

CREATION PLAN OF GOD

MAULANA
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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Compiled by
Prof Farida Khanam

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Goodword Books

A-21, Sector 4, Noida-201301, Delhi NCR, India

Tel. +91 120 4131448, Mob. +91 8588822672

email: info@goodwordbooks.com

www.goodwordbooks.com

CPS International

Centre for Peace and Spirituality International

1, Nizamuddin West Market, New Delhi-110 013, India

Mob. +91-9999944119

e-mail: info@cpsglobal.org

www.cpsglobal.org

Center for Peace and Spirituality USA

2665 Byberry Road, Bensalem, PA 19020, USA

Cell: 617-960-7156

email: kkaleemuddin@gmail.com

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GOD'S CREATION PLAN

The present world has been created as a testing ground for man. If he passes his test, he will obtain a place in the ideal world, Paradise, in eternal life after death.

A philosopher once remarked that it appears to be that in this vast universe, man is a strange creature. It seems that man has not been made for this world, nor has this world been made for him. Man and the world seem to be mutually incompatible.

Man is born with immense abilities. However, he uses only a minimal portion of these in this present world. By nature, man wants to live forever. However, death arrives quickly without his permission and whisks him away by a unilateral decision. Man has an ocean of desires in his heart, but not all of these desires are fulfilled. Every man's mind is a world of dreams, but not all dreams come true. In this regard, there is no difference between 'big' and 'small' people. As the philosopher mentioned above seems to assert, all this

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may be thought to suggest that man has come into a world that has not been made of him.

Why do man and the present world seem so mutually incompatible? To solve this conundrum, we need to understand the creation plan of God. This question of man and the world looking so inconsistent arises because of not knowing the creation plan of God. Therefore, we obtain a satisfactory answer by knowing God's creation plan for man.

God has created man according to His plan. Knowing this plan is necessary for the proper explanation of man. The significance of a machine can be known only when we see the intent of the engineer who created it. Nothing can clarify the machine's importance and purpose besides the engineer's mind. The same is true of man.

God created man for a specific plan. According to this plan, man must spend a period of time in the present, non-ideal world for the purpose of test, and after this, in line with his actions, man will obtain the right to

reside in an ideal world, which is called Paradise, or else will be consigned to a place of eternal deprivation forever.

The present world has been created as a testing ground for man. Here, man is engaged in a continuous test. If he passes this test, he will obtain a place in the ideal world, Paradise, in eternal life after death. On the other hand, if he fails this test, he will live in a state of eternal deprivation. To be eligible to enter Paradise, there are two things that man needs to do while on Earth. One is to acknowledge the truth, and the other is to lead a principled life.

In the present world, man finds himself completely free. However, this freedom is not given to him as a right. Instead, it is simply a sort of examination paper for everyone. Man has to acknowledge the truth without any pressure. Without any compulsion, he must bow before the truth. Man has been given freedom of choice to test him. Through his own choice, he should limit or control his freedom. Bowing before the truth is undoubtedly the most enormous sacrifice for man.

Acknowledging the truth may appear to be making oneself small compared to others, but this makes a person arrive at the highest position, leading him to reach the door of Paradise.

In this regard, the second thing man must do is lead a principled life. Generally, a person's character is constructed according to his emotions. Anger, revenge, jealousy, hate, opportunism, etc.—are negative feelings that often indelibly shape a person's character. Any man cannot enter Paradise with a character developed by such emotions. To enter Paradise, he needs to be a person of virtuous character. For this, man should not build his character under external factors; instead, he must build it by adhering to certain moral principles. Only people of honest character can be held eligible to enter and live in Paradise in the life after death. This is the creation plan under which man has been created.

Paradise is that ideal world where man can find perfect peace and satisfaction and be in the company of those who make his life truly meaningful. The desire for this Paradise is enshrined in every person's heart. It is this

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Paradise where man will find complete fulfilment. With his whole being, man is in search of this very Paradise. Moreover, Paradise is waiting with its entire existence for such people. The time is coming when Paradise and man shall meet each other. Each will find the pair made for them.

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE PERSONALITY

It is a positive personality in which the lofty desire to search for the truth awakens. Only a person of positive character and positive thinking finally arrives at the truth.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a famous French thinker. He was a champion of people's rule over monarchy. He famously remarked: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." (Social Contract, 1762)

However, man has another problem, which perhaps is even more severe than this. It is the problem of

conditioning. Every person lives in a particular environment. Therefore, every person's mind is conditioned by his environment, depriving him of right thinking. As a result, people do not remain capable of thinking naturally. Given this conditioning problem, Rousseau's statement can be better stated: "Man was created on divine nature, but I see him psychologically conditioned."

When a child is born from his mother's womb, he looks like the epitome of innocence. It seems as if an angel has assumed human form. At the time of birth, man has a pure mind. His thinking is natural thinking that should be the case in reality. However, man is a social being. He has to spend his entire life in a society made by others. Because of this, his mind receives external influences almost every waking moment. This is called 'conditioning'. This process of being influenced by the external environment keeps increasing until man becomes wholly conditioned.

In the quest for truth, the seeker needs to understand this conditioning, and accordingly, he should set about

deconditioning his mind, returning it to its natural state. He should make himself a man of nature rather than remaining an artificial man and a victim of conditioning.

Recently, a view that has gained tremendous popularity in psychology is called behaviourism. In this school of psychology, it is believed that conditioning is man's persistent state. It is as if a man is a prisoner of his conditioning and is simply a passive product of it.

A deeper study of man's personality disproves this theory. Recent discoveries about the genetic code raise serious questions about the above hypothesis. It has been proven that every person's complete personality is present in the genetic code by birth. Moreover, as the child grows, its personality development, it is said, is only an unfolding of this genetic code. If this is true, it would be more proper to say that the conditioning exercised by the environment is like an artificial curtain placed over man's natural being. It is as if a man's character is like an onion. Inside the onion is a marrow-like pea. Over this inner 'pea' are many

layers of skin-like curtains. If these layers of skin are removed, the inner kernel of the onion will emerge. The same is true with man. Through conditioning, artificial curtains are placed over man's actual being—curtains created by the external environment. If these curtains are removed, man's true personality will emerge.

Removing these external curtains over a person's personality is called deconditioning. It is binding on the person who seeks the truth to remove the artificial curtains of conditioning that cloud his actual being so that his real nature may emerge again.

Religion tells us that man is a unique creature of God. When a human being is born, he is born with a divine personality. In terms of his inner being, he is a true and perfect being. For a person's lasting success, protecting his natural character is necessary. He must keep himself in the natural state his Creator has created him on. This struggle to remain in this natural state requires removing all that functions as the artificial veils over it. This is what is called deconditioning.

When nurtured in a particular environment, man faces different negative situations and experiences daily. These situations and experiences keep making an undesirable impact on his character. For example, if someone did better than him, he may become jealous. Jealousy now enters his character. If someone misbehaves with him, he reacts with hate. Hate now becomes part of his character. If somebody oppresses him, that creates a violent streak in his character. Violence, thus, becomes a part of his character. And so on.

In this way, a person encounters different experiences to which he reacts negatively. Each time he does so, a harmful component enters his character and shapes it accordingly. Thus, man's true character comes to be concealed by a curtain over time. As a result, a person now changes from a natural to an artificial person.

Deconditioning is the reformation of this artificial state of affairs. This deconditioning is a pressing need for every person. Without it, man's character will

remain deeply flawed. He will never be able to obtain the position of a perfect character.

The primary means for this deconditioning is introspection. Every person must become his own inspector. First, he must closely search within himself and remove every negative item he may find. Next, he must rectify his thinking about these negative items by changing them into positive ones. Then, he must include these now positive items back into his personality. This process is similar to an animal chewing cud, regurgitating it, and chewing it again, making the food capable of being digested. Through deconditioning, every person should similarly reconstruct their character on positive lines.

Man's mind has two major components: conscious and unconscious. For example, when a man faces an unpleasant experience, the thought related to the experience enters the conscious mind as a negative item. This negative item remains in his conscious mind for a few days. After this, gradually, it goes into his unconscious mind, where it becomes a part of his

mind forever. Hence, it is necessary that on the very first day itself, or within a few days at the most, one should convert every negative item in one's mind into a positive thing so that when this item, passing through the conscious mind, enters his unconscious mind or the storehouse of the memory, it is saved there as a positive item.

This process is a decisive factor in building a person's character. This process determines if a person shall have a positive or negative personality. A person should engage in introspection daily to rectify his negative experiences and convert them into positive ones. As a result, the items will be collected as positive items in his unconscious mind or the storehouse of the memory. The character of a person who regularly engages in this process will be an exceedingly positive one. Failure to engage in this rectification process will cause all the negative experiences he has faced to find a place in his unconscious mind as negative items. The result of this will be that his character will become negative.

Whatever action a person does, be it in thought or

action or word, happens according to his unconscious mind. The personality of a human being is determined mainly through his unconscious mind rather than his conscious mind. The thoughts, words, and deeds of a person whose unconscious has become a storehouse of negative items will be negative. In contrast, the thoughts, words, and deeds of someone whose unconscious has become a storehouse of positive items will be healthy and positive due to this process that he has made efforts for.

Searching for truth is the action of a positive personality. It is a positive personality in whom the lofty desire to search for the truth awakens. Moreover, only a person of positive character and positive thinking finally arrives at the truth.

SOME ISSUES TO PONDER ON

The right way to plan and lead one's life can only be that which encompasses the eternal life of man in the world after death.

Among the first lessons a chemistry student learns is: 'Nothing dies; it only changes its form.'

There is no reason for man to be an exception to this universal law. Regarding the physical matter, we know it is not extinguished by burning, bursting, or some other accident. Instead of changing its form, it retains its existence. In the same way, we are compelled to understand man as a non-extinguishable creature. That is to say, the death of his body cannot be taken to be the end of his being.

This is no indirect speculation. Instead, it is a reality that is proven through direct experience. For example, the science of Cytology tells us that man's body is a collection of millions of tiny cells. These cells are continuously disintegrating, i.e., dying. The body of a man of average height contains around 26 trillion cells.

These cells are not like the bricks of a building that remain there as long as the building exists. Instead, vast numbers of cells die daily, and our food enables new cells to take their place. This continuous dying of the human body cells proves that, on average, a whole human body changes into an entirely new one every ten years. It is as if ten years ago, the hand with which I had signed an agreement is no longer a part of my body, yet the agreement that 'my earlier hand' signed remains my agreement! Despite the change in my body, the inner 'me' remains in its actual condition as before. My knowledge, memory, desires, habits, and thoughts remain intact. That is why someone has rightly said, "Personality is changelessness in change." (The Urantia Book)

If the body's death were the final extinguishing of life, the same 'death' happens, in a way, every day with a person who is still considered alive. Consider a 60-year-old man whom we see walking in front of us. In the sense of the cells of his body, he has already 'died' six times! Now, even if undergoing this bodily

‘death’ six times, a person has not died, how will he die from his seventh ‘death’ when he leaves the body for good?

The fact is that man is an eternal being. He remains alive and present even after his physical death. Man’s conscious existence continues even after his death. Death is not the end of life. It is simply an entrance into the next stage of life. When man dies, his eternal being enters into the world after death. Therefore, the right way to plan and lead one’s life in this world can only be that which encompasses the eternal life of man in the world after death.

UNIVERSAL MODEL

Submission to God is the best way for man to lead his life in this world. It also guarantees man’s success in the eternal period of life after death.

Man finds himself in a vast universe. This universe is like a vast society. Man is only a tiny part of this society. Therefore, man must adopt that model of living that

all other components of the universe have adopted in practice. It is the right and natural way for him. In this method is hidden the secret of man's success.

What is this universal model? Observe the stars and planets spread across vast space. Each star and planet move with extreme precision in its orbit. None of them enters the orbit of another. Because of this discipline, peace prevails throughout the cosmos. God desires that man, too, should adopt this policy of non-interference while living in society and with others. Everyone should know that his freedom ends where another person's freedom begins.

Reflect on the world of the trees. Silently, the trees have adopted a beautiful system based on serving others. To fulfil the needs of other living beings, they supply oxygen while absorbing the non-desirable carbon dioxide emitted by these beings. It is a selfless, benefit-providing system. It is also binding on man to adopt this system in his life.

Similarly, think of the mountain springs, with their

water gushing forth and rapidly flowing ahead. They repeatedly face massive boulders that appear to be barriers in their journey. However, the springs do not try to push the boulders out of their way to advance. Instead, they adopt a non-confrontational course. They swirl around the boulders and surge forward. It is, as it were, a message to man to avoid colliding against obstacles he may meet in life. The right approach is to circumvent them with tact and, in this way, be able to continue to engage in positive action.

In the same way, in the world of animals, we see that issues repeatedly arise among them, which causes them to enter into conflict. However, generally, they roar and growl or move their horns about for a while, and then they forget the issue and quickly return to normalcy as if nothing had happened. Man should live in a society in the same manner. In social life, certain things repeatedly happen that people find upsetting. The proper way to deal with this is to accept such situations as temporary. One should not let them take the form of permanent bitterness.

The study of the world of nature tells us that everything gives to others without demanding anything in return. For example, the sun generously gives us light but does not extract any price. The air continuously supplies oxygen, but it does not take any compensation. Similarly, many creatures and things are involved in serving people without any recompense. None of them presents a bill to the people who benefit from them. One learns that the world around us is a giver world. It is as if the culture of this world is a giver culture. Everything in this world continuously sends out this message—become a giver for others rather than just being a taker.

Man must adopt this same giver culture in his personal and social life. The universe around man is a model for him to emulate in this regard. The secret of man's success lies in adopting this model in his life. The only difference is that this model of submission is established under the law of nature compulsorily in the rest of the world, while man must consciously establish this universal model of submission through his own free choice.

To bring one's free will under this universal discipline is, as it were, to make oneself 'unfree' while still having freedom. This submission is the best way for man to live. It also guarantees man's success in the eternal period of life after death.

DISCOVERY OF MAN

Man's life is divided into the pre-death period for a trial and the post-death period for reward or punishment. Man's success lies in leading one's life in this light.

Man's brain contains around one hundred billion nerve cells. This astounding phenomenon is an indication of the fact that man's Creator has placed enormous abilities inside him.

With this, man has been given a unique thing that has not been given to any other creature in this vast universe—an acute sense of pleasure. Man is the only creature in the vast universe with a very acute sense of pleasure and the capacity to enjoy pleasure. For man, everything can potentially be a source of pleasure.

God has created man with unique abilities. God has also made a beautiful world, Paradise. Paradise is a perfect world where every form of pleasure is present in its ideal form. Man and Paradise are counterparts of each other, as it were. Man is for Paradise, and Paradise is for man. Paradise is that place where man will acquire complete fulfilment. Paradise is thus a place where human nature finds its perfection. Without Paradise, man is meaningless; without man, Paradise is also meaningless. Without Paradise, man's life is incomplete; without man, Paradise is also incomplete.

Man is a potential inhabitant of this Paradise, but no one will obtain Paradise as a birthright or as a result of being a member of a particular social group. The condition for entry into Paradise is that man should prove eligible for it, based on the qualities he develops in himself while living in this world of test.

God has made the present world for this purpose. It serves as a selection ground. The conditions of this world have been made so that everything is an examination paper for man. Here, at every moment,

man is being tested. God is preparing a record of every person's word and deed here. Based on this record, on the Day of Judgement, it will be decided who will be eligible to be settled in Paradise and who will not.

In this world, man has been given total freedom. However, this freedom is not a reward. Instead, it is for a test. God is watching how man uses his freedom. Under God's creation plan, the people who use their freedom rightly will be selected to be settled in Paradise. On the other hand, those who misuse their freedom will find themselves rejected on the Day of Judgement.

Man's life is divided into two periods—the pre-death period and the post-death period. The pre-death period is the trial period, and the post-death period is the reward period. The secret of man's success or failure lies in knowing this truth and leading one's life in this light.

“SORRY, THIS NUMBER DOES NOT EXIST”

Establishing a relationship with the true God is the biggest blessing for man. Then one receives guidance and develops a spiritual personality.

If you dial someone’s number on your phone and press the wrong button, your call will not be connected to the person you want to speak to. You will not hear a ‘Hello’ from the other side. Instead, you may listen to a recorded message from the telephone exchange, saying, “Sorry, this number does not exist.”

One day, I experienced this myself when I tried calling someone. In this incident, there was a great spiritual lesson—and that is if a person seeks to establish a connection with God, but due to wrong thinking, he considers someone other than God to be worthy of worshipping and calls out to him, he will get no reply directly from God. Instead, he will hear another voice telling him that the ‘god’ he called does not exist.

The idea of God is embedded in every person’s nature.

Man, by nature, seeks God. By birth itself, every human being aspires to find God. However, in history, it has always happened that people have made the mistake of attributing the status of God to someone other than God.

Establishing a relationship with the true God is the biggest blessing for man. The life of someone who establishes a relationship with God will be suffused with the light of guidance. He will develop a spiritual personality. He will obtain a high level of intellectual evolution. In contrast, someone who gives someone other than God the status of God will wander about in utter darkness.

Nowadays, everyone takes the name of some 'god' or the other, including 'gods' like money and power. Every person 'gives' something or the other the status of God and believes in this. However, a spiritual personality is not present in the true sense at a general level. People have made things or beings other than God, their deity. They call out to some or other 'non-god', and in reply, they get this voice: "The number you dialled does not

exist. What you call ‘god’ and call upon, that ‘god’ does not even exist!”

The first responsibility of every person is to discover the true God and find a way to connect with this God. Without this discovery, one is bound to face terrible destruction. Therefore, discovering the true God should be a person’s most important aim and purpose and the focus of his efforts. It is this that makes human life meaningful. The person whose life is bereft of this discovery is the poorest, even if he owns enormous material wealth.

The Discovery of God means the discovery of a Higher Truth. Moreover, discovering Higher Truth and establishing a firm connection with God makes man’s life meaningful. If you have not had this discovery, your life cannot be said to be meaningful in the true sense.

An issue that one needs to bear in mind concerning the discovery of God is that a person gets this opportunity only in the pre-death phase of his life. In the post-death period, those who had not discovered God in their life before death will be deprived of this chance. Then it would be too late.

EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God can be seen everywhere in His creation. Therefore, we need to acquire the eyes to see God in His creation. Then we will be able to feel the presence of God at every moment.

Among the three people who travelled on the spacecraft Apollo-15 to the moon in 1972 was a man called Col. James Irwin. In an interview, he said that setting foot on the moon was an outstanding experience. He felt God's presence on the moon, he said. He was ecstatic, sensing something deep inside his soul. He felt God very close to Him. He could see God's glory with his own eyes, he said. For him, he explained, that trip to the moon was not just a scientific expedition. It also blessed him with a spiritual life.

Col. Irwin's experience was by no means an unusual one. The fact is that all that God has made is so utterly amazing that one is awe-struck on seeing His creation and thinking how great the Creator of all of this must

be. The face of God appears every moment in the perfection of His creation. But we have become so used to seeing the world around us, from our infancy onwards, that we do not feel its uniqueness. The air, the water, the trees and the birds, everything that exists in the world—all of these are incredibly astounding. Every one of these creations is a mirror of the Creator. Because we have become so used to them that we do not realise how amazing they are. But when someone suddenly steps on the moon and beholds this creation of God for the first time, he cannot remain without feeling the ‘presence of God’. He sees the Creator reflected in the workings of His creation.

We can experience God’s presence in the world where we live in the same way as Col. Irwin did when he landed on the moon. But people do not see this world in the same awe-struck way as someone who steps on the moon for the first time sees it. If we begin to see our world in this way, we will experience the ‘presence of God’ at every moment. We will begin to live as if we

are in the neighbourhood of God and that He is present before our eyes at every moment.

If we see a high-quality machine for the first time, we immediately feel the presence of an expert engineer there. In the same way, if we can see deep into the world and whatever it contains, we will find the 'presence of God' at that very moment. The Creator will appear to us in such a way that we will not be able to separate the Creator from the creation.

The most outstanding achievement for someone in this world is to begin seeing God, to feel the presence of God near him. If he is indeed alive, he will see God's light in the sun's brilliant rays. He will discern reflections of God in the verdant trees. He will experience the touch of God in the softness of the breeze. Then, while prostrating and touching his palms and forehead on the ground, he will experience surrendering his entire existence at the feet of His Lord.

God can be seen everywhere in His creation. Therefore, we need to acquire the eyes to see God in His creation.

ONENESS OF GOD

Then we will be able to feel the presence of God at every moment.

ONENESS OF GOD

We must accord the supreme status to God alone. We must ask Him alone to meet our needs. We must do obeisance before Him; we must trust Him implicitly, above all others.

Belief in the Oneness of God means to believe that all power lies in the hand of one God alone and that He alone deserves to be worshipped. No act in the nature of worship is lawful unless directed towards God. It is God alone who fulfils all our needs. It is God alone who is behind the functioning of the entire universe. Superiority is the prerogative of the one and only God. No one enjoys real superiority in this world. All such concepts are false as associate anyone or anything with any aspects of God's sovereignty.

We must express reverence for the true God, the Creator, a Being who truly deserves to be held in awe.

On the contrary, when man bows his head before anyone else, he exalts one who is no better than himself—and, as such, has no right to be worshipped. Adoration of God glorifies Him while worshipping anything other than God degrades the worshipper. Veneration of God makes a man a realist while prostrating himself before a non-God turns him into a creature of superstition. Bowing to God opens the door to realising the truth, while worshipping something other than God closes this door.

We must accord the supreme status to the one and only God. We must ask Him alone to meet our needs. We must do obeisance before Him; we must trust Him implicitly, and above all others, we must reserve for Him the supreme status in all respects. Worship is the ultimate stage in any relationship: that is why, whatever its form, it must have God as its object. Therefore, any gesture in the nature of adulation is not permissible except when meant for God.

When an individual makes God the object of his worship, he bows before an entity which really exists.

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On the contrary, one who makes a non-God the object of his worship bows before something which has no actual existence, even though he may have set up some material image of his 'god'. While in the former case, one has found a trustworthy source of power, in the latter case, one has associated himself with crass superstitious notions, which have no basis in logic. God's worshippers are graced with eternal blessings; the worshippers of things other than God can expect nothing but lasting deprivation.

GOD'S PLAN FOR MAN

Man has been placed in the present world to be tested. Based on his record, man will either live blissfully in eternal Paradise or in complete deprivation.

What exists before us in the form of the universe is so great that all other things become insignificant in comparison. Therefore, when a great happening such as the creation of the universe can take place, why

cannot matters of smaller import likewise come into existence? In this context, the tidings given by the Quran that man has to be reborn have already been made understandable by known events on a vast scale.

Man's life stretches over two phases—one is the present life in this world, and the other is the life in the Hereafter, which is presently unseen. Therefore, the actual test of a man is for him to prefer the Hereafter to the present world. But this can be achieved only by those who have the courage to control their selfish impulses and desires while living in this world.

Man has been placed in the present world to be tested. This test necessarily requires freedom. That is why man has not been placed under any compulsion like the rest of the universe. He has the option either to conform to the system of God or to indulge in deviations from it. But this freedom applies only to actions during his lifespan in this world; it does not apply to the result of his actions. The unchangeable laws of God will determine man's final lot. Based on his record, man will find himself eternally and blissfully living in

HERE TO BE TESTED

eternal Paradise, or he will find himself in a complete state of deprivation.

HERE TO BE TESTED

Man is provided with many essential accessories for the duration of his test. Everything will be taken away once a man's trial has run its course. Man will stand alone before God, awaiting his outcome—either eternal Paradise or eternal deprivation.

While in an examination hall, a student has several objects at his disposal. Over his head, there is the roof of the examination hall itself. Then he has a table to write on, a chair to sit on, pen and paper for his answers, and attendants to see his requirements. He sits in his place and uses these facilities freely, without restriction.

If he did not have an examination hall in which to sit, the examinee would be exposed to heat and cold. If there were no desk and chair at his disposal, he would

not be able to sit comfortably. Without pen and paper, there would be no question of his writing answers.

But a student only has these things because of the examination he is taking. They are there only so long as his test lasts. As soon as the exam is over, all its accessories will be removed from him. Due to the freedom given to him within the confines of the examination hall, one would have thought they were his by right; now, it will become clear that they were only lent to him for a short while for the purpose of testing him.

It is much the same for man in this world. Here, man has many objects at his disposal. Naturally, he considers himself free to use them as he pleases, to live the life of his own choice. But the truth is that whatever man has in this world is his because of the test he is undergoing. God has put man in this world to be tested. For this test, man is provided with many essential accessories, which will only remain in his possession for the duration of his test. Everything will be taken away as soon as a man's trial has run its course. After that, man

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will stand alone before God, awaiting his outcome—either eternal Paradise or eternal deprivation. He will be like a traveller stranded in the middle of a desert or a man left to drift in the voids of space.

And only one thing—the invisible wall of death—lies between man and the end of his test on Earth.

THE TRIAL OF MAN

Life is one long trial for man in this world. Everyone is being examined; it is only the conditions under which this examination is being conducted that vary.

Life is one long trial. The great paradox is that while some enjoy life, others suffer continuously. In reality, however, all are the same, for their actions or responses to the situations they have been placed in are being scrutinised. Everyone is being examined; it is only the conditions under which this examination is being conducted that vary.

Another factor in man's trial is that God has made

some weak and others strong. There is always the temptation to succumb to the mighty and to exploit the weak. But to do this is to take the surest road to Hell. Only those who realize what is right, irrespective of circumstances will prove themselves worthy of Paradise, for it is often the underdog who is in the right and the mighty who are in the wrong. Even when others behave in a troublesome way, the best way to react is with mildness and circumspection, and no matter what the provocation, one should endeavour to be just and impartial.

How people respond to the various situations confronting them in life will determine their eternal abode. Those who yield to the mighty and oppress the weak will surely be punished in Hell, and they would do well to remember that there are two paths which open out before them every day, one of which leads to Hell and the other to Paradise.

TESTING MAN'S FITNESS

Everything man experiences is a test to see how he reacts to different situations. Based on this reaction, they will be adjudged fit for Heaven or Hell.

Man has complete freedom of will, but only God can make things happen. Man is just being put to the test on Earth. His reactions to various circumstances are being scrutinised.

Some respond to events in a patient, just and reasonable manner. Their actions earn them credit. Others react quite differently. Their hot-headedness, cruelty, and blindness to the truth earn them nothing but blame. Some profess to be believers. But if they adopt a disparaging, deceptive and malicious attitude towards others, their claim is immediately proved false. God will particularly help those who are wronged unjustly. Some uphold the truth, yet they are left helpless and forlorn. Others are blind to the truth yet have every conceivable worldly luxury at their disposal. This

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situation may seem paradoxical, but it occurs for a reason: to set apart those who cling to externals and deserve to be classed along with other deniers of the truth.

Everything man experiences, whether wealth or poverty, success or failure, is a test. Worldly triumph is no cause to rejoice, nor should worldly loss cause one grief. The winners and losers are tested to see how they react to their situations. Based on this reaction, they will be adjudged fit for Heaven or Hell.

ONLY ONE CHANCE

We have only one chance to show our worth; we can waste it or put it to good use. We have only one life on Earth; we can grow a Heavenly crop or an infernal one for ourselves.

Man is an immortal being. He spends part of his time on Earth and the rest in the Hereafter. This world is for actions; in the next world, we will reap the consequences of our actions.

ONLY ONE CHANCE

The only chance we have to work for the Hereafter is in this world. Afterwards, we shall not be able to act: we shall rather have to bear the consequences of our actions. We have very little time on Earth. Many who were once among us on Earth are now dead and gone. In the same way, we shall be removed one day from the land of the living. Our lives will end, and we shall be brought before the Lord to be judged.

This life is the first and last chance that we shall have to build an eternal future for ourselves. We have only one life on Earth, and it is in this life that we must prove our worth. We are being tried on Earth, and this trial will surely reach a decisive outcome. We shall not be able to escape the consequences of our actions.

Every second that passes is conclusive, for the time that has passed can never return. We have only one chance to show our worth; we can waste it or put it to good use. We have only one life on Earth; we can grow a Heavenly crop or an infernal one for ourselves.

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

The thoughts that come into man's mind every day build his character. Positive thoughts create a positive personality. Negative thoughts create a negative personality.

Experience tells us that a human being is the epitome of innocence as an infant. However, after growing up for years, different types of corruption creep into his personality and become part of his character. The question thus arises as to how one can develop or purify one's personality or character.

Personality or character development means preserving the same character that one had by birth. A person strives to remove the artificial curtains that later drape his character over time until his real nature, free of admixture, re-emerges. The latter way of character development can be understood with the help of an example. Iron is a pure mineral. However, due to the impact of water, it becomes covered with rust. For iron, this rust is just an outer covering. The rust can

be removed if scrubbed, and the iron can emerge in its original form.

This phenomenon symbolically points to a psychological process. An individual does something terrible and then quickly becomes aware of it. As a result, he repents, and his heart becomes pure. However, if he keeps doing one evil after another and does not introspect and seek forgiveness, the impact of sin on his heart is not removed. Consequently, he will soon become an insensitive person. He will start living in evil, and nothing good will have an uplifting or moderating effect on him.

Modern psychological studies have further clarified this point. Man's mind has three significant components present at birth. These components are the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, and the unconscious mind. Whenever a thought enters the mind, it forever becomes its part. Moreover, as we know, the human mind is but another name for the human personality. It means that whenever a thought enters a person's mind, it becomes a part of his personality forever, so even if

he tries to remove it from his personality, he will not be able to do so.

Whenever a thought—positive or negative—enters a person's mind, it first enters the conscious mind, also called the living memory. After this, when the person sleeps at night, by a natural process, the thought automatically travels out of the conscious mind and enters the subconscious mind. In this process, man has only 50% conscious control over that thought. The remaining 50% is out of his conscious control. After that, when he sleeps the next night, this thought travels further and enters his unconscious mind. When this occurs, the thought becomes totally out of the person's conscious control.

The thoughts that come into man's mind every day build his character. As the ideas are, so is the personality. Positive thoughts create a positive personality. Conversely, if one's thoughts are negative, one's character continuously becomes more and more negative.

These days, a great many people are drowned in negative thinking. If a person appears to be talking positively, it may be just superficial talk. However, if you converse with him further and try to understand his personality, you may discover that it is as negative as most others. Most people live in a graveyard of negativity, even though they are unaware of this devastating fact. In this, by and large, there is no difference between 'religious' and 'non-religious' people.

The worst character is a negative character, and the best sort of character is a positive one. Hence, the question is how to develop a positive personality. The proper way is that whenever a negative thought enters our mind, we must finish it at the earliest. Then, we should convert that negative aspect into a positive one through a particular method. For example, if you are angry with someone, you must immediately forgive him so that anger does not take the form of revenge and your character is spared from being tainted with the negative attributes of anger and hate. If you feel upset about someone achieving something, you can try

to bless the person instead. In this way, jealousy will not enter your character.

What we should do is to immediately convert a negative thought into a positive one. If there is a delay in this, the negative thinking will very quickly enter the subconscious mind and, after some time, the unconscious mind. Moreover, when that happens, it will become such an inseparable part of one's personality that even if one tries, one will not be able to remove it.

However, few people convert negative thoughts into positive ones. Because of this, they pay the frightening price of being dragged down by a corpse-like negative personality. A negative personality is a hellish personality, and a positive personality is a paradisiacal personality. If you want to save yourself from this self-destructive and devastating situation, practice the above internal reform and cleansing method and make it a part of your daily life. Only then can you continue to develop a positive personality. There is no solution to the problem other than this.

FLOWERS AND THORNS

The mind of a person who builds his character positively will be a treasury of positivity. Such a positive personality will find a place in the eternal world after death in Paradise, where they will forever lead a life of comfort and joy.

Man is an eternal being. However, his life is divided into two periods or phases: the period before death (generally, a maximum of 100 years) and the period after death (which carries on eternally). The life in the first phase is spent in this world, and the life in the second phase is spent in the world of the Hereafter.

Today's world—the present world—is like a thick jungle. Here, there are flowers and, along with them, thorns. In the world of tomorrow—that is the Hereafter—the 'flowers' and the 'thorns' will be separated from each other. After this, an eternal world will emerge, one part of which will have, as it were, only 'thorns' (Hell), and in the other part, only 'flowers' (Paradise). In today's world, everyone has the opportunity to make his eternal fortune. The record

of their life in this world will determine whether they will be settled in the world full of thorns or the eternal garden of flowers.

Dividing people into these two groups continuously happens in this world. Through the record of their life (or, in other words, based on the character that they are building in this world), each person is declaring, as it were, which of the two groups he is eligible to be included in after his death—the group that will be settled amidst the thorns or the group that will be placed among the flowers. The conditions of this present world are the means for this personality development. Every person is passing through this process. Someone is developing a thorny personality for himself, while someone else is developing a flower-like character. These two groups of people do not appear to be distinct and separate in today's world. However, in the world of tomorrow, they will be separated from each other. One group will be admitted into eternal Paradise, and the other group will be consigned to eternal Hell.

In the present world, every person faces negative experiences. If someone habitually takes an unpleasant experience as something negative, he will develop a negative personality. In contrast, if someone can convert a negative experience into a positive one, it is the best way to create a positive character.

For example, someone is rude to you, oppresses you, gets angry with you, and causes you harm. Now, you have two options to respond to this. First, you can try to do with this person just as he did with you. So, if he has abused you, you can abuse him back. If he has troubled you, you can also trouble him. If he has harmed you, you can also choose to hurt him. If he has shouted at you, you can shout back.

The person who reacts like this will develop a negative personality. He has sown a harvest of thorns in his heart, so his personality will be thorny. After death, in the next world, he will be resurrected as a thorny personality, and he will be put into the jungle full of thorns—Hell—where he will stay for all eternity, in a state of regret and sorrow.

In contrast is the person who positively responds to other people's negative behaviour. If someone abuses him he does not abuse him in return. Instead, he forgives him. If someone oppresses him, he refuses to behave in the same way. This sort of person has lived like a flower among the thorns. He developed in himself a flower-like character in this world. In the next world, in the life after death, he will be allowed to live in a garden of flowers—Paradise.

The human mind has two primary compartments—the conscious and the unconscious. Whenever a thought enters our mind, it first enters the conscious mind. After that, it gradually advances and enters the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is that part of the mind where every thought is preserved forever, although it is not in our conscious control. If you want to have a flower-like character, at the very moment when a negative thought enters your conscious mind, you should activate your thinking process and convert it into a positive thought so that this item is stored in the storehouse of the unconscious mind as a positive, not

a negative, item. For example, if a hate-filled thought enters your mind, you should diffuse it and convert it into a loving thought. If a vengeful thought enters your conscious mind, you should convert it into a thought of gratitude. If a thought that enters our mind provokes our ego and makes us feel proud, we should change it into a thought that engenders humility. If you entertain a selfish thought, you should convert it into a thought of selflessness. And so on.

The mind of a person who builds his character in this way will be a treasury of positivity. Such a person will be free of negativity. Only such a positive personality will find a place in the eternal world after death in Paradise, where they will forever lead a life of comfort and joy.

WHY THIS CONTRADICTION?

Man has to use the opportunities available in the present world per God's creation plan and then become eligible to live amidst eternal joy in Paradise.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was an English poet. He once remarked, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." It is a matter of everyday experience. Many people love to hear tragic stories. Popular novels are more often than not tragedies rather than comedies. Likewise, very often, those singers become popular who sing sad songs.

Why is this so? Why is it that sad poems or sad stories succeed in striking the chords of people's hearts?

It is because every person, in practice, lives in a psyche of deprivation or frustration. In such a situation, a happy story seems somehow unreal to them. In contrast to this, a sorrowful tale seems more natural to them.

If you study the issue in greater depth, you will realise that man is a pleasure-seeking being. In the vast

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universe, man is a remarkable creature. He is the only creature who has an acute sense of pleasure. It is a uniquely human attribute that man can enjoy pleasure. In the vast universe, there are many creatures, but man's unique ability is the quality of enjoying pleasure in this way.

For man, thinking can be a pleasure, as can seeing, hearing, speaking, eating, drinking, smelling, touching, and even walking barefoot on the grass. However, here there is a strange contradiction. Man has a great capacity to enjoy pleasure, but enjoyment is impossible for man in this world.

Once, I went to Kashmir, where, near Pahalgam, a mountain river flowed down from a stream up in the mountains. Its water was pure. When I reached Pahalgam and saw the clean, clear water, I desired to drink it. So I had a glass of water. It was wonderful—better than any other drink. I drank a second glass, then another, until I had drunk six glasses! Even after the sixth glass, I still wanted to drink but could not. Then, I developed a splitting headache. The pain was

so severe that I had to return at once. I got back to Srinagar. I was to have dinner at somebody's house, and several people had been invited. When I reached the venue, my head hurt so badly that I could not attend the dinner.

The same predicament arises with all other pleasures. Man earns wealth, obtains power, marries according to his choice, builds a grand house, accumulates many luxuries, etc. However, after having achieved all this, he realizes that there is a decisive obstacle in deriving complete and continuous satisfaction from any pleasurable thing. Even if he has all the comforts and luxuries, and material things he desires, he still fails to obtain complete and long-lasting joy and peace.

Man's desire for material comforts and luxuries is unlimited. However, to use these comforts, he has only a limited capacity. This limitation is always a barrier between man and the objects of pleasure. Even after obtaining everything that he desires, man remains frustrated. Man's bodily weakness, the decline in vitality with advancing age, sickness, accidents, and

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eventually death continuously negate his desires. Man obtains objects of pleasure when he desires to use them. However, he soon reaches the limits of his strength and becomes exhausted to the extent of becoming a spent force. Finally, death buries all his desires and dreams.

This contradiction is not a fundamental one. It arises out of a difference in the order of things. It has been decreed that in the pre-death phase of his life, man should obtain only an introduction, in a limited sense, to his desired pleasures and that in the post-death stage of his life, he may fully receive the pleasures that he seeks. This arrangement is not accidental or coincidental. Instead, it is part of nature. It is found in the whole system of nature. In this world, whatever success man earns, he gets in line with this principle. In this world, no success is an exception to this principle. For instance, a farmer must sow and reap only after that; one must plant a sapling in a nursery and obtain its fruits only after that. An ironsmith must first smelt iron, and only then can he produce steel. In other words, in this world, everything must go through

different stages. Everything first passes through its initial period and then reaches its climax. There is no exception to this principle of nature.

The same issue holds for man. Man has been given an unlimited sense of enjoyment, but the objects from which he can derive endless pleasure have been kept in the second stage of his life—in the world that comes after death. In the first stage of his life—in the present world—man discovers his ability to pursue pleasure. In the life after death, if he had led a righteous life in this world, he could obtain all the objects of pleasure. That is to say, in the pre-death phase of life in this world, he will experience the desire for pleasure, and in the post-death stage, he can experience the full experience of pleasure in Paradise.

In line with His creation plan, the Creator of the world has given man an initial introduction in this present world to the pleasures one will enjoy in Paradise. In this way, He conveys to man that if he wants to experience pleasure for all eternity and in the most total sense, he

should create a strong desire for this and perform such actions as will hold him deserving of Paradise.

What should one do to become deserving of Paradise in the Hereafter? To put it briefly, man should make himself a purified soul. He must purify himself of every negative emotion. He should save himself from becoming a victim of greed, selfishness, jealousy, dishonesty, falsehood, anger, revenge, hate, and other negative feelings. He should develop a lofty, entirely positive character that makes him worthy of living in the neighbourhood of God in Paradise. He must be transformed into an angelic person or a divine personality.

Man's life is divided into the pre-death and post-death phases. A tiny portion of man's life is kept for the first phase, while the rest—which carries on for all eternity—is in the post-death phase. If man's story is seen only in the pre-death phase, it will appear as a meaningless tragedy. However, if a man's story is seen in the light of the period after death, it will seem meaningful.

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In line with this creation plan of God, man stands at a very critical juncture. He has to choose between two alternatives. One option is to use the available opportunities in the present world according to God's creation plan and then become eligible to live amidst eternal joy in Paradise. The other option is to lead a life of heedlessness in this world and be eternally deprived of pleasure in the next phase of life.

CONCLUSION

An eternal principle is: As we sow, so shall we reap. The pre-death period of life is the period for sowing seeds, while the post-death period is like harvesting the crop.

Man's life is divided into the pre-death and post-death periods. The limited period before death is for the test, while the eternal period after death is for obtaining the results of one's performance in the test. Those who pass the test will be blessed with Paradise, and those who fail the test will be consigned to Hell.

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This is the creation plan of the Creator for this world. However, the status of Paradise and Hell are not the same. The actual purpose of creation is to select the people of Paradise. As far as the people of Hell are concerned, they are just relative components of creation; they do not form any real part of the creation plan.

The world before death is made following the demands of the test. After the period of this test, there will be no need for this world, nor will there be a need for those who fail the test. After this period, only Paradise and those people selected to be settled in the ideal world of heaven will remain in the universe.

To make people aware of this creation plan, the Creator has made various arrangements. One such arrangement is that He has placed a deep awareness of the creation plan in the nature of man itself. Every person experiences that he does not obtain complete peace and satisfaction in this world. It applies to almost everyone, rich or poor, powerful or weak. Almost everyone lives in a state of dissatisfaction and dies in

this condition. This general condition of dissatisfaction and frustration should remind us that our destination is somewhere else, that our desirable world is not the present world where we spend the pre-death period of life. This desirable or ideal world is somewhere else—in the Hereafter—and so, we should be motivated to make efforts to obtain it in the post-death period of life.

To make people aware of this creation plan, the Creator made this present world so that no one could acquire a life of complete comfort here. There are many problems—sickness, accidents, boredom, suffering, loss, etc. And then, after a short time, one dies. In this way, the unfavourable conditions of the world repeatedly remind man that he cannot make his desired or ideal world here. This world is insufficient to satisfy all his desires. This unfavourable situation continuously compels man to search for the truth.

In the same way, in this present world, many people undergo suffering, which serves as a warning lesson for others. For instance, a person becomes paralysed

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and is confined to a wheelchair. Alternatively, he falls victim to a disease without a cure and loses passion for life. People like them do the work of ‘signposts’ from God. They tell us how unreal life in this present world is. Such people silently convey that man cannot make an ideal world here according to his desires.

Some people have to face various unpleasant situations in life’s training course. On the face of it, those who get the chance to play the role of such a ‘signpost’ appear to be in difficulty, but there is excellent news for them. On the Day of Judgement after death, even their small actions will be accepted by God. Because of the difficulties they faced in this world, they were not physically capable of doing anything significant, and because of this, just accepting the role of ‘signposts’ destined for them will suffice. Therefore, while they remain in this world, they should adopt patience with all their difficulties. Then, based on observing patience and complying with God’s command, they will get admission into Paradise without any additional action. That is to say, simply by patiently surrendering

to God's will, without having to do anything else, they will get admission into Paradise after death.

This news is not something strange or novel for man. Through various means, man has been informed that he cannot construct the ideal world of his desires in the pre-death phase. Instead, whoever leads a righteous life here can obtain the ideal world of his desires in the post-death period. Paradise will be inhabited in the next world, but the paradisiacal man is being made in today's world.

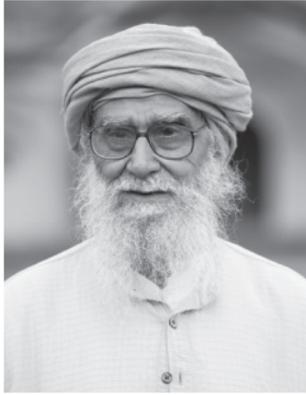
What is Paradise? One can understand what Paradise is like by looking at the present world. The present world is, in a sense, an introduction to Paradise. It is a miniature model of Paradise. Paradise is the complete and perfect edition of the present world. All the blessings available in the present world are present in Paradise. The difference is that the present world is imperfect, while Paradise is perfect. The present world is not ideal, while the world of Paradise is ideal. The present world is temporary, while the world of Paradise is eternal. There is fear and sorrow, noise and

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din, and other challenges in the present world, but it is not so in Paradise. The present world has limitations and disadvantages, while Paradise is free from these. In Paradise, man will obtain eternal fulfilment, unlike in the present world, where no one gets lasting satisfaction.

Hell is a place that is totally opposite of Paradise. In Hell, all those hardships will be gathered together, much more than we experience in the present world.

The pre-death and post-death periods of man's life are intimately connected. Their relationship is like that of sowing seeds and harvesting a crop. The pre-death period of life is the period for sowing seeds, as it were, while the post-death period is like harvesting the crop. It is an eternal principle: As we sow, so shall we reap.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. His work has received international recognition for his seminal contributions toward world peace. The Maulana authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, Islam's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and easily understandable. He founded Centre for Peace and Spirituality International in 2001 to popularize the culture of peace and share the spiritual message of Islam with people.

www.mwkhan.com www.cpsglobal.org
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God has made the present world a selection ground. God has divided man's life into two periods—the pre-death phase to serve as a trial period and the post-death period for reward or punishment. The conditions of this world serve as an examination paper for man. Here, at every moment, man is being tested. Every person's word and deed are being recorded here. Based on this record, it will be decided who will be eligible to be settled in Paradise and who will not. Those who limit their freedom, bow before the truth without compulsion, and lead principled lives will be settled in Paradise. On the other hand, those who misuse their freedom will find themselves rejected on the Day of Judgement.

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