

Discover Islam

THE WAY TO FIND GOD

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN





*In the name of Allah
The Merciful, the Compassionate*

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For more information, please write to:

Goodword Books

1, Nizamuddin West Market

New Delhi-110013

email: info@goodwordbooks.com

www.goodwordbooks.com

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Introduction

For some time now there has been a need for an introduction to Islam, presented in simple and concise language, which might provide children with fundamental religious instruction and also be useful to adults who want to understand the teachings of Islam.

By the grace of God a book of this nature has now been compiled. It consists of five parts, the names of which are as follows: The Way to Find God, The Teachings of Islam, The Good Life, The Garden of Paradise and The Fire of Hell.

The pamphlet is the first in this series, its title being self-explanatory. Man requires guidance in his search for God. The universe provides man with such guidance in visual form. The whole universe seems to be beckoning man to join it in its inexorable progress towards the Lord. So dazzling is the sun's radiance that it seems to wish to convey a message to man, but cannot do so before setting. Trees extend their branches. Rivers flow on in their pulsating motion. All these things and many others have something

to say, but men pass them by without ever realizing what that something is. All celestial heights and terrestrial panoramas seem to join in a massive yet silent congregation, which addresses itself to man visually, though never audibly.

But is the universe really no more than a vast museum of inarticulate masterpieces? Not at all. Everything in it bears a divine message, communicated in the language of eternity. So immersed is man in other worldly affairs, however, that he fails to hear this silent message.

The Prophet's role is to put this divine message into words that we can understand. He demonstrates the kind of life that God expects man and the whole of creation to lead.

The Quran—the word of God in Arabic—is the foundation of this inspired path. The sunnah—the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad, (on whom be peace and God's blessings), collected in several volumes—provides clarification of the Holy Book. Whoever seriously wishes to understand Islam should study these books, for they are the authentic source of God's religion. Here is a comprehensive course for those who do not have time to study them all:

1. The Holy Quran
2. *Sirat ibn Kathir* (Biography of the Prophet) by Ibn Kathir
3. Hadith, *Mishkat al-Masabih*
4. *Hayat as-Sahabah* (Life of the Companions) by Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalvi

These are well-known and easily-obtainable books. Though originally written in Arabic, they have been translated and published in several languages. They can be acquired and read in the language of one's choice.

This essay has been prepared with a general and fundamental understanding of the divine way in mind. If it imbues the reader with a desire to study religion in more detail and delve deeper into reality, then it will have been worthwhile.

Wahiduddin Khan
October, 1980
The Islamic Centre,
New Delhi

Man's Quest

Much as we long for a perfect world, we are compelled to live in an imperfect one. Our happiness is always short-lived and our every success is, in some way, eventually a failure. The aspirations that we cherish in the early days of our lives are shattered as we begin to age. Just as we begin to take root on earth, disaster, old age and death overtake us.

How enchanting the flowers are, but they blossom only to wither. How delicate the sun's radiance, but it shines for only a short while before being covered in darkness. Miraculous though man's existence is, no miracle can save him from death. Everything in this world shall perish. Although this world is inexpressibly beautiful and meaningful, all its virtues are bound to fade. All mundane things have a dark side to them. How, one may ask, could a God who is Himself perfect, be satisfied with the creation of an intrinsically imperfect world? The absolute cannot abide in the non-absolute. This world must be inconclusive. Another world must follow to compensate for the inadequacies of the present one.

There is no doubt about the transitory nature of this world. It came into existence at a specific time

some twenty million years ago. Its Creator must have existed eternally, for only an infinite Creator could have fashioned a finite world. If God had not always existed, then this transitory world could never have come into being. The very existence of an ephemeral universe shows that there must be an eternal Creator. If the Creator had not existed eternally, He could never have existed at all and, if there had been no Creator, there would have been no creation either.

If we assert that the world was created on a certain date, then this means that there must have been a Creator before that date. If we go on to assert that this Creator was Himself created on some previous date, however, then our claim can have no meaning. The Creator cannot himself have been created; He always was. In His infiniteness He has created a finite world. His existence, and that of all mortal creatures, is dependent upon His immortality.

Since God is immortal, He must also be absolute, for absoluteness is the greatest attribute of immortality. The one cannot be found without the other.

This world is a manifestation of God's attributes, but its shortcomings and limitations show the manifestation to be incomplete. A complete manifestation of a perfect and infinite God would itself be perfect and infinite. Another world must be

awaiting us. This incomplete manifestation of God's attributes requires a sequel for its fulfillment.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us. Paradise is evidence of God's absolute power to make beauty perpetual and joy boundless in a world of everlasting peace and contentment.

Everyone is seeking some unseen fulfillment. Everyone seeks a perfect world, but this has always eluded man. Yet it is quite natural that he should continue to strive, for the universe in which he lives testifies to the existence of one, infinite God. The emergence of a world of infinite blessings is just as likely as the existence of the present transitional world. How can an inherently infinite Creator be satisfied with a finite manifestation of His attributes? God, Who created all things from nought, can surely endow creation with perpetuity. This second creation is no more difficult than the first.

Immortality is God's unique quality, in which He has no partner. Immortality signifies the highest possible perfection to which only God can attain. No one can today imagine the wonderful nature of that paradise which is a manifestation of God's immortality: that beauty which will never fade; that joy which will

never end; that life, the continuity of which will never be interrupted; that world where all our hopes and desires will be fulfilled. No one will wish to part for even a moment from this wondrously delightful paradise, no matter how many millions of years have passed.

Man is always searching for a world of everlasting content. This quest is quite correct and in accordance with human nature; but our dreams cannot come true in this world, for here, there cannot be an eternally perfect order. The resources needed for such a world are lacking. The Prophet taught that God has made this world one of trial and tribulation, not one of reward and retribution. The world is full of things which put man to the test, whereas the factors required for a life of everlasting delight and repose will be forthcoming only in the next world. Death divides these two worlds. Death marks the completion of the trial of man and his entrance into the world of eternity.

If one wishes one's dreams to come true, one should not try to construct a heaven on earth. One should rather try to succeed in the trial of life, accepting the role of God's true servant, adopting the life pattern of the Prophet and restricting one's freedom to the limits which God has laid down. The dreams of those

who succeed in the trial of life will be fulfilled in the next world. Those who fail will find nothing but woe awaiting them there.

What is Truth?

There is only one straight line from one point to another; so there can only be one path leading a person to God. This is the true path. The question is: what does truth consist of and how can it be found?

Fortunately for us, there are not several truths to choose from. There is only one truth for us to accept. This solitary truth consists of the teachings of Muhammad, the Prophet of God, on whom be peace and God's blessings. Anyone who earnestly seeks the truth will find that no exacting choices have to be made. The choice is between truth and falsehood; there are no two truths to choose from.

For at least five thousand years philosophers have searched in vain for truth. Their tedious investigations have only exposed their inability to provide conclusive answers. Philosophy seeks truth by means of rational contemplation, not realizing that knowledge of the entire cosmos—something beyond the range of the limited human intellect—is

a pre-requisite for genuine gnosis. The philosopher can never attain to cosmic knowledge, so that neither can he conceive of an accurate idea of reality.

Science has never claimed to be in a position to explain the truth. It only looks into matters which can be repeatedly proved experimentally. Science discusses the chemistry of flowers, but not their fragrance, for the chemical parts of a flower can be analysed; its odour cannot. Science has itself restricted its scope, making it clear that it will deal only with partial truth and is in no position to expound on universal realities.

Some spiritual adepts claim, or their followers believe, that they know all about truth, and can communicate absolute information concerning it, but their belief is groundless. They claim to have reached the truth by means of spiritual disciplines. The so-called spiritual disciplines are in fact of a physical nature, and spiritual discovery by means of physical discipline is an unfeasible proposition in itself. Secondly, no spiritual adept is free of the limitations to which all men are subject. The obstacles which prevent others from reaching a full understanding of truth also block his path. No self-discipline can enable man to transcend these natural limitations and convey to him a knowledge of absolute truth.

So the stage is left to the Prophet. A prophet is a human being who asserts that God has chosen him and revealed true knowledge to him for the purpose of conveying it to others. Intrinsically, this is the only plausible claim so far, for only God, who is eternal and omniscient, can have actual knowledge of truth. God's divinity itself is proof of His all-pervading knowledge of reality. The claim of one who asserts that he has received knowledge of truth from God is worthy of consideration.

Here the question arises of there having been not just one prophet. There are many divine scriptures and many prophets have been sent to the world; which of them should be followed? A person who is really sincere in his search for truth, however, will have no trouble in finding the answer to this question. There is no doubt that in the past God has raised many individuals to the status of prophethood, but one can judge an event only by virtue of its historical credibility and only one prophet possesses credentials which make his prophethood a historical certainty rather than just a belief. Of all those who have claimed prophethood, only Muhammad, on whom be peace and God's blessings, can be said to have achieved full historical credibility. Everything about him is established historical fact. We are just as well informed about the Prophet of Islam as we are

about any contemporary person, or even more so. Apart from him, all prophets are legendary figures. No complete historical record of them exists, nor are the scriptures they left preserved in their original state. Only the life of Muhammad, on whom be peace and God's blessings, has been completely chronicled. The book which was handed over to people as the inspired word of God is also present in its original form. So, looking at the matter rationally, there can only be one answer to the question: "What is truth?" From a practical as well as a theoretical point of view, we should accept the only realistic answer there is. We should not try to select a solution from a wide range of alternatives.

This truth is the word of God and the word of God is immutable. God's commandments never change, either with respect to man or the rest of creation. The terrestrial and celestial orders have not altered despite the passing of billions of years. The principles which govern vegetation and water in one location are equally applicable in another. That is the way with God's commandments to man also: they are the same now as they were thousands of years ago. That which applies to one nation applies with equal force to all.

Some factors in life, such as transport or architecture, are continually being altered, but truth always remains

the same. Truth is attached to that side of human nature which never changes. The truth is concerned with matters like whom one should accept as one's Creator and Master; whom one should worship; whom one should love and whom one should fear; according to what criteria one should assess success and failure; what the purpose of one's existence is and the focal point of one's emotions; according to what code of conduct one should deal with people. Truth deals with matters which are not affected by time and place. Everyone, at all times and in all places is confronted by these questions. Just as God is one and everlasting, so the truth is also one and will always remain so.

A Danger Warning

What is the reality of life? Normally people do not like to think of such things. For them, there is one life—that of the world—and they try to live it in as prestigious and comfortable a way as possible, for afterwards, neither man, nor anything that concerns him, will remain. Some do think about this matter, but only on a philosophical level. They seek a theoretical explanation of the world. Such explanations are interesting from a philosophical point of view, but they are of no basic value to man.

Theoretical discussions about whether a cosmic spirit keeps the whole universe revolving for its own fulfillment, or whether everything is part of some sublime being, do not raise any personal issues for man. Some have a religious answer to the question, but their solution is also of no import to man. Some religions hold that the son of God was crucified in atonement for man's sins; others see life as a mysterious, recurring cycle, with man repeatedly being born and dying; some claim that man will be rewarded and punished in this world. These are the creeds of which most religions are made.

All such solutions to the problems of life differ from one another considerably but in so much as none of them raises any serious personal issue for man, they are all the same. They are either explanations of events or a means of providing us with some sort of spiritual satisfaction. They do not issue us with any warning or stir us into any action.

But the answer provided by Prophet Muhammad is of an entirely different nature. Whereas the other answers do not raise any critical issue for man, the answer provided by the Prophet places every individual in a precarious position from which the next step leads either to an awesome abyss of destruction or to a world of eternal bliss. It requires every man to take a serious view of his situation—

even more so than a traveller in the night whose torch reveals a black snake slithering menacingly in front of him.

The message taught by Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, contains a greater warning for all mankind. He taught that after this world a vaster world is awaiting us, where every person will be judged and then punished or rewarded according to his deeds. The props which man relies on in this world will not support him there, for there will be no trading, no friendship and no acceptable intercession.

The warning which the Prophet delivered to mankind makes his existence a matter of personal importance to everyone. Everyone's fate, according to his teachings, hangs in the balance. Either one can believe in his message and follow his guidance, thus preparing oneself for everlasting paradise, or one can ignore his teachings, thus resigning oneself to eternal hellfire.

There are two things which make this matter even more worthy of our attention. Firstly, the arguments of those who have expounded other theories on this matter have been very dubious. Those who consider material aggrandisement to be all that is worthwhile in life have no proof for their theory; their ideas are

based on superficial attractions. Those who speak in philosophical terms have only analogies to offer as evidence. They themselves do not have full faith in what they say, so how can others be expected to accept their theories?

Then there are those who speak with reference to the prophets and scriptures. Basically their platform is solid, but the prophets and books to which they refer belong to an age-long past. We have no reliable historical information regarding them at our disposal. Even though the original source of these religions is sound, we still cannot rely on their teachings as they are at present. The criterion with which to judge the past is history, and history does not verify the authenticity of their dogmas.

With Prophet Muhammad, however, the case is quite different. On the one hand, his prophetic credentials stand up to any scrutiny. He was the epitome of everything a prophet should be. There is no doubt about his prophethood; it is an established historical fact which no one can deny.

The facts of the Holy Prophet's life and teachings have also been carefully preserved; their historical credibility cannot be contested. The Quran exists in its revealed form. The Holy Prophet's words and actions are recorded in book-form, so one has no

difficulty in establishing exactly what he said and did in his life.

The Prophet warned us that we are confronted with a reality which we can never change; we have no choice but to face it. Death and suicide only transfer us to another world; they do not obliterate us altogether. The Creator has established an eternal scheme for success and failure which no one can alter or opt out of. We have to choose between heaven and hell; we have no other choice.

If the meteorological department forecasts a hurricane, it is telling us about an impending disaster in which those affected will have no say in the matter; another power will control events. One can either escape or expose oneself to destruction. So, when the earthquake of the Last day occurs there will be no path to safety save that which the Prophet of Islam has laid down. We ignore that path at our own peril.

The Teachings of the Prophet

God's religion is one religion. It is that one religion which has always been revealed to prophets, but man, in his carelessness, has always marred or altered the true way. Prophet Muhammad revived the divine religion and presented it in scriptural form for posterity. His religion is the true religion until the end of time. It is the only way to achieve closeness to God and salvation in the afterlife.

He taught that God is One; He has no partner. He created all things and has complete control over the universe. We should serve Him and submit to Him alone. In Him should we repose our hopes and to Him should we pray. Though He cannot be seen, he is so close to us that he hears and answers us when we call upon Him. There is no greater sin than to consider that He could have any counterpart or equal.

There is no intermediary between God and man. By remembering God, a person establishes direct contact with Him; there is no need for any go-between. No one will be able to intercede before God in the Hereafter either. He will decide everyone's case

according to His own knowledge; no one will be able to influence His judgement. God is not accountable to anyone for His decisions. All His judgements are based on wisdom and justice; He is not influenced by intercession and proximity.

Worship of God is much more than just superficial rituals; it is total submission. If one worships God, then one devotes oneself entirely to one's Lord, fearing Him, loving Him, having hopes in Him, and concentrating on Him alone. Worship of God is total self-surrender; it is much more than occasional observance of mere formalities.

When dealing with others, we should always bear in mind that God is watching over us. He will deal with us as we have dealt with others. So, in order to avoid recrimination when our actions are weighed up on the divine scales of justice, it is essential that we avoid evils such as cruelty, dishonesty, pride, antagonism, jealousy, selfishness and callousness. If one fears God, one will not treat His creatures with disdain, for those who mistreat God's creatures should not expect kindness from the Creator; only those who have treated others well deserve good treatment from Him.

The Prophet taught that the only acceptable life is one of total obedience to God. The basic principles

of this life are forms of subservience as laid down in the Quran, and God's Prophet has demonstrated them practically in his life. The only life pleasing to God, then, is one which follows the guidance of the Quran and the example set by the Holy Prophet.

The religion which the Prophet left us guides us in every walk of life; everyone should proceed in accordance with the scheme with which he has provided us. This scheme is based on certain tenets on which the whole of the Islamic life is based.

Firstly, there is the testimony: "There is no one worthy of being served save God, and Muhammad is His messenger." This declaration marks man's exit from one arena and his entry into another—his departure from all that is un-Islamic and his inclusion in the ranks of Islam. Secondly, prayer, that is worship five times a day in the manner of the Prophet. Thirdly, fasting, a test of patience and endurance annually performed during the month of Ramadan. Fourthly *zakat*, the setting aside of a fixed portion of one's income for the poor. Fifthly, pilgrimage, a visit to the House of God at least once in a lifetime, if one has the means. When one fulfills these five conditions, one becomes part of the prophetically established Islamic brotherhood.

Life can be lived in either of two ways; it can be founded either on the Hereafter or on the world. In the former

case, the Prophet's guidance is accepted and a person forms his beliefs and arranges his life according to his instructions. In the latter case a person guides himself, letting his own intellect dictate the way he thinks and acts. The first person can be called a God-worshipper, while the second is a self-worshipper.

There are several parts to the credo based on prophetic guidance: belief in God, the angels, the scriptures, the prophets, the resurrection of man and life after death, heaven and hell, as well as recognition of God as the overriding Lord and Sovereign. If one bases one's life on these tenets of faith, then one has truly submitted oneself to God. All one's efforts in the world become oriented towards the Hereafter. One's worship, sacrifices, life and death are all dedicated to God and His prophets.

The self-guided life, on the other hand, is a free and unprincipled one. One who lives such a life is unconcerned about the nature of reality. He believes what he wants to; he passes his time in whatever way his intellect and desires direct him; his efforts all centre on worldly gain; he develops into the sort of person he wishes to be, rather than what God and His prophets would like to see.

People who adhere to the religion of some previous prophet can only be counted as God's true servants if

they believe in the Prophet of Islam. Belief in him is in no way incompatible with adherence to their own religion in its most complete and perfect possible form. Those who deny his prophethood are proving by their actions that all they follow is a religion of conventional norms and prejudices, to which they have attached a prophet's name. Those who follow a religion simply because it is their national one can never discover the divine religion which the prophet brought. The veil of their prejudices will never allow them to see the truth which God has revealed to the last of His prophets. Those who really believe in God and His prophets recognize the religion of the Prophet of Islam as their own. They receive it with enthusiasm as one does a long-lost belonging.

Towards Death

Death will overtake everybody; no one can escape from it. But death is not the same for everyone. Some have made God their goal in life; they speak and keep silence for His sake alone; their attention is focused entirely on the after-life. Death is for them the end of a long terrestrial journey towards their Lord.

Others have forgotten their Lord; they do not do things for God's sake; they are travelling away from their Lord.

They are like rebels who roam at large for a few days, and then death seizes them and brings them to justice.

Death is not the same for both types of people as it might seem. For one, death is to partake of the Lord's hospitality; for the other, it is to be cast into His dungeon. For one, death is the gate to paradise; for the other it will be the day when he is thrown into hell's raging fire, to burn there forever as a punishment for his rebelliousness.

Believers have a different attitude to death from unbelievers. They are concerned with what comes in the wake of death; they focus their attention on gaining an honorable position in the life after death. Unbelievers, on the other hand, are caught up on worldly affairs. Their ultimate ambition is worldly honour and prestige. Under present circumstances, those who have consolidated their position on earth seem to be successful, but death will shatter this facade. It will become clear that those who seemed to have no base in the world were in fact standing on the most solid of foundations, while the position of those who had reached a high status in the world will be exposed as false. Death will obliterate everything; afterwards only that which has some worth in the after-life will remain. We are obsessed with the world which meets our eyes. We fail to pay attention to the

call of truth. If we were to see the next life with our worldly vision, we would immediately submit to God. We would realize that if we do not submit to Him today, we will have to do so in the future world, when submission will profit no one.

A Final Word

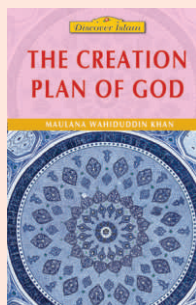
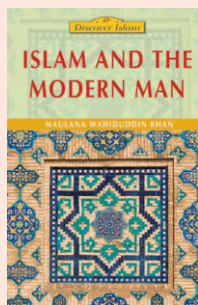
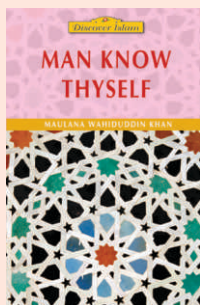
A city clock-tower informs people of the correct time. People set their watches according to it. Nobody bothers about who the engineers and mechanics who constructed the clock-tower were, or where the parts that they used were produced. The fact that it keeps good time is enough to attract everybody. God's religion is much the same sort of clock-tower, constructed for man's guidance; yet people fail to look at it and find their way by it.

There can only be one reason for this; people are serious in wanting to know the time, but not the word of God. God's religion is connected with the next life, while a clock-tower is a thing of this world. The clock has an important part to play in the realization of their worldly ambitions. They recognize its importance. But they have no ambitions for the future life, and no regard for the importance of something which guides man to eternal success.

True submission to God does not mean just acknowledging His existence. It involves total attachment to Him. It is an inward state with an outward form. Discovery of God is an event of incomparable impact which can never remain hidden. If God's truth has been revealed to someone, it will always be apparent. One so favoured will desire those around him to bear witness to the fact that he has answered the call of God, set aside the idols of worldly gain and expediency, and devoted himself entirely to God. If one claims inner faith, but does not express it, one can only be looking at faith as a convenience. Anyone who puts worldly interests before God cannot ever discover Him. Preoccupation with worldly priorities and prejudices are the very opposite of true submission to God, and two such conflicting states can never merge in one soul.

Discover Islam

In this series, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan presents the fundamental teachings of Islam in a simple way. The series provides the general reader with an accurate and comprehensive picture of Islam the true religion of submission to God.



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info@goodwordbooks.com
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centre for peace & spirituality
info@cpsglobal.org
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