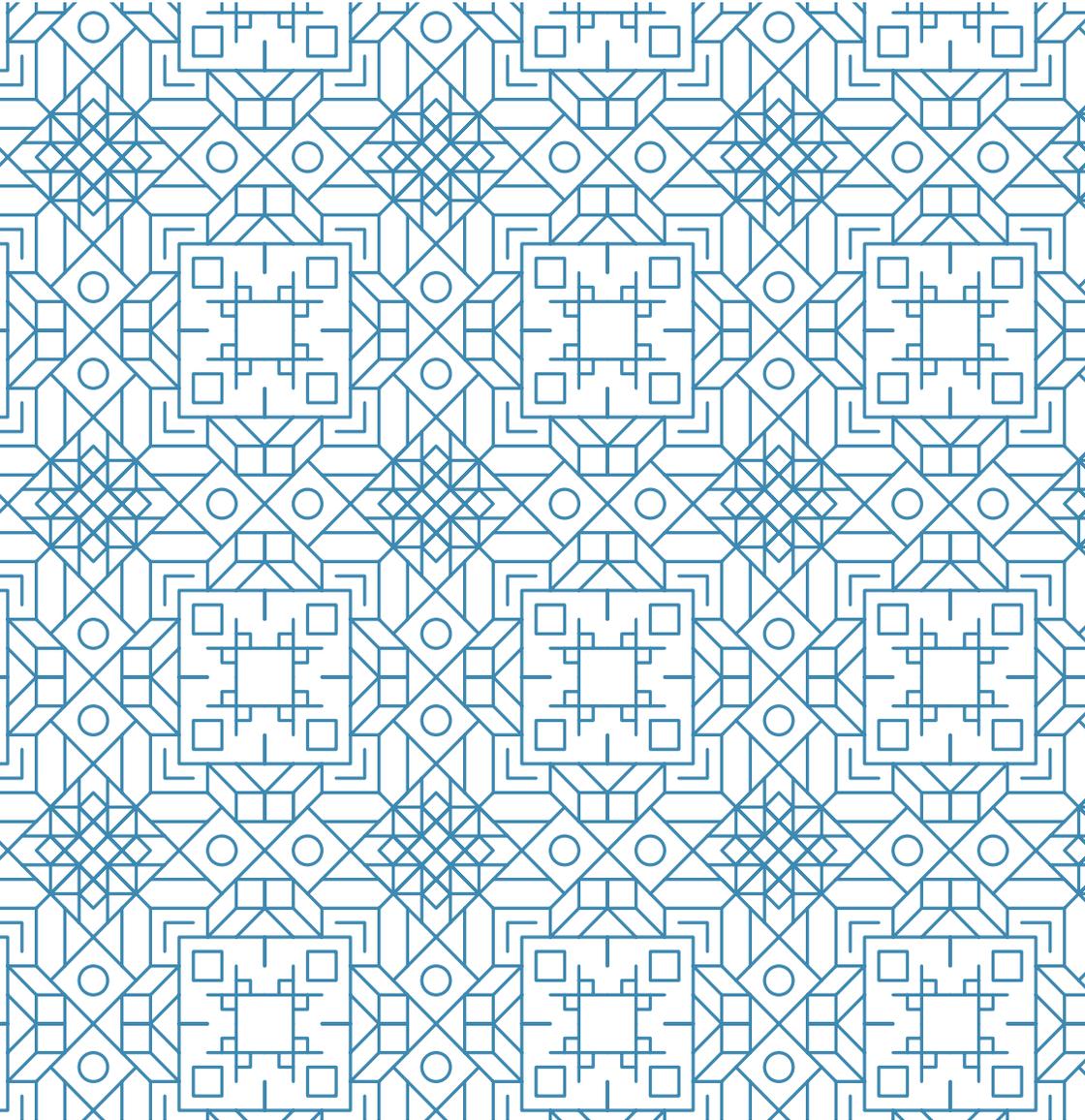


ENGLISH MONTHLY ISSUE 59 NOVEMBER 2017 ₹35

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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



**One should live as a giver, if not so
then as a no problem person.**

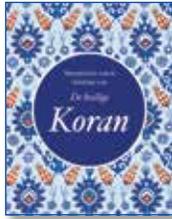
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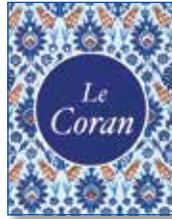
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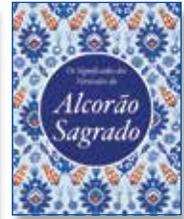
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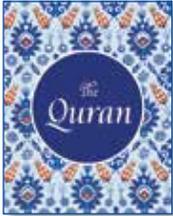
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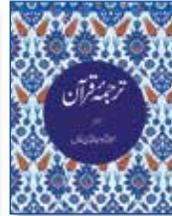
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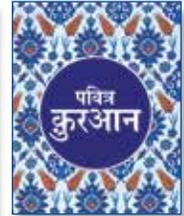
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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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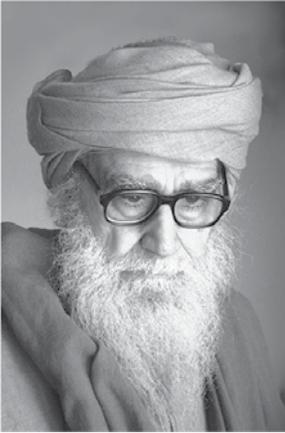
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

THE ROHINGYA MUSLIMS—ISSUE OR NON-ISSUE

FROM the ninth century onwards, Arab traders have visited the Rakhine state, formerly known as Arakan, on the western coast of Myanmar. In the 9th century, a group of them even settled there. As a result of interaction between these traders and the local population, Islam gradually spread until a large part of the Rakhine state became Muslim.

For centuries, the Muslims of Arakan lived peacefully with the rest of Burma and had no separatist tendencies. However, in 1947, certain emotional Muslim leaders tried to make a separate Muslim state out of the region where the Rohingya people lived. They described their efforts as 'self-determination'. This movement picked up in pace and many extremist Muslims took an active part in it. For the central government of Myanmar, their actions were looked upon as a revolt. In essence, it was a movement for separation from Myanmar.

Prior to the insurgency, the Rohingya Muslims had lived peacefully alongside the other citizens of Myanmar. But the emotional speeches made by the separatist leaders initiated a tendency towards separatism

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

in the Rohingya. To curb their activities, the Myanmar government took tough action and stern measures against them. According to the leaders of Rohingya, these steps by the central government were an act of “oppression”, but in the eyes of the government, this was merely retaliation. Their response was designed to bring discipline to their country.

In 1971 when Bangladesh was formed, it gave a kind of political boost to the Rohingya leaders who further intensified their separatist activities, due to which the Myanmar government also reacted more stringently than before.

The present exodus of the Muslims from Burma began after 25 August 2017 attacks by members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). They struck 30 police posts and an army base and then maintained several days of ambushes, as Myanmar security forces hit back. The army began its counter-offensive in response to this violence perpetrated by militant Rohingya.

The solution to the problem of the Rohingya Muslims is only one—that is, acceptance of reality. The Rohingya Muslims must disavow their insurgency and militant activities. They should make it known that they are a larger part of the Myanmar nation.

This is the story of the Rohingya Muslims in brief.

It was in 1966 when I was in Lucknow. I remember that one day a Muslim scholar came to me and said he was going to Burma and would I accompany him? When I asked why, he replied that a movement for the formation of a Muslim state was going on in Burma and that we too should lend our full support to it. I strongly disagreed with his suggestion. I explained to him that people who thought like him might be trying to form a state in the name of Islam but that such an act would only lead to strife. I told him that I

disapproved of their method of proceeding, as a movement that took shape in such a manner was not truly Islamic, and could only lead to conflict and dispute. I told him that I could not endorse such a cause. He became angry and left.

Since 1966, my opinion on the Rohingyas is that Rohingya Muslims are not oppressed but their case is the outcome of ill-judged political activities instigated by unwise leaders. If the whole picture were to be seen, one would arrive at the conclusion that the Rohingya Muslims are not victims of oppression, but are rather paying the price of their

own unrealistic actions carried out under the influence of misguided leaders.

Moreover, I would like to say that such a separatist movement would be unacceptable to any country, even if it were given the euphemistic name of 'self-determinism'. For example, the Muhajir leaders of Karachi once tried to make it an independent state, but the Pakistan government strongly objected to this and took very stern measures against these leaders, who had to flee the country and now live in exile.

The solution to the problem of the Rohingya Muslims is only one—that is, acceptance of reality. The Rohingya Muslims must disavow their insurgency and militant activities. They should make it known that they are a larger part of the Myanmar nation. They should rid their hearts of separatist tendencies. I am sure that the Myanmar government would then accept them, and the whole issue would be peacefully resolved.

The separatist movement has only caused a deterioration of the condition of the Rohingyas to the point of ruination, although prior to this they were living prosperously in Myanmar. Indeed, the best interests of the Rohingya Muslims lie not in wanting a separate land, but rather in living as part of the state of Myanmar. This is true both in the religious and secular sense.

In 1934 I took admission in the *Madrasah al-Islah*, an Arabic seminary in Azamgarh, for my religious education. I had only one friend in this seminary, one Abdul Rashid Rangooni (i.e. he was from Burma). He was a very decent person and had a very good opinion about Burma of his time. Judging by the impressions I received from him about the Burmese people, I would say that the blame for the later actions which were taken against the Rohingya Muslims lies not with the Burmese administration, but with the unwise Rohingya leaders who fuelled violent activities in the region. In the course of this militancy, outside leaders also participated, further worsening the situation. But I personally know that the Burmese are very good people and will certainly re-accept the Rohingya Muslims wholeheartedly, provided the Rohingyas acknowledge their previous wrong actions and remain faithful citizens of Burma.

The Rohingya Muslims should know that, in this world, friendship and enmity are both relative terms. If you offer friendship to another person, he too will definitely accept you as a friend.

The Rohingyas Muslims should know that, in this world, friendship and enmity are both relative terms. If you offer friendship to another person, he too will definitely accept you as a friend. This natural law has been stated thus in the Quran: *"Do good deeds in return for bad deeds and you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend."* (41: 34) □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

editor@thespiritofislam.org

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The greatest mark
of a lofty nature
is the ability to
set aside
grievances and
differences in order
to support another.

M A U L A N A W A H I D U D D I N K H A N

A SOUL-STIRRING REMINDER

The Final Judgement

WHEN religion becomes part of a national tradition, a new phenomenon comes into existence; ceremonies performed in the name of religion increase, but true religion disappears entirely. This is exactly the case with the Muslims today. The number of people who pray is on the increase, but there are few who really fear God. There is no lack of people who speak on behalf of Islam, but there are few who will remain silent for the sake of their religion. Everyone is sure of his own righteousness, but few acknowledge righteousness in others. There are plenty who are ready to display their piety in public, but few are really pious in private.

Muslims want to see Islam established in the whole world, but no one has time to establish it in the individual self. Everybody has huge reserves of fine words at his disposal, but few have any fine action to offer. Everybody thinks they have the keys to Paradise, but few feel the need to tremble in fear of Hell. Everybody is enthusiastic about Islam when it is embellished with material grandeur, but no one is interested in the Islam which shakes one's soul and makes one live in awareness of the afterlife. Never before in the midst of such a proliferation of religious activities has there been such spiritual bankruptcy.

According to the creation plan of God, in this world of trial every man is free. It is possible to torment one's neighbour, yet still be acclaimed for one's piety. One may be struggling for leadership, yet still be hailed as a holy crusader. One may choose to be unjust to those one deals with, yet still be invited to preside over meetings whose aim is to promote peace and justice. One may be forgetful of God in private, yet in public places be considered a representative of the divine cause. One may be totally indifferent to the plight of the oppressed, yet still find a place in the headlines as a friend of the downtrodden. One may only be spouting empty words, yet be given credit for beneficent actions.

Everybody is enthusiastic about Islam when it is embellished with material grandeur, but no one is interested in the Islam which shakes one's soul and makes one live in awareness of the afterlife.

A true believer will ponder about the awe-inspiring day when God sits in judgement. No one will be able to be defiant or proud. Those

who were loquacious in the world will be rejected by God. Those who were thought of as mighty and powerful in the world will be rendered powerless. Those who feigned piety in the world will be exposed for the impious beings they really were. People may hide behind artificial appearances in this world. They may hide behind seductive words; they may conceal their true nature behind material grandeur and splendour. But they will be denied these things in the life to come. Everyone will appear in his true garb.

A true believer will ponder about the awe-inspiring day when God sits in judgement.

Those who had been considered worthless and rejected in the world will be raised in value and accepted in God's sight. Those who had been considered weakest among people will, by the grace of God, be given great importance; it will be according to their testimony that people will be sent either to Heaven or hell. One who realizes the awe-inspiring nature of that day will suddenly be reduced to silence; worldly honour will seem to him as meaningless as worldly disgrace.

No facade, however perfect, can conceal man's true nature from God. But God keeps His superior knowledge hidden in this world and will reveal it only in the Hereafter. The scales of God will be put into place and everyone will be seen for what he is. There is no doubting the coming of that day. No one will be able to postpone it or escape from it. Wise are they who prepare for that day by placing themselves today on the divine scales of justice; for those who are placed on them tomorrow will be damned. □



Control Your Anger

A strong man is not one who overwhelms his opponent. A strong man is one who controls himself when he becomes angry.

WHO CREATED GOD?

Reasons to Believe

A COMMON argument from sceptics and atheists is that if all things need a cause, then God must also need a cause. They question, “Who made God? Something does not come from nothing, so if God is a “something”, then He must have a cause?”

Another form of the argument is: “If we believe that the universe was created by God—a Creator—then we must believe that God also has a Creator. In this way there will be an endless series of Creators. Hence, isn't it better to believe that this universe came about without a Creator?”

Such questions are inherently flawed because God, by definition, is not in the category of things that are created or caused. God is uncaused and uncreated—He simply exists.

How do we know this? We know that from nothing, nothing comes. So, if there were ever a time when there was absolutely nothing in existence, then nothing would have ever come into existence. But things do exist. Therefore, since there could never have been absolutely nothing, something had to have always been in existence. That ever-existing thing is what we call God. God is the uncaused Being that caused everything else to come into existence. God is the uncreated Creator who created the universe and everything in it.

People who reject God, however, continue to acknowledge and appreciate the universe we live in. If we can accept that the universe came about without a Creator—which in any case is not rational—then, what is the problem with accepting such a Creator (God) without a creator? If we are ready to accept and acknowledge creation or the universe without a creator, then why can we not accept a God without a creator?

God is the uncaused Being that caused everything else to come into existence. God is the uncreated Creator who created the universe and everything in it.

Direct observational evidence for a Creator is impossible like for many other scientific facts. It is neither with those who believe in a God nor with those who deny God. However, indirect evidence of God ubiquitous in nature and the universe is a valid reason and argument for belief in God. Some of those evidences are presented briefly here below.

Origin of matter, space and time

It has been established that time and space had a coincident beginning. The universe was created from nothing through or after a 'Big Bang'. The discovery of the 'Big Bang' is proof that time, space and matter are temporal and not eternal. The universe appears to be an effect and, thus, is seemingly dependent upon something outside of and beyond itself (a transcendent causal agent). The universe therefore, implies the need for a Creator or Originator outside of space-time.

Even if we refuse to accept a 'God', reason demands that we acknowledge a Prime Mover or a power that caused the universe to happen. How can we acknowledge the universe and fail to acknowledge the cause of the universe? Feigning ignorance like many people do, is turning a 'blind eye' or 'looking the other way'.

Order and design in the universe

After the Big Bang, the delicate balance of uniformity and irregularity in the inflationary expansion of the universe, the balance of matter, dark energy and dark matter that is responsible for keeping the universe stable as it expands, the perfectly tuned cosmological constant, hydrogen and carbon formation, the earth's star, the sun's luminosity, the forces and laws in nature, the value of the various constants that determine the nature of nature and a million other features of the universe demonstrate order and intelligent design.

The most elegant and simple explanation for reality is that of an intelligent mind designing a rational, ordered universe that produces intelligent beings capable of understanding that universe.

This in itself establishes direction and purpose in the formation of the universe and consequently these are evidences for a Designer, Director and Prime Mover.

Many physicists, cosmologists and scientists have acknowledged this fact. For instance, Paul Davies says, "I concede that the universe at least appears to be designed with a high level of ingenuity. I cannot accept these features as a package of marvels which just happen to be, which exist reasonlessly. It seems to me that there is a genuine scheme of things—the universe is 'about' something."

Fine tuning for life

Our unique planet Earth has been fine-tuned and custom-designed for intelligent life—the earth's atmosphere, the earth's magnetosphere,

earth's geophysical history, water, vegetation, its position in the solar system, its galaxy, its orbit, its axis, its satellite and a million other features are evident to prove this.

How can such a formidably complex system of the universe come about without a creative intelligence behind it? How can we refuse to believe in an Organiser of an organised universe? The most elegant and simple explanation for reality is that of an intelligent mind designing a rational, ordered universe that produces intelligent beings capable of understanding that universe.

God especially designed and crafted, through miraculous means, planet earth, so that it would support life and human beings. The earth is a product of divine design.

Physicist Lawrence Krauss' in his book, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing*, treats the question of "First Cause" as a serious argument against God:

Ultimately, many thoughtful people are driven to the apparent need for First Cause, as Plato, Aquinas, or the modern Roman Catholic Church might put it, and thereby to suppose some divine being: a creator of all that there is, and all that there ever will be, someone or something eternal and everywhere.

Nevertheless, the declaration of a First Cause still leaves open the question, "Who created the creator?" After all, what is the difference between arguing in favour of an eternally existing creator versus an eternally existing universe without one?

Krauss's argument isn't a very good objection because God, unlike the universe, is the sort of First Cause that accounts for His own existence. God is an infinite being, the Creator of time and space. It makes sense to say that He always existed (since He's necessarily infinite). But the universe isn't infinite, it's bound by time and space, and it had a beginning.

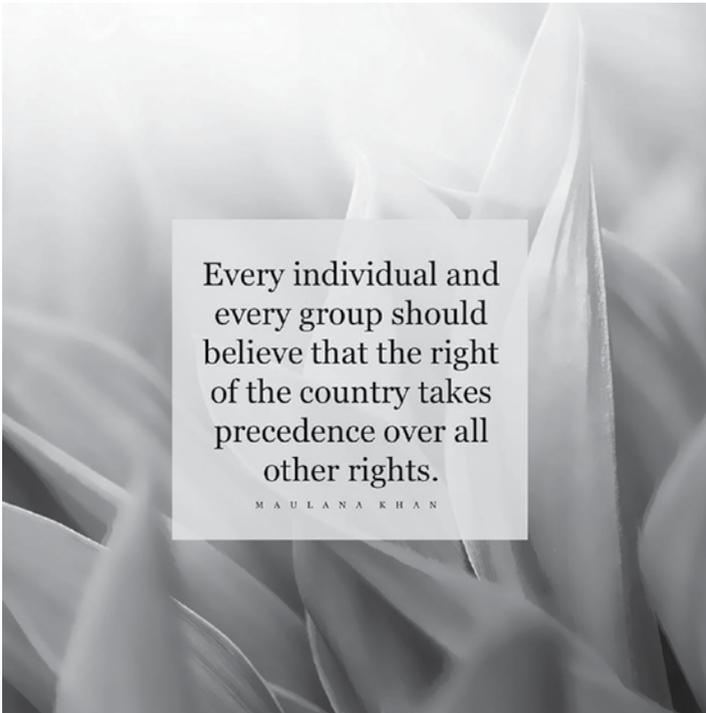
Now, what if the questioner accepts that the universe had a beginning, but not that it needs a cause? Nevertheless it is self-evident that things that begin have a cause—no one really denies it in his heart. All science and history would collapse if this law of cause and effect were denied. Also, the universe cannot be self-caused—nothing can create itself, because

The universe cannot be self-caused—nothing can create itself, because that would mean that it existed before it came into existence, which is logically not possible.

that would mean that it existed before it came into existence, which is logically not possible.

As Aristotle cogently argued, there must be a reality that causes but is itself uncaused (or, a being that moves but is itself unmoved). Why? Because if there is an infinite regression of causes, then by definition the whole process could never begin. And nothing is explained.

In conclusion, the choice we have is not between 'the universe with God', and 'the universe without God'. This is not an option. The real option is between 'the universe with God' and 'no universe at all'. We cannot opt for the proposition "no universe at all", since the universe is too obvious a fact for us to deny its existence, therefore we have no option but to accept the proposition of "the universe with God." □



A WORLD OF SECOND BESTS

Realistic Approach

ACCORDING to religious tradition, God created the human being and settled him in Paradise. But after some time, man committed a grave error and was sent down to earth.

In the beginning, God wanted to settle the whole of the human race in Paradise, but after man sinned, God changed His plan. Thereafter, only selected individuals would be allowed to enter Paradise. According to this story of creation, we lost our initial advantage and since then only the second best has been available to us. This story shows us the right direction for our lives.

The human being is an idealistic creature by birth. Everyone tries to find his ideal goal, one that is the very best for him. But it is a fact that no one succeeds in doing so. If this is the case, what should we do? The only course open for all men and women is to accept the second best as the only available choice. This is the only way to have a tension-free life in this world.

If you are not ready to accept the second best and you would prefer to keep straining for the ideal, the result could well turn out to be disastrous. For example, a certain lady, who was working in a multinational company, failed to get promoted for some reason. She fell into a state of deep frustration and ultimately committed suicide. There are many such cases of people failing to find what they think is optimal, and then they become deeply depressed.

This kind of depression is due perhaps to a lack of awareness of the law of nature. If the lady in question, for instance, had been aware that according to the law of nature, only the second best was attainable for her and that she (or others like her) had already achieved that, the realization would have given her contentment and a tension-free life. This principle applies not only to individuals but also to nations.

The best principle to adopt in life is: Try, try by all means to achieve the very best, but when you feel that you can only get the second best then

The only course open for all men and women is to accept the second best as the only available choice. This is the only way to have a tension-free life in this world.

accept it gracefully. Because if you remain in denial, and try to achieve the acme of perfection, that will only land you in a worse predicament.

The same applies to nations. This is a competitive world and this could be a formidable obstacle to everyone getting the very best in life. In such a situation, the only safe option is to accept the second best. When you try to have the very best, then you are compelled to engage in continuous confrontation. The only risk-free option is to accept the second best. So be a realist. If you try to get the very best, it means your approach is unrealistic, but if you accept the second best, it means that you have opted for a realistic approach. And in this world of competition only a realistic approach can save you from disaster.

In this world of competition only a realistic approach can save you from disaster.

In short, the very best might be unachievable, while the second best is always within your reach. It is a fact that everyone is an idealist by birth, but you have to rein in your idealism and be content with the second best. As a matter of practicality, there is no other option for you in this world. This is the story of our lives: We tend to lose whatever is second best on account of just one reason, and that is, our futile pursuit of the very best. □



*Man sees the
phenomena of the
universe and
depends upon it for
livelihood, yet he
fails to wonder at
its perfection.*



INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT IN RELIGION

Right Criterion

ONE principle of scientific study has been described in the Arabic words *tu'rafal ashya' bi azdadiha*, that is, 'things are known by their opposites'. It is through comparison that we understand things the way they truly are.

If applied to the study of a terrorist mind, it will raise the question, why are such destructive characters like terrorists born to religion and not to science? When we ponder over this question, we will arrive at a very important reality.

There are two basic branches of knowledge. One, the science of matter, and the other, the science of mind. All branches of knowledge stem from these two basic branches. The material, visible world is studied under the rubric of the science of matter, while the unseen world is studied under the rubric of the science of the mind. The science of matter is based on observation and experimentation. Any knowledge acquired through direct or indirect observation and experimentation becomes a part of the science of matter. It is diametrically opposite to the science of the mind where everything is based on speculation. That is why the branches of knowledge related to the science of matter are called exact sciences, whereas the branches of knowledge related to the science of the mind fall into the category of speculative sciences. There is a known and established way of settling differences in the sciences of matter. That is why such differences do not escalate into violence. However when differences develop in the field of the sciences of the mind, it is not possible to reach a consensus. This is the reason differences escalate leading to clashes and confrontation.

For instance, a common man sees the sun and the moon in the sky. It appears to the naked eye that the sun and the moon are both equal in size. The observer then forms the opinion that the sun and the moon are equal in size and that there is no difference between the two. However, modern astronomical instruments soon convince him that the sun is far bigger than the moon. In this way, any doubts or differences of opinion that anyone might have had about the size of the sun and the moon immediately come to an end. This is how differences are resolved in all the branches of the science of matter, paving the way for its disciplines to make commendable progress.

Let us take an example relating to the science of the mind. A certain person says that just as God is an omnipotent being with the power to work miracles, similarly, those pious individuals who have gone to their eternal rest too have comparable powers. In this way, he accords a similar status to both God and to those regarded as saints. Then another person claims that all power lies with God, no living or dead person is invested with any kind of power. Now the views of both differ and they start arguing to justify their respective stands. But their differences cannot be resolved because there exists no such clear-cut criterion like a telescope or a microscope which may decide the matter. Thus, the science of matter produces unity of opinion while the sciences of the mind are reduced to a jungle of confusion.

Let us compare two examples to understand this issue. In olden times, astronomers had different views regarding the solar system. Some were of the opinion that the earth was the centre of the solar system and the sun revolved around it, while others were convinced that it was the other way round—the first group supported the geocentric theory and the second the heliocentric one. Through observation and experimentation, a consensus was finally arrived that the heliocentric theory was correct.

According to Islam, the human mind is created for eternity. It has the capability to think and form opinions freely. The Islamic concept of accountability is related to this freedom of thought.

Now let us consider the other example. For thousands of years, man has been debating the question of what happens to him after death. Some are of the opinion that death is the very end of a man, while some others feel that there is life even after death. No unanimity has ever been achieved on this matter.

It has been a struggle with this seeming lacuna in the sciences of the mind for many years. There was a strong desire to know whether just as there was a clear criterion in the sciences of matter which is sufficient to settle differences, was there any criterion in the sciences of the mind which could settle differences similarly?

A study of the Quran offers the criterion. Due to this aspect of the Quran it is called the standard or *Muhaymin*. (5: 48)

There are three major categories of the sciences of the mind—psychology, spirituality and religion. All three departments differ from the departments of the sciences of matter. There is no external criterion to give a concept an absolute form or a final shape. The Creator can

only give a criterion. To illustrate this point let us take the three fields of psychology, spirituality and religion then understand them one by one.

Psychology is the study of human mind. However, so far, psychology has not been able to understand the human mind completely. The reason is that psychology does not have one definitive guide book. This fact has been explained by Alexis Carrel in his book *Man, the Unknown*.

Among the many schools of psychology six are regarded as the major ones. But the dominant school of thought is the one attributed to the famous American psychologist John Bradus Watson (1878-1958). The theory devised by Watson is called behaviourism. Today, although behaviourism is not much in favour, it is still taught as a concept under classical psychology. The essence of behaviourism is that man is not made by nature, but by nurture. It holds that it is environmental events that form man and not his mind. This view is totally opposite to the Islamic concept of life. According to Islam, the human mind is created for eternity. It has the capability to think and form opinions freely. The Islamic concept of accountability is related to this freedom of thought.

But man's position becomes totally different from that of animals. As regards man, this concept of behaviourism is based on a misunderstanding. It regards a temporary phase to be a permanent phase. It is true that when a child is born it is influenced by its environment, but this influence is superficial not real. If these layers are removed, its original personality will be revealed just as it was at the time of its birth.

The teaching of the Prophet will help us to understand this phenomenon. The Prophet said that every child is born according to nature, then he gets conditioned in the environment he lives in. There are different kinds of pressures in the environment which influence his personality. This influence is called conditioning and at times can be so strong as to suppress man's true personality. He then deviates from his original nature that he is born with. However man possesses will power. His independent will power is a part of his personality even after superficial conditioning. That is why it is always possible for man to de-condition and return to the original nature he was born with. The believers of behaviourism did not understand this

True spirituality is that which leads man to intellectual development. It is based on taking lessons from God's signs spread in the universe (Tawassum) (15: 75) which means converting every material event into a spiritual lesson.

reality. The Quran uses the word *Tazkia* which means purification. This refers to the removal of the superficial conditioning to reveal man's true nature. Then the Quran gives the good news that "Paradise is for those who purify themselves". (20: 76)

The second case is that of spirituality. Spirituality has existed in the world in one form or the other for around five thousand years. But studies tell us that, despite such a long period, spirituality has not been able to make any noteworthy progress. It may be observed that compared to spirituality, materialism has made tremendous progress within a very short period of time. The goal of spirituality also, was small. Spirituality for all practical purposes became a means of easing tension. In today's world, people usually live in tension and stress. In the sphere of self-centred spirituality, people use different techniques to stop the thought process which they think de-stresses them. If one were to think deeply, one will realize that it is only a very temporary relief.

The Quran has this explanation to offer to its sincere reader. It says that man is bestowed with the capacity to think and this is what distinguishes him from other creatures. True spirituality is that which leads man to intellectual development. It is based on taking lessons from God's signs spread in the universe (*Tawassum*) (15: 75) which means converting every material event into a spiritual lesson.

The third case is that of religion. The history of religion is as old as the history of man. However, religion has been reduced to a stagnant state. It could not match the tremendous progress made by material sciences. This was because within a few decades, degeneration set-in amongst the followers. Etiquette, rituals and form came to be regarded as religion and intellectual exercise was replaced with a set of rituals.

People regard rituals as synonymous with religion today. That is why people fail to receive any benefit from religion. The reason terrorists are surfacing from within religious circles is that religion has degenerated into stagnant rituals. The thinking of religious people is not being shaped by intellectual aspects of religion but it is being formed by other factors like national and communal issues which have nothing to do with God's religion. Therefore if we are seeking to change the situation and help people live God-oriented lives which is marked by a well-wishing attitude towards humanity.

We must revive true spirit of religion. The source of true religion is not a concept or a group, but the divine message of God and the teachings of His Prophet. □

PUTTING AN END TO SUPERSTITION

Islamic Revolution

AMONGST many others, a basic change brought about by the Islamic revolution was similar in some respects to the scientific revolution of modern times; that is, the rooting out of superstitious thinking and the general prevalence of thinking based on facts.

The continued existence of nature worship and superstitious thinking in ancient times was due to the ignorance of human beings regarding nature. Ancient man used to judge natural phenomena by their appearance. Astounded by the power of nature and without an understanding of natural phenomena, he began to hold them sacred. It was this awe surrounding nature that gave rise in ancient times to many stories, now called myths. On the basis of pure conjecture, man developed many suppositions which, in the course of time, became widespread beliefs, rooted in the human imagination.

In every age man has had a set of beliefs which moulded his thoughts and deeds. In ancient times this set of beliefs was entirely based on myths. The 7th century AD saw a change in this pattern of thinking. Now importance was attached to facts instead of superstition. This revolutionary shift from superstition to facts can be traced as a contribution of the message of Islam. Anyone who understands the pristine message of Islam from the Quran and the teachings of the *Hadith* will realize that the prevalent superstitions in the society were understood as false and were shunned by those who accepted the facts presented by the Prophet. How did this happen? By the simple fact that the message of Islam presented the concept of God being the Creator of everything and that nature was to be explored and God had to be worshipped. So, the awe surrounding nature was replaced with a spirit of research and enquiry.

The Quran repeatedly enjoins man to reflect on the objects of the universe thereby inspiring one towards scientific enquiry.

In the wake of this revolution all those things which were held sacred earlier were relegated to the status of mere creatures. They were there to be harnessed by man and not for man to be enslaved by them. They were entirely helpless beings, mere objects and not the masters of man. Earlier as nature was placed upon a pedestal of sanctity it had completely

discouraged an investigation of it. Without such investigation, scientific and industrial progress was simply not possible. Here what Islam simply did was to separate the Creator from the creation and gave a message that nature was meant for us to make use of and to benefit from it.

In this way, it has happened that the phenomena of nature, looked upon by ancient man with reverence, have now become objects of investigation. The Quran repeatedly enjoins man to reflect on the objects of the universe thereby inspiring one towards scientific enquiry. This is no simple matter. The act of pondering over the nature of the phenomena of the universe has been encouraged in Islam. This thinking results in putting things in the universe to research and investigation.

The following example will illustrate the difference between science and superstition presenting to the discerning reader the message of Islam on the issue.

One of the phenomena of nature in our world is the eclipse: sometimes the sun going into eclipse and at other times the moon. Today we have discovered the astronomical laws governing these phenomena but, in ancient times, man was ignorant of what these phenomena and their causes actually were. Strange and wonderful stories on the basis of conjecture were, therefore, concocted to bring them within the realm of human understanding

The Chinese account of the eclipse and its 'remedy' is one of the more fanciful.

When an eclipse occurred, the Chinese thought that the sun was being swallowed by a huge dragon. The whole population joined in making as much noise as possible to scare it away. They always succeeded! (Ian Nicholson, Astronomy 1978)

Considering their 'success,' it is little wonder that the Chinese used the same tactics with happy conviction on subsequent occasions. It is now common knowledge that the dates and durations of such eclipses are entirely calculable, just as the course of Halley's Comet was entirely predictable.

It was during this age of superstition that Islam had the following teaching about eclipse. It so happened that the death of the Prophet's son Ibrahim, at the age of one and a half coincided with a solar eclipse. The ancient belief still being prevalent that eclipses were caused by the death of an important person, some of the inhabitants of Madinah began spreading the story that the eclipse was due to the death of the Prophet's son. The Prophet, on hearing this, gathered his people

together and explained the truth to them. This account of his is set forth in two of the authentic books of *Hadith, Muslim and Bukhari*:

After praising and glorifying God he said: "Eclipses of the sun and moon are not due to the death of any human being; they are just two signs given by God. When you observe an eclipse, you should pray to God, praise Him, ask for His mercy and blessings, and give something in charity."

The scientific way of thinking of the modern age initiated in the early period of Islam, continued as a process, spreading from one country to another until it reached the west where it saw its culmination in the western world. In respect of its reality, this scientific thinking is a revolution desirable by Islam itself. The Quran and the teachings of the Prophet contain suggestions towards science and encourage its adherents to undertake scientific pursuits.

The Prophet mentioned these suggestions as signs of God in the universe, and the Quran has the following to say about these signs in order to know Him as He is in the unseen:

We will show them our signs in the universe and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth. (41: 53) □



A Dangerous Attribute

*If you fail to immediately correct
a wrong way of behaving, it is very
possible that you will develop a taste
for this behaviour.*

DEATH'S LESSON

For those still Alive

AFTER the death of a person the body is washed and wrapped up in a new sheet of cloth. People say the prayers that are recited on such occasions, and then, lifting the corpse on their shoulders, they head to an empty grave. They lower the body, with great respect, into the grave and cover it up with mud. When one witnesses such a scene one should ponder over the question as to "Why has Islam ordained such honourable treatment for a dead body?"

The human body is useless after death, but is accorded a respectable status and buried with full dignity. Burying it in mud is a commandment directed not at the dead body, rather its significance is for those who are still alive. Through a dead person an important lesson is conveyed to living people—that they, too, will meet the very same fate one day. In this way, the living can see themselves in the form of the dead. They can experience death before death arrives.

A man who was a living being like any of us is now dead. Just the other day, he was walking, talking, seeing, and doing so many things, but now he lies perfectly still. The value he commanded in people's eyes has suddenly been completely wiped out. God uses this event to convey a lesson about life to others.

Through a dead person an important lesson is conveyed to living people—that they, too, will meet the very same fate one day.

When a Muslim dies, people wash and clean and clothe a corpse with great care and carry it to the grave that awaits it. And when they lower the corpse into the grave, each of them takes a handful of mud and puts it in the grave. They do this three times. While doing it the first time, they say *Minha khalaqnakum* ("From the earth We have created you").

When throwing in the mud the second time, they say *Wa fiha nuidukum* ("And We return you to it"). And the third time, they say *Wa minha nukhrijukum taratan ukhra* ("And from it We shall bring you forth a second time").

This putting of mud in the grave three times is the climax of the whole event. In this way, it serves to remind us of the reality of man and of our final destination in the Heerafter. □



GOODNESS IN EVERY SITUATION

Win Win

Strange are the ways of a believer, for there is good for him in every situation. And this is not true for anyone except for a believer. If he has an occasion of happiness, he is grateful, thus this happiness becomes good for him. If a difficulty befalls him, he keeps patience over it, and so the difficulty becomes good for him. (Sahih Muslim)

THE conduct of a person other than a man of faith is very different. If he experiences an occasion for happiness, he is filled with pride. On the other hand, if he faces a difficult situation, he falls prey to despair. Both these conditions are equally unwanted. In contrast to this, if a man of deep faith experiences joy, his heart is filled with gratitude. And if he is faced with a difficulty, he accepts it, regarding it as God's Will. In the light of this, reflect on this Quranic verse (89:15-16):

As for man, when his Lord tests him, through honour and blessings, he says, "My Lord has honoured me," but when He tests him by straitening his means of livelihood, he says, "My Lord has disgraced me."

In this world, what is truly important is not whether the circumstances of your life are good or bad. What is of real importance is that no matter what the conditions, you should draw sustenance from them for establishing a close bond with God. Every experience in life should become a means for you to grow closer to God. You should continue to draw divine food from every situation. You should discern God's glory in every observation of nature and the universe. Every pleasant experience of life should remind you of God's mercy, while every bitter experience should lead you to grow in God-consciousness. Failure should lead you to remember God, and success should take you closer to Him. □



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



BREAKING A PERSON'S HEART

THE petal of a flower and the feather of a bird are very beautiful, but at the same time both are very delicate. Merely touching them with the hand can cause a disturbance in their pleasing structural form. This phenomenon is an indication that the Creator of the petal and the feather possesses subtle aesthetic tastes. He desires that human beings should behold and appreciate His beautiful creation, but not trample on or treat it destructively. The Creator wants man to draw nourishment from nature for his soul, but at the same time He does not want man to pass on his filth and dirt to the constituents of his natural environment.

In this world created by God, there is something even more fragile and delicate than a petal or a feather, and that is, the human heart. There is nothing in the world tenderer than a person's heart. Hence, someone who breaks the heart of another person will be considered guilty of committing a grave crime in God's eyes. A person who tramples on and crushes with his feet an artist's splendid artwork will have, according to the artist, committed an enormous crime. But guiltier of a greater crime is one who tramples on another person's heart, destroys his peace of mind and indulges in activities aimed at jeopardizing his work.

Those persons who witness these happenings but do nothing have an equal share of responsibility as the one who is directly guilty of wrong behaviour. They do not take any action to stop the oppression by the wicked nor do they expend their capabilities in defending the ones who are being wronged.

Most guilty of crime are those who take up leadership roles in the name of bringing their community out of its state of oppression, however, when an individual from their community presents himself with an issue, they make no effort to alleviate his difficulty. In their speeches, these leaders claim that when a helpless member of their community raises his voice for help, other people of the community should not rest content unless they have relieved him of his hardship. However, when a grieving person actually does cry out towards them for help, they have no urge to provide support and comfort to him. □



Way of the Flower

Man should live in the world in the way that the flowers do—giving off a sweet fragrance even to those who give nothing but abuse.



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TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



THE POWER AND PRICE OF PEACE

ACCORDING to a *Hadith*, "God grants to gentleness what He does not grant to harshness." That is to say, peaceful activism is distinctly superior to violent activism. There is nothing mysterious about the point made in this *Hadith*. This is a simple and a well-known fact of life. In a situation of war and violence, feelings of hatred and enmity flare up between the two sides and, in the process, the existing resources are destroyed. People from both sides get killed and the entire society turns into a jungle of negative feelings. It is quite obvious that in such an atmosphere no constructive and consolidated work can be done. There is nothing to be achieved in war and violence, save death and destruction.

On the contrary, an atmosphere of 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 development or other activities. A positive bent of mind will prevail which will help develop academic and intellectual undertakings.

The greater ill-effect of war is that it limits opportunities whereas the greatest benefit of peace is that it opens up opportunities to the ultimate extent. War invariably results in further loss, while peace invariably results in further gain. That is why Islam teaches us to avoid war and confrontation at all costs and commands us to establish peace to the greatest possible degree.

Everything has a price attached to it. You can acquire a particular thing only when you are ready to pay for it. In this world, you simply cannot get what you want without paying its appropriate price. This holds true for peace as well. Peace, too, has its price. An individual or group can obtain peace when one pays its price. What is the price of peace? It is to tolerate loss.

This fundamental truth is narrated in the Quran (2: 155-56) in the following words:

We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives and crops. Give good news to those who endure with fortitude. Those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return,' are the ones who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord: it is they who are on the right path!

This verse of the Quran tells us about a basic fact of life. According to the law on the basis of which this world has been created, it is necessary that people will face different kinds of loss. Sometimes, they will face challenges from others. At other times, they may face economic loss. Sometimes, they may become victims of some accident or the other. At other times, they may be denied what they consider to be their right. Every person undergoes such unpalatable experiences sometime or the other in their lives. This is entirely in accordance with the law of nature. In such a situation, if people do not tolerate their losses, it will easily result in violence. If they accept and tolerate their losses, it will enable them to live in peace.

To patiently accept and tolerate loss is not tantamount to defeat. Rather, it is something that requires great courage and boldness. It is to voluntarily accept reality. It is to remain aware that even though one may have suffered some loss, one still has many resources left, on the basis of which one can rebuild one's life.

If one keeps patience and tolerance in the face of loss, one saves oneself from losing balance. Despite a temporary setback, one is able

An atmosphere of 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 development or other activities.

to still retain the ability to view things in a balanced and pragmatic way and to make new life-plans. Forgetting what one has lost; one is able to carry on with one's purpose in life on the basis of what one still has. One saves oneself from hopelessness, and with wisdom, is able to surge ahead in life.

In life, after every evening a new morning dawns. This world is full of potentials and possibilities. Here, if you lose one opportunity, you can gain another one. If you miss one step, another step leading to a new door, opens up to you. In this way, if a certain plan fails, one can always make a new plan to carry on with life's purpose.

To patiently accept and tolerate loss is not tantamount to defeat. Rather, it is something that requires great courage and boldness.

The fact of the matter is that in this world bad news always comes along with good news. Every accident silently gives us the good news that we must not be disheartened, and that instead, mustering our courage, we should search for new opportunities. If we respond in this positive way, then nature itself gives us the good news that our loss is not permanent. It tells us that we can very soon rebuild our lives—and in a better way than before. It conveys to us that we can convert what seems to be our defeat into a new and brighter future.

Those who do not accept loss fall prey to negative thinking and so make their lives into an enormous burden. In doing so, they themselves become a burden on others. On the other hand, those who respond with patience and courage can build a new mansion on the ruins of the past. They search and discover a new dawn after a dark evening, in the light of which they carry on with their life's journey unimpeded. □



Universe with God

The choice for us is not between a universe with God, or a universe without God. It is rather between a universe with God, or no universe at all.

THE SPIRIT OF SALATH (PRAYER)

Purification

ACCORDING to a verse in the Quran, in the Hereafter those who are cast to Hell will be asked: "What has brought you into the Fire of Hell?" and they shall reply, "We were not among those who prayed." (74: 42-43)

In order to understand the Quran, it is important to bear this rule in mind: Some verses of the Quran help clarify other verses. Therefore, to understand the above verse, consider another verse of the Quran, which says: "Paradise is for those who purify themselves." (25: 76). This means only those people will be held deserving of Paradise who undertake the purification of their personalities in this world. This process of purification is called *tazkiya*.

Salath (Prayer) Helps in Tazkiya

When we reflect on both these verses, we realize that *salath* which does *tazkiya* of the believers, and not merely a spiritless *salath* is what will take one to Paradise. If one performs *salath* with spirit, only then will one's *salath* serve to purify one's inner being. If *salath* is performed merely as a set of rituals, it will certainly not have any impact on a person's character or personality. What actually is the spirit of *salath* or *salat*?

To understand this we need to consider what is recited during the five-time daily prayer that Muslims are required to observe.

Three phrases are recited often. These are: *Alhamdulillah rabbil alameen*, *Allahu Akbar* and *As-salam alaikum wa rehmatullah*.

These three phrases represent the spirit of *salath*, and they can be rephrased as: *Hamd* (praise of God), *Takbir* (glorifying God) and *Salamati* (peace and security). A believer who incorporates these three in his life, in the true sense, will be able to purify his personality such that he may be held deserving of Paradise.

Praise of God

When we offer prayer, in every unit of prayer we read *Surah Fatiha*, which is the first chapter of the Quran. The *Surah Fatiha* begins with the words: '*Alhamdulillah rabbil alameen*' meaning, 'All praise be to God, the Lord of the universe'. Generally, people have translated *hamd* as 'praise'. However, the best meaning is given by the scholar Hamiduddin

Farahi as *shukr*. Thus, in the very beginning of *salath*, a worshipper acknowledges that all gratitude is for God alone.

Our entire life is full of things which call for thankfulness to God, we could begin with our own faculties of speech, hearing, thinking etc. Hearing for example is possible because of the presence of air, which acts as a medium for the transfer of sound waves. In the absence of air, sound could not have travelled and we would have not been able to hear.

Those who truly believe that God is the greatest will have an outburst of thankfulness for Him and will mention His glory and greatness when they speak, instead of speaking about the complaints they have of others.

For further thankfulness one could remind oneself of modern means of communication, which has made it possible to be heard and to hear others from distant locations. Both these phenomena are a source of offering of gratitude to God. It implies that God not only provided air to enable communication between people who are near to each other, but also made nature in such a manner that we could develop technology through which the entire globe can potentially listen to what one has to say. Even kings in earlier times did not have the luxury of speaking and being heard by all: they had access only to people physically near them.

Since the twentieth century, Muslims kept lamenting about the loss of the Abbasid, Ottoman and Mughal Empires. The focus of Muslims since these empires collapsed has been to regain their lost glory. But in reality, they could not regain what they had lost. A more grave aspect of this tendency in Muslims was that as a result of their desire to get back what they lost, they started living in a sense of deprivation. Instead of living a life of gratitude and thankfulness to God for what they already have, Muslim psyche came to be marred by the feeling of loss and deprivation.

So although Muslims observe *salath*, and utter the phrase *Alhamdulillah rabbil alameen*, in reality they do not live with the spirit of true gratitude. A person who yearns after something he does not have and fails to regain it will naturally lament over it and become sorrowful, instead of living with the feelings of thankfulness to the Creator. Though Muslims perform the prescribed five-times *salath*, in truth their lives are devoid of the spirit of thankfulness or *shukr*.

The Prophet had predicted this scenario of the Muslim community. He had once said: "A time will come when mosques will be full [of people], but devoid of guidance." (*Mishkat al-Masabih*)

When the worshippers live in a sense of loss, how can they at the same time also have feelings of gratitude for the Creator?

Glorifying God

During *salath* the phrase *Allah Akbar* is repeated several times. It means 'God is Greatest and His Glory is foremost.' In reality, however, Muslims do not live in the glory of God. Often Muslims are heard saying: 'Israel and America are oppressing us. Or so-and-so is conspiring against us'. Those who utter these words are considering 'Israel' or 'America' to be greater than God.

The greatest harm done by the feeling of loss is that it makes one devoid of the glory of God. While the complaint that one has is apparently against a human being, in reality the one who complains is silently declaring that he is bereft of the acknowledgement of the glory of God. Those who truly believe that God is the greatest will have an outburst of thankfulness for Him and will mention His glory and greatness when they speak, instead of speaking about the complaints they have of others.

*Paradise is a place
where we will get to
see and talk to God.
Paradise is a place to
meet God.*

Peace and Well-Wishing for Others

Salath ends with the worshipper turning to his left and right and uttering the words: *As-salam alaikum wa rehmatullah* (May peace and the blessings of God be with you!) Who are we saying this to? The worshipper says this to all human beings who reside on earth. The worshipper addresses all mankind: 'O people! May there be peace and mercy on you! My heart is full of well-wishing for you!'

But again if you read the articles penned by Muslims or attend any of their meetings, you will realize that their speech is filled with the hatred for other human beings. In mosques, Muslims call down God's curse on others—an act which is entirely and highly un-Islamic.

Therefore it is only *salath* performed in the right spirit that will take a person to Paradise. This is the *salath* which inculcates in the worshipper true thankfulness to God, makes him live in the glory of God, and lastly develops in him feelings of peace, compassion and well-wishing for fellow human beings.

Salath—A Training Course in Character Development

When Umar was the second Caliph and the Muslims had to engage in battle with the Sassanid Empire, there was a covered area for holding prayer in congregation. On one of the days before the battle, Caliph Umar led the prayer of all the Muslims present in this hall. The Iranian General at that time was Rustam. When he saw the Muslims offer prayer, he remarked: "We cannot win against Umar, because he teaches character and discipline to his people!" Rustam realized that *salath* was something that inculcated high character in those who observed it. This is the true *salath*, while the one that is performed only as a set of rituals and which does not impact one's real life cannot be the *salath* that takes one to Paradise. *Salath* initiates a process in one's life which leads to the development of such character and personality which make one worthy of inhabiting Paradise.

According to a *hadith*: "One who observes the morning (*fajr*) prayer will come under the guarantee of God." (*Sahih Muslim*). What is the meaning of this *hadith*? How can one who prays in the morning be guaranteed God's protection?

The fact is that *fajr salath* is the beginning of the process of character building. When you read *salath* in the morning it is like taking a pledge to instil the spirit of *salath* in yourself. You take a pledge to follow this spirit during the rest of your day. You decide to live in gratitude for God, undertake the process of *tazkiya*, aiming to purify yourself of negativities and becoming a positive person. Then the prayers offered during the day—*Zuhr* and *Asr*—are meant as mid-day reviews of the pledge you had undertaken in the morning. In companies and organizations, there is an annual review system in which they make an analysis of the profit or loss they may have incurred during the year. God has instituted a mid-day review system so that during the day a believer can review what he had promised to God in the morning.

Salath is not about repeating empty rituals or forms, rather it is meant as character-training for the individual.

At the end of the day, when one prays at night (*Isha*), one engages in introspection. The night prayer is meant for the believer to introspect and understand whether he really spent his day in the spirit of *salath*; whether he adhered to the lessons he had learnt in the morning prayer. When the believer wakes up in the morning on the next day, he observes the same course. Thus, *salath* is not about repeating empty rituals or forms, rather it is meant as character-training for the individual.

What is Paradise?

A verse in the Quran tells us about the people of Paradise: "Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, the witnesses, and the righteous. What excellent companions these are!" (4: 67). Paradise is a society of people of the best character from the whole of human history. The present world is meant for training in the development of a character that makes one deserving of Paradise.

At one place in the Quran it is said that Prophet Moses urged God in these words: "My Lord, show Yourself to me so that I may look at You." (7: 143). These words of Moses speak of the desire of every human being. Moses said these words on behalf of all humanity. Every person has the deep yearning to see God, the Creator who created them. Just as a father longs to see his son, similarly a human being has an even greater wish to directly observe and speak to the One who created him. Paradise will be the place where this desire in every human being shall be fulfilled. The Prophet said that the people of Paradise will be enjoying the blessings God bestowed on them. Then God will manifest Himself and on beholding God's glory and majesty, they will forget all the blessings they had been enjoying.

Paradise is a place where we will get to see and talk to God. Paradise is a place to meet God. This is a place where people will meet God, reside in His neighbourhood and have the companionship of the best people from all of human race. This is why the Quran says: "And vie with one another for your Lord's forgiveness and for a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been prepared for the God-fearing." (3: 133)

Paradise has been promised to a person who prays (*salath*). We should know that if our prayer has to make us eligible for the Paradise described above, it has to be a prayer which elevates the person to the loftiest level of character befitting to be in the neighbourhood of God. □



EVERY SITUATION IN LIFE IS A TEST

Comforts and Hardships

A COMMON phenomenon observed when people get palatial homes built for themselves is the display of words put up in frame outside their home: "This is by the grace of my Lord." Apparently, the owner means that the house he possesses is a blessing bestowed on him from God or a gift given to him by God. But this is not the correct or complete meaning of these words.

The phrase "this is by the grace of my Lord" has appeared in the Quran in Chapter *al-Naml*. These are the words spoken by the Prophet Solomon. The context given in the Quran is that when the Queen of Sheba entered Solomon's royal court, he demanded the *jinns* of his kingdom to bring to him her crown all the way from Marib in Yemen to Jerusalem in Palestine. One of the *jinns* who was under Solomon's command accomplished this feat in the twinkling of an eye. When Solomon saw this extraordinary feat of the Queen's crown being so swiftly placed before him, he exclaimed: "This is by the grace of my Lord, to test whether I am grateful or ungrateful."

(27: 40)

The real gift that God bestows on a person in the present world is, therefore, the ability to show gratitude when in comfort and to remain patient when faced with troubles.

If we keep all of Solomon's words before us, we will realize that he had taken God's "grace" as a means of putting him to the test.

According to him, this special blessing of God upon him was to test if he would acknowledge His bounties and humble himself before God, or if he would become arrogant and haughty.

In truth, believers will receive God's gift in the world Hereafter. Whatever a person gets in this world is only meant to test him; its real purpose is to test a person and not to bestow anything upon him. From this perspective, the comforts and luxuries of this world are, in essence, the same as the difficulties and hardships—both situations are meant to examine a person. One is required to be grateful to God when he enjoys well-being and to exhibit patience when he experiences problems.

The real gift that God bestows on a person in the present world is, therefore, the ability to show gratitude when in comfort and to remain patient when faced with troubles. □

ABSTAINING FROM BASENESS

Noble Character

A BELIEVER makes mistakes, but does not stoop to baseness. Mistakes are often made in sudden fits of emotion, but, when the passion cools, one becomes conscious of the error and feels ashamed of one's own wrongdoing. The next step is to seek out the wronged person, beg forgiveness and make amends. If compensation can be given, well and good. If not, one should pray: "Lord forgive my mistake and accept this salutary prayer from me on behalf of the person I have wronged!"

A person with a mean character would behave in quite a different way. A person who has stooped so low feels neither shame nor any urge to make amends for what has passed. In fact, he would be happy to see his opponent suffer more. If he has a grievance against someone, he is not satisfied merely with a severance of relations, but does his utmost to lay that person low. He makes slanderous accusations and concocts vicious plots against him. He does not just point out a person's errors; he seeks to discredit that person completely and isolate him from the rest of society. He tries to undo whatever his enemy has accomplished and bring all his gain to nought. This shows a lack of magnanimity and, as such, is unbecoming of a believer.

Refusal to admit one's faults is contemptible. It is likewise despicable to favour one's own kith and kin, while treating others with disdain.

Refusal to admit one's faults is contemptible. It is likewise despicable to favour one's own kith and kin, while treating others with disdain. A base person cannot rise above envy and vindictiveness. Such a person is far away from God. □



Reason for Failure

The cause of man's failure often lies in his failure to recognize major threats and his determination to concentrate all his efforts on minor dangers.

REALIZATION OF TRUTH

Mirror of Reality

THE human mind is a mirror of reality. Everyone knows the function of a mirror: it reproduces anything that is placed in front of it. The image it produces corresponds exactly to the reflected object, leaving nothing out and adding nothing of its own. So it is with the human mind. When reality is placed before this mirror, it is reproduced exactly. The image of truth which is reflected in the human mind is exactly the same as that which stands before it. It recognizes the truth for what it is, and accepts it as such.

This being the case, why is it that truth comes before many people, yet they fail to accept it? The answer to this question is that it is always personal attachments and commitments that prevent one from accepting truth. There can be no sound reason for denying the truth; those that do so are motivated by their attachment to something else which prevents them from attaching themselves to truth.

The only ones who can succeed in the search for truth are those who forsake everything else and give themselves up to it entirely when it comes before them.

If a third object is placed in between a mirror and the thing that is meant to be reflected, then the image that will be obscured. So it is with truth and the human mind. If something else comes in between the two, then the image of truth that should be cast on to the mind becomes obscured. It is essential, therefore,

that nothing should be allowed to come in between oneself and truth: there should be nothing to prevent one from accepting it. This is a basic precondition for realizing the truth, yet it is one that people are usually unable to fulfil. All too often they let something else come in between themselves and the reality that has been placed before the mirror of their minds.

Sometimes it is people to whom one is attached who come in the way of truth. Sometime it is self-interest, or some other commitment. In every day and age people have let some unconnected thing come in between themselves and truth, with the result that they remained bereft of what should have been lodged in their souls.

Abu Jahl was a major opponent of the Prophet Muhammad. He failed to accept the truth due to concern for his own power and position. Taif was

one of the places that the Prophet visited in his early days in Makkah. The people of Taif refused to accept the truth that he presented before them because he appeared to them to be an insignificant person. How they thought, is truth being taught by one who does not rank high among the mighty of this world?

The reason for them doing so was their superiority complex. The Roman Emperor Heraclius showed clear signs of recognizing the truth. Yet he did not accept it, the reason being that he did not want to become isolated from his people: In each case the truth had been recognized. There was no sound reason for these people's denial, only their blind commitments to something else which they could not break away from.

Truth only accepts one who has accepted it without any reservation, who has given himself entirely up to it. Those who are attached to something else which they cannot break away from can never find truth, for they cannot give it the attention it demands. The only ones who can succeed in the search for truth are those who forsake everything else and give themselves up to it entirely when it comes before them. □



**IGNORANT
IS HE WHO
ALWAYS KEEPS
COMPLAINING**

M A U L A N A K H A N

WHEN A NATION SUFFERS DECLINE

Changelessness

IN ancient times when the Jews underwent political decline, they decided to fight to regain their lost political power. At that time, in the words of the Old Testament, their messenger Jeremiah admonished them: "Say to the king and the queen mother, 'Humble yourselves and sit down, for your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory.'" (Jeremiah 13: 18)

Here, the example of ancient Jews has been taken to point out that it is a common phenomenon that communities see a period of ascendancy, but after that also experience a state of decline: after enjoying political supremacy, they have to face a period of political subordination. This happens according to the law of nature. When a community or nation goes through this transition, it is required of it to accept the change. Refusing to accept this state of affairs may lead it toward further destruction.

Change in society is initiated by making efforts to bring about change in the individuals who constitute the society, and not by trying to magically cause change to happen at the level of the whole society at once.

The truth is that political power is not the monopoly of any particular group. A certain group receives political authority due to its necessary competence. So long as a nation has the required capability, it will remain in possession of political power. But if it loses this capability, its grip over political power will loosen and go into the hands of another. When this happens, it is essential for the nation to work to regain its lost competence instead of engaging in futile conflict with others.

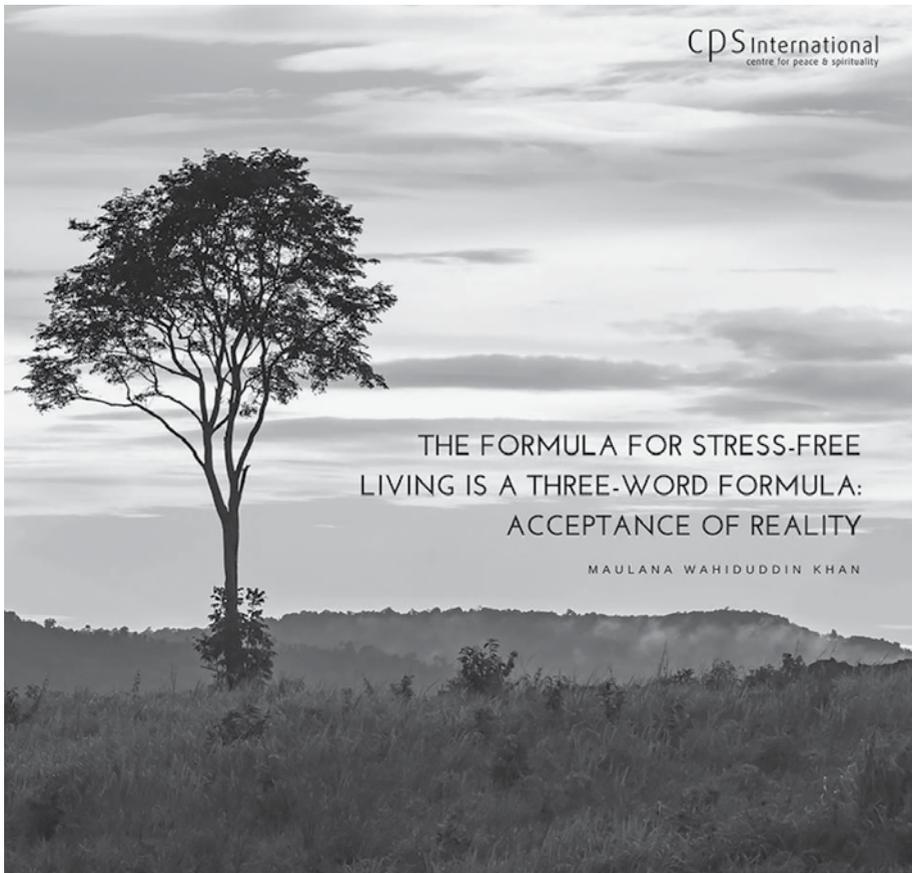
The Quran speaks about this law of nature in these words:

God does not change the condition of a people's lot, unless they change what is in their hearts. (13: 11)

In this verse, "condition of a people's lot" refers to the collective state of people while, "what is in their hearts" refers to the state of an individual person. That is, a community or nation as a whole can undergo change only if the individuals who form it have undergone this change. If a nation finds that it is suffering decline at the collective level, it must determine the cause for this deterioration within the people who together make the nation. This is because a nation's collective situation

can be transformed only by changing the character and attitude of the people comprising it.

Change in society is initiated by making efforts to bring about change in the individuals who constitute the society, and not by trying to magically cause change to happen at the level of the whole society at once. Any action that is taken at the level of the entire society will only be considered a leadership feat and not any serious step aimed at reformation of a nation or community. □



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THE PROBLEM OF STRESS

Solution lies in the Remembrance of God

THESE days everyone complains of stress. This situation has produced experts in de-stressing, but these experts have only complicated the problem. One common solution for de-stressing is to take a break from work and go sightseeing. This formula has increased tourism, but it has totally failed to make people free of stress. There is the widespread notion that the holiday culture has only added a new item to the list of stressful things and that is holiday stress.

Why this failure to manage stress? The real problem is that modern day stress is intellectual in nature, while people are trying physical means to de-stress themselves. The nature of the present problem entails that we find an intellectual solution.

In this regard the Quran has this to say: "Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God—surely in the remembrance of God hearts can find comfort." (13: 9)

Remembrance of God means finding a high level on which to lead one's life. That is, engaging in what is called 'big bird' thinking in symbolic language. Trying to find a solution for de-stressing at the same level at which the problem has been produced is futile. Such a formula is not at all workable. Remembrance of God is the only workable formula because it is an elevated formula. This provides a higher level to lead one's life than that of the problem. The formula of remembrance of God, in secular terms, can be called positive thinking. Remembrance of God is the religious term for positive thinking. Both these terms in their nature are one and the same. Positive thinking is an expression of a developed personality.

Remembrance of God means finding a high level on which to lead one's life. That is, engaging in what is called 'big bird' thinking in symbolic language.

In the material world of nature there are models of positive thinking for example, the rose plant. In the branches of the rose plant there are flowers as well as thorns. But there is no conflict between the two. The flowers and the thorns have learnt the art of peaceful living. Man must adopt this physical model in his life and then he will find that stress has suddenly disappeared from his life.

There is another aspect of the problem of stress. Stress is not an evil. Stress is a boon. Stress engenders a sort of energy—stress-energy. It is the manner of its utilization that makes it good or bad, positive or negative. If you have a developed mind, you can divert your stress energy towards positive thoughts rather than negative thoughts.

Whether or not one finds certain situations stressful largely depends upon one's mental attitude towards them. They may not in themselves be stressful, but only require a calm appraisal of the situation to be resolved rather than preoccupation with one's own symptoms of stress. The best aid to such a course of action is the remembrance of our Creator. □

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If you challenge
someone's ego, your
success is doubtful but
when you challenge
someone's conscience,
then your success is
guaranteed.

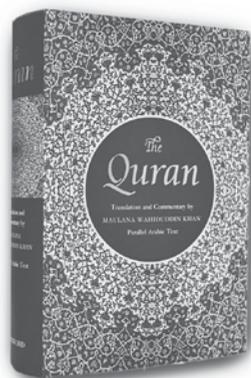
M A L L A N A W I K H A N

THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



Ha Mim A revelation from [God], the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful a Book whose revelations are well expounded, an Arabic Quran for people who possess knowledge, proclaiming good news and a warning. Yet most of them turn away and so do not listen. And they say, 'Our hearts are encased against that to which you call us, and there is a heaviness in our ears, and there is a barrier between us, so do as you will and so shall we.' (41: 1-5)

The call of a prophet is the pure call of religion. However, people mostly follow the religion of their forebears. Their thinking is dominated by their national traditions and contemporary mores. For this reason, the prophet's unadulterated religion does not fit the pattern or mould of their thought. He appears a stranger to them. This difference acts as a mental barrier between the prophet and the common people. Unable to see the prophet's call in its proper perspective, they are not prepared to accept it.

The prophet's call is in itself extremely rational. It is in itself a proof that it has come from God. But the aforesaid mental barrier proves so impregnable that a man is unable to penetrate it in order to grasp the meaning of the prophet's call. Thus God opens the doors of His Grace to man, but he does not pass through them.

Say, 'I am only a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that your God is One God. So take the straight path to Him and ask His forgiveness.' Woe to those who associate others with Him, who do not pay the zakat, and who deny the Hereafter. 'The ones who believe and perform good deeds shall have a reward which will never be withheld from them.' (41: 6-8)

Whenever the call for Truth is issued, it takes place at the level of human beings. But people are unable to understand how it is possible for a man to speak in the language of God, and therefore they deny his message. But God communicates his message through a human being. One who cannot see beyond the humanness of the prophet and recognize the divineness of the message delivered by him, must remain deprived of God's guidance in the present world of trial.

Only that belief in the Hereafter is reliable which is accompanied by a firm belief in the oneness of God and the giving of alms for the sake of God's pleasure. One who truly finds God can never be held in thrall by the greatness of any other being. Similarly, one who truly finds God cannot prevent himself from spending his wealth for the cause of God.

'So take the straight path to Him' means 'keep your worship purely for God', i.e. your whole attention should be directed towards God; the sole object of your prayers and worship should be the one and only God; your entire thinking should become God-oriented. God's perpetual blessings will be showered on those who conduct themselves in this way.

Say, 'What! Do you indeed deny Him who created the earth in two Days [periods] and do you set up equals with Him? He is the Lord of the Universe.' He placed firm mountains on the earth, and blessed it. He measured out its means of sustenance all in four Days; this is for those who ask for it. Then He turned to heaven when it was vapour and said to it and to the earth, 'Come willingly or unwillingly.' They both said, 'We come willingly,' and in two Days He formed seven heavens, and revealed to each heaven its functions; and We adorned the lower heaven with brilliant lamps [stars] and guarded it. That is the decree of the Almighty, the All Knowing. (41: 9-12)

A study of the universe reveals that its creation has been effected gradually in a phased manner. Creation in this way—in other words by stages, means planned creation; and when the creation of the universe has been so carried out, it essentially follows that it has a Planner who has purposefully created it according to a set plan.

Similarly, there are mountains on this earth at various places that maintain the balance of the earth. There are millions of species of living organisms on this earth and every species requires different types of sustenance, which are found in its habitat. Similarly, a study of the universe also shows that initially all things were in the shape of divided atoms. Then they combined to form different entities. It is

further evident from such a study that all the things in this immense universe are uniformly governed by the laws of nature.

These observations clearly establish that the Creator of the universe is all-knowing and all-aware. He is all-powerful and dominant. So, who else can be there whom a man can treat as being worthy of worship? □



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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Why is Islamophobia spreading outrageously in the whole world?

The term 'Islamophobia' has come to denote prejudice against, hatred towards, or fear of the religion of Islam or Muslims. In my opinion, this term is a self-styled creation of Muslims and the real fact is contrary to what Muslims think. For example, if the bereaved family members of the victims of the recent killings in Manchester hold complaints about Muslims or Islam, it is but natural. It is not due to Islamophobia; their complaint is in fact a reason-based complaint whereas phobia is an irrational aversion and it develops without a reason. Therefore it is correct to say that there is no such thing as 'Islamophobia'; it exists neither in the West nor anywhere else in the world. So, what is needed is for Muslims to reform themselves—then everything, including other peoples' negative perceptions about Muslims and Islam, will be settled. It is a two-point formula: first, Muslims must admit that this phenomenon is 'Muslim-phobia' and not 'Islamophobia' as such. Second, they must correct themselves. It is the duty of right-thinking Muslims to educate other Muslims in this regard.

Do you think political Islam is compatible with Western values?

Political Islam is based on self-interpretation and has nothing to do with Islam. Political Islam rests on authoritarianism and is certainly not compatible with Western values, which are based on freedom and democracy. Islam is a religion of nature and operates on the principle of freedom. Just as nature does not follow the course of authoritarianism, similarly Islam does not encourage authoritarianism. Islam recognizes individual freedom. But this also means that everyone is free to misuse their freedom. It is this misuse of freedom that creates problems. In such a scenario, those who misuse their freedom may be made to understand and persuaded with reason. However, abolishing their freedom is not the solution advocated by Islam.

Is the concept of 'religion' to be blamed for the chaos in the world, or is it the humans who are responsible?

The source of chaos in the world is not religion. Its source is misuse of freedom by human beings. God bestowed freedom upon mankind in order to put us to the test in this world. It is the misuse of this God-given freedom which creates all kinds of problems in society. Evil is not a part of creation. It is a result of misuse of freedom by man.

Would the world be more peaceful, without religion, without borders, with one culture, one language and no conflicts?

Religion, Border and Culture are a must—they result in a peaceful society. But it must be understood that the values required for a peaceful society do not come on their own. In reality, they come from religion; religion is the source of these values. Without religion, these values are nothing but rhetoric.

It is a mistake to believe that the world would be a more peaceful place if there were just one culture or one language, without religions and without borders. This will never happen because conflict is in human nature; it has no existence in the external world.

There are two key aspects of human knowledge: humanities and physical sciences. Physical science could not have any differences, for instance, water shall always be H₂O, and every scientist will always end up with the same conclusion through different experiments, while in the subject of humanities there will always be differences. As we learn from 312-page book of Dr. Alexis Carrel wherein he has failed to find the reality of human life. That is why he titled the book, Man, the Unknown.

Psychological studies show that every man and women is different from one another. It can be seen that even in a family living together in the same house, following the same culture and speaking the same language, there can still be differences. Such differences are not a problem. Any difference causes discussion and it further leads to brainstorming. □

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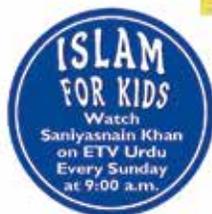
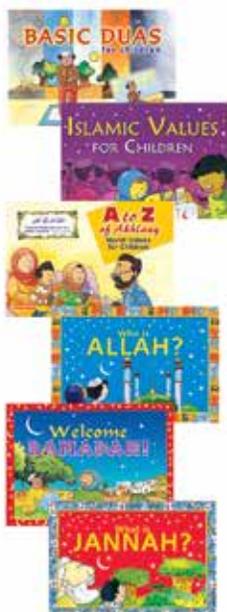
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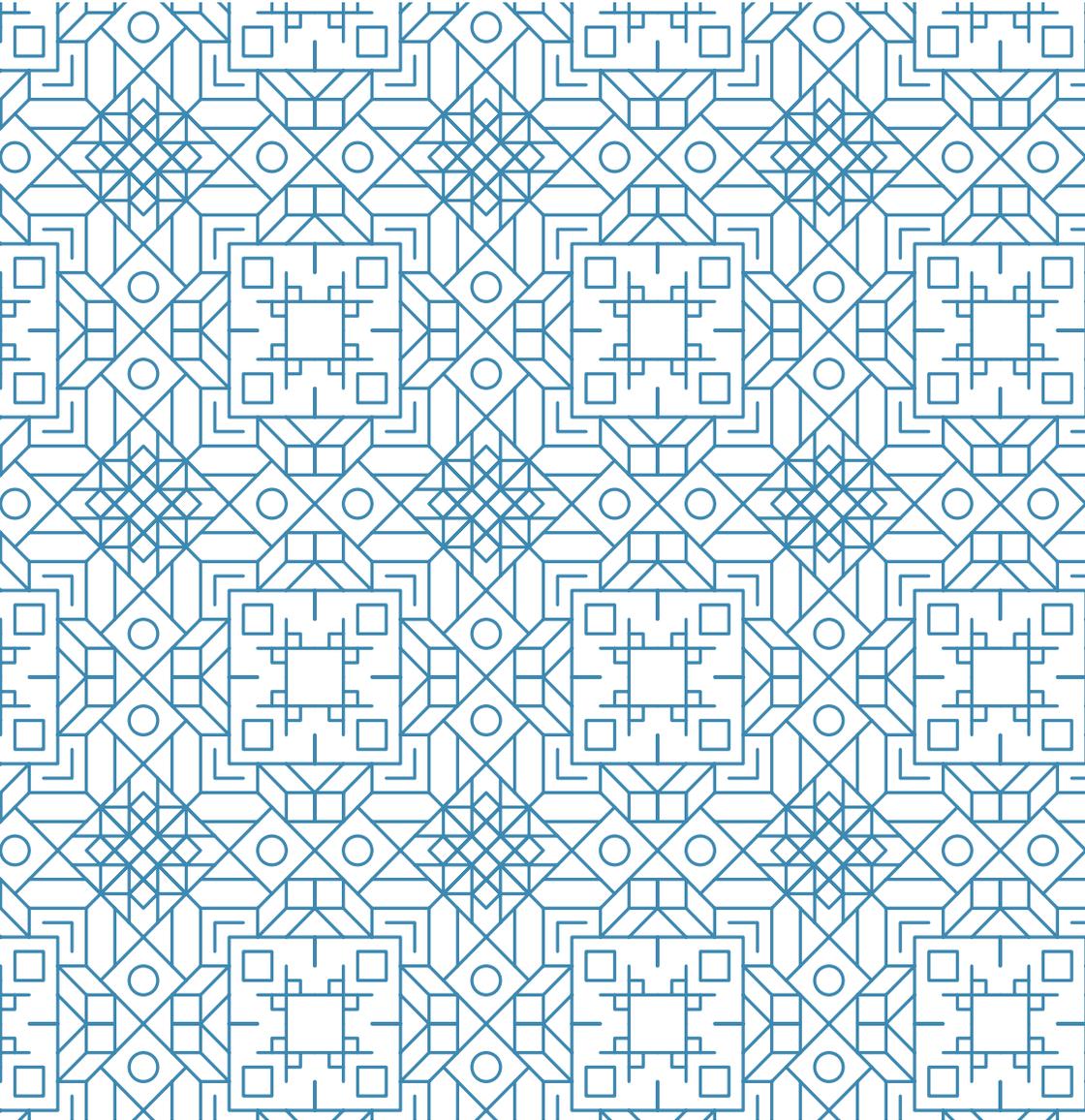
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