



LIFE DEATH AND BEYOND

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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Goodword

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Introduction



This book is about human life—in particular, about the purpose of human life. Why have we taken birth here, on Earth? What is death? What happens to us after death? These issues are a central focus of the Quran. In fact, one could say that a basic purpose of the Quran is to inform human beings about the purpose of their life so that they plan it accordingly.

We are born from our mother's womb, enter this world, spend some years here, die and then move on to the next stage of life. The Quran describes this in a very clear manner.

The first and foremost task for each one of us is to discover the purpose of human life and to understand what happens after we die. We need to reflect on the reality of death. Being heedless of death, we set many goals such as pursuing material luxury, acquiring fame and honour, unceasingly working to defeat our rivals or opponents, trying to make others suffer losses at our hands. All the while we are ignorant of the truth that at death, we will not take any of these accomplishments with us to the afterlife.

We need to know for what eternal purpose we have come into this world. How should we plan for our life by rising above superficial considerations and achieve that which is abiding and permanent, so that it benefits us in the life Hereafter?

The Quran provides us the guidance we need in this regard.

Ray of Hope



A certain highly educated Indian Muslim man completed his formal education and shifted to London, where he is now based. In terms of his thinking, you could call him ‘ultra-secular’. He doesn’t believe in Islam or any other religion and lives a completely ‘free’ sort of life.

This man has now become old and his health isn’t at all good. Witnessing people die, he thinks that he, too, will die in the same way. He now eagerly wants to know what happens to people after death.

Once they grow old, many people who have lived a ‘free’ life like this man begin to fear what the future might have in store for them after they die. They never cared about this question when they were young, but now that they are old, the realization that they might die at any moment and the fear of what awaits them after that begins to haunt them.

Once, a wealthy old man requested a religious preacher to meet him. His apprehension about his impending death had begun to trouble him. “You see,” he said to the preacher, “I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?”

To such a questioner, it can only be said that the reliable means to know what happens after death is the Quran. No human being knows what is going to happen after death. But God, our Creator, definitely does, and He has explained this fully in the Quran.

Prepare for the Coming Day



Suppose one day a human being suddenly crawled out from a cave in some remote mountain. On seeing this, people would be astonished! They'd wonder how this happened. They'd think it was some sort of miracle.

Now, consider this fact: a human being—a little child—crawls out of his mother's womb and comes into the world. But even though this is as astounding a happening as a man emerging from a cave in the mountains, people don't find it surprising at all. Why this difference?

The reason for this is that a child being born from its mother's womb is something that happens every day. People are so used to it that they don't think it is remarkable at all. They simply take it for granted. But if they seriously reflect on this phenomenon, they could be led to discover from it the existence of God, the Creator of all life. If we deeply ponder on the birth of a living, conscious human being from its mother's womb, we can begin to understand that every human being is a living introduction to the Creator.

When a child is born on Earth, there is a complete life-support system in place here already for it. This system is so perfect that without paying anything for it the child has access to all that it needs to live. All its needs, big and small, are taken care of, and that too in a perfect manner. From the Earth to the Sun, everything in the world, you could say, is busy serving a human being.

After having spent some time on Earth, one day we

suddenly die. A person desires eternal life but, generally in less than 100 years, he dies. Against his will, he leaves this world forever. Every person who has taken birth on Earth experiences two things. One is birth, and the other is death.

We are placed here on Earth for a relatively short period, not as some sort of reward but, rather, for a test. In this present world, an individual feels that he is free. But this freedom is on account of the test that he is undergoing all through his life here. A complete record is being maintained about who used this freedom properly and who misused it, about who led a principled life and who didn't care at all about principles. Death is the day when this test gets over and man receives the result of his test from the Creator.

A human being is eternal. But human life is divided into two periods: the pre-death period, and the post-death period. The pre-death period of our life is for the purpose of being tested. The post-death period of our life is when we receive and experience the result of the test we had undergone—in the form of reward or punishment, depending on our record.

Today, a person finds himself in this world as a living, conscious being. Death is the moment when this living, conscious being is taken out from this temporary world and transferred towards the next, eternal, world. This enormously serious moment will compulsorily appear before every person, one day or the other. With death, a person will find that he has been separated from all the things that he was earlier surrounded with. Behind him is the world that he has left forever. In front of him is the world where he has to live forever. Wise is one who prepares himself for this coming day.

The Story of Human Life



Human beings are actually eternal beings. But their life is divided into two periods. One period, a very small portion of their life, is the pre-death period. The remaining portion of their life is the post-death period, which never ends.

In the universe, except for a human being every single thing or entity is under the law of nature. They function exactly as is decreed for them according to the law of nature. The case of us humans is different. An individual human being is, exceptionally, a free being. He charts his future based on his own free will. He can use his freedom responsibly, or he can misuse it. He can avail of the many opportunities he is provided with. But, equally, he can foolishly waste them.

This fact is expressed in the Quran in different ways. For instance, the Quran (95:4-5) says: “We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low.”

This is, as it were, a warning for human beings, inviting him to reflect on his present and his future. It means that God created us with great potentials and possibilities, but by under-utilizing them, we make ourselves the worst case of failure.

A human being’s personality is a dual one. An individual consists of body and soul (or mind). Both have their own characteristics. A person’s body is not eternal, while his soul is. Unlike the body, the soul is a non-material reality. It is above and beyond physical laws, in contrast to a person’s body, which is subject to physical laws and continuously undergoes decay.

The human body consists of many tiny cells. At each moment, the body's cells are dying, in vast numbers, and new ones are taking their place. Our digestive system is like a cell-manufacturing factory. This factory is continuously supplying the body with nourishment to create new cells. In this way, our body is kept intact. Because of this, it so happens that every few years we receive, as it were, an entirely new body, while our spiritual being, our inner core, remains the same, without any change. Hence it is said that personality is changelessness in change.

A person repeatedly makes the folly of ignoring the unchangeable part of his personality—his soul—and of being concerned solely with the perishable part—his body. Because of this, most people are not properly prepared for death when it arrives and for the life that follows death. When, after spending some time on Earth, an individual dies, his perishable part is destroyed, along with all its embellishments, and his true self—his soul—enters the post-death phase of life without having made the necessary spiritual progress. This is the case with most people.

It is this event that is characterized as human beings' failure in the Quran. It is really a terrible failure—that being born with many great potentials, a person generally misuses or underutilizes them and has to face the consequences of this in the post-death phase of his life.

Humans have the unique capacity for conceptual thought. It is a capacity that is not found anywhere else in the vast universe. That is why it is said, "Man is a thinking being".

Seen in this way, man's personality, it can be said, consists of his non-thinking body and his thinking soul. Those people who use their potentials only for sense-pleasures may apparently serve their bodies, but they do nothing for their soul, the thinking part of their being. They waste the pre-death part of their life on their material development, but they do not do anything for their intellectual development.

So, when death overtakes such people, they die like animals. Having spent their life catering to sensual pleasures, they enter the next phase of life only to face torment and regret.

Another unique characteristic of a human being is that, unlike all other creatures, he has a concept of 'tomorrow'. In the universe, all other creatures live only in 'today'. It is only we humans who possess consciousness of the future and who, making the future his concern, can plan for it. It can be said that while all other creatures live only in the present, human beings live in the future.

People who waste their potentials only for acquiring the things of 'today'—the life of this world—and do nothing for their 'tomorrow'—the life after death—are victims of a grave error. Such people may seem to be very happy and prosperous now, but in the life after death, they will be an example of the worst sort of deprivation. This is because in the life after death what will prove to be of use is one's intellectual and spiritual development, not one's material progress.

Human beings possess unlimited desires. Along with this, they have enormous abilities, using which they can fulfil many of their desires. People generally use only so much of their abilities as can give them some temporary pleasure in the limited world before death. Not having used these abilities for their spiritual development, when they die, they enter a world for which they have not prepared themselves. Hence, they will be doomed to live there without relief and comfort.

Given this, the realistic way for an individual is for him to plan his life in such a way that he uses his abilities in the best possible way, so that he can gain felicity and success in the eternal post-death period of his life. He should save himself from living in such a way that in the Hereafter all that he may have to say for himself is: "I was a case of misused opportunities."

In both the pre-death and post-death period of life the principle of success is just one. And that is, to make oneself

a spiritually prepared person. In conventional materialistic terms, a prepared person is someone who has acquired professional education, who is popular among people, who talks well, who hankers after immediate gain, and so on. But a spiritually prepared person is someone who is appropriately prepared for the life after death, having spent the opportunities that he has received in this world on his spiritual and intellectual development.

Only such a person will have any value in the world after death. This person, using his intellect, discovers the truth. He stands firm in his conviction amid a jungle of doubts. He has made God his sole concern. He has quashed his ego and is devoted to God. He remains steadfast in positive thinking even in negative conditions. He leads a principled life, saving himself from opportunism. Free from hatred, he has a deep concern for human welfare. Despite having freedom, he submits to God.

Death and God's Creation Plan



Our world is based on the principle of pairs. Here, everything is found in pairs—for instance, electrons and protons, male animals and female animals, men and women. In the same way, the world itself is part of a pair. This pair consists of this temporary, imperfect world, on the one hand, and an eternal, perfect world, which is called Paradise, on the other.

Paradise is an ideal world, free of all limitations. In Paradise, all of a person's hopes and aspirations will be fulfilled.

But only some selected people will be given admission to this perfect world, on the basis of merit. Without the necessary merit, no one will be able to enter Paradise. This is part of God's creation plan.

The present world is an initial and temporary part of this creation plan. In accordance with this plan, this world has been made as a selection ground. Here, people take birth in this world so that it can be seen who among them is qualified to be settled in the perfect world of Paradise. Those who qualify for entry into Paradise will be settled permanently in that perfect world. And all the rest will be considered a rejected lot.

On what basis will this selection of people take place? According to the creation plan of the Creator, the basis for this selection is just one—and that is, how a person used the freedom that he was blessed with while living in the present world. The way that one used this freedom, that human beings alone have been given, is the criterion for deciding every person's eternal future after death.

The person who saves himself from the negative conditioning of his environment and who spends the pre-death phase of his life in accordance with the Creator's instructions alone qualifies for admission into Paradise after death.

In the present world, every person is in a continuous state of test. In accordance with God's creation plan, a detailed record of every person is continuously being prepared. On the basis of this record, God will decide the eternal future of every person after death. On the Day of Judgment, some people will be settled in eternal Paradise, while the rest will be consigned to Hell. Conditions tell us that this day has now come very near. The final hour has now arrived when a person should awake and prepare himself.

The End of Glory



When the Roman Empire was at its peak, it stretched over vast parts of Europe, a significant portion of Asia and much of coastal North Africa. The Romans built many buildings, roads and bridges. Some of the bridges they made were so solid that they are still standing today, some two thousand years later, in Spain. Such was the power and influence of the ancient Romans that even today Roman Law is the basis of European law.

But then, despite all its glories, the Roman Empire one day came to an end. And now its glories are to be found only in the form of architectural ruins or as texts that grace the shelves of libraries.

If people ponder on phenomena such as this and draw lessons from them, they will realize the folly of being proud. They will realize that one day, death puts an end to all the supposed glories of the world.

A Human Being is Eternal



Among the first things a student of Chemistry learns is that nothing ever dies. It only changes its form.

There is no need for a human being to be an exception to this rule. We know that matter doesn't get destroyed if it is burnt, but only changes its form. In the same way, man is a creature that is not subjected to annihilation. His death cannot be his extinction.

This is no indirect reasoning or empty speculation. Rather, it is a reality that is proven through direct experience. For example, cytology tells us that the human body is made up of tiny cells that are continuously disintegrating. The body of a human being of average height has around 26 trillion cells! These aren't like the bricks of a building that remain there for a very long time. Every day, cells in the human body disintegrate in large numbers. And every day, the food we eat helps to continuously replace them with fresh cells. Through this process of the disintegration of the cells of our body and their continuous replacement, every ten years or so we receive, a totally new body, as it were, consisting of totally new cells. It is as if the hand I had used ten years ago to sign a document is no longer there but has been replaced with a new hand. And yet the signature written by my 'former' hand still remains my signature! Despite the change of the body, the inner person that is the real me still remains as before. My inner being remains intact. That is why it is said that personality is changelessness in change.

Counting Our Blessings



A person I knew died at the age of around 45. When I first met him, he appeared to be robust and healthy. Later, he was diagnosed with cancer. Despite taking treatment, his illness mounted. Towards the end of his life he had become a virtual skeleton. His digestive system had been so badly affected that he couldn't eat even simple food. Even drinking water had become very difficult. When someone would come to meet him in his sickness, he would say, "Don't think about me. Rather, think about yourself. Be thankful that you have a healthy body. You can eat and drink and walk. All this is a blessing from God. If God wants, He can take away these blessings, and then you will have nothing."

Most people are blessed with a healthy body at birth. But they take this for granted. Rarely do they recognize that their healthy body is entirely a gift from God. Seldom do they think that they should bow before God in acknowledgment of this gift.

Likewise, as long as a person is alive, he thinks that this life will remain forever. Rarely, if ever, does he think about the reality of his death, which is sure to happen one day or the other. This is, without a shadow of doubt, the biggest mistake.

A person who is aware of this reality constantly remembers that one day he has to die and meet his Maker. He recognizes that everything that he has been given is as a gift from the Lord of the worlds. It is such a person who will be successful in the test that human beings are being put to. In contrast, someone

who doesn't acknowledge God and is completely heedless that he has to die one day miserably fails the test of life.

Old Age, a Reminder



The Quran (35:37) says: “There they will cry out, ‘Lord, take us out! We shall do good deeds, and behave differently from the way we used to.’ But He will answer, ‘Did We not make your life long enough to take warning if you were going to? The warner did come to you. So now have a taste of the punishment.’ Wrongdoers will have no supporter.”

There are many reports in the books of Hadith with the same sort of message. In a *hadith* it is said that the person who gets a long life or old age will not be in a position to present any excuses to God on the Day of Judgment.

An individual passes through several life-stages: childhood, youth, middle-age and, finally, old age. Old age is the final stage in this world for anyone because after that comes the stage of death. In this sense, old age is a prior notice of the arrival of death. In old age, a person's organs become weak, and some of them even stop functioning completely. These developments tell a person that the time of his death has come near. They are a compulsory reminder of death. Old age leads one to stand at the rim of the grave.

If a person's mind is awakened, on reaching old age he will know that very soon the time will come when he will die and will be made to appear before God to account for his life on Earth. In this way, the experience of old age can jolt a person

out of complacency and lead him to develop consciousness of the Hereafter. Old age tells him that his journey in this world is drawing to an end. Now he will compulsorily have to enter the next period of his life and stand before God Almighty on the Day of Judgment.

The most unwise person is he who experiences old age but still refuses to reflect on his impending death and the Hereafter and continues to live in heedlessness and dies in that state, too.

Learning a Lesson from Death



Unlike what many people think, old age isn't at all something undesirable in itself. In fact, it presents many opportunities for people to take heed.

We come into this world for a very limited period of time. And, as soon as we are born here our countdown begins! Till the age of around 35 years, our graph moves upwards. Then, it starts to decline. We pass through middle-age and then old-age and, finally, meet with death. In the course of this period, we face all sorts of difficulties. As we age, we begin to lose many things, including our youth and physical health. When death strikes, we lose all our material possessions and even our own physical existence.

The experience of death is the most serious experience for any person. With death, whatever material things we may have accumulated in the pre-death phase of our life will be snatched away from us. Ahead of us is the post-death stage

of our life, which stretches into eternity. In this second stage of our existence, only that will prove useful to us which we had sent before us in the form of good deeds. This truth is expressed in these words in the Quran (59:18):

“Believers! Fear God, and let every soul look to what it lays up for the future. Fear God: God is aware of what you do.”

Old age is something from which we should take lessons, not something to complain about.

Before Old Age Arrives



As soon as we are born, we begin our journey towards old age. After the age of 40 or so, signs of the advent of old age become increasingly apparent. This process finally culminates in death, the event that will separate us from this world forever. And so, as a poet has very rightly said: “Prepare a boat for yourself before the storm.”

Each of us should prepare a ‘boat’ for ourselves before we grow old and the ‘storm’ of death strikes us. After this, we won’t have any opportunities to make the necessary preparations for the Hereafter.

The period that comes after the age of 40 is actually the best period of one’s life. By this stage, one has become more serious, more mature and more intellectually grounded. One has acquired varied experiences over many years that can help one make right decisions. The period after the age of 40 is really the best for preparing for the Hereafter. In this stage, an individual has been cut down to size, as it were. He has a more prepared mind.

Wise is the person who uses this precious period of his life to prepare himself for the Hereafter. Ignorant is he who wastes it on anything else.

Pre-Death Period is a Temporary Journey



Some years ago, the British TV star Jane Goody was diagnosed with cervical cancer just as she was preparing to appear in the Indian version of a British TV show. Following this, according to a media report, Ms. Goody announced that she had started to plan for her own funeral, adding that she wanted people to “cry over” her. “Most people plan their weddings. But I am planning my funeral”, she explained.

Ms. Goody was at the peak of her career when she was told that she had cancer. She cancelled her future plans and declared that she now wanted to prepare for her death.

This isn't the story of just one British TV star. In fact, it is every person's story. People are busy enjoying themselves, making grand plans about their careers and other such things, when suddenly death arrives and puts a complete end to their dreams. Given this reality, we need to constantly remind ourselves that the pre-death phase of our life is only a temporary journey. We should focus all our attention on leading this phase of our life in such a way that we are successful in the post-death phase of our life, which, unlike our limited life on Earth, continues forever.

A Leap into the Unknown



What is death? Death is a leap from the known world into an unknown world.

How shocking this event is! Yet, how absurd is our heedlessness that we almost every day see or hear about people dying but we don't get alarmed at all! A person's death is an announcement to everyone else that they too will meet with the same fate some day or the other, when they too will have to give themselves up, completely helpless, to the angel of death.

Death is a dividing line between two stages of human life. Death takes a person from the present world into the next world. Death is a journey from power to powerlessness.

Death's assault is completely one-sided. In this combat, we have no option but to helplessly accept death's decision.

On Death's Doorstep



We see that everything that takes birth one day dies after a certain period. Despite this, very few of us ever seriously reflect on our own death. Such is our heedlessness! The fact is that any moment can be our last moment on Earth. We could, quite literally, be standing at death's doorstep at this very moment!

Death is a journey from a known world towards an unknown world. While in this world, we undertake journeys—sometimes short journeys, sometimes long journeys. We go from one known place to another. But the journey of death is different. It is to travel from out of this known world into a world that is completely unknown to us.

We are so used to the journeys we take every day—for instance, from our home to our workplace—that we don't think much about them. That is understandable. But we tend to exhibit the same sort of taking-for-granted attitude towards the journey of death, which is a journey of an utterly different kind. It is the most serious kind of journey, but yet we treat it totally callously, hardly ever thinking about it. While we make elaborate preparations for the journeys that we undertake here every day in this world, we make little or no preparations for our final journey, when, after death, we have to travel into the Hereafter.

Time's Up!



An examination was underway in a school. The students were bent over their desks, writing their answers. A short while later, a teacher announced: “Time’s up! Stop writing!” The students had to put down their pens and hand in their answer-scripts.

This scenario in an examination hall in a school applies, in a wider sense, to our life as such. In this world, we are, as it were, sitting in a vast examination hall. Here, each of us is writing our own exam. We have each been allotted a previously-decreed period of time in which to write our paper. As soon as this period is over, an angel of God arrives and, in a silent voice, announces that the time for us to act in this world is up and that we have to now appear before God to account for our actions.

The predicament of a student in an examination hall tells us something very profound about life. The pre-death phase of our life, which we spend in this world, is an examination. And death is the event that marks our being sent into the next world, where we receive the result of our examination. Only those of us who spent the exam period of their life in the right way will receive a good result in the next, post-death phase. The others, who failed their exam, will get nothing but loss and despair.

A student who is giving an examination is very serious about his task. His entire focus is on writing his answers as best as he can. We must have precisely the same attitude towards the examination of life too. We must try to solve the

‘exam paper’ given to us by God in the best manner so that after the exam of our life gets over and the results are declared, we are delighted to know that we have passed!

Old Age is Giving You a Message



An elderly man had enjoyed good health, but after he turned 75, he fell sick. This sickness was an announcement about his impending death. But that is not how he took it. He regarded it simply as an issue that called for medical treatment. And so, he consulted various doctors and visited different hospitals, spending a lot of money in the hope of a cure. When he had spent all his money for this purpose, he took a loan and started some expensive treatment. Despite this, he couldn't regain his health. He remained sick for some years and then died.

This isn't just this man's story. In fact, it is the story of a great many people.

Old age is like a news-announcement. It announces to us that the time of our death has come near. When elderly people fall sick or their organs begin to fail, this is further reminder that their death is just around the corner. Such things happen so that if people are heedless of death they can wake up to its reality and make preparations for it and for the life in the Hereafter.

But very few people take lessons from these events. Old age and accompanying infirmities loudly announce to them their impending death. But ignoring this message that these events are intended to convey, they consider them only as

something that requires medical treatment. They make the rounds of doctors and hospitals and then finally die, in utter helplessness. What they obtain isn't cure and good health but, rather, frustration and death.

Period for Preparation



If you check the word 'death' in a dictionary, you might find that it is defined as 'the permanent cessation of life'.

This dictionary meaning of death presents a negative picture of death. It suggests that a human being was born as a complete being but after living a short time here, he has been extinguished forever. With his death, all his desires, hopes and abilities have completely disappeared, and in such a way that they can never come back.

In contrast to this, Islam presents a positive concept of death. According to Islam, death is not the end of life. Rather, it marks the beginning of a second phase of human life.

Man was created as an eternal being. Then, his lifespan was divided into two parts—the pre-death period, and the post-death period. The former is the period for sowing the seeds of actions. The latter is the period for reaping the results of one's actions. All this is part of God's creation plan.

In line with this creation plan, we should regard the pre-death period of our life as the preparatory period. We should spend it in preparing ourselves for the eternal life that follows death by leading a God-oriented life. This phase of life is the only one we have to engage in this preparation, because in the

post-death phase of life there will be no actions but only the reaping of the results of one's previous actions. The event of death is a message to us to focus on preparing ourselves for the eternal life after death. In this regard, we should do what we need to today itself and not leave it for tomorrow. For, who knows if we will be alive then?

The Taste of Death



The Quran (3:185) says: “Every human being is bound to taste death.”

A human being lives in the ‘tastes of the world’, but, finally, the taste that is destined for him is the ‘taste’ of death. The taste of death is so bitter that it destroys all other tastes. The Prophet Muhammad has said: “Remember death much because it demolishes all desires.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah* 4258)

It has been observed that a human being is a pleasure-seeking being. He seeks pleasure in everything—in eating, sleeping, drinking and merry-making, in building a good house, securing a top position, wearing nice clothes and travelling in a luxurious vehicle, and so on.

In all such things a person derives pleasure, so much so that he sometimes gets completely lost in them. But if he seriously reflects on the fact that as soon as death strikes him all these things will be snatched away from him, his life can completely change.

Consider the case of a person who habitually derives malicious pleasure at the cost of others, an all-too-common

phenomenon. He revels in demeaning others, because this gives his ego a big boost. He wrongly grabs things that belong to others, thinking that it shows that he is very clever. If such a person were to develop the conviction that the angel of death can arrive at any time and suddenly end his life and that then he would be brought before God to be accountable for his deeds, his life may be totally transformed. He may begin to live as if he has died to the world even before he actually dies.

Sixteen Minutes from Home



It was the 2nd of February 2003. The headlines of newspapers across the world that day announced that the US space shuttle *Columbia* had exploded and disintegrated. After its 16-day journey, it was about to land on Earth. It was at a height of some 200,000 feet and was travelling towards the Earth at a speed of 19,000 kilometres per hour. It was just 16 minutes from landing when, suddenly, it lost contact with ground control and exploded. At that time, there were seven people on board, all of who died. This news was published in *The Times of India* (New Delhi) with the title “Just 16 minutes from home.”

When I read this news, I thought to myself that this is the very same end-result for everyone in this world. Every person nurses the hope of building an ideal home of his dreams here when suddenly death strikes him down. He is just ‘sixteen minutes from home’ when death arrives. And instead of

entering the worldly home of his dreams, he is taken off to the court of the Hereafter.

Among the seven people aboard *Columbia* on its last journey was a woman of Indian origin, Kalpana Chawla. She was 41 years old. A great many people were awaiting her return. Friends and relatives had travelled to America so that they could congratulate her. If she had returned safely, she would have received a hero's welcome. But death became a barrier, and a joyful story suddenly became a tearful tragedy.

This event was a personal experience for Kalpana Chawla, and for others a learning lesson. Wise is he who can see his own fate hidden in this event.

My Personal '9/11'



The famous tennis-player Martina Navratilova once consulted a doctor for medical advice. The doctor examined her and informed her that she had breast cancer. The cancer was in an advanced stage. Ms. Navratilova was shaken by the news. "It was such a shock for me. It was my 9/11", she said.

Ms. Navratilova said this because she had seen that death had come very close to her. But the phase of life that comes after death is much more serious than even that. Death cuts off all ties. After death, an individual is suddenly taken to another world, which is totally different, in every respect, from this present world.

After death, all of a sudden two serious realities open up to us. Firstly, that it is now impossible to go back to the pre-

death phase of life, where we had made a world of our own. And secondly, that in the phase of life after death we are not able to make a world of our own.

In this world, if you lose one chance, you can get a second one. Using your second chance, you can recover your losses and succeed. But in the Hereafter, this is not possible. There, no one can get a second chance. If you have failed in proving yourself deserving of heaven in the Hereafter, you will not be able to come back to the present world for a second time in order to make amends.

Burial of the Dead



Once, I participated in someone's burial. After his death, his body was washed and wrapped in a shroud made of new cloth. Then, people read the funeral prayer and, lifting the bier on their shoulders, they took it to a graveyard. There, they laid the body in a grave very respectfully. Mud was then poured on the grave.

I thought to myself, "Why has Islam ordained such deference for a dead body?"

It is true that after a person dies his body is nothing but a lump of mud. But despite this, it isn't thrown away, treated like some ordinary mud. Rather, it is given the same treatment as a human being.

This commandment to treat 'mud' like a human being is not for the sake of the deceased person, but, rather, out of consideration for the living. Through the dead person a

message is given to the living, telling them that they too will meet the same fate one day. In this way, those who are living should see themselves in the form of the dead. They should experience death before dying.

According to the Islamic custom, when a corpse is being buried in the grave, those who are participating in the burial take some mud in their hands three times and put it in the grave. When they do this the first time, they say *Minba khalaqnakum* ('From the earth We [God] have created you'). The second time, they say *Wa fih nuidukum* ('And We return you to it'). And the third time they say *Wa minba nukbrijukum taratan ukbra* ('And from it We shall bring you forth a second time').

This putting of mud in the grave is the climax of the whole process. In this way, it is explained to those who are still alive what their own fate will be one day.

Introduction to Paradise



Once, a man was on an island, where he happened to observe the sun setting. It really moved him. "I wish I could see this sunset forever", he wrote about this experience.

Nature is astoundingly beautiful. One can never get tired admiring it. One can watch it forever! But of course, we can't do that, for we have to leave this world one day.

In this world, nature is a glimpse of Paradise. The finesse of Paradise, its beauty and its immense attractiveness—a distant glimpse of all this is available in this world itself, in the form of nature.

Nature reminds us of Paradise. It reminds us that we should lead a virtuous life in this world so that in the Hereafter we may be able to be admitted into the astoundingly beautiful world of Paradise. In the present world, we cannot experience complete enjoyment from a mere glimpse of Paradise in the form of nature. But in the perfect world of the Hereafter, this complete enjoyment will be possible for every person who is settled there.

The Thought of Death: A Masterstroke



Death compulsorily comes to every person who takes birth on this planet. For many people, the most terrifying aspect of death is that it is not possible to return after death to this world. After death, one has to live in a new, eternal, world. After death, there is only the facing of the consequences of one's actions performed while on Earth.

A human being is a very sensitive creature. He cannot tolerate any hardship, no matter how minor. Given this, we need to ask ourselves this question: If we are to live in very harsh conditions after death, how will we tolerate it? If we seriously ponder on this issue, we will experience a veritable revolution in our lives.

In the Quran (35:34) it is said that when the people of Paradise enter Paradise they will say: "Praise be to God who has taken away all sorrow from us. Our Lord is forgiving and appreciative."

A life of pain is most intolerable for a person. Conversely,

a life free of pain is the most desirable sort of life for him. If we reflect on this issue seriously, death will become our greatest concern.

The thought of death can work as a masterstroke for a person. In the game of caroms, a masterstroke is a stroke that shifts all the coins on the carom-board from their place. In the same way, consciousness of death can completely shake us out of our complacency. It can transform our way of life totally. It can make us a completely new person.

Save Yourself from Eternal Failure



Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, died on 27th July 2015. He had gone to Shillong to deliver a talk. He was making his presentation when he had a heart attack and fell on the stage. He was rushed to hospital, only to be declared dead by the doctors. He was then 83 years old.

Death is an event that all of us will face. One day or the other, the angel of death will appear before us suddenly and will, as it were, tell us, “O man! You had to live only ‘83 years’ in this world. This period is now up. Now you have to live in another world, where you will live, not for ‘83 years’ but forever!”

Most people know what they need to do in order to be successful in the phase of life before death. For this, they make elaborate preparations. But how many of us know what preparations we need to make now in order to be successful in the phase of our life after death, which will last forever? Hardly any of us!

What we need to do in order to be successful in the eternal life after death can be said to be the biggest issue before a human being. Even so, most of us are completely heedless and ignorant about this issue. Isn't this the height of absurdity? People do everything they can to save themselves from what they regard as failure in this world. But they do nothing to save themselves from failure in the eternal world of the Hereafter—sometimes out of ignorance, and sometimes even knowing full well what they ought to do.

Living Awareness of Death



The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: “Remember death much because it demolishes all desires.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah* 4258)

If people have a living awareness of death, their worldly attachments will disappear. They will consider the life after death to be more important than the life before death. Their thinking will become completely Hereafter-oriented. As a result, their hopes and aspirations, their activities, engagements and plans—all these would also become oriented to the Hereafter.

A person who is heedless of death begins to think of this world as everything. The profit and loss of this world overwhelms his mind. He becomes a worshipper of this world.

Death is such a reality that if someone gains a living awareness of it, a total revolution takes place in his life. He will be constantly aware of that day when everyone, including

himself, will have to stand before the Lord of the worlds. His greatest concern will be how to save himself from the admonishment of God in the Hereafter. He will fear Hell the most and will desire Paradise the most. Awareness of the reality of the Hereafter will be clearly evident in every aspect of his life.

Consciousness of Death Can Change Our Life



If a person remembers his own death, it becomes a means to demolish his worldly aspirations. After that, for him no aspiration remains an aspiration. The material things that people get excited about will no longer give him any pleasure.

Awareness of the reality of death reminds us that we will have to face a day when suddenly everything will totally change. We may be in our home, enjoying ourselves with our family. Or, we may be among our friends or with colleagues at work. All of a sudden, the angel of death will arrive. Then, tossing away our body like the skin of some discarded fruit, he will take our soul to another world. Those whom we spent years amidst—our family, friends and colleagues—will know nothing about where we have gone.

Awareness of death makes a person very serious about life. His biggest concern is now to seek answers to existential questions such as, “Who am I?”, “What am I?”, “What is life?”, “How should I live?”, “What is death?”, “What will happen to me after I die?”, and so on.

Awareness of death makes a person more serious about the affairs of life. It leads him to engage in constant introspection and self-reform.

Death very clearly tells a person that although ostensibly his present is in his control, his future definitely is not. Awareness of death makes us take our future in the life after death much more seriously. It leads us to spend our short time on this planet wisely, in a manner that will benefit us in the eternal life after death, instead of wasting our life in chasing sense-pleasures.

Destroyer of Attachments



The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: “Remember death much because it demolishes all desires.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah* 4258). It means that if someone remembers the reality of death with full seriousness, his life’s focus will change completely. His life will now become Hereafter-oriented, in place of worldly-oriented.

A worshipper of the world is engaged at every moment in seeking to earn what are conventionally thought of as the profits of this world. He derives great pleasure from this obsession. He thinks that his constant busy-ness will bring him the worldly glories that he hankers after. But if he is a seeker of truth and comes to know that he is going to face a day, sooner or later, when he will have to leave behind all his worldly wealth, he will lose his interest in this preoccupation. He will witness a new awakening. He will realize that if the

material wealth that he has earned is not going to accompany him after death, he must change the direction of his life and the focus of his activities. Such is the transformation that awareness of the reality of our own death can bring.

Similarly, if someone gets angry with a person and seeks to exact revenge from him, remembrance of death can work a miracle in him. He will think, "When my revenge cannot harm anyone in the eternal sense except myself, why should I waste my time in vengeful activities? I shouldn't stoop to this level. I will have to face serious consequences for this after I die, in the Hereafter."

Remembrance of death thus works as a powerful mechanism for self-correction and self-restraint. It can help us avoid negative actions and to engage in positive actions. Remembrance of death makes one realistic about life as well as serious about it. It reminds us that one day we must leave this world of men and enter God's world. This reminder becomes a very potent means for our self-correction.

Death Just Can't Be Defeated



Louis XI, Emperor of France, died some 500 years ago. He never wanted to die. He made many attempts to try to live forever, but of course he failed.

When Louis was 58, he fell sick with paralysis. He knew he wasn't going to live long now. In his family, no king had been able to celebrate his 60th birthday.

Louis wanted to live in safety. So, he began to live in a palace where very few people had permission to enter. A moat

was dug around the building. 40 archers were stationed on the walls. They were told that if anyone dared to come near the palace without permission they should be killed. 400 horsemen patrolled the area day and night. Inside the palace, the Emperor lived in great luxury.

Although he had grown physically weak, Louis still exercised total control over his subjects. But he was constantly worried that some power-hungry nobleman of his might topple him. He desperately wanted to convince his people that he was still very powerful.

The Emperor began to doubt everyone. He doubted even his old servants. And so, he dismissed them and replaced them with foreigners. He would constantly change the latter too, as well as the officers who were appointed for his safety. He would tell them, "Nature is very fond of change." He had become too old to handle the affairs of state and was scared that his subjects might even forget that he was still alive. So, in order to demonstrate that he was still the ruler, he resorted to all sorts of ploys. He would dismiss officers and appoint new men in their place. He would decrease the salary of some and increase the salary of others. He sent representatives throughout Europe to buy horses and dogs, of which he was very fond. The animals would be brought to his palace, but his health was so bad that he couldn't even see them or talk to the people who had bought them. But he was aware that he was being able to still enter transactions and buy commodities from all over Europe and thus he was still alive.

In the hope that his health might thereby improve, the Emperor ordered that the word 'death' must never be spoken in his presence. He richly rewarded his personal physician with a huge salary of 10,000 gold crowns a month. At that time, in the whole of Europe an army officer who had served in the battlefield for 40 long years wouldn't have earned so much money! So desperate was the Emperor to continue living that

if someone could extend his life by even a single day, he was ready to give him his entire treasury!

When his 60th birthday was nearing, Louis XI became even more worried. He had become so weak that it was with difficulty that he could lift a morsel of food and put it in his mouth. He gathered all the religious resources he could in order to live as long as possible. He sent thousands of gold coins to churches in Germany, Rome and Naples and distributed money to religious leaders. He despatched ships to an island to fetch big turtles from there. He had been told that these turtles had life-giving properties.

But despite all these desperate measures, the Emperor died, in an attack of paralysis. His last words were, "I am not as ill as you think I am."

When Louis at last died, as he had to, he realized that no one, not even an Emperor, can win over death.

One's Own Funeral Prayer



A man died, and an acquaintance of mine attended his burial service. The *namaz-e janaza* (funeral prayer) was about to begin when a person who was standing next to my friend wanted to know what sort of prayer he should intend to make—a *farz* (obligatory) prayer or a *sunnat* (optional) prayer. My friend responded by saying that he should make the intention of making his own funeral prayer! The man was shocked!

Reciting the funeral prayers for a deceased person isn't a mere ritual. Rather, it is a reminder of a very grave reality—

that just as the deceased has died, everyone present at the time of his burial will also one day die. Participating in the burial prayers for someone is a reminder of this reality. The true funeral prayer is one where participants in the service remember in the death of the deceased their own impending death. Participating in the prayer, they become aware that, one day or the other, they will meet with the same fate as the deceased. In this way, while participating in someone else's funeral prayer they will, as it were, participate in their own funeral prayer.

Death is something that all of us will face. It is an indisputable reality for everyone. Once it comes, no one can send it back. Given this, we ought to remember death often. Every now and then we should reflect on the fact that one day or the other we will die. This will greatly help us live in the right way.

Seriousness about Life



In the present world, every person builds a world of his own. But very soon, the time comes when death strikes and totally destroys this world. Death is synonymous with the complete nullification of the world that we spend our lives here constructing.

Given this, if one is a realistic person, remembrance of death will be enough for his reformation. It will demolish his hankering after this world, making him someone who is completely oriented to the Hereafter. The root of all evils in the

world is just one—and that is, to think without remembering the reality of one's death. And the source of all goodness is awareness of the fact that we will have to die, one day or the other, and then will appear before God, where we will have to give a complete account of our brief sojourn in this world to Him.

Heedlessness of death makes a person frivolous. Awareness of death makes a person serious about life to the utmost. Consciousness of the fact of death demolishes feelings of disobedience to God and rebelliousness. It reminds a person that he is just a helpless creature. It cuts people down to size. It snatches away all misplaced feelings of superiority and greatness and makes one modest to the utmost. Awareness of the fact that one day we will have to die, after which we will have to face God and give an account of our life on Earth, is the most potent means for our reform. It makes us take our every moment seriously and spend it in the most responsible way.

Death is Not an Accident



Once, a woman's husband died in a road accident. While speaking with her I suggested that she view this event in the light of the following two verses of the Quran:

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. (2:155)

Every human being is bound to taste death: and you shall receive your rewards in full on the Day of Resurrection. He who is kept away from the Fire and is admitted to Paradise, will surely triumph; for the life of this world is nothing but an illusory enjoyment. (3:185)

According to these verses, death is a decision of God. Life comes into being through a decision of God, and death also happens in the same way.

The fact is that no death is really an 'accident'. Death is a test. If death is viewed as an accident, it makes one feel sorrowful. On the other hand, if death is seen as a test, one is fired with a new determination. One will think, "Till now, I was being tested through life. But now my test will be conducted through death. I should see death as a test and should seek to pass this test successfully."

Anyone's death—be it as a result of an accident or illness—never happens at the wrong time. Every person who takes birth in this world is born for the purpose of being tested. For every person a certain examination period has been

already determined. As soon as this period is over, the angel of death arrives and takes the person's soul to the world of the Hereafter. The time for this to happen has been fixed by the Creator.

We need to be completely realistic with regard to the matter of death. We must accept it as an indisputable and unchangeable reality. We should make death a means to draw vital lessons for life, and not something to feel sorrowful about or regret. He who obtains true understanding of death becomes extremely serious. He will make his 'tomorrow' his goal, instead of his 'today'. His life will become a Hereafter-oriented one in the complete sense.

Negation of Greatness



The famous Indian journalist Khushwant Singh died in Delhi on 20th March 2014. He was then 99 years old. In the worldly sense, Mr. Singh was a very successful man. Fame, wealth, position, honour—all these he had obtained. He lived in a very big house. But at the time of his death, all of this was suddenly snatched away from him. Like all other people who have experienced death, he did not take any of his greatness along with him.

This is not Mr. Singh's story alone. It is the very same story of every other human being!

Death reminds us of the fact which the Quran explains in these words (6:94):

“And now you have returned to Us, alone as We created

you at first, leaving behind all that We gave you. Nor do We see with you your intercessors, those you claimed were your partners with God. The link between you is cut and that which you presumed has failed you.”

The Quran (79:24) says that Pharaoh, ruler of ancient Egypt, had claimed: “I am your supreme Lord”. Consciously or unconsciously, every person lives in this same feeling. Every person claims some or the other so-called supremacy or greatness. Death completely nullifies this feeling. Death informs a person that this supremacy or greatness that he imagines he possesses is actually not a part of his real self. All this greatness is merely external. Death is a practical reminder of this.

The biggest reality an individual should know is that God’s greatness is part of God’s very being. It will never be separated from God’s being. In contrast, a person’s supposed greatness is not part of his being. Before death it may seem that his greatness is part of his being, but as soon as death arrives, the two are separated from each other. And then he travels towards the Hereafter in such a way that he leaves behind all his greatness forever.

Travelling to Participate in a Victory Rally



Gopinath Munde was an Indian politician. He had been appointed as a Central Minister in the new Indian Government. He was to take up his post on 4th June 2014 in New Delhi. But

just a day before that, he died in a road accident. At that time, he was just 64 years old.

This isn't the story of just one man, though. Every person who takes birth in this world, no matter how big a position he acquires, gets only a very limited period of time to live here. Symbolically, you could call it 'just 64 years'. But, strangely, no one is consciously aware of this reality.

The day Mr. Munde died, he was going to participate in a victory rally. But before this, the last moment of his life arrived. The same is true for everyone else in this world. Everyone is, according to their own understanding, travelling to participate in some 'victory rally' or the other. But before arriving at their desired destination death takes over and they are suddenly made to appear in the world of the Hereafter, and that too without having made any preparations for this.

It is estimated that every day around 100,000 people die throughout the world. Each dying person leaves behind a silent message to those who are still live: "O you who are still alive, prepare for your death! O you who are so busy with the affairs of the world, make efforts to build your Hereafter! O you who are living in heedlessness, wake up! O you who are hankering after status in this world, make yourself worthy of Paradise in the Hereafter! This is how you should spend your life before it is too late."

News of Promotion



Once, a man said to me, “I’ve received a promotion! I’ll now get a bigger salary! I’ll have a bigger house! I’ll be given a bigger car to use! Earlier, I used to get a railway pass to travel, but now I’ll get air tickets!”

Listening to this man I thought that the issue is precisely the same with the Hereafter too. Paradise is also a sort of promotion. Those people whose record in this imperfect world is good will, after death, receive a ‘promotion’ and will be admitted into the perfect world of the Paradise in the Hereafter.

This situation demands that we should live in the world with the utmost caution and awareness. We should gauge every matter on the basis of whether it might help us or hinder us in gaining entrance into Paradise. If our mind gets awakened in this way, we will become our own watchman. We will continuously inspect our every thought, word and action. We will embody this saying of the Caliph Umar: “Weigh yourselves [in this world] before you are weighed [on the Day of Judgment].”

Death, a Divine Plan



The Quran (3:185) says: “Every human being is bound to taste death.”

This statement of the Quran is a universal reality. Wealth, strength, power, knowledge—nothing can save a human being from death. Every being that takes birth in this world will definitely die after spending a fixed period here. No person, throughout human history, has been able to protect himself from death.

If it were the case that an individual is born by chance and dies by chance, then some people would die, and others would live forever. But the fact that nobody is an exception with regard to death proves that death is not an accident or a matter of mere chance but that it is part of Nature’s planning, part of God’s creation plan.

That death is a plan of God tells us that both life and death are purposeful phenomena. And when it is accepted that behind life and death is the Creator’s plan, it becomes incumbent on us to discover the purpose of creation and to lead our life in line with it. In this is hidden the secret of a person’s success.

The phenomenon of death tells us that material wealth and worldly glory cannot be the true goal for a human being. A person’s goal can only be that in which both life and death appear meaningful.

The Prophet Muhammad said: “Remember death much because it demolishes all desires.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah* 4258). This

means that we should not make our plans based on the desires of the present world, but, rather, on the reality of death.

Positive Conception of Death



There are innumerable stars in the vast space. They are in constant motion. Their speed is so accurately attuned and determined that there is not the slightest change in it even after thousands of years. Because of this accuracy, it is possible to predict, for instance, the time the sun will rise and set a hundred years hence. The same is true for all the stars in the universe. It is as if in the entire cosmos there is the highest level of time management. How different the world of human beings is from this!

In the natural world, everything is in its perfect form. For instance, the grass that grows in the wilderness is the perfect model of grass. The water that nature supplies us with is the perfect model of water. And the solar system in which Earth is located is the perfect model of a solar system. It is as if the entire universe is the ultimate model of source management. What a difference from the world of us human beings!

In the universe, at every moment innumerable activities are taking place. All of these activities are result-oriented. In the vast world of nature, no activity is without results. Even little insects that are active day and night are engaged in very useful activities. Contrast this with the world of human beings!

In this world, nothing is in a static state. Everything is in constant motion. From the electrons and protons spinning

around in an atom to the mighty stars, every single thing is constantly moving. Despite this, nowhere in the universe is there any clash or accident. It is as if in the whole world of nature, a no-problem culture prevails. How different it is in the human world!

In the universe, all things work on the principle of providing benefit to others. From the rays that the sun emits to the oxygen that is breathed out by trees, all things are designed to be beneficial to others. For this purpose, they work in perfect coordination and harmony with each other. It is as if throughout the cosmos a culture of giving prevails. What a stark difference from the world of humans!

In the natural world, everything is exceedingly beautiful. Be it the stars up above, or snow-capped mountains, the sunset or the sunrise, or an army of ants busy at work, everything in Nature is amazingly beautiful to behold. In contrast, a human being's life is a mix of beauty and ugliness, with the latter often far exceeding the former.

By birth itself a human being is an idealist. He has an irrepressible desire to build a world of his dreams and to live there forever. But he fails to obtain this world here, on Earth. After spending a limited time on Earth, he goes into the Hereafter, where an ideal world does indeed exist—the world of Paradise.

In the universe, everything is engaged in converting its potentials into actuality. For instance, a seed gradually grows into a tree, thus fully achieving its potential. But a human being, who is born with immense potentials, dies without using all or even most of them. In the human mind there are around 100 million million million particles! The human mind is a treasure of enormous possibilities. But a person uses just a miniscule fraction of these potentials and then death whisks him away.

But death is not the end of a person's life. Rather, it is the door for him to enter eternal life. After death, he enters

the period of life that stretches forever, where, if he has lived the right sort of life while on Earth, he finds the world of his dreams, in Paradise. There he gets all the opportunities that he needs to actualize his immense potentials.

Wise is one who plans his short stay on Earth to develop the spiritual character that will make him deserving of living in Paradise, the ideal world of joy and comfort, for eternity.

'Right Here, Right Now'



The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: “Remember death much because it demolishes all desires.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah* 4258). This means that thinking about death destroys world-oriented thinking and engenders Hereafter-oriented thinking. If a person repeatedly remembers death, he will become someone who desires the Hereafter, not this world.

In the above *hadith* the Arabic word *lazzat* is used. It stands for all those things that makes something the focus of one’s attention. If you repeatedly remember that you will not live in this world forever and that you will die sooner or later, it will change your focus of attention. You will now consider the world that comes after death to be more important than this world, where we live only for a temporary period.

This realization can create a revolution in our thinking. It can completely transform our behaviour, our moral standards and our dealings with others. It can demolish all our base desires.

Many people are completely heedless of death. They

hanker after worldly goods and sense-pleasures. ‘Right here, right now’ is their slogan. But if they develop a living consciousness of death, they would never utter such words.

Every Birthday is a Reminder



Death is the end of life on Earth for the deceased. And for those who still remain here, someone else’s death is a reminder—of their own impending death. When someone dies, it appears that a person who used to speak has now fallen silent. But this person’s becoming silent is itself a loud announcement. And the announcement is this: “The momentous event that had been destined for me has arrived. And now, sooner or later, you too will be faced with the same situation. Please prepare yourself adequately for this event.”

It is a custom in many places that when someone completes one more year of his life and the next year of his life begins, his birthday is celebrated with much gusto. But the more appropriate thing is to consider this day as a day for the remembrance of one’s impending death. The fact is that for all of us, the countdown of our life is happening continuously. Every birthday only announces that one more year of the period that has been decreed for us on this planet has gone by. Death is the culmination of this countdown.

People celebrate their birthdays as an occasion for much fun and frolic. But if you look at the matter realistically, the issue is quite the opposite. Every new birthday is actually a reminder that one’s death—and the Day of Judgment too—has

moved one year closer and that now one year less remains for one to prepare for the Hereafter.

One aspect of death is that the deceased has left the present world. Another aspect of death is that the deceased person has died without having all his desires fulfilled. This is an indication of the fact that this present world is not the place for the complete fulfilment of a person's desires. The only world for this purpose comes after death, in the world of Paradise. But that place is accessible only to those who have qualified for it.

Wise is he who understands this fact and, considering this present world as the stage for preparing for the eternal Hereafter that comes after death, makes himself worthy for the next world.

This life is the period for us to engage in action, and death is the time for us to appear in God's court. This is a matter of utmost seriousness for all of us. Wise is he who understands the gravity of this matter and makes it his supreme concern.

Death: A Cause for Mercy



Respected Brother,
Assalam Alaikum!

Yesterday evening, a gentleman informed me by phone of the death of your mother. We belong to God, and to Him we shall return.

On returning from South Korea on 17th August I could have come via Mumbai and in that way could have had the

good fortune of participating in your mother's last rites. But maybe this was not destined.

May God bless your mother with a place in *Jannat ul-Firdaus* [the highest level of Paradise], and along with this, bless us also with a place in Heaven.

A mother is a great blessing for her children. In a mother's love there is reason for hope for every servant of God—that God will shower him with His mercy, just as a mother showers her children with her mercy.

When a mother dies leaving her children behind in this world, her death contains a valuable learning lesson. In departing from this world she tells those who grieve for her that one day they too will leave the world, just as she has. In her death she conveys this message to them: "O you who are alive, remember that your countdown is happening. You too will have to face death one day."

This reminder is no trivial matter. It can completely shake a person out of his complacency. It calls out to the living, saying: "O people! There is now very little time left for you. Use every moment of the time you may have in the best possible manner before the opportunities to use your time get over!"

Death is destined for every being that takes birth on this planet. Some people may think that death is the greatest tragedy. But God has made death a cause of mercy for us in a very surprising way. When someone dies, the bereaved should adopt patience. There is good news of great reward for those who are patient.

In such matters how does being patient become a means for Divine reward? The reason is that being patient is actually synonymous with willingly accepting God's decision. It is undoubtedly the biggest blessing for someone that God should decide something that he doesn't like (for instance, the death of a close relative) and that he should accept it wholeheartedly, knowing that it was sent by God. A death such as this becomes for the bereaved a means for this great Divine reward.

It is also God's mercy that the one who has died has departed. The deceased had to depart at the appointed time. But in this incident God, in His mercy, has placed something very valuable. And that is, if the bereaved consider this as a Divine decision and accept it, God will look upon their acceptance in such a way that they will get back what they have lost, and in greater measure.

The event of death appears, on the face of it, to be a tragedy. But in this world, along with every minus there is also a plus. And undoubtedly the event of death is not an exception to this rule.

Your well-wisher,
Wahiduddin
23rd August 2003

Do Not Wait for Next the Morning



Former Indian President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam died on 27th July 2015. He was 83 years old. He had gone to Shillong to deliver a lecture at the Indian Institute of Management. He was delivering his lecture and there were many people in the audience. He had spoken for barely five minutes when his tongue suddenly fell silent and he collapsed on the stage. He was rushed to a hospital, but the doctors said that he had died.

Death compulsorily comes to every human being. It is generally thought that death comes to a person in the form of sickness or an accident or in old age. But the Creator

sometimes arranges for someone's death to come all of a sudden—like in the case of Dr. Abdul Kalam.

Sudden death comes to someone so that other people can draw the lesson from it that they should not lead a life of heedlessness. It is this reality which Abdullah ibn Umar, a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, expressed in the following words: “When you are in the evening do not wait for the morning; when you are in the morning do not wait for the evening.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari* 6416)

Why Untimely Death?



Some people die when they are still young and healthy. People generally consider such a death as an ‘untimely’ one. But actually, no death is untimely. All deaths happen at just the right time, at the time that God has fixed for them. A so-called ‘untimely’ death can be more properly called as a ‘reminder death’. It is an eye-opening death, so that, witnessing or hearing about them, people who are still alive in this world may remember that they too can die at any time. This awareness may help them focus on leading life the right way.

When an event that people expect to happen happens, it doesn't make much of an impact on them. But something that is unexpected, like an unexpected death, can revolutionize their life. An unexpected death is like an alarm. It calls out to people, saying, “O you who are fast asleep, get up! You might have to face death this very moment!”

The Airport of the Hereafter



Once, I was travelling by air and arrived at an airport. I and most of the other passengers went through the necessary formalities and came out. But some passengers were stopped by the airport authorities. They were told to wait for special checking. Some information had been received about these passengers, and that is why the authorities dealt with them that way. Witnessing this sight at the airport I was reminded of a scene from the Hereafter wherein God directs angels to some people and says: “And stop them there for questioning.” (Quran 37:24)

The issue of life is like this too. The Earth, on which we have been settled, rotates continuously about its axis, at a speed of about 1,000 miles an hour. It is as if we are aboard an airplane that is taking us towards an airport at a great speed. This airport is the airport of the Hereafter. A time will come when all of us will be made to disembark there. Then, some people will be detained on landing. They will be told, “You wait here. You will now be questioned.” And on the other side there will be some fortunate people, who will get a very different treatment. They will be welcomed by angels, who will say to them: “Peace be upon you. You have done well, enter Paradise and dwell in it forever.” (Quran 39:73)

To Which Country Have You Gone



In October 2011 several famous people died. Ralph Steinman, from Canada, died on the 13th of the month, at the age of 68. He was to receive the Nobel Prize for Medicine but just three days before he could be informed about the award he passed away. US computer giant Steve Jobs died on the 6th of October, aged 56. He had been the Chief Executive of the American company 'Apple' and introduced the world to the iPhone and the iPod. He died just a month after Apple launched its new iPhone 4-S model. The famous Indian singer Jagjit Singh, known as the 'King of Ghazal', died on 10th October, when he was at the peak of his career. He was 70. His son had died in an accident, after which he had sung these lines, which applied also to himself after his own death:

Chitthi na koi sandesh

Janey voh kaunsa desh

Jahan tum chaley gaye

(No letter, no message:

I don't know which is the country

To which you have gone.)

Every day, across the world thousands of people die. This event is an alarm for everyone else. It tells us that we are destined to spend only a very limited period here in this world. Then, we shall die, after which we will all go back to our Creator, where we will receive His decision about our eternal future.

Given this, the foremost thing each one of us needs to do

is to learn why God created us. We need to understand what the Creator's creation plan is and then spend our life here in line with it, so that in the next world, after death, we can hope to obtain the Creator's reward—that is, the reward of eternal Paradise.

In a Totally Different World



I once came across a news item that has great instructional value. It was about an Indian film actor. He had parked his big car in a parking lot. After some time, when he returned, the car wasn't there. It had been stolen! The man had lost many of his personal belongings in the theft—including his laptop, DVDs, CDs, clothes, mobile phone, personal diary, and an expensive stone ring. "I was emotionally attached to them", the actor explained to a newspaper reporter. "I feel like I am stranded on some island".

This may have been the experience of one film actor, but very same sort of thing, on a much larger scale, will happen in the Hereafter. In the pre-death phase of life, a person lives amidst all sorts of things—his material possessions, his family, his job, his bank balance and so on. But in the life after death, he will suddenly find himself in a totally new world. There, he will be completely alone. All the things he was surrounded with while on Earth will have been snatched away from him. Behind him will be the world that he has left forever. In front of him will be an eternal world, which may be an eternal desert for him if he failed to lead the right sort of life while on Earth.

If he did not live in line with the Creator's creation plan, he will feel, like the actor who lost his car, as if he has been "stranded on some island".

Death, A Personal Earthquake



Death is undoubtedly the biggest issue of every individual. It is like a personal earthquake. Just as no one has the power to stop an earthquake, no person has the power to stop death. An earthquake comes without any prior announcement and without seeking permission. So too is the case with death. In the face of an earthquake, a human being is totally helpless. So also in the face of death.

Remembrance of death is negation of the ego. Ego is a basic attribute of a human being. But this very same ego becomes the cause of all evil. On account of ego a person becomes self-centred. It makes him feel self-important. Self-centredness and self-importance are the cause of all negative qualities, such as arrogance, revenge, pride and envy.

Remembrance of death can purify us of the negative emotions that are generated by a bloated ego. If we are constantly aware that we are going to die and that we have to then face our Maker and face the consequences of our actions, we will try to desist from evil. Our sense of self-importance will be replaced with deep humility. We will be led to acknowledge God and recognize our total dependence on Him.

A Living Concept of Death



On 31st January 2010, my younger brother, Abdul Muhit Khan (b. 1932), died. He was 77. In my life I have seen many people dying or have heard news of their death. But the death of my brother was a completely new experience for me. It gave me, if I may call it, a living concept of death.

I reflected about why this new awareness regarding death came to me then. We were six siblings. After my younger brother's death, it struck me that all my siblings had now died and that only I was left. This realization came as a shock. Till the other day, my brothers and sisters were in this world where I still am. But now, one by one, they have all died. I am the only one who remains here, the rest having gone out of this world and having entered another one. We can no longer meet. Death has separated me completely forever from my siblings.

What is death?

One way of viewing death is as compulsory expulsion from this world. In this present world, every person makes a world of his own for himself. House, property, business, children, relations, fame, public influence, position, and so on—on the basis of such things he builds his small or big world, in which he spends his days and nights. But suddenly, the moment of death arrives and takes him into a world where he has nothing at all but his own self!

A Meaningful Life



We have all received the gift of life from the Creator. Some of us squander this gift, living aimlessly, while some others lead a truly meaningful life. What accounts for this difference? If we are born with the same basic capacities, what is it that makes people become so different in the way they lead their life?

The basic reason for this is just one—and that is, awareness, or the lack of it.

Some people do not develop the necessary awareness about life and its purpose. They are completely under the influence of others or allow themselves to be totally conditioned by their environment. They live as others tell them to. They seek to fit into their mould, irrespective of whether the mould is right or wrong. The life of such people is devoid of true meaning and purpose. They live like animals, and they die like animals too. They squander the gift of life that God has bestowed them with.

In contrast, some people develop the awareness of life and its purpose. They learn about why God has created them and what sort of life God wants us to lead. They learn about God's creation plan. They reflect on themselves and the world. They learn to distinguish between right and wrong. They are strict about living ethically. The life of such people is truly meaningful. And their death is truly meaningful too.

The Wealth of Good Deeds



In the whole of human history, man's greatest forgetfulness has been forgetfulness of death. In this regard, man's heedlessness has been so extreme that down the centuries one can discover very few people who have not been a victim of this malaise.

This present world is a testing-ground. This means that in this world whatever a person has got—material possessions, social relations, status, and so on—he has received for the purpose of writing his test, the test of life. Death puts an end to this period of test. That is why with death's arrival all the things that had been given to a person for the purpose of his test are snatched away from him.

After death, an individual suddenly enters a new world, where he will receive the results of his actions done in the pre-death phase of his life. Before death, a person lived in the midst of the things he had been given as part of the test that he had been put to. After death, he is separated forever from all of these. He will now live in the midst of the results of his actions in his pre-death phase. The things of the world that he had been so attached to and had so taken for granted will be completely separated from him. The only wealth he will now have will be the wealth of faith and good deeds.

Given this stark reality, it is strange that so few of us take death seriously.

Dying in Hope



A famous film producer died some years ago. He was in his 80s. In his last days, he lived almost all by himself. With him only his domestic help remained. His last stage was painful. Dialysis ventilators were his companions for several months. More than that were the sorrows of his personal life. His wife, his brothers, and even his younger son had passed away.

In his last days, a close friend of this man went to meet him. The man took his friend to sit outside and watch the sun go down. When the sun had set, he broke his long silence and said, “One more day has gone by.”

When I read this report about this man, I thought that this was the tragedy of a person who had been unable to discover the reality of life, a man who had spent his last days in despair.

In contrast to this man is someone who has discovered Truth. Such a person has learnt that life doesn't end with death but, rather, that after death one enters the next phase of life, where God's mercies and His eternal Paradise are awaiting those who have lived in the way pleasing to God. Instead of mourning about one more day go by as he sees the sun set, such a person will joyfully exclaim, “One more day closer to Paradise!”

This reality we can learn from the life of Bilal ibn Rabah al-Habashi, a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad. Bilal ibn Rabah died at the age of 63 in 642 CE. It is said that in his last days he was seriously sick. Seeing his condition,

his wife bemoaned: “O sadness!” When Bilal heard this, he exclaimed: “O happiness!” Then he said: “Tomorrow I shall meet Muhammad and his companions!” (*Kitab al-Shifa*, Qadi Iyad, vol. 2, p. 53)

The stark difference between these two events—one, relating to the famous film producer, and the other concerning a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad—clearly shows the difference between someone who has no knowledge of Truth and someone who is aware of Truth. A person who doesn’t know that there is life even after death may seem happy for some time, but when he becomes old and enters the last stage of his life in this world, he feels that there is now nothing but darkness for him. He is drowned in depression and despair. He dies in a state of hopelessness.

In contrast to such a person is someone who has learnt about God’s creation plan. He knows that he should lead a God-oriented life in the pre-death phase of his life so that in the post-death phase of life he can receive a place in God’s eternal Paradise as a reward. For such a person, life, including old age, is an experience full of hope. He lives with hope, and he welcomes death with hope. For him, there is no question whatsoever of despair—neither in this life, nor in the life after death.

Modern civilization has provided an individual with many things that provide him comfort and ease. But despite this, most people live in stress and tension. This is because modern civilization provides a person with a great many things for his life before death, but it cannot save him from death, and nor can it give him any message of hope for the life after death. It is this fact that, consciously or unconsciously, causes people to drown in stress and tension.

Final Appearance



A wicked man once seized the house that belonged to an old man. After this, he even filed a case in the court against the old man, in the hope that the latter would succumb to pressure and accept his illegal occupation of his house.

The court hearing began. The case dragged on, and the two men had to keep appearing in court. The old man's money and time was now being unnecessarily wasted on the case. But he didn't get upset. When he met the usurper, he simply said to him, "Remember, the final appearance will happen in God's court."

In the present world, people engage in wrongdoings. They wrongly capture other people's wealth or harm them in other ways. This doesn't prick their conscience. In fact, they think that their ability to hurt others shows that they are very powerful and clever. They even brag about their oppression of others, imagining it to be some big success.

But all such victories and successes are totally false. Their true worth will be revealed when, after death, every person appears before God. At that time, oppressors will have no words to utter in their support. They will have no option then but to acknowledge their crimes. But then, to do so at that time will not help them at all!

Seek the Right Philosophy of Life



In the year 2008 a special programme was held in the Parliament Annexe in New Delhi. On this occasion, a well-known journalist was conferred with a national award. In a speech introducing the celebrated journalist, it was explained that his philosophy of life was to “Enjoy good things in life”.

But sitting on stage, the person who was to be awarded was a living rebuttal of this philosophy. He was almost 95 years old and had become very weak. He walked with a stoop and looked very dejected. His smile had disappeared from his face. Witnessing this sight, I thought to myself that a man who had propagated the philosophy of enjoying the so-called good things in life had himself become so weak that now he was unable to enjoy anything.

This isn't the story of just one person. It is, actually, the story of almost the whole of humanity. In every age, men have sought to build a palace of happiness for themselves. But, finally, old age arrives and causes all their plans to fail.

This almost universal phenomenon should cause people to reflect on what they should make as the philosophy of their life so that they are not compelled to face despair in the end. Few of us do this, however. As a result, most people die in a state of utter hopelessness and frustration.

The End of this Life



A person who has crossed the age of 50 is now in the final stage of his life. Having passed through various phases and having gained much experience and wisdom, he has become a mature person. But just then, the angel of death arrives and sweeps him away from the world, like a plant that is considered unwanted being plucked out from a garden.

Post-50, a person is capable of thinking in a more mature way. He can better appreciate the songs of the universe. He can taste with greater finesse the finer tastes of life. He can do many things in a much better way than in his earlier years, because he has seen more of life and has learnt more lessons. But just then death strikes him.

This is the story of most people. They spend their lives doing this and that and then, when they reach the final stage of life, they see tragedy staring them in the face with the inevitable appearance of death. They think that death puts a complete end to all that they had spent their life for. But they regard this situation as tragic only because they mistakenly think death to be the permanent end of life. The fact, however, is that death is simply the inauguration of a new phase of life—the post-death phase. In contrast to the pre-death phase of life, which lasts, at most, for just a few years, the post-death phase of life carries on for eternity.

For those who realize this truth, old age can become a beautiful and very meaningful phase of their life. They can avail the many opportunities that this phase of life affords to

build their Hereafter, where they can hope to enjoy a blissful life forever.

Planning for Life



“Oh! How foolish I was! I got the chance to live just once, and I completely wasted it!”

This feeling will overwhelm a person who leads a life of heedlessness when he dies and enters the world of the Hereafter. Behind him will be the world where he has finished his allotted time. And ahead of him will be the eternal Hereafter, where he will have to face the consequences of all his actions in his life before death. At that moment, he will be completely drowned in regret for having wasted the precious opportunity of living in this world for preparing for the eternal Hereafter. Because this opportunity is given to an individual only once, he will feel even more remorseful—for there is now no second chance. Regret and despair will burst like a furious volcano inside him.

If we want to save ourselves from such a fate, it is absolutely necessary to understand the purpose for which God has created us and sent us into this world—in other words, the Creator’s creation plan. Why does an individual take birth? Why are we provided with the many things that are necessary for life, and who provides these? Why is it that after spending some time on Earth, all of us must necessarily face death? What is the meaning and significance of this life? What is the final culmination of life? What is death? What, if

anything, happens after death? Which way of life takes us to success in the life before death and in the life after death?

We need to obtain a clear understanding of all these issues. This should be the topmost concern for all of us—whether we be learned scholars or so-called illiterates, rich or poor, weak or strong. For all of us, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, religion and so on, these are most crucial questions. To obtain the right answers to these questions should be our foremost concern.

Beginning of a New Stage of Life



Plants, animals and human beings—all of these have to face death, one day or the other. Every tree finally loses its greenery. Every lion finally loses its majestic mane. Similarly, every human being who takes birth here will die. Death is a universal law of this world, to which no one is an exception. But unlike other living beings, it is only a human being who knows that his life can be cut short at any moment and that even if he attains what is regarded as the expected human lifespan, his growth is bound to be followed by eventual decline, and, in due course, by death.

Among all creatures it is only a human being who has an understanding of death. This exception tells us that the matter of death is different for man than it is for other living beings. For the latter, death is an event of unawareness, while for man it is something that he can become fully aware of. This exceptional quality of human beings indicates that for man, along with death there is also consciousness of death.

For a person, it is desirable that well before the moment of his death arrives, he should deeply contemplate about death and be suitably prepared beforehand to face it. For other living beings, death is simply the end of life. That is why there was no need for them to have been given the consciousness of death. But for a human being, death is not the end of life. Rather, it is the beginning of a new stage of life. That is why it was necessary that he be made aware of death in advance so that he could make the necessary preparations for it.

A human being should die a conscious death, not an unconscious one like animals and plants.

Why Does Life Become a Tragedy for Many?



Percy Bysshe Shelley was an English poet. He died in 1822. He is known for his pain-filled poems. A line by him reads:

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Shelley is right here as far as most people are concerned. But why is this so?

This is because most people live in the feeling that for them life has been unfulfilling, if not tragic, because they have been unable to obtain or experience all that they wanted to. Consciously or unconsciously, they think of themselves as failures in some way or the other. On account of this, when they listen to a plaintive song or read a pain-filled poem or story, their psyche of deprivation leads them to consider it as

the call of their own heart. It powerfully resonates with their own life. Hence, they think it is true. In contrast, if they listen to a happy song or read a comedy, deep inside they do not find it in consonance with their own life, and so, consciously or otherwise, they think it isn't true.

Why do people think this way? Why do they feel deprived and frustrated deep inside, even if they may be surrounded with material comforts?

The reason for this is that, generally speaking, people make plans for their life without understanding the creation plan of God. And so, they hanker after such things—such as unsullied, permanent joy—that are, according to God's creation plan, simply unattainable in this present world. This is the basic reason for their predicament. If they were to remain content just with what they need and not seek what is impossible for them to attain in this world, they could save themselves from this misery.

If we want to live in line with God's creation plan and be happy, we need to be content with only so much of the things of the world as we actually need. We must consider anything in excess of this as something that we might be able to get in the Hereafter. We should not waste our life in a quest to obtain the ideal in this world itself. This is the only secret for a peaceful and happy life.

The Day of Judgment Knocks!



It seems that human history has reached its end, that the 21st century may be the last century in human history, and that humankind may not be able to witness the 22nd century. The present situation is such that evil has reached its peak. And when this happens, humans lose all justification to live on God's Earth.

When immodesty and immorality have become rife, you can assume that people have reached the depths of evil. That is precisely the situation today. In the name of freedom every sort of evil is sought to be justified. In many places, people are engaging in violent terrorism in the name of religion, killing innocent people. Humanity has reached the lowest levels of immorality. When men fall to such depths, they lose all justification for continuing to inhabit this world of God's.

Things have become so terrible that people do not even bother to denounce these evils that are happening around them. In the light of these facts, it is right to say that the Day of Judgment has arrived at our doorstep and is now knocking on our door. We have no idea, though, when it will tear down the door and barge in.

Being 'Next to God'



A certain Indian film actor was considered to be a superstar. “Being at the top”, he wrote when he was at the peak of his career, “is a feeling of being next to God.”

The American boxer Cassius Clay, who changed his name to Muhammad Ali, was a big name in his field. He was said to be a ‘world champion’. “I am the king of the world. I am the greatest”, he is reported to have declared.

But the final end of the Indian superstar and the American boxing champion proved to be the same—just the opposite of what they had boasted about themselves! The former suffered a long illness and became a virtual skeleton, dying at the age of just 69. Muhammad Ali suffered for a long time from Parkinson’s disease. Towards the end of his life he became wheelchair-bound and had to be repeatedly hospitalized for various ailments until finally he died at the age of 74.

The death of these two men illustrates a general predicament of human beings. When someone obtains a top position or wins some big success, he revels in his imagined glory. Instead of thanking God, he considers himself to be like God Himself. History tells us that such people are finally brought low and then pass away. But strangely, people who come after them do not learn any lessons from their folly.

Remembering Death is Good for Health



A study has revealed that remembering death can be a good thing. According to a report in *The Times of India* (New Delhi, April 21, 2012):

Thinking about death can actually be a good thing as awareness of mortality can improve physical health and help in prioritizing one's goals and values, a new study has revealed. According to a new analysis of recent scientific studies, even non-conscious thinking about death like walking by a cemetery could prompt positive changes and promote helping others.

Generally, it is thought that thinking about death often dampens people's enthusiasm to be active and engenders negative thinking. But this is mere speculation. When the issue was studied in depth it was found that the reality is just the opposite. The fact is that remembering death is a good habit. It nurtures good qualities in a person.

The Quran (3:185) says: "Every human being is bound to taste death." In this regard, there is a *hadith*: "Remember death much because it demolishes all desires." (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi* 2307)

Remembering death is remembering the reality of life. Remembering death reminds us that we don't have unlimited time here. At any moment, death can come and take us away.

Remembrance of death helps promote a sense of urgency. It is an incentive to do what we need to do soon because we

have no idea when we might die, after which we cannot do anything. In this way, remembrance of death encourages us to engage in planned action for the things we have to do in life.

Remembrance of death also helps promote intellectual awakening. It brings out our hidden intellectual abilities. It is a means for our intellectual development.

According to the Islamic concept of life, a person's life doesn't stop at death. After death, there is another life, which will remain forever. After we die, depending on the actions we have performed before our death we will be judged to have succeeded or failed. If we realize this fact, it can create in us a powerful consciousness of the need to lead a life of true purpose. We will be stirred to lead our lives in a truly meaningful way.

According to the general understanding, thinking about death is thinking about it as an event that supposedly causes the end of life. But according to the Islamic understanding of life, remembrance of death means that reflecting on death, a person should prepare for the period of life that comes after death. He should consider the life of this world as an opportunity to engage in actions that can be of benefit to him in the eternal life that follows death. This conception of death reminds a person that one gets life just once and that it depends on each of us to make our life a success or a failure, in terms of how we will fare in the Hereafter.

Secret of Mental Peace



Charles Moss Duke Jr. (b. 1935) is an American astronaut. He was on the NASA team. He completed several journeys in space. In 1972, he even travelled to the moon!

In February 2008, two members of our Centre for Peace and Spirituality met Mr. Duke in New Delhi. He gifted our team with an autographed photograph of his. In this photograph, he is wearing a spacesuit and is standing on the surface of the moon!

Mr. Duke kindly agreed to be interviewed by our team. The interview, which was video-recorded, was about spirituality. During the interview, Mr. Duke was asked if he was satisfied with his life and if his life was happy. Explaining his condition, he said, “I had no peace in life. I thought the moon would give me peace. I thought all these goals, all these accomplishments, this great career, would give me peace, but it didn’t. So, I thought I’ll change career. So, I left NASA as an astronaut and went into business. I made a lot of money, but I still had no peace in my life. There was still something missing.”

This is the story not just of Mr. Duke alone. Rather, it is the story of almost every single person in the world today. Today, opportunities to earn money, fame and power (and, for some, to travel to the moon!) have increased manifold. People are running after such things. Many manage to obtain them. Such people are considered to be super-heroes and super-achievers. But experience shows that these super-heroes and

super-achievers often turn out to be super-failures. Despite obtaining the wealth, power and status that they hankered after, they fail to obtain inner peace and joy, and, finally, they die.

It is claimed that in today's times one can score big successes. But experience tells us that many such big successes turn out to be big failures as far as the inner life of a person is concerned. Many super-achievers suffer from tremendous stress. Additional wealth only turns out to be a cause for additional tension, and even additional illness, for them.

Today, stress has become so pervasive that an entire industry has cropped up in response to this situation. It is called 'de-stressing'. In special de-stressing centres, there are experts appointed whose task is to try to cure people of stress. But despite all this, people's stress levels are continuously rising! It is said that today, the biggest threat is not World War Three but, rather, mounting levels of tension and stress.

This situation reminds us of a verse in the Quran: "Surely in the remembrance of God hearts can find comfort." (13:28) This point was expressed by the Prophet Muhammad in the following words: "There is no joy except the joy of the Hereafter." (*Sahih al-Bukhari* 2961) This means that by making God one's supreme concern one obtains peace and that the ideal life one is seeking can be obtained only in the period after death. In the phase of life before death no one can get the ideal life he desires.

This issue is directly related to God's creation plan. God, the Creator, has made this present world as a testing-ground. The present world cannot become for us a place for the fulfilment of all our desires. This world is, for every person, a stage in one's journey, and the Hereafter that is to come is our eternal home.

If you are travelling in a train and want to have during your journey all the facilities and comforts that you enjoy at home, you will definitely be disappointed. You will not get what you

want. This is because a train is a train; it cannot be a substitute for your home. In the same way, in the present world, the fulfilment of all of one's desires is impossible for us. The person who hopes for the complete fulfilment of his desires must work for the Hereafter, where, in the eternal home of Paradise, this might be possible for him. It is this truth that is expressed in the Quran (37:61) in the following words: "It is for the like of this that all should strive."

Nothing is Our Personal Possession



There is a report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad that appears in different books of Hadith. One of the traditions appears as follows:

A person often cries out: 'My wealth! My wealth!' However, of a person's wealth there are only three portions for him: whatever he eats and is thus consumed, that by means of which he dresses himself and so it wears out, and that which he gives away [in charity] and thus stores up for himself [as reward in the Hereafter]. Apart from this, the remaining will pass away as he will leave it behind for people. (*Sahih Muslim* 2959)

When a person spends his life in this world, he has access to several things that he regards as his own. He does a job, through which he earns money. He thinks that this money is his—his rightful earnings. He also thinks that the things he buys with this money all belong to him. He feels that he is the

owner of them, and that, therefore, he has the right to do with them just as he pleases.

But death is a complete rebuttal of this notion. Death tells us that a person actually has nothing that is really his own. None of his possessions will remain with him forever. Death completely separates him from his wealth forever. After death, he suddenly finds himself all alone. This is the biggest fact of life. A person who discovers this truth will use his money and possessions in such a way that will benefit him in the life that comes after death. Without knowing this truth, a person's life is oriented to this world alone. But if he realizes this truth, his life becomes a Hereafter-oriented one.

Why This Heedlessness of Death?



I was listening to All-India Radio. It was the interview of a certain writer. This man had died some months before. After his death, when I listened to his voice on the radio, suddenly I felt that he had been speaking while he was still alive in the present world and then, after he had died, he had gone to another world and now it was if he is speaking from there!

A recorded voice that is listened to later symbolizes the fact that even after death a person is not extinguished. Rather, moving out of one phase of his life he enters another one.

Man is an eternal being. He can never be snuffed out. After death, he continues to live, in some form or the other. According to modern findings in biology, the human body is a collection of more than 100 trillion cells. These cells

are continuously decaying and dying, and their place is continuously being taken by new cells. Inside the body, this process is taking place nonstop. It is as if in terms of his body, a person dies every few years and once again receives life.

But despite this repeated 'death' of his body, an individual's personality remains intact. For instance, his memory remains the same as before. This proves that the body is simply a vehicle for a person. A person's vehicle changes, but his personality remains intact, in its true state. This fact is expressed by a western scholar in these words: "Personality is changelessness in change".

Death means that setting off on a journey, a person leaves the present world and travels to another one. Death is something that all of us will face, some day or the other. Given this, we ought to ponder deeply on death. In fact, we should contemplate on it the most, because it is a leap towards a completely new world. Since death is inevitable for all of us and is such a momentous thing, we ought to prepare ourselves fully for it and for the state after death. Our thinking should become 'death-oriented' thinking—in a positive sense.

Death is the most certain occurrence for anyone. We are repeatedly faced with occasions to think of death. We all see or read or hear about death happening every day. But despite this, very few people think from the perspective of the reality of death. Most of us live in such a way as if we will never die, as if we are going to live in this world forever. Throughout human history there has not been a single person who has not died. Yet, we don't learn any lessons from the inexorable fact of death. A person acknowledges, in the true sense of the term, the reality of death only when it comes upon him, when, in accordance with a compulsory decision, he finds that he has arrived at death's doorstep.

When a person travels, he does so with the thought that in a while, his journey will come to an end and that then he will arrive at a new place. For this purpose, he makes the

necessary travel arrangements. An individual's life is also a sort of journey. Each of us is journeying from life to death and beyond. Yet, few people, if any, view this journey through the lens of death. We live as if we are going to live here, on Earth, forever.

My ancestral home is Azamgarh, in eastern India. In the period before India's independence there was a rich man who lived there. He began building a mansion for himself, near the city's main road. He spent a lot of money on the project. It was to be a multi-storeyed, fort-like house. Beautiful artwork adorned its walls and roof. But before the construction work was over, the man died. He was unable to live in the mansion of his dreams.

This is the story not just of one man though. It is almost every person's story. Most of us make plans and build dream-palaces and live in such a way as if we are going to live here forever!

Why are most of us so heedless about the reality of our own death? This is a really serious question. We see or hear about others dying. But rarely, if ever, do we think about our having to leave this world one day too. According to a hadith, the Prophet of Islam said:

When people turn around to return after the burial of a person, God sends an angel at that place. He takes some earth from the burial site and hurls it at people, saying: "Go back [again] to your world and become forgetful of your own death!" (*Al-Haba'ik fi Akhbar al-Mala'ik* by Jalaluddin Suyuti, vol. 1, p. 112)

In this *hadith* a profound truth is explained in symbolic language. It is an admonition. People see others dying before them. They participate in their burial. They see that a person who just a while ago was moving about has now been buried below the ground. Yet, they do not draw any lesson for themselves from this. They continue to lead a heedless life.

They do not want to draw lessons from other people's death or to reflect on the reality of their own oncoming death.

What is the reason for this general heedlessness? This can be understood from the point of view of what is called 'programming'. Generally speaking, whatever people do, they do in accordance with their mind's programming. Several of our programmed actions are a natural phenomenon—for instance, feeling hungry, thirsty or sleepy. All of these happen in accordance with our biological or natural programming. Other forms of programming include those that are a result of one's environment and of one's self-talk.

Generally speaking, a human being thinks according to his programming. Rarely, if ever, does he think in opposition to it or act against it. Anti-programming thinking is actually another name for anti-self thinking, which is something very rare. Our programming can change partially, but at a conscious level to think against one's programming is a very difficult thing.

As we know, computers work according to how they have been programmed. It is the same with the human mind. In line with their programming, people engage in various activities throughout their life. They live in this state, and in this state they die. During their life, they keep seeing or hearing about other people dying. Yet, rarely, if ever, do they seriously think about their own death. In fact, many of us think that we won't ever face death! This predicament owes also to programming.

Our minds have the capacity to know many things, but one thing that we cannot know is when, how and where we will die. It is perhaps because of this that many of us live as if death is never going to happen to us. We live and plan our lives in such a way as if we are going to live in this world forever!

The study of the DNA or Deoxyribonucleic Acid is a relatively new branch of biology. A lot of research is happening in this field, which is yielding new information about human beings. It is said that a person's DNA contains a huge amount

of information about him, including about how he will look, how he will speak, how he will smile, and so on. All this information is contained in the form of 'chemical letters'. It is said that this information relates to some 3 billion different subjects about a person's life! A person's genetic code, it is claimed, contains so much information that if it is decoded and written out, it would require several hundred volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*! But strangely, despite this information of encyclopaedic proportions being contained in the genetic code of a single person, this code contains no information about when, how and where he will die. Why is this so? The reason is that God has made death a matter of conscious discovery for an individual. A person should come out of his programming and think about the fact of his death, and, in the light of this, plan his life.

There is a similarity between sleep and death. This is expressed in the words of a *hadith* of the Prophet: "Sleep is the sister of death." (*Shu'ab al-Iman* 4416) When someone goes to sleep, he becomes unconscious and oblivious to his surroundings. Similarly, death appears to make a person unconscious. But there is a basic difference between sleep and death. People generally have some sort of fixed sleeping hours, or at least are aware when they retire to bed to go to sleep. But with regard to death, no one knows at all when it might come. Death suddenly arrives, without anyone's knowledge. Someone dies in infancy or in the prime of youth. Someone else dies at a ripe old age.

This fundamental difference between sleep and death conveys to us a profound truth. And that is, that while sleep is a part of the natural programming of a person, death is not so. When death arrives, it does so as a direct decision of God. It is God who decides when a person shall die.

When someone dies, it does not mean the end of his life. The fact is that despite his bodily death he is still alive and is present at a different place. Thus, death is actually a transfer.

Death is the name of that special moment when someone passes out from one phase of a life and is transferred into another one. It is like a passenger getting off from a train at one station and from there boarding another train, thereby continuing with his journey.

Many people are very particular about planning the journey of their every day, being mindful of the limited number of hours that they have that day. They are very particular about their daily schedule. Why, then, is it that when we have only a very limited time on this planet, most of us do not properly plan the journey of our life? For instance, why don't we think that in a few days or years we have to die, so what is the use of wasting our life accumulating unnecessary material things, things that we cannot take along with us when we die?

These issues can be properly understood only when we study them in the light of God's creation plan. When God created a human being, He created him as an eternal being. Every person brings with birth itself the awareness that he is an eternal being. His journey does not end at death. Rather, he continues to be, to exist, even after death. Every person lives in the consciousness of his eternalness.

Our programming tells us that we are eternal beings with eternal personalities. This sense of our eternalness generally stands as a block in our awareness of the fact of our mortality. Our programming leads us to imagine death as something that happens to others but that will never happen to ourselves. In line with this programming, people consider this present life as never-ending, while actually it is only temporary. Just as a student spends only a temporary period in an examination hall and then returns to his actual home, a person has come into this world only temporarily and will then be taken back to his real home—which is the eternal world of the Hereafter.

Given this, for the proper planning of life we need to develop 'anti-programming thinking'. We should think against ourselves, in particular against our instinctive tendency of not

wanting to recognize the fact of our mortality. Only then can it be possible for us to rise above our conditioning, distinguish between the pre-death phase of our life and the post-death phase and plan our life on the basis of reality. This way of thinking can be called ‘detached thinking’. In the words of a poet:

My ability of detached thinking is worthy of praise. I remember You while in the midst of non-godly things, O God!

Thinking realistically in this manner, one will realize that there is just one sensible way to plan our life—and that is, what can be called ‘death-based planning’. In other words, to plan our life based on the recognition that this life of ours stretches from the temporary pre-death phase of life through death and to the eternal post-death phase. The present life is for all of us only a temporary journey. It is like a station where one gets off and then boards another train, which is heading to another place.

In this regard, revealed knowledge, knowledge from the Divinely-revealed scriptures, provides us with reliable guidance. According to this guidance, the phase of our life before death is the time for making preparations, while the stage of life after death is the phase where we receive according to the preparations we had made in the former stage. This present life is like an examination hall. Everything here is an exam paper. Here, everything that happens with us, good or bad, is, in fact just a test paper. What we sow here shapes what we reap in the life after death.

These are some basic truths or facts about human life. Each of us must plan our life in accordance with these truths if we want to be truly successful, in this life and in the life after death.

In this present world, to plan one’s life on the basis of reality, ‘anti-programming thinking’, or, as they put it, ‘thinking out of the box’, is a must. This might appear to be something

very difficult, because for this one needs to think in terms of both this present, temporary life as well as the future, eternal life. But thinking in this way actually isn't really difficult at all if one trains one's mind to do so. A person's mind is so vast that it can encompass all sorts of contradictions. This truth has been wonderfully expressed by the British writer Walt Whitman in these words: "I am large enough to contain all these contradictions." It is entirely possible for us to begin to think contrary to the way we have been programmed, including about the phenomenon of death.

Each of us must seriously think and decide about how, in what direction and for what purpose we want to spend this temporary life of ours in this present world. This decision is of utmost importance because it will determine our eternal future after death.

Modern civilization is based on the concept of the maximization of material comfort and sense-pleasures. It is premised on a view of life that focuses only on this present life, a worldview encapsulated in the slogan 'Work hard, party hard!'. The creed of confession, you could say, of the mind that this civilization represents, is: 'Be happy, right here, right now!'. The modern media is almost entirely run according to this ideology.

This concept of a successful life is totally against God's plan for a human being. The fact is that human life is eternal. It stretches beyond death into the eternal future. Given this, a concept of life that is concerned only about today (this present life) and that totally ignores tomorrow (the eternal life after death) is a completely erroneous understanding of life and its purpose. Given the fact that human beings are eternal beings, the only beneficial way for us to plan our lives is to do so taking into full account the fact of our eternalness and the fact of the Hereafter, rather than recognizing just this present life and this present world.

But people in general don't recognize this. They keep

seeing others die but refuse to recognize that they too will die one day. To understand this point, consider this account about the late Russi Karanjia, a famous Indian journalist. Born in a Parsi family, he became a trendsetter in sensational journalism. He was considered on par with journalists like Khushwant Singh and Dom Moraes. He worked as a war correspondent in the Second World War. In 1941, he founded his weekly magazine, *Blitz*, on which the following motto used to appear: 'Free, Frank and Fearless'. He had contacts with many important people, like India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia, President Abdul Nasser of Egypt and the Shah of Iran.

Russi Karanjia suffered a heart attack twice. He died in a hospital in February 2000 in Mumbai. At that time, he was 92. A report in *The Times of India* (February 2, 2008), related that before his death "the only thing he complained about was that the nurses' skirts were not short enough".

At that time Mr. Karanjia was on his death-bed. He had almost reached death's doorstep. But even at that moment what he was obsessing about was that the skirts of the hospital's nurses were not short enough—while actually what at that moment he should really have been concerned about was what his condition would be after death. The reason why he didn't think as he ought to have was lack of awareness, including about the reality of death. He was unable to rise above the way he had been programmed to think. Hence, even in his last moments he remained unaware of the reality of death.

In the Quran, the Prophet's mission is described as *inzar*, or to give warning—that is, to remove people's unawareness and make them aware of the reality of life. Since we have no idea at all when we will die, most people rarely, if it all, think about death or recognize that they too will die one day. So, they live as if they will live forever. We need to overcome this unawareness so as to lead a life that will bring us true success,

both in this world and in the life after death. This requires us to come out of our programmed way of thinking and to move to higher levels of thinking, based on reality. The mission of the prophets is to help every person develop the capacity for this lofty thinking and lead a life that can bring us eternal success in the Hereafter.

One reason that many people do not seriously think about the inevitable fact of their having to die one day is because death seems to them simply as the cessation of life. Consciously or otherwise, they are unaware of the fact that death is not the end of life at all and that, actually, it is the beginning of a more meaningful stage of life. If they come to know this, their entire way of living will change. Their focus will be on how to live here in the right way so that they can become successful in the eternal life that unfolds after death.

Consciousness of the fact of our own death can thus become the greatest incentive to lead a truly meaningful life here and now. Remembrance of death doesn't make a person inactive and listless. On the contrary, it can make him much more active, in a very positive way. Remembrance of death can inspire us to do as much meaningful work as possible right now because such opportunities for action will not be available after death. Death is not the end of life but, rather, the end of opportunities for action. After death, we will not engage in actions but will be reaping the consequences, sweet or bitter, of the actions, good or evil, that we engaged in while in the pre-death phase of our life. If we are aware of this fact, remembrance of death can become a very strong motivational force for positive action.

He who created us—God—has made us as eternal creatures. In this sense, a person's true place of residence is the eternal world of Paradise. After birth, a person is kept in this present world for a limited period. This temporary place of residence is a place for him to be tested. During our short stay here, we are being tested to see who among us passes the

test and who doesn't. Those who pass the test of life will be chosen and settled in Paradise. And those who fail the test will be branded as a rejected lot, separated from the others.

Death is actually a midway station in an eternal journey. It is part of the continuity of life. None of us knows when death will come to us. The time of our death is known only to God. It is because of this that rarely, if ever, do we think about our death. We remain unaware of this reality until death suddenly whisks us away to another realm.

Every person has been made as an eternal being. No one can destroy this eternalness of a human being. However, when God sees that the period of someone's test in this world is over, He decides to put a stop to his stay on Earth and arranges for him to be taken from this world and brought into the next, eternal world. This transfer period is called death. In reality, death is simply about being transferred from one place or plane to another. It is definitely not the end of life.

This fact tells us that for success in this life, each of us should develop a special ability, and that is, 'anti-programming thinking'. This sort of thinking is, as it were, thinking against oneself. Only in this way can we truly understand the issue of our own death, by thinking against our programmed heedlessness about it. Only then can we properly plan our life in such a way that we may gain true success, in this world and in the world after death.

Under the influence of programming, which causes him to be heedless of the fact of his death, a person seeks to build Heaven on earth, in this present world, for himself. But this is the height of stupidity because it is to mistake the journey (i.e. our temporary passage through this world) for the final destination itself—Paradise in the Hereafter—and that is something that is doomed to fail. All the things we may put ourselves to in accumulating here on Earth will suddenly be taken away from us the moment we die. We will leave all of it behind and go to the next world completely empty-handed.

This life is a journey. When you travel—by train or plane, for instance—you think of yourself as a traveller who is seated in a vehicle for a limited period. But suppose you forget this fact and take your journey to be your destination itself and start demanding to have all the facilities that you have only at home, your journey will become very difficult. That will be the case even if you are travelling by first class! But this is precisely the problem with most of us as we journey through life. We want to obtain things like perfect peace and joy here that can be had only in another world—in Paradise.

Death is an announcement of the fact that the different things that we had been given while we were in this world was not because they were our right or privilege but because they were part of our ‘test paper’ of the exam of life. The arrival of death is the end of this exam period. As soon as this period is up, all the things that we had received as part of our exam will be taken away from us and we will be left all alone. This enormously serious situation that all of us will one day face is a warning. It tells every person: “You must prepare now itself for the stage of life after death by leading the right sort of life. If you enter that stage without having made the necessary preparations, you will suddenly find yourself completely without any support. You will discover that whatever you had in this world has been parted from you and that now you have nothing whatsoever of what you require in your new stage of life.”

Life Beyond Life



Does a person remain alive after death? The answer is ‘Yes’. Death isn’t the end of life for anyone, because every person’s life is eternal. Death only means that a person comes out of one stage of life and enters another stage.

A person’s body consists of innumerable tiny cells. These cells are continuously decomposing and dying out, and new cells keep taking their place. This process goes on uninterruptedly, till all the cells of the body are replaced in this way. It is as if even before what is thought of as his death, a person’s body keeps dying. We see that despite this process, a person’s memory generally remains intact. How is it that when a person’s physical body is repeatedly experiencing ‘death’ through the continuous decaying of cells, his memory remains intact? If we were simply a collection of the cells of our body, our memory should have vanished. But our memory remaining intact despite the continuous death of the cells of our body is proof of the fact that our real being is distinct from our body and beyond it, that it is a separate being by itself and that it remains intact despite the death of the body.

Wall of Laughter



There was once a very strong and high wall that stood in some place, stretching far on both sides. The people who lived on both sides of the wall knew nothing about what lay on the either side and about those who lived there.

One day, the people from one side of the wall wanted to learn about things on the other side. So, for this purpose, they built a tall ladder and placed it against the wall. They sent a man from among them up the ladder so that he could see what lay beyond the wall and come down and tell them what he saw. But when the man climbed the ladder and got to the top, he found the world on the other side to be so beautiful that he just couldn't contain himself. He started to laugh uncontrollably and leapt across to the other side!

After this, the people living on this side of the wall sent another man up the ladder. But then the very same thing happened this time as well! When he reached the top, he found what he saw on the other side so wonderful that he burst out laughing and jumped to the other side of the wall.

This kept happening, over and over again. Each time the people sent a man up the ladder he found the sight on the other side of the wall so attractive that he laughed out loud and then leapt across to the other side. In this way, despite their efforts, the people living on this side of the wall remained completely unaware of what lay on the other side.

This 'laughing wall' is like the 'wall' of death. One part of our life lies on this side of the 'wall' of death. On the other side

of this 'wall' is a world of great joy—the world of Paradise. In contrast to Paradise, this side of the wall, where we presently are, is a world of hard work and struggle.

The story of the 'laughing wall' is as it were the story of the whole of human history.

By his very nature an individual seeks a life full of joy for himself. He is a joy-seeking being. Ancient man, faced with a life of challenges and sorrows, began searching for ease and happiness. For this purpose, he invented many things—such as, for instance, the wheel—following which a person's quest for a life of happiness continued apace. You could call this the 'Journey of Civilization'. After a long period of many centuries, this journey entered the phase of what is called 'Modern Civilization'. This civilization, based on modern industry, has led to the 'Age of Consumerism', when all sorts of consumer items that promise physical comfort have become super-abundant and are very easily available.

In this way, human civilization negotiated a long journey and finally arrived in the 21st century. But having got there, a new, exceedingly serious problem arose. Man's 'laughing wall' has now become a new sort of 'wailing wall'! People are now being forced to realize that the world that they sought to build for themselves after so much struggle and effort is not the world full of joys that they hoped for. Rather, it is a world full of problems. And so, in the 21st century, human civilization has entered a blind alley, synonymous with what can be termed as 'The End of History'.

Why and how did this happen? The answer to this has much to do with the nature of modern industry, of which pollution is an indispensable part. In order to create the world of our dreams we need pollution-free industries, but to create such industries is simply impossible for human beings. In this way, the problem of industrial pollution, which has assumed epidemic proportions today, has negated a great deal of the achievements of modern civilization.

On the one hand, there is the huge environmental pollution that is happening as human beings continue in their relentless quest to construct a world of their desires. But on the other hand, there prevails throughout the cosmos a completely pollution-free industry which has been in existence for aeons. This is the industry of Nature. Human beings have completely failed to create pollution-free industries. But on the very same planet where we presently live Nature has been running, since the very beginning, completely pollution-free industries, and that too on a huge scale!

Planet Earth is continuously in motion. It moves continuously about its axis, at a speed of around 1000 miles an hour. Along with this, it moves in the vast space in a fixed orbit around the sun, at a mindboggling speed of 67,000 miles per hour. The first journey gets over in 24 hours; the other in a year. This twin movement of Planet Earth is taking place continuously. But this produces no noise or any other sort of pollution!

The sun is an enormous storehouse of fire, heat and energy. It is so vast that it can contain 12,00,000 planets the size of the Earth! It is situated at a distance of around 92 million miles from the Earth. Despite being so far, it continuously sends to Earth light and heat, without which life here would be impossible. In this process too there is no pollution at all!

There is another industry in Nature—in the form of trees and plants. This industry functions in accordance with an intricate system. Trees and plants continuously supply animals and human beings with much-needed oxygen. Along with this, they continuously absorb the carbon dioxide that we breathe out. This is a really astounding sort of industry. And it too is completely free of noise, smoke and other sorts of pollution!

The Earth has huge reserves of water in the form of seas and oceans. This water contains preservatives, in the form of salt. Because of this, this water is not directly usable for humans to drink. But here too there is an amazing natural

industry that works for our benefit. The sun's heat causes sea water to evaporate. Then, through a process of condensation, water, now made free of salt, falls in the form of rain in areas of human habitation. This is a natural process of desalination of sea water, another industry of Nature that creates no pollution whatsoever!

These are two vastly different sort of phenomena: modern man-made industries, which are inconceivable without emitting pollution, and the pollution-free industries of Nature that are a blessing of God. The former have proven a failure in creating for us a world of joy. In seeking to produce objects of comfort, they have produced an impenetrable jungle of problems for humans that now may threaten the very survival of all life forms on Earth. But at the very same time, the industries of Nature produce a vast range of things that we require not just for our comfort but also for our very survival and are also completely pollution-free!

If, in line with the story about the wall mentioned above, death is considered as the wall that divides two worlds, it would be true to say that on one side of the wall is a 'wailing world'—a world full of pollution and racked with environmental destruction on account of human greed—and on the other side a 'laughter world'—Paradise, a world of unending joy.

The 21st century human civilization, despite having reached an impasse, is giving us a new, hope-filled lesson—and that is, that we should not try to create a 'laughter world' on this side of the 'wall' of death, for any such attempt is doomed to failure. Instead, we should focus on trying to obtain a seat in the 'laughter world', the world of joy that is Paradise, which lies on the other side of the 'wall'.

Break in History



Among the rules of government service in some countries there is one—that if a government employee doesn't take approved leave and is absent from office, the government has the right to treat his case as one of 'break in service'.

'Break in service' means that the employee will lose his seniority. In terms of employees' rights, he may even go back to where he was on the very first day that he joined his job. He may lose the chances of promotion that his previous period of service might have entitled him to.

A 'break in service' is a break in an employee's employment status. This same thing actually applies, on a much bigger scale, to every single individual—in what can be called a person's 'break in history'. With death, every person will experience his own personal 'break in history'. His entire personal history, which he has so carefully spent his life trying to build, will, when death strikes him, suddenly be wiped off. And then, he will be rendered 'history-less', as it were.

In this world, every person stands on the foundation of the personal history that he has built for himself. Over the years, he avails of many different opportunities that come his way, through which he makes his life. Money and properties, family and friends, power and fame—such things gather around him, and with these he constructs a history for himself. It is through his history that his character and individuality are built. Through it he knows himself and others know him.

This is the case with all of us. Every person is constantly

engaged in this process of making his personal history in this way, on the basis of which he forms his personal identity. But no one gets to live in his own history for very long. Suddenly—and in almost all cases considerably before 100 years—the moment of death arrives and a person is separated from all that he had lived amidst. This is everyone's 'break in history' moment.

This event is bound to happen to each one of us. Every person spends his life trying to build a world of their dreams and hopes. But then, all at once, death strikes and he is forced to leave this world that he has constructed with such great effort. He now arrives in a world for which he may have made no preparation. Behind him is the world that he has left forever. In front of him is a world that stretches on forever but for which he may have done nothing.

The pre-death phase of life is for all of us the first and last opportunity that we will get. After this, no one is going to get a second chance. A person who wastes this one and only chance simply on running after worldly goods and sense-pleasures will be compelled to live in complete deprivation in the stage of life after death. Death will separate him from his previous history forever, while he will not have another opportunity to make a new history for himself.

How strange it is that most of us, being engrossed in the rat-race of this world, are completely oblivious of the opportunities that we can avail of only in this present life in order to obtain success in the eternal Hereafter! How terrible will be the deprivation that one will have to face in the Hereafter for this heedlessness!

The Real Destination



Every individual seeks a secure world for himself. But all sorts of accidents and tragedies—man-made and natural—constantly intervene to remind him that we live in an unsure and insecure world.

An individual wants a life in this world that never ceases. But the event of death reminds him that he has got only a very limited period of time to live on Earth.

Every individual searches for ideal happiness, but different types of difficulties convey to him that here, in this world, he can only get that sort of happiness that is less than the ideal of his dreams.

A human being has enormous abilities, but most people use just a very small fraction of their potentials and leave the world.

Why is this so? The answer to this is present in the way a human being has been fashioned. In contrast to animals, who live only in the awareness of the present moment, man has a concept of tomorrow. On Earth, man is the only creature who has a concept of the future. It is this that is Nature's answer to the above question. And the answer is this—that the ideal that man is searching for right now—in this present world, in the phase of life before death—is actually present only in the Hereafter, in the phase of life after death. This is in line with the Creator's creation plan.

According to God's creation plan, a human being's life has two parts: one, the pre-death period, and the other, the

post-death period. The ideal world that a person desires has been kept in the post-death period of his life. The status of the pre-death period of his life is that of a testing-ground or selection-ground. Only someone who in the pre-death period proves himself to be suitably qualified will be declared to be eligible to be settled in the ideal world called Paradise in the post-death period.

Events like natural disasters that occur every now and then serve as a warning—to tell us that it is simply impossible to make Heaven on earth, to build Paradise here. Although Planet Earth is very beautiful, it is also very vulnerable. Here, there are so many limitations that it simply cannot become the abode of Paradise. Earth is only a preliminary introduction to Paradise, not Paradise itself. For Paradise, another world is required, a world that is unlimited and that is free of every sort of fear. Paradise requires a perfect world in every sense, whereas the present world is in every sense less than perfect. A perfect Paradise cannot be built in an imperfect world.

By nature, a human being is a seeker of Paradise. But this Paradise cannot be had in this world. It can be had only in the post-death phase of one's life. Those who know this fact and lead a Hereafter-oriented life can, with God's grace, enter that Paradise after death. And as for those whose only concern is enjoyment in the world of today, there can be nothing in store for them after death but abject failure.

End of a Period



In the first week of June 2007 a meeting of the ‘G-8’ was held in Berlin, participated in by the heads of some of the developed countries. An important issue in the conference’s agenda was global warming. But despite long discussions on the subject, no programme was able to be decided on. A report on this important issue was published in *The Times of India* (New Delhi, June 10, 2007) with the title ‘Too broke to save the world’.

These days, the media is flooded with news, almost on a daily basis, about global warming. Scientists from across the world are saying that the world’s climate is dangerously changing. The Earth’s life-support system will soon be so badly damaged that there might no longer be any possibility for life to remain on the planet. The time has now come very near when the present period of life will come to an end, in accordance with God’s plan, and the second phase of life, the world of the Hereafter, will begin.

God had made this present world as a preparatory ground for man. Here, all those things were made available through which man could make himself worthy of Paradise in the next world. Everything in this world was a means for man to prepare for the Hereafter, rather than being simply a means to draw comfort and ease from. But man’s actions did not conform to God’s creation plan. He took the present world to be an abode for pleasure, fun and frolic and invented this formula for his life: ‘Eat, drink and be merry!’

In this way, humans deviated from God's creation plan, so much so that they created modern consumerist civilization, which is based in the fullest sense on the above formula. God waited for thousands of years so that people might rethink their conduct and pattern of life, that they should stop pursuing their personal agenda in God's world, that by reforming themselves they should live in accordance with God's creation plan, that they should use the opportunities of the world to become a person desired by God, whom God would choose to settle in His eternal Paradise.

But man did not show that he was prepared to re-examine and change his behaviour. Man has now lost the justification on the basis of which he had been settled on Earth. Present-day global warming is actually an advance warning of this fact.

In this situation, it was the duty of followers of all faiths to make people aware of the terrible dangers that loom ahead, to tell them that the final opportunity for making preparations are soon going to get over, that they should make no delay and immediately set about trying to live in line with God's creation plan. But people of all faiths are waiting for a saviour to come in the future. They all think that some person who they expect will mysteriously appear through some miraculous power and will perform all the tasks needed to set the world aright. But this is a grave misconception. The fact is that no such mysterious being is going to come. What is going to come is only the Day of Judgment. And when the Day of Judgment comes, it will make no concessions for anyone at all!

Selection for Paradise



It was perhaps in 1998 when Dr. Sharma introduced me to a senior scholar, Professor Singh. After retiring from America, Professor Singh had returned to India. His house looked like a library! It exuded a scholarly charm. Professor Singh appeared to be a scholar in the true sense of the term.

During our conversation, Professor Singh mentioned that he had done his MA in Political Science. After that, he did his Ph.D. in International Relations. At that time, a university in America needed a professor in that subject and advertised for the post. Professor Singh applied for the job. Soon, he received a reply from the university, inviting him to America for an interview.

When Professor Singh reached America, a man was at the airport to receive him. The man said to him that he had been sent by the university so that he could guide him around. Professor Singh got into his car and they headed to the university, where Professor Singh was put up in the university guesthouse.

After this, the man would come to Professor Singh every day, and from morning to evening would take him around the vast university campus. In this way, he took him to all the various faculties and engaged him in various activities in the university.

A week passed this way and soon Professor Singh got apprehensive. He spoke to the Head of the Department, saying that he had been there for a week, having been called

for an interview, and yet the interview hadn't taken place as yet. The Chairman said to him something like this: "Your interview is over. We have selected you, and you can join us from tomorrow!" He explained to Professor Singh that the man who had met him at the airport and had been taking him around the university was a senior professor who had also been his interviewer!

The Chairman said that from the documents that Professor Singh had sent them it was clear to them that as far as his educational qualifications were concerned, he was fully qualified. But they also needed to know if he would be qualified in terms of being compatible with the university's culture. His interviewer had been engaged in trying to find out precisely this over those several days. He had taken Professor Singh to every department in the university. He had shown him around. In the course of this process, he had observed his behaviour with students and teachers. His report about him was fully positive. And so, the university had decided to select him and was now offering him the job that he had applied for!

This incident, in the form of a real example, tells us something very profound about the reality of man and Paradise. Just as Professor Singh was subjected to a detailed test by the university authorities in order to gauge if he was qualified for joining the university, every person on Earth is being tested to see if he is qualified for joining the world of Paradise.

God made a vast world, the world of Paradise, a world that was in the fullest sense a perfect world, a world where everything was of top standards. God wanted that in that world He should settle such people who in terms of their character were fully qualified for it, who would live in that ideal world as ideal people. Now, God also made the present planet Earth—as an introductory model of the perfect world of Paradise. Here, all those things are found that are present in Paradise. The only difference is that Paradise is a perfect

world, while the present world is an imperfect world. Paradise is eternal, while the present world is temporary. Paradise is free of fear and grief, while the present world is full of fear and grief. Paradise is the world for reward, while the present world is a world for being tested.

In accordance with this creation plan, God created human beings and settled them on Earth. God has given every person full freedom. He has granted a person the freedom to live without any restraints. He has the choice to use this freedom as he wishes—in the right way or a wrong way. Every person who is born here has two invisible angels of God always present with him. They are continuously recording every thought, word and action of his. On the basis of this record the decision of eternal Paradise or eternal Hell in the next world for every person will be made.

In Paradise, a person will live with full freedom. But he will be so mature and awakened that under no circumstances will he ever misuse his freedom. While being fully free he will live in full discipline. It is to select such people that the present Earth was created. A record is continuously being made here of the people who, passing through different sorts of conditions while here, gave proof of a paradisiacal character. Such people will be settled in a paradisiacal world in the Hereafter for eternity.

God's invisible angels are continuously recording how we are using our freedom while in this present world—for good or for ill. It is this that is our real test, and it is on the basis of this test that the decision about our eternal future will be made. The test is this: At every opportunity, did we acknowledge God's greatness, or did we ignore it? When our conscience admonished us, did we accept its voice, or did we turn away from it? When faced with a truth that came along with evidence for it, did we willingly accept it, or did we seek to defy it? When our ego conflicted with Truth, did we follow the former or the latter? In dealing with people, were we just, or

did we, for the sake of our interests, act unjustly? Did we appear good in front of others just in order to create an impression, or were we good in our personal life too? Did we make Truth or something else our supreme concern? If we obtained power, did we fall prey to corruption, or did we remain upright? Did we maintain equanimity in both poverty and richness? How did we behave when we were put on the sidelines, and how did we behave when we were given importance? Did we keep our emotions under the control of ethical principles, or did we chase after our desires?

A record of our performance with regard to these and other such matters is continuously being made by the invisible angels that are always with us, throughout our life. On the basis of this record the decision about our eternal future after death will be made.

The present world, here on Earth, has been made for a limited period. After this period is over, all the people who have taken birth here will be brought before God. In accordance with the record prepared by the recording angels, God will announce the decision about their eternal future. If a person's record shows that he lived in this world with a paradisiacal personality and that he used his freedom within the limits set by God, it would prove that he is qualified to live in Paradise. Accordingly, he will be selected and settled in that realm. And as for those who couldn't give evidence of a paradisiacal personality, they will be rejected and put into the eternal dustbin of the universe, so that they will lead a life of despair and remorse forever, never to be able to escape from it.

Hereafter-Oriented Thinking



In a general comment on human beings, the Quran (76:27) says:

Those people [who are unmindful of God] aspire for immediate gains, and put behind them a Heavy Day.

Man has been created as an eternal being. But his lifespan consists of two parts: the pre-death period, and the post-death period. A common weakness of man is that he takes his pre-death period as the basis or framework of his thinking and is concerned about it alone. He does not think in the context of the post-death period of his life. This is the truth that is referred to in the above-cited Quranic verse. This is no ordinary matter. It is this issue that gives a person's thinking the right or wrong direction.

A person who thinks only in the framework of the problems and issues of the pre-death period of life develops in himself world-oriented thinking. His thinking will, in every sense, become non-realistic thinking—because he ignores the reality of the eternal life after death. And non-realistic thinking is another name for wrong thinking.

In contrast to this, a person who thinks in the framework of the issues of life after death will develop in himself Hereafter-oriented thinking. This sort of thinking is realistic thinking, because it is based on the reality of the eternal Hereafter. And realistic thinking is but another name for right thinking.

A person's progress or destruction depends entirely on

this issue. If a person who develops in himself world-oriented thinking, his entire life will move in the wrong direction. In contrast, the person whose thinking is Hereafter-oriented will head in the right direction. It is this issue that is of fundamental importance for an individual's character-building.

The Nursery of the Hereafter



The first thing that a person in this world should discover is the creation plan of the One who created human beings and the universe. From a study of the Quran it is clear that God first made a vast and perfect world—the world of Paradise. Then, He made humans and settled them there. God bestowed humans with complete freedom of choice. It was desirable for people to freely acknowledge their Creator and, through this free choice, lead a self-disciplined life. But people did not pass this test. They misused their freedom.

At first, human beings had been settled in Paradise on a general basis. But when they failed to live up to the established standard, God decided that the decision of Paradise was to be made on a selective basis—that is, only those people would be settled in Paradise who fully lived up to the desired standard of self-discipline. For this purpose, God made a temporary world, a world in addition to eternal Paradise.

This temporary world is Planet Earth. The Earth is, as it were, a temporary nursery to feed the garden of Paradise. On this planet, people are being 'cultivated', like saplings in a plant nursery. Here, people are given the opportunity to live

amidst different conditions. Throughout this period, they are under the supervision of recording angels. These angels are continuously watching how people behave in different situations and what sort of personality they are developing. Then, if someone proves, through his character and his thoughts, words and deeds that he is in sync with the standards of Paradise, he will be taken out of the temporary nursery of the world and planted in the eternal garden of Paradise so that he can flourish in the atmosphere there forever and continue on a never-ending journey of progress. Death for him is the day when this transplantation will happen.

In the Quran (51:49), a principle of creation is described as follows: “We created pairs of all things so that you might reflect.” Nature’s system is such that here everything has been created in the form of pairs. In the same way, the present world has also been created as a pair. Planet Earth is one member of a pair. The other member of this pair is the world of the Hereafter, where Paradise is located. Paradise is the complementary part of the present world. Without Paradise, the present world is incomprehensible, but with it, it becomes fully comprehensible.

The Nursery of Paradise



The Creator made a vast world. This world was in every sense ideal and perfect. This world is called Paradise. From the Quran we learn that Paradise was made before the creation of Adam. After this, God wanted that He should select those

people who were worthy of being settled in this paradisiacal world. For this purpose, He created Planet Earth. This planet is, as it were, the nursery of Paradise. A nursery is a place where saplings are reared for transplantation, to be later taken out and planted in a garden.

The present world is a sort of nursery. Here, people are continuously taking birth. Through his actions, every person is building up a positive or negative character for himself. Death is that moment when, like a sapling being plucked out from the nursery, an individual is taken out of this world. If he has built an undesirable character for himself, he is rejected, like an unhealthy sapling that is discarded. And if he has developed a desirable character, he is settled in the garden of Paradise.

This point can be understood in the light of this Quranic verse (67:2):

He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving One.

On the planet where we presently are, innumerable people take birth. They spend a limited period of time here and then die. This entire crowd is not desired by the Creator. The Creator will select only those people who in the course of this period of selection prove that in the fullest sense they are the best in deeds. In a nursery, all sorts of plants grow. Likewise, in this world there are all sorts of people, with varying types of character. But in Paradise only those people will be settled whose record says they are qualified for this—in terms of their character and deeds.

In the Quran Paradise is described in great detail. In one sense, the Quran is an introduction to Paradise. This introduction is in such an effective manner that one who reads the Quran begins to see Paradise with his own eyes, as it were. If you collect together the verses of the Quran that refer to

Paradise and study them you may experience a strong emotion emerge within, urging you to make Paradise your destination and to focus all your activities in its direction. As is said in the Quran (37:61): “It is for the like of this that all should strive.”

For the present world the Creator’s criterion of selection of people for Paradise is not collective or mass-based, but, rather, individual-based. In this sense it would be correct to say that the present world is not for the establishment of a system or government but, rather, for the development of one’s personality or character. Here, only development of one’s personality is possible in the ideal sense. The formation of an ideal system or state is completely impossible here. It is this interpretation of human life that is the right one. Evidence that it is right is the fact that with this description of human life everything falls into place and one gets fully satisfying answers to all the questions of life.

Two Worlds



It is said that there are two worlds: a positive world, and a negative world. Just as without a positive particle and a negative particle an atom cannot exist, for the existence of one world, the second world is also necessary.

We live in a world that we see and feel with our physical senses. This is the world in which we spend our entire present life. We spend 24 hours a day every day of our life here, witnessing different scenes and performing different activities.

In addition to this world, we have an idea or concept of another world in our minds—a world which, in comparison to the present one, is perfect, where all our desires will be completely fulfilled. A human being is by birth a perfectionist. In line with this, he seeks to obtain an ideal world of his dreams. But he fails in this search ultimately and dies.

In this way, it can be said that in every person's mind there are two worlds. The first is the world in which he presently lives, here on Planet Earth. The second world is the ideal world of his hopes and dreams, which he seeks to obtain while in this world itself but fails to and then dies.

This aspect of a human being's mind is an indication of the fact that there are indeed two worlds—the first being the world where we are at present, and the second being the world that we may obtain in the future, after death.

Misuse and Proper Use of Freedom



God is the eternal source of every sort of beauty and goodness. God created human beings. Man is a complete being by himself. Man contains within himself every sort of ability, of perfect standards. Man's brain contains some 100 million billion particles. These phenomena indicate that the Creator has blessed man with unlimited potentials.

Along with this, man has been given a unique sense of pleasure. Man has an unlimited capacity for enjoyment. For man, everything is potentially a means for enjoyment. God has created man with these unique abilities.

God has also made a beautiful world, Paradise. It is a perfect world, in which every sort of pleasure is present in its perfect form. Man and Paradise are, as it were, counterparts of each other. Man is for Paradise, and Paradise is for man. Paradise is that place where man can obtain complete fulfilment. Paradise is, as it were, the completion of man. Without Paradise, man is meaningless, and without man, Paradise is incomplete.

Man is a potential inhabitant of this Paradise. But Paradise is not obtained by anyone on the basis of birth or ethnicity. The condition for entrance into Paradise is that a person should prove that he is worthy of it in terms of his character.

God made the present world as a selection-ground for this very purpose. Conditions in this world have been arranged in such a way that everything here is a test-paper for us. Here, at every moment we are on trial. God is preparing a record of every person's words and deeds here. On the basis of this record it will be decided which of us will be qualified to be settled in Paradise.

A human being has been given full freedom in this world. This freedom is not as a reward, but, rather, for the purpose of our being tested. God is noting how we use this freedom. Do we use it responsibly, to do good? Or, do we misuse it, to do evil? The person who uses this freedom in accordance with God's creation plan, in the right way, will be chosen for being settled in Paradise. On the other hand, those who misuse this freedom will, on the Day of Judgment, find themselves to be a rejected lot.

Human life is divided into two phases: the pre-death period, and the post-death period. The former period is a trial period, while the latter period is the reward period. It is this that is the biggest reality. And in knowing this lies hidden a person's success or failure.

Detached Thinking



How does it happen that a person becomes so heedless of the Hereafter?

The reason for this is that at every moment a person finds himself in a world which his experience tells him is a world other than the Hereafter. All his dealings and relations are with this known world. From morning to night, and again from night to morning, his entire life is spent in this same world. In this way, he becomes so used to this present world that, consciously or unconsciously, he thinks that whatever appears to him externally is precisely the whole of reality or the total world and that beyond it there is nothing. Even many of those who in theory accept the Hereafter think in this same way in practice.

In such a situation, a strong, throbbing faith in the Hereafter can only be had by someone who develops in himself detached thinking—that is, while living in this world, he mentally separates himself from it. Physically, he is still located in this world, but in terms of his thinking, he has reached the world of the Hereafter.

This method of detached thinking is the only way for one to live in the consciousness of the Hereafter. It is this Hereafter-oriented thinking that makes a person develop a truly spiritual personality. There is simply no other way.

To become a spiritual person there is just one condition—and that is, to become a complex-free soul or, in the words of the Quran, a ‘soul at peace’. Only such a person receives

God's guidance. And it is only God's guidance that can make someone a spiritual person.

Returning Is Impossible



These days, when I see people laughing and enjoying themselves I sometimes have a strange feeling. A powerful emotion compels the hairs on my body to stand on end, as it were. I begin to think about the end-result they have to face one day but of which they are completely unaware. Very soon, they will encounter an enormously serious situation from which they will never be able to save themselves. Yet, they are totally unconscious of it. In the face of the immensity of the event they are going to confront, they ought to have fallen silent. But instead of this, they are sunk in fun and frolic and are laughing away uncontrollably.

What is that terrifying event that they are going to face? It is the event of death. Every person who takes birth here has to die. No one can save himself from death. Nor does anyone have the power to divest himself of life in the true sense of the term, since after being created, we have actually all become eternal. Every person has, come what may, to live forever, even after death.

After death, suddenly every person will find himself in a world from which return is impossible. An individual will arrive in this next world without any return ticket that can bring him back to the present world.

The present world is the world for action. There is no

reward here. The next world will be the world of reward. There will be no opportunity for action for anyone there. This is the fate for all of us. None can change this.

While living in this present world the first thing we ought to do is to learn what the creation plan of the Creator is. Why did the Creator make this amazing world in the first place? And why did He settle therein a creature like a human being, whom He has gifted with such amazing abilities? People's unawareness is on account of not knowing the creation plan of God, because of which many of them think that death is the end of life and that after that there is nothing at all. But if they come to know that we are travellers on a long journey, that passing through this present world and going beyond death we have to enter the eternal world of the Hereafter, the entire pattern of their life will change!

Life on the Other Side



A human being is apparently perfect. But in actual fact he is a deficient or incomplete being. An individual has eyes, but without external light he cannot see. He has ears, but without air he cannot hear. He has legs, but without sufficient force of gravity he cannot walk. He has a mouth, but if he has no access to food, he cannot eat.

Now, imagine a situation where you are alive in this very body but all the external things that you require to function have been taken away from you. You have eyes, but there is no external light. You have a mouth, but there is nothing to eat.

You have legs, but the force of gravity has disappeared, or the ground on which to walk on is missing. Moreover, you have become all alone. All your people have left you.

Sounds scary, isn't it?

But this is no imaginary scenario. The fact is that every person will have to face this situation, one day or the other, when death arrives. Every single person who is alive today will die someday. And then he will find himself in a world as depicted above.

This momentous day that is bound to arrive is actually at this very moment racing towards us, rushing closer and closer by the second. And so, the very first thing that each one of us needs to do is to know about the reality of this impending event and then to make appropriate preparations for it. When death arrives, it will be a point of no return. After death, a person can only reap, not sow. He cannot return to the world in order to make the necessary preparations for the Hereafter that he ought to have made before.

As soon as we take birth in this present world our countdown begins. No one knows when this countdown will reach its final number.

Everything Falls into Place



Most people think of death as something undesirable. Generally speaking, people want to live a long life. But despite this, suddenly, one day or the other, they die. They were, it seemed, on a journey. They planned to travel very far. But well

before they could arrive at their hoped-for destination, death, in line with a unilateral decision, put an end to their life here!

Why does this happen? This is a question that all of us ask. Everyone wants to know why death takes place. What is life? What is death? Why is it that people want to live a long life, but then, without their consent, they have to accept death's decision?

One clue with regard to these existential concerns lies in our DNA. Every person has a DNA code inside him. Our DNA is, as it were, a vast encyclopaedia about a huge number of aspects of our personality. But it does not contain any information about one key aspect of our life—and that is how, where and when we are going to die. This fact is an announcement from Nature that a human being is a creature who shall never die. For a human being, there is continuous life. In the true sense, death will never happen to his being.

Now, include another aspect of an individual's personality here—that among all living beings it is only a human being who has a concept of 'tomorrow'. All animals live only in 'today'. No animal has a notion of the future. On account of their limited consciousness, all animals share this common predicament. But exceptionally, a human being is a creature who has a clear concept of 'tomorrow'—of the future.

A human being has many desires. He has many dreams for his today and tomorrow. But almost all people die while many of their desires remain unfulfilled. If you survey the general system of the universe, this seems to be really odd. In this vast universe it is only a human being who is beset with this predicament. Other than humans no creature is afflicted with this problem. There must certainly be an answer to this question. An individual's desires must meet with fulfilment in just the same way as in the case of other creatures. This suggests that after the present world, another world will come, a world where a person can obtain the fulfilment of all of his desires.

There is an additional aspect of this issue, and that is that a human being has an innate sense of justice. By nature, a person wants that in the world decisions be made according to justice—that good people should receive full reward for their goodness and evil people should receive adequate punishment for their wickedness. This is demanded by human nature itself. This demand also necessitates that there be another world where this requirement of justice is fulfilled, because for this to happen in the present world is just not possible.

Keeping all these things in mind, the concept of the Hereafter comes to be seen as convincing and true. By accepting the reality of the Hereafter, one receives a completely satisfactory reply to all questions about life. Everything falls into place!

The Invisible Wall of Death



In a place somewhere in eastern India there was a coal mine, some 450 feet deep, which had been closed for many years. Gradually, a lot of water had filled up inside. Some years ago, another mine was excavated nearby, at a distance of some 80 feet from it.

On 27th December 1975 a terrible accident occurred. The distance of 80 feet or so between the two mines was thought to be considerably safe. But suddenly, a 60 feet-wide hole formed and water from the old mine rushed into the new mine with such speed that in just three minutes, the new mine filled up. More than 370 labourers and engineers who were working

at that time in the mine were drowned in a flood of more than 100 million gallons of water. Only one person survived—he had come out of the mine just a few minutes before the accident occurred.

This shocking incident has strong parallels with our own life. Between the present world and the world of the Hereafter is the thin wall of death. At every moment it is possible that this wall will collapse and the realities of the Hereafter will, like an enormous flood, break upon us. At that time, nothing can save us. An individual will then be brought before his Lord, bereft of any support. Then, those people who were so lost in the deceptions of the world that they refused to heed words of counsel and guidance will stand before God to face judgment. Only those will be saved who had prepared a good account before being presented before the Lord.

Wise is he who puts himself to preparing for that coming day.

Real World, Imaginary World



A human being takes birth in this present world. He spends his days and nights here. Passing through various experiences, the journey of his life continues apace. Through these experiences, consciously or unconsciously he comes to think that this present world is the real, absolute and ultimate world. In contrast, he thinks that the world of the Hereafter is an imaginary world. On account of this apparent difference between these two worlds, a person thinks only on the basis

of this world. In his thinking and in his planning, there is, in actual practice, no place for the eternal Hereafter.

This is a human being's biggest problem. Because the Hereafter has such enormous consequences for a person, his thinking ought to be Hereafter-oriented, not worldly-oriented. In order to help save a person from going astray in this regard, Nature has arranged for this world to be a world of difficulties. These problems function as a sort of speed-breaker. They exist so that a person should not be deluded into taking this present world as the ultimate world and that, instead, he should build his life on the basis of the Hereafter.

Psychologists say that a unique feature of a human being is that he possesses conceptual thinking. This quality distinguishes a human being from other creatures. This attribute, that is part of the way a person has been created, tells us what is desirable for him—and that is, that he should formulate the purpose of his life through conceptual thinking.

The present world is a world that can be seen by our physical eyes. In contrast, the Hereafter is a world that cannot be at present seen by us. It behoves us to make the world of the Hereafter our destination, rather than this present world. For this, we need to transform our thinking accordingly. We need to conceptually discover the true purpose of life.

Losing Out in the Hereafter



Once, I was talking with the manager of a company. I said to him that for success in life, effort is the most necessary thing. The manager replied that this was a principle of old times. The

present age, he claimed, is a completely different era, and for success in this age what is required is professional expertise. What he possibly wanted to say is that without such expertise, in today's age one is doomed to failure.

I reflected on this man's claim and discovered something really important. I thought that in this present world, some things are thought of as being important for success. But the Hereafter will be a very different world. What one needs for success there is very different from what is regarded as the criterion for success by most people in the present world. Accordingly, those who enter the world of the Hereafter without having prepared themselves in accordance with its standards will discover that they will have no place there. In the Hereafter they will obtain nothing but remorse.

Those who today revel in boasting about their presumed superiority will find themselves speechless in the world of the Hereafter. There, only one language will have any value, and that is the language of modesty.

Those who today refuse to acknowledge God will become totally valueless in the world of the Hereafter, because in that world, only those people will be deemed successful who lived in the acknowledgement of God and His greatness.

Those who are experts in spewing hate here will lose all status in the world of the Hereafter, because in that world, the culture of love will prevail, not the culture of hate.

As a result of this difference, many of those who appear big today in the eyes of the world will, in the world of the Hereafter, appear to be insignificant.

Racing to Nowhere!



If you look around you, you will find people hyper-active, very busy trying to fulfil their seemingly never-ending desires. They are engaged in a frantic race to obtain all sorts of things for themselves and their families. This is the mad rat-race that is impelled by the ideology of materialism. But what is the end result of this madness? It is simply that everyone still lives in the feeling that his desires have yet to be fulfilled!

Almost everyone lives in a feeling of deprivation. Their days, nights and years pass by this way, until one day, their huge mansion of desires is suddenly struck by the storm of circumstances and collapses into smithereens. And if circumstances do not demolish it, death arrives at its appointed hour and compels everyone to accept its merciless decision.

People are obsessed in trying to obtain all sorts of things for this temporary life before death whereas the real thing to do is to prepare for the eternal life after death. The life before death is the life of test, an examination. It is God's responsibility to provide for every person those things through which he can appear in the examination of life in this world. But as far as the issue of the life after death is concerned, God has not taken its responsibility. In the life after death, the entire matter depends on an individual's actions in the life before death.

The principle of the present world is that even if you don't do anything, the things that you need will be given to you. But in the next world the matter is very different. The principle that operates in the next world is that you reap as

you have sown. Yet, strangely, people make big efforts for this present world but completely ignore or forget the next world. In the present life, today's deficiency can be made up for by additional action tomorrow. But in the next life, no one will have the opportunity to come back to the life before death and make up for one's negligence.

The Tomorrow That is to Come



The Quran (75:20-21) says: "Truly, you love immediate gain and neglect the Hereafter."

When someone is born and comes into this world, he sees that here, all around him, there are many different opportunities that he can avail of. He rushes to make use of them, hoping to obtain as much benefit as he can.

This is the biggest mistake, in which almost everyone is engrossed. The opportunities of the present world are not for the purpose of simply gaining mere temporary worldly benefits. Rather, they exist so that they can assist people to engage in virtuous actions that can prove to be of benefit to them in the Hereafter. For instance, if someone has wealth, its true purpose is not to fulfil his sensual desires or to bolster his social status. The proper way for this person to use this wealth is to keep apart enough of it for his needs and then to spend the rest in God's path, such as for inviting people to God.

This world is temporary, and the world that is to come after death is eternal. But surprisingly, a person spends his everything to obtain what he regards as progress and comfort

in this temporary world alone, completely ignoring the eternal life of the Hereafter. He lives in such a way as if the Hereafter is a mere myth.

Wise is he who lives in awareness of the Hereafter. Foolish is he who is heedless of the Hereafter.

The Countdown has Reached Last but One



One day, I began to think about people who were once my contemporaries. These were people who were born around the time when I was born (about a century ago), people with whom I had travelled through the journey of life, people I had walked with. I had seen Mr. A alive, but today he is not in this world. Mr. B, Mr. C, Mr. D, Mr. E—all these people too have met with the same fate. In this way, I recalled many people I knew. I realized that all these people had died, so much so that I recently heard that Mr. Y, too, has also died.

I fell into deep thought. These words issued from my lips: “The countdown has reached the last but one letter of the alphabet!”

Then, I thought that this isn’t just a personal affair of mine, something that applies to me alone. The fact of the matter is that it applies to everyone else too! Every day, we see or hear about other people dying. But, surprisingly, few people seriously think about their own death. No one thinks that he could die that very day or even the next moment! People’s minds are constantly occupied with issues of the life before

death. But about matters related to the life after death no one feels the need to think deeply.

This is an utterly strange phenomenon of not knowing despite knowing! We know we will die one day, but we behave as if we never will! We hear about people dying every day, but we think that we will never meet the same fate!

World of Action, World of Reward



The present world is the arena of action, and the Hereafter is the arena for acquiring the results of our actions. A very small portion of the life of every person is spent in this present world. Then, after this, he is taken to another world, where, his fate will be determined in accordance with his actions in the world before death.

In this sense, the present world is a place for our examination. An examination hall is a place where students spend some time in order to be examined, not a place where they obtain the results of their examination. If a student wants to acquire a job while still sitting in the examination hall and even before writing his examination, he will definitely fail! In the same way, a person who wants to build an eternal palace of joy for himself in this present world is never going to succeed—because the present world hasn't been made for that purpose at all!

Wise is he who understands this difference and who, while being in this world, does here what he has to and desires for the Hereafter that which can be had only there.

In this regard, a wise person adopts the same principle that a student does. When a student is in an examination hall, his entire attention is on trying to answer his test paper as well as he can. He doesn't try to build the palace of his dreams in the examination hall itself. A wise person has the same attitude regarding this world and the Hereafter. He puts his short life before death into preparing for the Hereafter so that after his examination in this world, he can obtain for himself an eternal world of joys—in Paradise.

If a person is heedless in this regard, after he dies, it will not be possible for him to make up for it. It will be impossible for him to return to the world and again appear for the examination of the Hereafter.

Why This Honoured Status?



With regard to the creation of a human being the Quran (23:115) says:

“Do you imagine that We created you without any purpose and that you would not be brought back to Us?”

The Creator has created human beings in the best form. The Quran (40:64) says:

He [God] shaped you, formed you well, and provided you with good things. Such is God, your Lord, so glory be to Him, the Lord of the Universe.

In the entire universe, a human being has the status of an honoured creature. Thus, in the Quran (17:70) God says:

We have honoured the children of Adam, and have borne them on the land and the sea, given them for sustenance things which are good and pure; and exalted them above many of Our creatures.

The Creator has blessed human beings with wonderful abilities. In terms of his creation, an individual is an extremely meaningful being. An exceptionally intelligent design is clearly evident in the way he has been made. In this there is clear indication that God, man's Creator, wants man to play a positive role in this world. Yet, most people do just the opposite, generally speaking. This is undoubtedly the biggest question of human history.

The answer to this question can be found through a *hadith*, according to which the Prophet Muhammad said: "Remember death much because it demolishes all desires." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi* 2307). This *hadith* means that losing himself in temporary pleasures, a person fails to play the role that was set for him given his abilities. In this regard, a person must awaken his consciousness. He should understand this indication from the Creator—that if, in accordance with God's creation plan, he puts himself in the divine scheme of things (which is the proper use of his abilities), all his life's needs will be taken care of, and in the best way, by the Creator Himself.

Towards the True Companion



The Quran says that when the tyrannical Pharaoh of Egypt ordered the death of his believing wife, she uttered the following prayer (66:11):

“My Lord, build me a house in nearness to You in Paradise and save me from Pharaoh and his misdeeds. Save me from all evil-doers.”

This is a prayer expressed in the words of an ordinary believer. The very same prayer was expressed by the Prophet Muhammad when he was near the time of his death in these words: “O God, the most noble Companion!” (*Allabumma al-rafiq al-a’la*). (*Sahih al-Bukhari* 4463)

In terms of their essence these two supplications are synonymous. The first is a prayer in the words of a believer or *momin*; the second is a prayer uttered by a prophet by virtue of being God’s messenger.

These two supplications are actually an expression of a devout believer’s feelings with regard to death. When the moment of death arrives, a believer’s feelings are moulded in the form of a supplication like the above. At that moment, a believer should feel that on being separated from the people of this world, he should acquire the closeness of God; that when he is lifted from the company of people, he should be blessed by being admitted into the company of angels; that when death cuts himself off from his people, he should not become alone

but, rather, that he should enter the lofty company in which he obtains the blessing of being in God's neighbourhood.

The above-mentioned prayers are an expression in words of the inner spiritual feelings of a person who has deep trust in God. Such a person desires that the next phase of life will prove to be better for him than the present phase. He hopes that in the world after death he will be granted a higher level of the blessings that he had received from God in this present world. Death for him is to come out of an imperfect world and a means to enter a perfect one.

Permanent Joy Only in the Hereafter



Charlie Chaplin was a British film star. He was born in 1889 and died in 1977, at the age of 88. He was a famous comedian. He excelled in making people laugh. But inside, he was a very sad man. Despite all his material wealth, he wasn't at all happy.

It is said that once a person visited a psychiatrist. He told the psychiatrist that he was very depressed and requested him to suggest some way that he could become happy. The psychiatrist advised him to see Charlie Chaplin's shows. And do you know what? The man told the doctor that he was Charlie Chaplin himself! He explained that while he made people happy, he himself was deeply unhappy.

Charlie Chaplin was a comedian, but by the time the moment of his death drew near, he had turned into a tragedian! The man who used to make other people laugh once said this

about himself: “I always like to walk in the rain, so that no one can see me crying”.

This is the very same story of many people in this world. They laugh artificially, but inside they have no joy. They tell others stories about their supposed successes, but inside they are racked by a defeatist mentality.

The truth is that in the present world, there is no permanent joy and comfort for anyone. Such joy and comfort are possible only in the Hereafter, for people of firm faith in God.

Wait for Fulfilment of Desires



It was in the time when the British were ruling India. There was a Muslim man who was a senior government official. On the face of it he had all the comforts of the world. He had three daughters. He named them *Farhat* (‘Joy’), *Rabat* (‘Comfort’) and *Isbrat* (‘Affection’).

But this seemingly idyllic state of affairs did not last long. In 1947, the country was partitioned. After Partition, this man’s family was scattered. Moreover, they got stuck in different problems, which didn’t seem to end. Each member of the family fell victim of despair and then died.

This is the story of most people in this world. Here, an individual has all sorts of desires. He seeks to fulfil desires and obtain joy thereby. But no person manages to have all his desires satisfied here. Every person is in search of permanent pleasure, but almost everyone dies without obtaining it.

The fact is that God has made a human being as a seeker of happiness, but God has not placed in this present world the opportunities to obtain ideal happiness.

It is decreed for a person that he should have desires in this world. It is for him to manage or control these desires and wait for the world that comes after death for their complete fulfilment. Success lies in making this discovery.

Strength of Belief in the Hereafter



A story is told about Malik Shah (d. 1092), ruler of Iraq. One day, he was passing over a bridge while seated on his horse when an old woman came up and stood in front of him. A soldier of the king had conscripted her son for forced labour. Addressing Malik Shah, the woman told him what had happened. The king said to her that she should present a formal request in the court. The woman responded, “Malik Shah! You must decide for me right now, on this very bridge. Otherwise, tomorrow the decision will happen on the other bridge.”

By ‘the other bridge’ the woman meant the *pul-e sirat*. From a *hadith* we learn that the *pul-e sirat* is a bridge that is thinner than a hair, sharper than a sword and hotter than fire. In the Hereafter, true believers will pass over it quickly. Some people will find some difficulty crossing it but will eventually find relief. And other people will slip and fall down in the deep pits below.

Malik Shah was taken aback hearing the old woman’s words. At once he fulfilled her request.

Belief in the Hereafter is undoubtedly a revolutionary belief, much more revolutionary than all other beliefs and concepts. If someone discovers the Hereafter, he simply cannot remain as he was before. His discovery will become a personal earthquake, as it were, for him. It will completely transform his thinking, behaviour and dealings with others. In fact, he will become an entirely new person in every aspect.

If a society is made up of people who have a living conviction in the Hereafter, every member of that society will possess tremendous energy. In such a society, to remind a person of the court of the Hereafter will be a much more effective way to lead him to reform his behaviour than any sort of law or force. Faith in the Hereafter converts even a weakling into a person of great strength.

Failure of the Successful Person



Azim Hashim Premji (b. 1945) is among the biggest industrialists in the world. He is considered to be a super-achiever. He once remarked that the most interesting thing about life is that when you begin to understand it, it gets closer to getting over.

Many successful people have expressed similar views about life. The truth is that while a person's lifespan here is limited, his desires are unlimited. When he arrives at the age of maturity, he encounters various sorts of experiences—negative and positive. Passing through various stages of learning, he arrives on a plane where he feels that he can now

move towards his destination in a better way. But at that very moment he begins to feel that he has become old and that the time of his death is near.

Arriving at this stage, a person's conviction turns into frustration. He feels that he is dying without having reached his final destination. The noted poet Rabindranath Tagore expressed this feeling in these words: "I have spent many days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung."

Many people begin life with great enthusiasm but then die in utter frustration. There is only one reason for this tragedy—and that is, seeking to obtain in this temporary, ephemeral world what can be obtained only in the world of the Hereafter.

To save oneself from this tragedy, very early on in life one should learn what the Creator's creation plan is. In this world, true success is decreed only for that person who leads his life in accordance with this plan.

When Pleasures Are Demolished



The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Remember death often because it demolishes all desires." (*Sunan Ibn Majah* 4258)

Death is a sort of personal earthquake. Just as we are completely powerless in the face of an earthquake, we are completely helpless in the face of death. Death comes in accordance with God's decision. We can do nothing but to compulsorily accept it, whether we like it or not.

The average lifespan of a human being today may be around 70 years. Nobody of course knows when he will die. Consciousness of this fact ought to be enough to make every worldly pleasure lose its attraction for us. When we are truly aware of the reality and inevitability of death, wealth, power, and fame, all begin to appear ultimately meaningless. If someone once derived malicious pleasure in backbiting others, in character assassination and in gossiping, a living conviction about the reality of death will make him realize the utter futility of these negative actions. He will now know that such actions will only harm him—in this world and in the Hereafter.

Finally, the Grave



The Quran (102:1-2) expresses a general fact about people in these words: “Greed for more and more distracted you [from God] till you reached the grave.”

Many people make the amassing of as much material wealth as they can the sole purpose of their life. They remain fully engrossed in this activity until, suddenly, death arrives. Then, they depart from this world lamenting that they failed to obtain what they had set as their target.

The fact of the matter is that as far as our real needs are concerned, there is a limit to the wealth or money that we require. But when wealth for the sake of wealth itself becomes the purpose of life, there is no limit whatsoever. If you want to earn only so much wealth as you require to fulfil your needs,

once you reach the required limit you will be satisfied. But if you have made wealth for the sake of wealth the purpose of your life, you will never be happy—because your desires will never end. You will live in a state of perpetual discontent and agitation, and you will die in that state too.

The famous American business magnate Bill Gates acquired a lot of wealth in life. He was so successful in this regard that he became, in terms of material wealth, the richest person in the world! But, finally, he realized that his needs were limited and that hoarding excessive material wealth was pointless. In a lecture he is reported to have said, “I can understand wanting to have a million dollars...but once you get beyond that, I have to tell you, it’s the same hamburger.” In other words, no matter how much wealth you accumulate, all you need to fill your stomach is the same snack!

People who spend their lives accumulating material wealth finally take nothing of this with them when they leave. No matter how big a palace you may own, you can be only in one room at a time. And then, finally, when death comes, you will be parted from your palace forever. No matter how big his empire may be, an emperor can sit only on one throne at a time. And one day or the other, the emperor will have to give up his throne when he is compelled to leave this world.

Given this, if you want to be practical, make Paradise your destination, not anything of this world.

If seen in terms of this world, an individual’s final place is just the grave. But seen in terms of the Hereafter, there is an eternal world that can open up to us, a world that has no limitations. This is the world of Paradise. Wise is the person who takes from this world only what and as much as he actually needs and makes Paradise in the eternal Hereafter the focus of his hopes and desires.

A Compulsory Reminder



Death is mentioned in several verses in the Quran. In one verse (29:57), the Quran says: “Every soul shall taste death and then to Us you shall return.”

Death is a compulsory experience for every person. But what is death? One way to define death is that it is that which causes the total detachment of a person from the world that he has constructed from himself and in such a manner that it is not possible for him to ever return there. Consciousness of this fact is enough to completely shake a person out of his heedlessness. In just a moment death tears a person away from the world where he may have spent several decades!

Another way to describe death is that it is a compulsory reminder—a reminder to every person that his real or ultimate destination is not this world but some other place. Death reminds us that one day or the other we will be compulsorily ejected from this present world and then returned to our Creator, going back to the One who created us.

The Quran repeatedly reminds us of this event that is fated for each one of us and exhorts us to be aware of it. We should remember death so often that it can be said that our very thinking should become death-oriented thinking—in a positive way—so that being conscious of the inevitability and reality of our death, we can lead our life in a truly meaningful way, in accordance with God’s creation plan. Awareness of death should enable us to spend the pre-death period of our

life in preparing for success in the post-death period of our life.

Guidance from Death



Many newspapers have a regular ‘Obituary’ column, where news of the death of people is announced. These are generally of people from economically wealthy families, because you need to pay quite a bit to have an obituary published in a newspaper. Obituaries generally have a picture of the deceased, along with mention about when and where their last rites will take place and an invitation to relatives and friends to attend the ceremony.

Generally, when someone dies, their heirs consider it their duty to perform their last rites, in accordance with the traditions of their religious community. And, if they can afford it, some people also arrange for an obituary to appear in a newspaper so that others can know about the person’s death. This done, they think they have done their duty.

But this isn’t enough really. The fact is that news of someone else’s death is also news about one’s own death in a way. Hearing about someone else’s death should make one reflect on his own impending death. He should see his own fate in the fate of the deceased. To draw guidance for oneself from someone else’s death is a very wise thing. But how many of us do that?

Your Actions Will be Returned to You



The Prophet Muhammad is said to have remarked: “When a person dies, the reckoning begins for him.” (*Kanz ul-Ummal* 42123) This means that death is not the end of life (contrary to what atheists, for instance, contend). Rather, it is to exit from one phase of life and enter into another. There is no gap between these two phases. Life is a continuity, and death is simply a matter of being transferred from one phase of life into the next one.

This present world is the place for building our character. Here, each one of us is engaged, whether we recognize it or not, in this process. Character-building is of two types: positive character-building, and negative character-building. Those who develop a positive character for themselves in this world will, after death, be admitted into the gardens of Paradise. Contrarily, those who develop a negative personality while in this world will, after death, be devoid of the great blessing of Paradise. This is expressed in a *hadith* in these words: “Surely your actions will be returned to you.”

Between an individual and his actions there is no distance at all. Where a person is, his actions also are. In the present world, all of our actions are not apparent. But after death they will suddenly become stark clear. All at once, a person will find himself amidst all his actions. A person who has done good actions will find himself surrounded by them. Someone who has done evil will find himself in the midst of his evil actions.

Prepare for the Moment That is Coming



It was a summer morning, and I was sitting in my office. From nearby trees I could hear the chirping of birds. I turned on the radio. A song was playing. I recall one line of the song:

Sajan re jhoot mat bolo

Khuda ke paas jana hai.

(Do not speak lies, O my dear,

We have to return to God!)

Hearing this, I felt as if the song coming from the radio and the chirping of the birds coming from the trees were actually one and the same! It was as if the radio was expressing in the form of words the same truth that the birds were expressing in the form of their chirping. Their message was the same: “O man! This world where you presently are is God’s world. The secret of your success lies in realizing this truth and moulding your life according to it.”

Life in this world is a period of test. And death is the end of that period. After death, every person is taken to God’s court, there to give a complete account of his life. On the basis of this accounting his eternal fate will be decided.

Many people celebrate their birthday every year. They think it is an occasion for much fun and frolic. But actually, one’s birthday is in a sense one’s ‘death-day’. It should remind us that we have one year less now to remain on Earth, that our allotted span here has been reduced by a whole year.

We are all sent into this world for a very limited span of time. After this, for everyone it is decreed that they must

die, at a time fixed by God and known only to Him. Seen in this way, one's 'countdown' is continuously happening. Every birthday makes one's remaining time here one year less and the final countdown one year closer.

Death is an event that everyone has to face. Death is a warning. It reminds us that, finally, we all have to face our Creator—God. It tells us that the time is very near for us to appear in God's court. It calls out to us, saying, "O you who are in deep sleep, wake up! And you who are awake, beware! Very soon you will be presented in God's court. Prepare yourself for that momentous day!"

Every morning, when the sun rises, it is as if God is shining His universal torch and reminding every person that He is seeing them all. What we have thought, what we have spoken, which path we have trod, how we have used whatever God has blessed us with—with all of this God is fully aware. Hence, when we think, we should always think carefully, with awareness, since God knows even our innermost thoughts. When we speak, we should speak consciously and carefully, for even before our words reach someone else, they reach God. When we perform any action, we should do so only after weighing our decision properly because God is fully aware of all that we do and for every action we will receive reward or punishment.

If we want to lead a truly successful life, in this world and in the Hereafter, we need to cultivate a God-oriented lifestyle. Rising above temporary desires, we need to orient our life in such a way that will benefit us in the eternal Hereafter. We need to cultivate awareness of our true status—of being creatures and servants of God. We need to be conscious of God's divinity and we must willingly and cheerfully submit to God. When we think, speak or act, we should first think if our thoughts, words and actions are in accordance with what God likes or not. We need to work on our thoughts, purging our minds of evil. Becoming well-wishers of others, we should

fully save ourselves from hatred and violence. If we receive a position in society, we should consider it our responsibility, not an honour that we supposedly deserve. We should become peaceful members of our society and peaceful citizens of the country where we live. We should love helping others.

These are some features of a God-oriented lifestyle.

We need to always keep before us our eternal success, in Paradise, rather than temporary gain, in this world. The most important thing we need to do is to understand the Creator's creation plan so that we can engage in proper planning of our life so that we reach our true destination and do not go astray.

Human life is like an iceberg. A very small portion of it—the tip—is visible in the world of today. The rest of it has been kept for the world that is to come after death. God, the Creator, has made a human being as an eternal creature. God kept a very small portion of his life in this present world and placed the rest of his life, which carries on forever, in the next world. Then, He decreed that he should spend the exam portion of his life in this present, short-lived, world, after which he would be taken to the next world, which comes after death.

What is the present world? And what is the next world? Paradise is an eternal world, while this present world is ephemeral. The present world is an imperfect world, while the next world is a perfect or ideal world. The present world is the place for us human beings to be tested, while the next world is the place where we will receive the results of our test. In this present world of test, those individuals who, through their actions, prove themselves worthy of being settled in the perfect world of Paradise are being selected. Those who do not come up to this standard will be thrown into the rubbish-bin of the universe.

Many people today are in a constant state of dissatisfaction. Even those who possess every material comfort are discontented. The reason for this is that by nature a person seeks an ideal world, whereas this present world, despite all

the many resources it contains, is an imperfect world. This hiatus between an individual's desire and the reality of this world is the real cause for frustration.

In Paradise, this hiatus or contradiction will be fully overcome. Paradise is the ideal world that a person instinctively seeks. In Paradise, every person will enjoy complete fulfilment and contentment. There, everyone will get complete fulfilment of his desires. The Prophet of Islam has described Paradise as what "no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being." (*Sahih al-Bukhari* 3244)

If you reflect on a human being in the context of his eternalness you will discover that his real problem is not success and failure in this present world, as the terms are conventionally understood. Rather, his real problem is to save himself from the punishment of eternal Hell in the Hereafter and to make himself worthy of entrance into eternal Paradise.

Real Existence is God's Alone



Robert H. Court was a businessman from Australia. In 1962, he started a small mill. His business made rapid progress so much so that it grew into a big commercial empire. Court's assets reached the 1.1 billion dollar mark. But in 1978, his decline began, so much so that he lost half his wealth. In 1990, he suffered a heart attack and died. At the time of his death he was 53. Giving news of his death the TIME magazine (September 17, 1990) reported: "Once the country's wealthiest

man, he died second richest (after fellow entrepreneur Kerry Packer), with an estimated fortune of \$650 million.”

In this world, this is the very same story with almost everyone else. Here, before his death, every person stands, in his own mind, as ‘first’—the centre of his own universe. But death makes everyone ‘second’. Death conveys this message: that here, no ‘I’ has any real existence and that no person is the centre of the universe, no matter what they would like to think. Death tells us that real existence is God’s alone.

Wise is the person who realizes this truth himself without death having to teach it to him. One who discovers this truth only when death strikes him is blind.

The Happiness We're Searching For



Once, I visited a place in Rajasthan, along with the late Maulana Muhammad Taqi Amini (d. 1991). There, we met a man who lived on a farmhouse. He had inherited considerable wealth from his father. He had married a woman of his choice, and the two of them lived on the farm.

On the face of it, the farmhouse seemed a lovely place. But inside, the man and his wife were a picture of utter misery. The couple had married out of choice and began a happy married life together on the farm. But after some years, they got bored of this sort of life. Maulana Amini and I spent a night and a day in the farmhouse, and during our stay I did not see them talk with each other even once. The farmhouse that was once a nest of joy had turned into a graveyard of gloom!

In my long life I have seen many people like this. They had worked very hard to amass wealth, but after that, they discovered that their wealth couldn't give them the joy they were seeking.

It often happens that a person gets married, very excitedly and with many hopes and dreams, to someone of his choice. But just a few days into their marriage he feels that his marriage is only a dry responsibility for him, a big burden! Someone else spends a major portion of his life in politics, hoping to climb up the ladder of political power, but when he gets to where he wanted to, he finds that he is utterly miserable! Somebody works for years to make money so as to build a beautiful house for himself and his family. But after staying in the house for a while he finds that he still isn't happy!

For many people, life seems to be full of such tragedies. Writers in different languages have written hundreds of thousands of novels about this. These novels are a representation of a very general phenomenon across cultures and communities. Strangely, in hardly any language has a comedy become a bestseller. Most bestselling novels have been tragedies.

The reason for this is that most people live in the feeling that they have not obtained the happiness that they were seeking. It is because of this that tragic novels touch a person's heart in a way that comedies rarely can.

It is a very strange aspect of human life that for many people, the first half of life is spent searching for happiness, and the remaining, second half is spent in the feeling that despite having accumulated many things that they thought would make them happy, they have failed to achieve the joy they were seeking.

This general phenomenon, that runs through human history, tells us that the purpose of this present life is not for us to build a world of pleasure for ourselves in this world. The purpose of this present life is only this—that through good

actions, we should make ourselves capable of obtaining the ideal world of joy, which is Paradise, in the eternal life after death. The stage of life before death is the stage where one can work to become eligible for Paradise after death. The stage of life after death is the stage of entry into Paradise, if one has proven oneself to be eligible for it.

Limitless Hopes, Unfulfilled Dreams



Maqbool Fida Husain (1915-2011) wasn't able to complete his formal education. But with his hard work and natural talent he earned a big name for himself as a painter. He rose to fame when during an exhibition at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, a foreign company bought a painting of his for 500,000 rupees. After this, he began being hailed as one of India's best artists.

Once—this was when he was around 75 years old—somebody asked Mr. Husain if there was anything that he was afraid of. Mr. Husain answered in the negative, but added that at times there was a strange sadness—that just when he had “got a grip” on painting, when he had “begun to grasp its mystery”, it was “time to pack up”. “There is so much I can still paint. I am still so full”, he added.

This is precisely the story of almost every person in the world. We come into this world with limitless hopes. We work hard day and night to try to fulfil our dreams. Yet, many of our desires remain unfulfilled and then the moment of our death arrives. No matter how ‘big’ or ‘small’ they may be, most people die with many unfulfilled desires.

There is precious learning lesson in this for us—that this world is only a world for effort, not for receiving all the fruits of our efforts.

In Search of a Satisfactory Explanation of Human Life



The famous American Christian preacher Billy Graham was once on tour when he got a message from a wealthy man. The man wanted Billy Graham to meet him immediately. Billy Graham changed his programme and went to meet him. When he got to the man's house, the man told him, "You see, I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am going to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?"

This isn't the story of just one rich American man. Rather, it's the story of just about every human being. Almost every person, rich or poor, 'big' or 'small', is, towards the end of his life, afflicted with this feeling. Every person wants to build a world of his dreams for himself. He spends all his life for this purpose, until the last moment of this short life of his arrives and he departs from this world in the regret that he failed to obtain what he wanted to.

Why is this so?

In this vast universe, a human being is the only creature who nurses in his heart innumerable desires. Is it that we have these desires only that they shall never be fulfilled and that

we should be buried in the graveyard of our desires and depart from the world?

In every person's mind there is an entire world of dreams. Is it that this beautiful world exists only so that our dreams remain mere fancies and never come true?

Every person cultivates a garden of desires and hopes in his breast, but hardly anyone experiences the joy of entering this beautiful garden. Why is there this contradiction in us? Why is there no such contradiction among all the other creatures in the universe? Plants and animals do not experience this contradiction at all. Why is it only a human being who does?

The reason for this is that there is a big difference between a human being and the rest of the universe. A person's life consists of two phases—the pre-death period of life, and the post-death period of life. In contrast to this, all other creatures in the universe experience just one phase of life—i.e. they come into existence and then, one day, they disappear. They take birth and then die and are extinguished forever.

The fact of the matter is that much that a person desires to obtain in the first phase of his life has actually been kept for him in the second phase of his life. The things that he will get in the second phase of his journey he will never get in the first phase. The reason for this is that there is a special law of Nature for a human being, one that doesn't apply to other creatures in the universe—and that is, that a person's life is based on the principle of action and compensation or recompense. In the pre-death phase of his life, he must engage in actions, while in the post-death phase of his life he will reap the consequences of the actions that he had done in the first phase.

It is absolutely essential to understand this law if we want to understand the reality of human life. It is only after understanding this law that our life can become truly meaningful and we can lead it in the right way. This law provides perfect answers to all our questions about life. After

knowing this law one can get a fully convincing and satisfactory explanation of human life.

According to this law, the world before death is the stage for a person to sow seeds of action and the world after death is the stage where he reaps the harvest of his actions. A person should spend his life in this present world engaging in actions that will bear him a rich harvest in the post-death phase of life, instead of uselessly wasting it in seeking pleasures here. If we spend the present phase of life in the right way, in the world after death we can hope for a place in Paradise, where one can obtain everything good that one desired in the present world but couldn't get.

The Road to Success



When a road is built to connect one place with another, signboards are placed along the way. They inform travellers about the right direction in order to reach their desired destination. The traveller who follows the signboards properly will definitely arrive at his destination.

The journey of life is like a road. On this road too there are signboards. For the person who wants to travel on the road of life and arrive at his desired destination it is necessary to read the signboards that have been placed along the way and follow their instructions.

In this regard, the first and foremost thing to do is to select, after deep reflection, a road for oneself, a road that one must never have to leave. To keep changing one's road is to

take oneself back in one's journey. Success is possible on every road, but the person who keeps changing his road cannot arrive at his destination.

The second most important thing is that one must not get stuck in the obstacles that one is bound to face while travelling on the road. Avoiding these inevitable obstacles, one must proceed ahead. To clash against these obstacles will cause the journey of life to come to a halt. On the other hand, ignoring these obstacles will enable one to continue with one's journey.

The third most important thing is that the traveller must not become satisfied with the little benefits that he may gain while on the road, for that would make him complacent and lead him to deviate from his target. In this world, you can score a big success only if you don't agree to settle for small successes. For the sake of a big benefit you must ignore small benefits. In the hope of the future, you must rise above the present.

Paradise on Your Wish List



Some years ago, a woman landed up with a job of her dreams, a job with TIME, a famous American magazine. In the 15th August 1991 issue of the magazine there is a glamorous picture of hers, below which she joyfully exclaims that working for TIME was always on her 'wish list'.

Every person considers something or the other as his biggest thing. He lives in the hope of obtaining it. He dreams

of it. He eagerly awaits it. This thing is the Number One item on his wish list. In this present world there is no one who doesn't have something or the other as the focus of his hopes and desires in this way.

A person of faith in God is he who has written Paradise on his wish list—the world of eternal and perfect blessings, where he will see his Lord, where he will live in the shade of God's blessings, where he will be in the company of the righteous, where he will be free of all vain and sinful talk, want and fear, where there will be perfect peace and delights that have no limits.

How to Attain God's Neighbourhood



What is Paradise? Paradise is actually the name for living in the neighbourhood of God (Quran 66:11). In the world before death, a person of faith spends his life in the neighbourhood of God at the level of spiritual feelings. In the world after death, he will get an opportunity to spend his life in the neighbourhood of God in actuality.

God is the source of all virtues and goodness. That is why we can get true peace only in the neighbourhood of God. Anything less than that cannot become a means for true peace.

The present world is a testing ground. Here, those people are being selected who, in terms of their qualities, will be eligible to be settled in the neighbourhood of God. These are those whose thoughts, emotions and actions conform to the ethical standards required for being a neighbour of God. This

selection will happen on the basis of the record that is being made by recording angels. In the eternal life of the Hereafter, this good fortune of living in the neighbourhood of God will be obtained exclusively on the basis of merit.

The neighbourhood of God is a universal garden, as it were. In this garden, only those people who fully conform to divine standards will find a place. Anything less than divine standards will not entitle a person to a place in this garden. Those selected for entrance into Paradise will be those who in the life of this world made God their supreme concern, whose thinking, feelings and actions were all devoted to God, whose days and nights were spent in devotion to God. It is these fortunate people who will be selected for living in God's neighbourhood.

Farsightedness in Seeking Paradise



Abu Hurayrah relates that the Prophet Muhammad said: "Whosoever fears, sets out at nightfall. And whoever sets out early at night, reaches the destination. Verily God's merchandise is expensive! Verily God's merchandise is Paradise!" (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi* 2388)

In ancient Arabia, travellers would begin their journey in the darkness of night so that before the heat of the day became extreme, they could arrive at their next halt or their destination. This was how people travelled in the desert in those days, because there was the danger that if one travelled in the hot sun, one might die, and so too might one's camel.

The matter of the seeker of Paradise is just like this. The seeker of Paradise makes his travel plans with great farsightedness. He must set off on the journey to Paradise with such great preparations that no excuse should become a cause for him to stop his way. He should allow nothing to deviate him from the path.

For the sake of worldly benefits, a businessman makes many arrangements, often going out of his way for this purpose. The bargain of God—which is Paradise—is much more valuable than all other bargains. Therefore, for the journey of Paradise one should take very great care and make every necessary arrangement in planning for it, just as people make necessary arrangements for travelling in this world. One should not live in heedlessness.

Planned action is the means to success. Worldly success is possible only through well-planned action. In the same way, success in the Hereafter is possible only through the Hereafter-oriented planning of one's life.

This World is an Examination Hall



A student enters an examination hall. He sees around him a very big room. He notices a comfortable chair and table, which have been placed there for him. On all four sides there are lovely flowering plants in big pots. There are attendants on duty, who at his command, immediately fulfil his demands. From the windows of the hall he can see a beautiful park outside.

But the student doesn't derive any joy from any of this. Even in what appears to be a beautiful, pleasure-filled environment he remains serious. This is because at that moment his sole concern is that he is in an examination hall, there to write an examination, not to have fun. "I am not the owner of anything in this hall. Every single thing that is here belongs to someone else," he reminds himself. "I have come here only to write my exam paper, to answer the questions right. Moreover, I have been given very limited time in which to do this. The only proper use of this time is to devote it to writing the exam well. Every other occupation is for me a total waste of time, not an appropriate use of it."

This is just the same in the case of an individual in relation to the present world. This world is a vast examination hall. In this world, whoever enters comes here to write the examination of life. This is an examination to test who truly acknowledges God and who does not. It is an examination to find out who has fulfilled his responsibilities vis-a-vis others and who has not.

If the status of the world as an examination hall becomes clear to a person, his condition will become like that of a student who is writing a test. For such a person it will become impossible to spend his time in heedlessness, to waste his time in frivolities, to lose himself in sensual pleasures. For such a person, the world will be a place to fulfil his responsibilities, not somewhere to wallow in material comforts.

What Do You Really Own?



In an examination hall a student gets many things. He gets a place in the hall to sit. There are a table and chair for him to use. He is given paper to write. And so on. The student uses these things freely, without any restrictions. The building saves him from the heat or the cold. The table and chair enable him to sit and write comfortably. The paper enables him to record his answers.

But all these things that the student has access to at this time are simply on account of the examination that he is writing. These things are 'his' only till such time as the period of the examination is not over. The moment the examination period is up, all these things that had till then been freely available for his personal use are taken away from him.

Something similar to this is an individual's affair in this present world. Here, a person appears to own many things. He thinks that he is free to live here just as he pleases and to use the things he has received just as he wants. But actually, all that a person has here is on account of an examination. God is taking an examination of individuals in this present world. In accordance with the demands of this examination, God gives many necessary things to a person. But these things remain with him only till such time as his examination period is not over. As soon as the examination period is up all these things are taken away from him. The person who till now seemed to possess a great many things is suddenly bereft of everything! At that moment—of death—he becomes like a traveller who

has been suddenly dropped into a barren desert or into outer space without any support.

Between our present state and our future state there stands only the invisible wall of death.

Love for the Immediate



The Quran describes an aspect of a human being's mindset in these words (76:27): "Those people [who are unmindful of God] aspire for immediate gains, and put behind them a Heavy Day."

The psychology of love for immediate gain was present in people in the past. But today it has become so common that there are hardly any exceptions to it. Almost everyone's slogan today is 'Right here, right now!' 'If not now, then when?' these impatient people demand.

People who speak like this certainly do so without proper thinking, because the real issue is not that one should obtain all that one wants today. Rather, the real issue is: Why is it that today too we do not obtain all that we want? History tells us that every person who has taken birth has wanted to fulfil his desires in this world but then almost everyone left this world without this happening. In the whole of human history there are hardly any exceptions in this regard. This being the case, the real question is not that whatever we want we should obtain today, but, rather, why we are not able to obtain in this present life all that we want. If we reflect on this question, we will come to the conclusion that, in line with the Creator's

creation plan, we are not going to obtain in the world of today all that we desire. It is simply not possible.

Exceptionally among all creatures, human beings have a concept of tomorrow. This is in the language of nature an answer to every person's question. This fact tells us all that an individual desires can indeed be obtained in the phase of life of tomorrow—in the Hereafter, if he proves himself qualified for it. But for him to receive it in the phase of life of today, in this world, has not been decreed according to the law of nature.

Will You be Alive Tomorrow?



He who has died has died. This everyone knows. But there is another fact, which few people care to think about—that one day or the other they too will die. One day, you and me—all of us—will meet the same fate as has befallen hundreds of millions of people right from the dawn of human history. Every day we see or hear about people dying somewhere or the other but, strangely, in our minds we exempt ourselves from this experience, as if such exemption were really possible! It is as if people are announcing, “Others had to die, and so they have died. But I am never going to die!”

This is a terribly dangerous delusion. It is like the proverbial ostrich burying its head in the sand. The fact is that whether one thinks about one's death or not, death in any case is racing towards us!

Death is like a personal earthquake. An earthquake strikes without making a prior announcement. Similarly, death arrives

without prior notice. In the face of an earthquake, a human being is completely helpless. So too in the face of death. You may want to stop death, but that can never happen. Death has its own law, which operates completely without an individual's consent.

This situation demands that everyone should be very serious about death. We should reflect on death very often. Every day, when evening comes one should remember that a new day, the next day, may perhaps not be written in one's destiny. This awareness can completely transform us. Then, life will not remain as it has been all along. Instead, it will become a creative preparation, as will waiting for death.

Fortunate is one who becomes aware of death and makes preparations for it well before it suddenly strikes.

Revolution in One's Thinking



The life of this world is a life of test. Here, no law or court can compel human beings to always behave properly. There is only one thing that can keep a person on the right path—and that is, the awareness that in no circumstances can he be exempted from appearing before God, the Lord of the worlds, after death and giving a complete account of his actions. There is just no way we can hide from God. We cannot invent a device that can form a veil between us and God.

If an individual truly develops this consciousness, there will be a complete revolution in his personality. His daily activities and his lifestyle will totally change, as will his

concepts of good and evil and his way of forming opinions. His whole life will become a God-oriented one. Consciousness of having to answer God in the Hereafter will completely take over his way of thinking.

This revolution in consciousness is called *tazkiya* ('purification') in the Quran and Sunnah. Thinking based on *tazkiya* will lead to the emergence of a new personality, characterized by both love for God and fear of God. In contrast to the world before death, success in the world after death will become one's greatest concern. As a consequence of this transformation in his thinking, his intellectual stagnation will end and he will grow in creative thinking. The whole universe will become a source of intellectual nourishment for him. He will feel as if he has acquired the company of angels.

From Everything Towards Nothing



In this world, an individual appears to have been given everything that he needs to live—for instance, heat and light from the sun, oxygen, water, food, a family, social relations and institutions, a governmental system and so on. They are part of what is called the 'life-support system'. All these things a person receives at birth itself, and he continues to have access to them throughout his life, generally speaking. Because of this, a person tends to take these things for granted. He doesn't think that, one day or the other, all of these will be taken away from him. Yet, that is precisely what is destined for us all. One day, after a certain age, death must happen and all the things

that we have been given here will be taken away from us. We will remain the very same person that we were before death, but all the material things we were surrounded with will be separated from us. People who love to accumulate things will, in a fraction of a second, be bereft of all their material possessions. This is something that is bound to happen. Given this, it is something that we must seriously ponder on. In fact, it must become our greatest concern.

Keeping Away from Preoccupations Temporarily



People have knowledge of death, but they don't have conscious awareness or realization of it. They know that there is something called death, but they haven't discovered it at the level of conviction. It is because of this that people live as if death is something that will never happen to them.

Death is the most terrifying thing that can happen in a person's life. If people realize this truth at a conscious level, their entire focus will change. They will be conscious about living in such a way that they can be successful in the life that follows death.

What is the reason for the general heedlessness about death? The reason for this is that in this world, a person faces, at every moment, different sorts of conditions and situations. These conditions and situations keep him constantly occupied. His life becomes a distracted one. On account of this, a person doesn't make space to think about death.

Thinking about death is possible only for someone who saves himself from distractions. But because most people do not do this, their heedlessness with regard to death never ceases.

An individual's heedlessness with regard to death comes to an end only when the angel of death appears and stands in front of him, when other than this angel he can see nothing. This busy life of people makes death seem some far-off news. A person's own death doesn't become something of concern for him. Hence, he is totally unprepared to face it when it happens.

The solution to this problem is to keep oneself free from occupations and preoccupations for a while every now and then and to spend time on thinking about death. One should also study scriptural references to death. Other than this, there is nothing that will make us understand the reality of death.

Death Can Come in Any Situation



Dick Shawn was an American actor. He excelled in making people laugh—in films and on stage. On the night of April 17, 1987, he was in a theatre in La Jolla in California, where he was acting and making people laugh. There were some 600 people sitting in the hall enjoying themselves. All of a sudden, Mr. Shawn suddenly fell on his face on the stage. People thought it was a joke, part of the acting.

Mr. Shawn lay on the floor in this condition. Then, his son Adam got suspicious. He called a doctor. The doctor

immediately advised that Mr. Shawn be taken to hospital. In the hospital, doctors examined him and later announced that he had died. The immediate cause of his death was a heart-attack. He was at that time 57 years old.

In this world, some people cry and die, and some others laugh and die. For some, death comes when they are in a bad condition, for others, when they are hale and hearty, fit and fine. Someone dies seated on the bare earth, someone else on the stage of a theatre and yet others while ensconced on a throne. Death is a universal phenomenon—it happens to everyone, no matter what their condition and status in society. Yet, humans are most forgetful of this biggest reality.

Be Seeker of the Hereafter



In the present world people constantly run after pleasure. But here, not all our desires for pleasure can be fulfilled. Here, one races towards one's desired destination, but few people finally arrive there.

A person enters the struggle of life. He spends all his time and energy in the hope of what he regards as a successful life. But despite having obtained many of the things that he desired, his feeling of deprivation doesn't end. If someone strongly desired a good job or a new house or the latest sort of car and he gets what he wants, after a while he finds that he still has many unfulfilled desires. After some time, life for him becomes simply a sort of burdensome duty. While once

he thought he was becoming very successful, he now begins to suspect that he is actually failing.

Why is this so?

A person's basic fault here is that he has made this world his target. What he ought to have done instead was to make the Hereafter his target. A person should know that this world is simply a place to sow seeds. It isn't the place to reap a harvest. The person who desires the world desires something that he is simply not going to obtain in the manner that he desires.

Wise is he who becomes a seeker of the Hereafter, because it is the Hereafter which is real and it is that alone which one will obtain in the life after death.

The most serious aspect of life is that one gets life only once. We have been given just one chance to engage in action. After this, there is only the eternal consequences of our actions and nothing else. This fact demands that we be very alert, serious and careful with regard to how we spend our life in this world and the direction in which we want to take it.

Successful Life, Unsuccessful End



A certain man wanted to make a lot of money. He thought that with this money he could obtain all the pleasures of the world. He earned a lot of wealth. He built a grand house. He accumulated all sorts of items of comfort and luxury. Yet, he did not obtain true joy. Then, he became old and bedridden. In the last phase of his life he wrote in his diary: "Now, I am

90 plus. My story can be summed up in these two phrases: successful life, unsuccessful end.”

This is the very same story of many other people who are called ‘achievers’ and ‘super-achievers’. People who are said to have scored big successes in the eyes of the world only acquire little joys, mixed with much frustration, and finally depart from this world in despair. This phenomenon is so general that there are very few exceptions to it.

There is a famous singer, who is now almost 100 years old, who is regarded as a top achiever. In her life she got all the things that many people hanker after—wealth, fame, popularity, honours, and so on. She also got to travel the world. But now, in the evening of her life, she feels that she didn’t get many of the things she wanted. Despite her external successes, she lives in a state of dejection. Some years ago, an interview of hers was published in a newspaper. The interview was tellingly titled ‘My dreams have never got fulfilled’. When the interviewer asked her that if God were to ask her what, having arrived at this stage of her life, her greatest desire was, she immediately replied, “I would like to leave this world”.

In this failed story of a successful person there is a very big lesson for everyone. And that is, the ideal happy life that many people spend their entire life trying to obtain is simply not attainable in this world.

To have desires but to be unable to fulfil them all in this world indicates a big reality—that the ideal joy that an individual seeks to obtain in the pre-death world has actually been placed by the Creator in the post-death world, the Hereafter. This being the case, the wise thing for us to do is to make ourselves eligible for being successful in the post-death world. We should put ourselves to preparing for the eternal life that comes after this temporary world.

By birth a human being is an idealist, but in the present world, everything is found in a less than ideal condition. This is the actual cause of tension for people. People devote all

their energies only to acquire something that turns out to be less than their ideal. To understand this difference between the seeker and the sought is the greatest wisdom. One who understands this difference can realistically plan his life and course of action and then arrive at the plane of success. Such a person will never live in tension.

How to Overcome Anguish?



Ratan Singh (b. 1927) was a famous Urdu novelist. During a conversation, his interviewer, Rehana Sultana, asked him which of his stories he considered as his representative story. He replied, “I am yet to write my representative story”.

In his famous book *Gitanjali*, the Bengali poet-writer Rabindranath Tagore said this about himself: “I have spent many days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung.”

This feeling is found among almost every litterateur. What is the reason for this? The reason is that a human being is by nature an idealist. A person seeks to express his feelings in words in an ideal way. But this isn't possible. This is because the words he has are less than ideal for the purpose.

On account of this sort of contradiction—between a person's nature as an idealist and the non-ideal reality of this world—most people live in a sort of anguish, and they also die in that state.

The only place for a person to quench this thirst, to get over this anguish, is Paradise. If a person is a true seeker and

seriously contemplates this issue, he will certainly discover this fact. He will understand what he should make the goal of his search.

By birth every human being is a seeker of Paradise, the ideal world of his dreams. A human being is the seeker, and Paradise is what he seeks. A person's success lies in knowing this truth and making Paradise his goal.

Coming and Going



Calvin Coolidge (1824-1933) was the 30th President of the USA. In 1924, he won the American Presidential elections with remarkable ease. The main reason for this was that he posed himself as an opponent of dangerous radicalism. It is said that when he was President a visitor once facetiously asked him who lived in the White House, the place of residence of the American President. "No one," he replied, "they just come and go."

Calvin Coolidge gave this reply with regard to the occupants of America's White House. But this reply applies to every other house in the world, big or small, actually. No one is going to live in their house—or in this world for that matter—forever. Here, they will just "come and go", like the inhabitants of the White House.

In this world, there is no permanent house. Every house is, as it were, a temporary guesthouse or traveller's inn. Here, people come only in order to leave. People stay here for a while, but they cannot, despite wanting to, settle here permanently.

People know life, but they don't know death. People work for years to construct a home of their dreams, only to leave it when death arrives, being sent to the home that God has destined for them in the Hereafter.

Detachment from One's Greatness



When a well-known person dies, magazines and journals sometimes publish articles about them, full of praise. Big functions are organized in their memory, where the deceased's supposed achievements and virtues are extolled. But this can be very misleading.

When someone dies, he suddenly leaves behind all the symbols of his supposed greatness. Death takes him into a world where he is totally alone, without any support. That is the state he is actually in after he has died. But people who write and speak about a recently-deceased person don't refer to—or even know about—this present condition of his. They only recount his past greatness, even though the deceased person has been completely separated from his supposed laurels.

Death is synonymous with total detachment from this world. Death means that a person has lost his first and only chance of life here. He is not going to get a second chance to come into this world. Every dead person should remind us of this aspect of life. But, strangely, people who extol a deceased person don't mention this fact. Reading or hearing about the supposed greatness of a dead person, the misleading

impression is created that he still possesses this greatness, while it may well be that at present he is actually in a state of total despair and helplessness.

True Success: Finding God



Most people want to live a long life. That is why there has always been much research on this subject. In ancient times, kings used to patronize the science of medicine, thinking that this could help them live long. In present times, a lot of research is being conducted on this issue in medical circles.

An individual craves for longevity. The real question, however, is not the length of one's life but, rather, its quality, the kind of life one leads. Suppose a person lives very long but his life is full of sorrow or his quality of life is miserable. What is the use of his living so long? His long life will only magnify his misery, not solve it.

A human being is born and then passes through various stages—childhood, youth, middle age and then old age. In this long period, he continuously faces all sorts of problems and challenges. Given this, the real issue is the quality of a person's life, not the length of his lifespan.

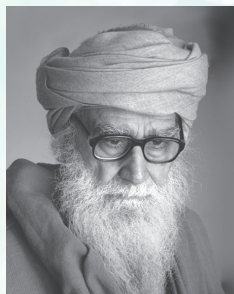
The Quran (35:34) tells us that when the inhabitants of Paradise enter this noble abode they will utter these words of gratitude: "Praise be to God who has taken away all sorrow from us. Our Lord is forgiving and appreciative." Here the word 'sorrow' is very significant. It includes all that which makes the life of this world bereft of joy. It includes all those things that

in terms of the physical body or external circumstances are a cause for misery for a person in this present world. In terms of what he is seeking, the real issue is to acquire a life free of all sorrow. If sorrow exists, nothing can give one true happiness.

Human beings are born with the desire for an ideal world of joy. All of a person's hopes and engagements in the present world are devoted to seeking to obtain this ideal. People repeatedly form opinions about different things, thinking that if they obtain them they would be able to attain the ideal world of their dreams. But then, after making all kinds of efforts throughout their life for this purpose and even after being able to obtain many things that they hankered after, most people fail to get the desired happiness that they had sought for.

The reality is that an individual's true success is only this—that he finds and discovers God, his Lord and Sustainer. Other than this, nothing will give a person the joy that he innately seeks.

Few people think about death and what lies beyond it. We plan our lives in this world without realizing that our existence here is only temporary. Our aims, desires and sentiments are influenced by the thought that the life of the present world is final. In this book, the author urges the reader to reflect on the inevitable experience of death. The book takes the reader on a journey that explores the higher purpose of life, one that connects the dots between the present world and the life Hereafter. The author's powerful and moving style prompts a person to introspect and contemplate whether he is only existing on the material plane, and if yes, what must he do to rise above the superficial.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. He is the founder of Centre for Peace and Spirituality and has been internationally recognized for his contributions to world peace. The Maulana has authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's nonviolent approach, religion's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is popular because its language is simple, contemporary and easily understandable.

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