momin*) has precisely such a prepared mind. When he sees the universe with its various parts functioning in an absolute coherent manner, he spontaneously says: “There is no god but one God!” and when he examines it, he will find that there are so many complex happenings in its vastness. Nevertheless, he finds that every part of the universe is highly predictable. With this discovery, he realizes that it is as if God

was suggesting that he himself should have a predictable character. When he observes that the various parts of the universe function with absolute harmony, he realizes that, in like manner, he should live in complete harmony with society, without hatred or malice towards anyone. When he sees the events of the universe always proceeding towards a meaningful result, he realizes that man's life, too, must have a meaningful end. Thus he exclaims:

Lord, You have not created all this without purpose. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the fire. (QURAN 3: 191)

God has revealed Himself in two books—the Quran and the universe.

The Quran is a literal version of God's word, while the universe, or nature is a practical demonstration of it.

In brief, the universe is a manifestation of the attributes of Almighty God. Hence, it is a source of spiritual nourishment for those who want to lead a divine life on earth. For them, the whole universe becomes a great means of attaining spiritual perfection. This spiritual development continues incessantly throughout their earthly life. As the ultimate result of this life-long developmental process, they attain that degree of spirituality, which the Quran calls the *Rabbani soul*. It is such as these who, in the life Hereafter, will be told by their most compassionate Lord:

Enter the Garden! No fear shall come upon you nor shall you grieve.

(QURAN 7: 49) □

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SIR SYED AHMAD KHAN'S LEGACY

Problems or Opportunities

TODAY, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) is highly acclaimed in all circles, be they religious or secular, as a pioneer reformer of the Muslim nation. But, in his own times, he was branded as heretic, an enemy of the Muslim community and an enemy of Islam.

What is the reason for the difference in past and present attitudes? It is simply that those who nowadays extol his virtues, do so in retrospect, having had the opportunity to see the results of his guidance, whereas his own contemporaries were so lacking in foresight that they could not imagine any good arising from his teachings. This has been the fate of every reformer. There is no revolutionary who has not suffered from the shortsightedness of his contemporaries and who has not, as a result, had to face stiff opposition. Even the prophets were not spared this fate. It is only when the reformer's efforts ultimately bear fruit that people begin to sing his praises.

Sir Syed lived in the days of British rule in India—a period looked upon to by all senior religious leaders as an age of slavery. All the leaders of that time hated the British. In their view, British rule afforded no possibility of Muslim progress.

However, Sir Syed's thinking was totally different. He discovered favourable aspects of those same British rulers who were regularly depicted as the enemies of Islam. In the 'slave nation,' as Muslim intellectual would have it, he pointed out that certain freedoms did exist.

If there are problems, there also exist opportunities side by side with them. Ignore the problems, feed the opportunities, and by availing of opportunities, build your life.

What did his pointing out of freedom in slavery really mean? It meant that even under the political subjugation of the British, Indians still had educational and economic freedom. Notwithstanding the political problem, the country still offered them the opportunity to carve out an honourable, affluent life by working in non-political fields.

The opponents of Sir Syed, on the other hand, concentrated on the problem of British usurpation to the exclusion of all else. In their eyes, no progress could be made unless British rule came to an end. But with his deeper insight, Sir Syed saw that if there were problems, there also

existed opportunities, side by side with them. In very simple terms, he gave the people a viable formula:

Ignore the problems, feed the opportunities, and, by availing of opportunities, build your life.

In Sir Syed's time, even those who had eyes failed to see the wisdom of this dictum. But now, after the experience of a hundred years, even sightless people can see that Sir Syed's way was the wisest and most appropriate.

In Sir Syed's own time, his approach had appeared to be one of cowardice and inaction. But its subsequent results showed its wisdom, and what its potential had been for positive action. In fact, it was the only possible strategy to adopt. Had his advice been heeded in the initial stages, the Muslim condition would certainly have been very different from what it is today.

According to the system devised by nature itself, problems in this world are always followed by opportunities.

But the inability to learn from the past is an ever-present human weakness. Hence the prevalence today of the same shortsightedness as existed in Sir Syed's time. People, of course, have now begun eulogizing the Sir Syed of the past, but if anyone speaks of applying Sir Syed's solutions in the present, they again turn hostile to him as his own

contemporaries did.

The most pressing reality of this world is its competitiveness. In such a set-up, it is inevitable that one group or the other will be left behind. This state of affairs has existed since the days of Abel and Cain (the sons of Adam), and it will continue to exist till Doomsday. This system, created by God Himself, will never change.

What needs to be done in this world of competition is not to keep protesting against the prevailing circumstances, but to make a careful study of them. Instead of reacting against the way things are, some method of adjusting to realities must be sought. Sir Syed's formula is the key to such an adjustment.

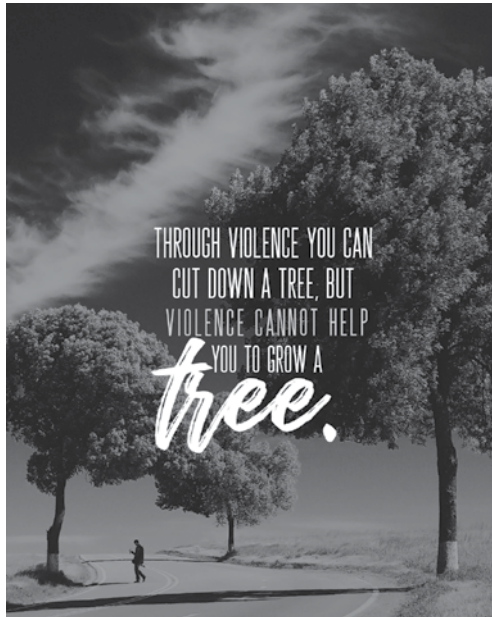
This world, being one of competition, is bound to be problem-ridden. It has been so throughout the ages and it is still so today. But it must be borne in mind that problems stem from nature's own system and not from the oppression and prejudice of others. What is even more

important to grasp is that according to this system devised by nature itself, problems in this world are always followed by opportunities. Given this state of affairs, both reason and wisdom make only one demand:

Ignore the problems; avail of the opportunities.

This is the only way to succeed in this world. Whenever an individual or a group has achieved success in this life, it has been done by adhering to this principle. Those who attempt to fight problems are more likely to fail than succeed, while those who avail of opportunities have every chance of doing well for themselves. There is no other path to self-improvement in this world, either in India or in any other country. And what holds true for the present, holds equally true for the future. □

The inability to learn from the past is an ever-present human weakness.



TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



ISLAM AND PEACE

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

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

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

Islam aims at making all individuals peace-loving to the ultimate extent. That is why we are enjoined to greet one another by saying

'Assalam-u-Alaikum' that is, peace be upon you. According to another saying of the Prophet, the best Islam is to greet everyone you come across, whether or not you are acquainted with the person. (*Fath ul-Bari*)

The frequent reiteration of this phrase 'peace be upon you' is in fact an external manifestation of the desire for peace within. Islam wishes to inculcate this feeling within every individual so that he become a true lover of peace to the point that this feeling starts welling up in his heart, finding expression whenever he meets a person.

Islam enjoins us to establish peace even at the cost of unilateral sacrifice and patience.

Islam is a peace-loving religion from beginning to end. And it is but natural that it should be so, as all the best results it aims to achieve, can be achieved only when an atmosphere of peace is maintained at both national and international levels. This path of peace is followed by the entire universe. It is known as the law of nature, which is imposed upon it by God. Whereas man has to adopt the path of peace of his own free will. This has been expressed in the Quran in these words:

Do they seek a religion other than the religion of God, when everything in the heavens and the earth has submitted to Him, willingly or unwillingly? To Him they shall all return. (3: 83)

When peace is the religion of the entire universe, it should, therefore, be the religion of man too, so that, in the words of Jesus Christ:

The will of the Lord may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

(Matthew 6: 10)

In a similar vein, the Quran tells us that:

The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outpace the day: Each floats in [its own] orbit. (36: 40)

When God created heavens and the earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan. Peace is no external commodity to be artificially imposed upon man. Peace is inherent in nature itself. The system of nature set up by God already rests on the basis of peace. If this system is not disrupted, it will

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

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

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

The path of peace is followed by the entire universe. It is known as the law of nature, which is imposed upon it by God. Whereas man has to adopt the path of peace of his own free will.

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

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

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

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

To sum up, Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic root of Islam is '*silm*' which means peace. The Quran states: '... and Gods calls to the home of peace' (10: 25). It is thus God's will that humankind should jointly establish a society of peace in His world. Peace is basic to all religions. Let us all strive then to establish peace in the world, for that is the bedrock on which all human progress rests. □

A GOOD SOCIETY

Towards Communal Harmony

A GOOD society is the cherished ideal of every human soul. But a consensus has yet to emerge about what constitutes a good society. This is undoubtedly one of the most complex questions facing us today.

It would be no exaggeration to say that three major initiatives, designed in their separate ways to offer a solution, have been utter failures. A hundred years ago it was generally assumed that the setting up of a national government would provide the answer. It was felt that it was foreign rule which was responsible for the rot that had set in society, and that indigenous rule alone could set matters right. We did finally succeed in establishing a national government in 1947, but it failed to yield the desired result—a good society.

Similarly, the initiative which led up to home rule, i.e. the non-violent movement started seventy five years ago by Mahatma Gandhi, did not usher in any utopian ideal. It had come to be assumed that once the principle of non-violence became the mainstay of Indian politics, it would automatically be put into practice in society. But this transference of a principle from the political to the social sphere did not take place. We may have been successful in launching a political movement based on non-violence, but we were to find that it took more than earnest enunciation of the principle of non-violence to build a good society.

If individuals are reformed, society follows suit. And if individuals degenerate, society too goes into a decline.

The third initiative, carried out after independence, was the attempt to bring about a good society by legislation. There are now scores of laws aimed at social reform, each social evil having several specially framed laws to itself. But this multitude of laws has done little to bring a good society into existence.

Our basic shortcoming is to think purely in terms of systems. This has caused us to devote all our attention to overall social reform, at the expense of the more worthwhile reform of individuals. Over a period of a hundred years, all the major movements launched in our country have been system-based, rather than individual-based.

The individual is the primary unit of society. If individuals are reformed, society follows suit. And if individuals degenerate, society too goes into a decline. That is why our best efforts should centre on the individual, who is, after all, the basic building block of society. The day we reform individuals in their thousands and tens of thousands we shall have set ourselves well and truly on the path of successful social reform.

The solution to our problems lies in uniting in spite of our differences. The need of today is to hold dialogues. Serious minded and influential people from all communities should participate in this dialogue. Its goal should be the securing of peace on the basis of purely non-political grounds.

Dialogue is not a meeting of rivalry but is a brotherly meeting. Such noble tasks are performed by rising above the defeat-victory psychology.

The representatives of all communities should hold discussions with open hearts. They must strive to put an end to controversial situations on their sides and they should discover a common basis by adopting which both communities can live together as good neighbours.

A dialogue of this kind is exactly in accordance with the Islamic *Shariah*. The Hudaibiya peace treaty in Islamic history is an instance of a successful dialogue of this nature. After the

Prophet's emigration in AD 622, the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims had considerably deteriorated in Arabia. A number of battles and skirmishes ensued, walls of prejudice and hatred barred one another from coming closer.

Finally, Prophet Muhammad was forced to stay for about two weeks at Hudaibiya near Makkah in AD 628. Here began negotiations with non-Muslim Makkah leaders. And then according to most of their conditions, a peace treaty was signed between Muslims and non-Muslims known as Hudaibiya Treaty in Islamic history.

If such a dialogue is held with full justice and sincerity, a new chapter will be opened in the history of India. It is at this point of inter-community relationship where the history of India is standing still. Once this problem is solved and the relations between communities improve, nothing else will come in the way of India's progress.

The dialogue, if it has to succeed, should not take the form of polemics. They should not become spokespersons of their respective communities during the discussion. What should be uppermost in their

minds is larger national interest and the path of improvement for all communities.

All parties will have to commit themselves to differentiating between issues and non-issues; that they will not hold any matter as an issue of prestige; that they will not adopt the way of claim and counter-claim; that they will speak only with the result in mind; that their way will be one of impartiality; that while pressing their demands they will also be willing to concede; that while taking from others they will also be willing to give.

The solution to our problems lies in uniting in spite of our differences.

Dialogue is not a meeting of rivalry but is a brotherly meeting. Such noble tasks are performed by rising above the defeat-victory psychology. Its aim is to solve the matter and not confound it. The feeling at work behind dialogue is one of reconciliation and not of rivalry.

Dialogue means an attempt to solve controversial matters through negotiation rather than through confrontation. If a dialogue is started with this spirit, its success is certain. The door to progress of our country is barred. And a dialogue keeping this spirit in view can surely open the closed doors provided it is conducted with true spirit. □



THE ANTIDOTE

Overcome Depression with Hope

EVERY DAY the media reports news of suicides. A common observation from these reports is that, it is only very rarely that a handicapped person kills himself. Most of the people who die by their own hands are physically quite healthy. There are many reasons, however, for their taking the extreme step of suicide; failure to gain admission to post-graduate courses, or to secure a good job after completing a university education, postponement of promotion, inability to marry the person of one's choice, depression due to various other social factors.

Most of these people had everything in their favour, including good health. They lacked none of the necessities of life. But because one thing—which seemed of great importance to them—eluded their grasp, they fell prey to such an overwhelming sense of frustration that they decided to end it all.

Because the present has not been blessed with abundance does not necessarily entail that the future will not change for the better.

One thing—the greatest thing in the world—was absent from all of their lives: *hope*. Man lives on hope. Where it evades him, life appears so meaningless that he sees no sense in continuing with it. That is when he takes his own life.

All who commit suicide make the mistake of looking only at the present and not at the future. Because the present has not been blessed with abundance does not necessarily entail that the future will not change for the better. If a man contemplating suicide were instead to turn his attention to exploiting his own capabilities and seizing whatever opportunities came his way, it is very likely that he would soon come to possess all those things, absence of which makes him so miserable today.

The man whose gaze is fixed on the present may find much to depress him. It is only when he looks to the future that he will find the courage to act. □



THE MESSAGE OF THE QURAN

Acknowledge Your Lord

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL. Praise be to God, Lord of Creation; the Compassionate, the Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgement. You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help. Guide us to the straight path. The path of those whom You favoured; not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray. (QURAN 1: 1-7)

It befits man to commence any task in the name of God, his Master. God is the source of all mercy and compassion. His blessings are continually descending upon creation. To commence any undertaking in His name is to pray that God, in His infinite mercy, should come to one's assistance and bring one's work to a successful conclusion. This is man's acknowledgement that he is God's servant, and also brings divine assurance of success.

The Quran has a special way of expressing a believer's inner sentiments in the best possible words. The invocation of God and the opening chapter of the Quran constitute a supplication of this nature. The feelings which are naturally aroused in one after discovering the truth are given the form of words in these lines.

Man's being is a great gift of God. It is so precious to him that he would never exchange his eyes or hands, or any part of his body, for any kingdom of the world. Even this basic gift of God is more precious to man than a kingdom is to kings. Similarly, when man looks at the world around him, he cannot fail to notice God's power and mercy in evidence everywhere. With what care God watches over the world! Everything has been made to fit in with man. This observation shows one that the great cosmic machine cannot be in vain. One realizes that there must come a day when the ungrateful will be taken to task and the grateful rewarded. One spontaneously entreats God in words to this effect: "Lord, You are Master of the Day of Judgement. I have submitted to You and humbly seek Your help; have mercy on me. Lord, show us the path that is, to You, the true path. Enable us to tread the path of Your chosen servants. Help us to avoid the path of those who have gone astray, and the path of those who have incurred Your wrath due to their obstinacy."

God requires His servant to live his life with such feelings and emotions. The opening chapter of the Quran is a miniature picture of such a believer, and the rest of the Quran an enlargement of this picture. □

TWO CATEGORIES

Grades of Piety

PARADISE is the ultimate abode of the pious servants of God. As the Quran tells us, the inhabitants of Paradise will fall into two broad categories: the especially exalted class of good people, who are nearest to God or, *muqarrabun* (56: 11-26), and righteous people in general, who are called 'Companions of the Right Hand'. Magnificent rewards are reserved for the first group—the foremost in faith, while rewards of a general nature are reserved for the other group.

What will be the basis of the difference between the two categories? The Quran tells us that those who gave of their wealth before the Prophet's victory and who took part in the initial struggles are of a higher standing than others who did not. They have a 'degree greater' (57: 10). The difference does not relate just to the period in which they lived, but to the nature of their faith. This is what will determine the final categorization.

When truth enters the phase of victory and influence, it no longer assumes the shape of a mere intellectual exercise, but rather becomes a tangible reality, visible to one and all.

Truth stands by itself, in abstract form. At the very outset, it is like an ideology, which is supported solely by the force of logic. Later when truth enters the phase of victory and influence, it no longer assumes the shape of a mere intellectual exercise, but rather becomes a tangible reality, visible to one and all.

In the initial stages, truth is recognizable only through verbal argument, whereas, in the later stages, concrete evidence is there to support it. In the first phase, as soon as a man accepts the truth, he becomes a stranger among his own people. One who accepts it in a later phase immediately becomes respected and popular. In the first phase a man stands to lose, whereas in the second, he is the gainer. In the first phase one is likely to sink into oblivion, whereas in the second, one scales the heights. It is the difference made by the kind of sacrifices one has made, which decides whether one is to be placed in the first or the second category. □



DISTINCTIVE QUALITY

Science and Reason

ISLAM as presented in the Quran and demonstrated by the Prophet possesses the quality of being in accordance with human reason and human nature. Rational thinking and academic progress do not clash with the message of Islam. That is to say, at no stage does Islam and reason contradict one another. No believer is faced with the problem of accepting religious dogmas at the expense of science and reason.

Acknowledging this characteristic of Islam, George Bernard Shaw writes:

When the Mohammedan reformation took place, it left its followers with the enormous advantage of having the only established religion in the world, in whose articles of faith, any intelligent and educated person could believe.

It is due to this characteristic of Islam that people have been attracted towards Islam before as well as after the age of science. The modern educated mind when presented with the different aspects of Islam as it is, acknowledges that it is according to nature and appeals to one's reasoning.

The modern educated mind when presented with the different aspects of Islam as it is, acknowledges that it is according to nature and appeals to one's reasoning.

What George Bernard Shaw has termed an enormous advantage for the Muslims of the first phase, exists equally for the believers of today. But it is not being availed of. Instead of presenting the message of Islam peacefully, Muslims are putting up a violent and unfriendly image of Islam. If people create obstacles by resorting to general ill-will, there will be a misunderstanding of the religion. When this obstacle is removed, the Islamic goal of living in harmony society will be fulfilled. □

Being patient

Through patience you can turn your fortune around; without patience you can expect nothing but failure.

DARE TO TAKE RISKS

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

WALTER WRISTON, former chairman of Citicorp, said, "Failure is not a crime. Failure to learn from failure is." When Jim Burke became the head of a new products division at Johnson & Johnson, one of his first projects was the development of a children's chest rub. The product failed miserably, and Burke expected that he would be fired. When he was called in to see the chairman of the board, however, he had a surprising reception. "Are you the one who just cost us all that money?" asked Robert Wood Johnson. "Well, I just want to congratulate you. If you are making mistakes, that means you are taking risks, and we won't grow unless you take risks."

No one knows for certain what factors will be conducive to the success of any venture. Given our human limitations, the only possible course is to take the initiative in spite of being unable to forecast the result.

One of the ever-present features of our present world is that no one knows for certain what factors will be conducive to the success of any venture. Given our human limitations, the only possible course is to take the initiative in spite of being unable to forecast the result. This is the risk factor.

No doubt there are apprehensions about taking risks. But in the present world nothing can be achieved without a certain amount of daring. As the proverb says,

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. □



God at all times

It is possible for man to contact God at any moment. This concept gives one unshakable confidence and a source of help in every situation.

A GRAND ADVENTURE

Sacrifice Before Success

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success. —Sir Ernest Shackleton

THIS is an advertisement published in *The Times, London, 1900*, by Sir Ernest Shackleton. He required a team for exploration of the Antarctic. As a result of this advertisement Shackleton's epic voyage to within 100 miles of the South Pole (1907-1909) took place.

No commercial stunts or slogans, just a few lines of type pulled applications that far exceeded the requirement, so Shackleton had to make a selection from among them in order to form a team.

It was neither the subject of the advertisement nor the personality of the advertiser which produced such a great response; it was the nation to whom the appeal was made. It is a historical fact that during the 19th century, the British nation was the most ambitious and adventurous in the world. On account of this, it established an empire which extended over such a vast portion of the globe that the sun never set on it. Indeed, it was not only for the Antarctic exploration, but for any adventure whatsoever, that this nation could produce highly dependable people. Nothing great was ever accomplished without making sacrifices.

Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS) through its publications such as the monthlies *Spirit of Islam* and *Al-Risala*, breathes the same spirit as the above advertisement. Our appeal, then, is addressed to those who have the same spirit of adventure and self-sacrifice as those who responded to Shackleton's appeal. Our aim is to form a team which will set out, as Shackleton's team did, on a grand adventure requiring self-denial and courage. This team, however, will have its sights set not on any worldly goal but on an eternal cause: it will strive to communicate the true message of Islam to the people of the world. The Muslim world today is engaged in all manners of activities; but it has neglected this all-important task.

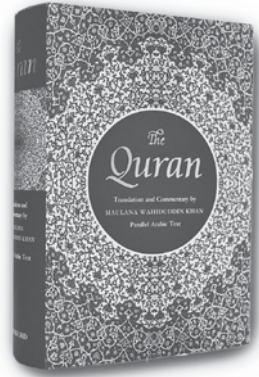
This is a mission which demands the sacrifice of life and property; it calls for suppression of desires and ambitions; it requires one to rise above the thoughts of visible gain in this world for the sake of invisible gain that is promised in the life to come, for God has promised Paradise to those who come forward to serve His cause. Eternal blessing and eternal comfort: they are there for the asking. Will anyone come forward? □

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

Alif Lam Mim Sad

This Book has been sent down to you—let there be no heaviness in your heart about it—so that you may warn by means of it and it is a reminder to the believers. Follow what has been sent down to you by your Lord and do not follow any protector other than Him. How seldom you take heed. (7: 1-3)

The Book of God is, in essence, a book of guidance. But as such it is of value only to the few who have kept their consciences alive. For the others, it amounts only to a warning of the impending grievous fate towards which they are moving because of their arrogance. The preacher of truth is concerned to see that what he sees as the absolute truth is being rejected by the majority of the people who consider it a falsehood. What is paramount in his eyes is treated by people with unconcern, as if it had no substance, as if it were completely unreal.

This is a world of trial. Here, everybody has the opportunity and the liberty to accept or reject the truth as he pleases, and even find clever words to justify his stand. But this position is a temporary one. As soon as the period of trial comes to an end, it will be revealed to all that the preacher's words were based on eternal truths; that it was sheer bias and egotism on his opponents' part which prevented them from seeing the Truth at the core of his arguments. It will become clear at that time that the arguments advanced by them to contradict the preacher's words were simply a falsification of the facts and not a form of reasoning in any real sense.

How many towns We have destroyed. Our scourge fell upon them by night or at midday when they were resting: and when Our scourge fell upon them, their only cry was, 'We were indeed wrongdoers!' Then shall We question those to whom Our message was sent and those through whom We sent it with full knowledge, We shall tell them what they did, for We have never been away from them. Truth alone will be of weight that Day. Those whose scales are heavy shall be successful, and those whose good deeds are light [in the balance] will be the ones who have lost themselves because they wrongfully rejected Our signs.

(7: 4-9)

In this world, the importance of an individual is gauged by the material splendour surrounding him, and his ability to influence people with his impressive words, and thus have a massive following. Since the preacher is not generally in such a happy position, his word is valueless in the eyes of worldly people, while the words of his opponents, who bask in material grandeur have a greater impact. But when Doomsday uncovers all the facts, the position will be just the opposite. Now, all the weight will be on the side of the Truth: Falsehood will be divested of all its arguments and will be rendered valueless.

We established you in the land and provided you with a means of livelihood there: yet you are seldom thankful. (7: 10)

Whatever God has bestowed upon man in this world has been given for the purpose of eliciting his gratitude. But this is the very thing which man does not offer to his Lord. The reason is that Satan contrives to distort his feelings and steers him away from any expression of gratitude. □



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THE 5 WHYS

Why God?

All of us have the feeling that we suffer from limitations that make us helpless. These experiences—a loss, illness, accidents, death or old age—repeatedly remind us of the fact that we are in need of a Superior Power without which we cannot go on in life. These feelings are a psychological proof of the existence of God. In this way each one of us, in our inner beings, witnesses the existence of God. The nature of every human being constantly urges them to recognize the need for God. Without God, our lives cannot be complete. Without the help of God, we cannot succeed in life.

Why Freedom?

Man has been given freedom in this world by his Creator as a test. This freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If, on receiving freedom an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, it will mean that he has failed the test. But if on the other hand, he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's will on all occasions, he will have made the right use of his God-given freedom: he will, without any compulsion, have bound himself by divine principles. One who chooses this course will succeed in the test of freedom. He will be handsomely rewarded by God as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God, he will remain in an everlasting state of bliss and blessedness.

Why Peace?

Peace is the only option for man in the world today. The greatest benefit of peace is that it opens up opportunities to the ultimate extent; whereas the greatest ill-effect of violence is that it limits opportunities. That is why Islam teaches us to avoid violence and confrontation at all costs and commands us to establish peace to the greatest possible degree. Peace enables normal relations to be established between people. Feelings of love and friendship prevail in such a situation. In a favourable atmosphere constructive activities flourish and the existing resources can be used for progress and development. A positive bent of mind will prevail which will help develop academic and intellectual understanding.

Why Tolerance?

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. When negatively affected by another's unpalatable behaviour, your mental equilibrium is upset. On the other hand, emotionally untouched by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment, you will continue to perform your work in the normal way. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances your efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it. Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

Why Hard Work?

All learning is acquired in the school of hard work; all progress is achieved at the price of unflagging effort. Perseverance is a virtue which can be practised at all times, even by one who is crippled by a disease, and even by one who had failed to get a degree from a university. Hard work, in fact, is the brightest jewel in the crown of human virtues. □



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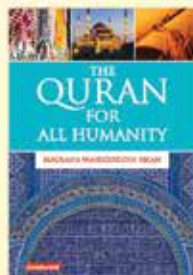
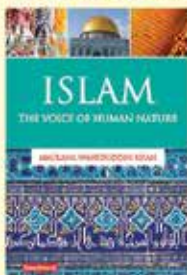
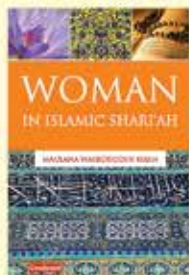
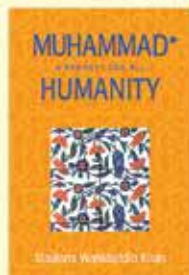
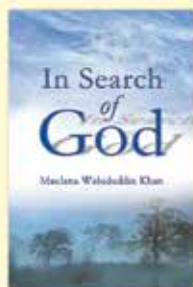
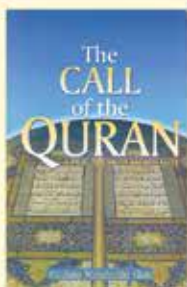
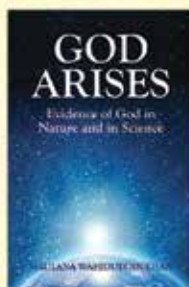
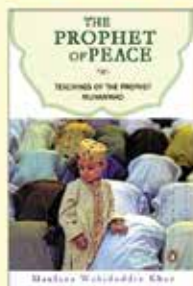
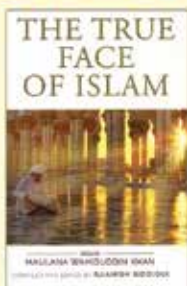
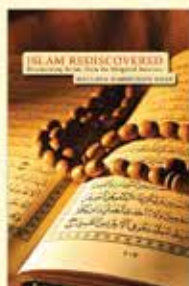
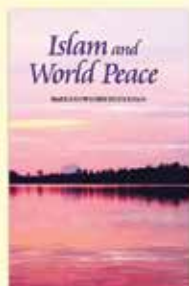
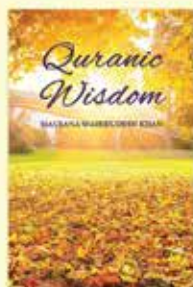
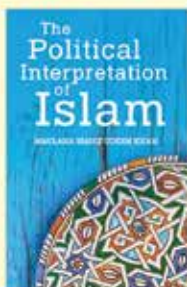
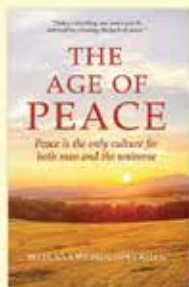
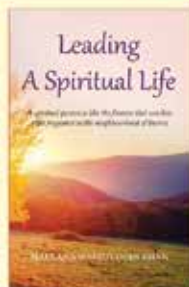
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