



LIVING IN HOPE

Opportunities Amidst Problems

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

*Translated by:
Prof. Farida Khanam*

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FOREWORD

Often, I have heard people say that they find themselves at an impasse. All doors are closed to them. To such people I say that we may find that some doors are locked along the way, but there are always others that remain open and it is just a question of entering the right one to reach our destination. In the world of today, success lies within the grasp of those who are alert to the opportunities around them. Failure is the result not so much of a lack of opportunities but the lack of will to grasp such opportunities as exist, and to pursue one's course with determination and energy.

According to the creation plan of God, this world is a world of possibilities and not a world of frustration. God has created this world full of wonderful opportunities. Here, when matter perishes, it becomes energy; when darkness comes, a new light emerges from its depths; when one building falls, it leaves a place for another construction. So it is with events in the life of man. From every failure emerges the chance of new success for everyone.

The same applies to rival nations. If one nation becomes advanced, while another remains backward, this is not the end of the matter. When this happens, another process begins: the advanced nations develop a love of comfort and luxurious living, which is likely, in the long run, to bring about its decadence and downfall while with new spirit of struggle and endeavour the people of the backward nation can reach new heights of greatness.

This means that no one need lose heart in this world of God. However uncompromising circumstances may seem, they contain, somewhere or another, the possibility of triumph for man. What one should do is seek out this possibility and use it to turn one's defeat into victory. Just remember that every dark cloud has a silver lining.

Life is full of disadvantages. Frequently, we face areas of existence with which we are totally unfamiliar. Dealing with them takes thought and planning and, at that time, we need some pointers to a future line of action. In such a situation, belief in God serves as a lighthouse. We are like the captain of an ocean-going vessel, who finds himself in a state of loneliness and isolation. Then he spots a lighthouse on the coastline. Its light gives him new hope, and he decides to follow the path it illuminates. The result is that he is successful in reaching his destination.

Indeed, life is like sailing across a great ocean. We need to believe that there is someone on the coast who can give us help when we are at our most helpless. This is the role of God in the life of every man and woman. One's success is fifty per cent struggle and fifty per cent hope. It is a source of great hope for everyone that God is with us. There is no distance between man and God. He is just a call away from us.

Wahiduddin Khan

January 26, 2021

New Delhi

I

A World Full of Hope

NO END TO POSSIBILITIES

No one need lose heart in this world of God. However uncompromising circumstances may seem, they contain, the possibility of triumph for man. What one should do is seek out this possibility and use it to turn one's defeat into victory. Just remember that every dark cloud has a silver lining.

The sun was setting in the west over the mountains. Half of the orb had already dipped beneath the ridge. In a few minutes, the whole sun disappeared behind the still glowing mountain range.

Then darkness began to set in on all sides. The light of the sun was gradually receding, and it seemed as if the whole area would be plunged in pitch darkness. But just then, another light began to ascend. It was the full moon, ascending in the east as the sun was setting in the west. In a short while, the whole scene was lit up again. Not long after the eclipse of the sunlight, the earth was illuminated anew.

“This is a sign of nature,” I thought to myself. “When one possibility ends, another begins. When the sun

set, the moon came to give light to the world.”

So, for individuals and nations, there is always hope. If one falls a victim to the hand of fate, there is no need to be discouraged. There is no cause for despair in this world of God. By grasping fresh opportunities and utilizing them, one can arise again. All one has to do is go about one's task in an intelligent manner, and never give up trying.

God has created this world full of wonderful opportunities. Here, when matter perishes, it becomes energy; when darkness comes, a new light emerges from its depths; when one building falls, it leaves a place for another construction. So it is with events in the life of man. From every failure emerges the chance of new success. The same applies to rival nations. If one nation becomes advanced, while another remains backward, that is not the end of the matter. When this happens, another process begins: the advanced nations develop a love of comfort and luxurious living, which is likely, in the long run, to bring about its decadence and downfall while a new spirit of struggle and endeavour rises in the people of the backward nation to lead them on to greater heights.

This means that no one need lose heart in this world of God. However uncompromising circumstances

may seem, they contain, somewhere or another, the possibility of triumph for man. What one should do is seek out this possibility and use it to turn one's defeat into victory. Just remember that every dark cloud has a silver lining.

THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY

When we find ourselves in difficult situations, we should study them carefully, in the way that the jeweler studies his diamond. We should not approach them, carelessly, from the strongest point, but with circumspection, from the weakest point.

You have probably seen manufacturers of glass frames scouring the surfaces of sheets of glass with a pen-like instrument, then neatly snapping them into two. The cutting edge of this tool is made up of small razor-edged diamonds. Even the huge drills used for boring through hundreds of feet of rock strata in the search for oil are fitted with diamond cutting edges. It is the extreme hardness of the diamond which makes these tools so effective. The diamond is, in fact, the hardest known naturally occurring substance. It cannot even be scratched. Put it in acid, and there will be no effect. But there is another aspect to this wonderful stone. If it is heated at a very high temperature, it will disappear—it will simply sublime into carbon dioxide, and if struck

a sharp blow at exactly the right point, it will break asunder. You have only to look at diamond gemstones to see what exquisite, multi-faceted forms they can be given by jewelers, because, by studying the inner structure of the diamond, they know exactly where and how to break them.

Similarly, when we find ourselves in difficult situations, we should study them carefully, in the way that the jeweler studies his diamond. We should not approach them, carelessly, from the strongest point, but with circumspection, from the weakest point. We should not adopt methods which are likely to gain poor results like aggressiveness or violence, for these only engender bitterness and obstinacy in others. We should resort to politeness and diplomacy—eschew harsh language in favour of gentleness and tact.

We should also consider that there are certain human beings who are known as “rough diamonds.” That is, on the outside they appear to be unattractive and without merit, whereas on the inside, they are of great worth. Therefore, they must be given the same delicate handling and treated with the same expertise as the master craftsman lavishes on a superb but fragile piece of jewelry.

OVERCOMING ONE'S LIMITATIONS

All your limitations can be quickly overcome provided you put to good use the natural gifts bestowed upon you by Almighty God.

Opticians usually have arrangements for eye-testing on the premises so that customers can have their eyes tested and buy their spectacles all in the same shop. One of my acquaintances once opened a spectacle shop. It was rather small, certainly not big enough to permit eye-tests to be carried out, for a distance-vision chart has to be 18 feet away from the client. And this little shop was only 9 feet in length. My friend was quite unperturbed by this. When asked how he proposed to do eye-testing in such a confined space, he said, "Simple! We just fix a mirror on the wall, and there you are! The distance is doubled!" The clients could then be asked to read the chart through the mirror because the reflection would have the effect of doubling the distance. Undaunted by the

acute shortage of space, this shopkeeper had shown great ingenuity in solving his problem.

This principle is applicable in most of life's arenas. When you have limited opportunities, when your horizons seem narrow, there is no need to become a defeatist. It is simply a question of racking your brains and you will be able to "convert" your "9-feet shop" into an "18-feet shop".

When your home is only a small one, you can always add upper stories to it to enlarge it. When you do not have enough resources to make investments, your basic honesty is your best guarantee of success. When you do not possess university degrees or other high qualifications, your courtesy and hard work will in large measure compensate for this. When there are no chances of overcoming your enemy by waging war against him, your wisest policy is to win his heart. When your share in political power is a diminished one, you can still score in the economic field and achieve a different, but equally important set of objectives. When you feel you are in a weak position because your sympathizers are few in number, you can make up for this by encouraging unifying forces and striving towards efficient organization of whatever human resources are available.

Every 'small shop' can be converted into a 'big shop'. A shop is small only so long as you do not use your brain to expand it. All your limitations can be quickly overcome provided you put to good use the natural gifts bestowed upon you by Almighty God.

SOMETHING MORE TO BE DONE

If after the night the Almighty makes you see things anew in the morning, you should understand that there are more days left for you to do your work.

Lord Robert Clive (1725-1774), one of the top Britishers who struggled hard to make India a British colony in the 18th century, came to Madras at the age of eighteen, in 1743 and joined the East India Company as a clerk. His salary was five pounds annually. This amount was quite insufficient for his expenses. He was burdened with debts and, due to disappointment and depression, he quarreled with his colleagues and officers.

Later, an incident took place which changed the direction of his life. One day to end his unsuccessful life, he put his loaded pistol to his head and pressed the trigger. But he was surprised that his pistol did not work. He opened his pistol and found it loaded with bullets. Although he had fully intended to kill himself, he was still alive.

This was a very strange occurrence. Realizing this, Robert Clive cried: "Certainly the Almighty has saved you for some important purpose." Now he resigned from his job as a clerk and joined the British army. At that time both the Britishers and the French were trying simultaneously to set foot in India. Finally, a battle was fought between the two forces. In this war, Robert Clive proved himself by showing extraordinary capability and bravery. Subsequently, he made a great deal of progress and was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British army. Robert Clive who had wanted to kill himself in frustration, finally rose to the position of being the first conqueror of India.

All of us at one time or the other are faced with such incidents, when we safely emerge from an extremely dangerous situation as though a miracle had happened. However, very few people learn their lesson as Robert Clive did. There are very few who come to understand from these incidents that: "Your time has not yet come, you have yet to complete your work in this world."

Every man has been allotted a fixed time and certain opportunities. This fixed time and these opportunities are not taken away from him until the Almighty wills it to be so. If after the night the Almighty makes you see things anew in the morning, you should understand

that there are more days left for you to do your work. If you succeed in saving your life in this world so full of grave incidents, it means that, according to the plan of Almighty, you have to do something which you have yet not done.

SEEKING THE RIGHT ALTERNATIVES

Things which are impossible to obtain by direct confrontation can be achieved by the patient fostering of mutual goodwill. Where provocation and retaliation have failed, patience and human concern will succeed.

A luckless passenger rushed, panting, into the station just as his train was steaming out. His watch—unaccountably slow by ten minutes—had let him down. “Don’t worry, Babuji,” sympathized a passing porter, “There will be another train along in about a couple of hours. Why go away? Just wait here for it on this same platform.” The passenger, keen to reach his destination, decided to accept his advice, even if it meant waiting two long tedious hours. Just getting to where he wanted to go was too important to him to think of expending time and energy in coming and going from the station all over again, and perhaps missing his train once again; so, he stayed right where he was and catch his train he did.

When we miss a train, there is always the comforting knowledge that there is that next train coming along. That is the lesson that the platform teaches. It is then up to us to make the correct decision about our next move. But it is surprising how many people fail to grasp this reality. They are inexplicably plunged into gloom and depression when they fail initially to grasp an opportunity and frequently adopt such a pessimistic attitude that they fritter away their precious energies in blaming others for their failures. How much better would it be if they were to make a proper assessment of the situation, taking all possibilities into account, and then seek new ways and means of achieving their goals, even if it meant a lengthy wait. This is a matter simply of patience and determination. There is always that “next train” for them to catch. It is just a question of being properly alert to this and being ready to avail of that God-given second opportunity.

If, in any given situation, someone with whom you have business or personal relations turns hostile, pursuing a policy of open confrontation seldom reaps rewards. It is almost invariably more politic to extend courtesy, love and sympathy. That is the way to a person’s heart. It is only by pursuing such a course that a formidable foe may be transformed into a faithful friend.

Suppose you work in an office and, for reasons which you fail to comprehend, you are dismissed. In such a situation, if initial attempts to clear your name and have yourself honourably reinstated come to naught, it is seldom worthwhile persisting in your efforts. It is far better to wash your hands off the whole situation and try to break new ground elsewhere. That way you can sometimes do even better than before.

Often, when someone does not pay you your dues, your first inclination is to enter into legal battles with him or wage a relentless psychological war on him. Either course should be eschewed, for the net result is generally wasted time and money. Years can go by without your receiving anything in return for a great deal of energy spent. No, it is better to ignore the injustice done to you, and to put your trust in hard work to get what you want out of life. It is perfectly possible that, through sheer diligence, you will succeed in achieving all those things you wanted others to give you as a matter of right.

Most personal problems are the result of a limited outlook on life. If people were to broaden their perspectives, they would soon realize that there are many different ways of approaching the same problem. It would, above all, become clear to them that things which are impossible to obtain by direct confrontation

can be achieved by the patient fostering of mutual goodwill. Where provocation and retaliation have failed, patience and human concern will succeed.

THE WORLD IS NOT A TYPEWRITER

This is a world of grave realities and it is only by adjusting to realities that we can achieve anything in this world.

A man was sitting with a typewriter in front of him. Something came to his mind, and he immediately put a paper in the typewriter and his fingers started moving along the keyboard. His thoughts were taking the form of words. Now all the sentences were turned out as follows:

- I am right, except for me, everyone is wrong.
- There is no fault in me. In all matters, others are at fault.
- I am the greatest of all. Others are inferior to me.
- I am God's favourite, Paradise is reserved for me.

The man was happy that whatever he wanted had been written down on paper. But man's misfortune is that the world in which he lives is not a typewriter. The

way he made his thoughts real on a paper, could not be done in this real world. It is enough to move our fingers on the typewriter to print words of our choice on paper. But one has to perform a long and extensive struggle in real world to make one's thoughts come true. It is not just a question of moving one's fingers on a keyboard. The result is obvious. Whereas the typist had apparently achieved everything in the world of words, he was totally deprived of any such result in the outside world. However unpleasant it may appear to us, it is a fact that the world is not like a typewriter for us. We are not its typist and we cannot, just by the movement of our fingers draw anything we like on the map of the world. This is a world of grave realities and it is only by adjusting to realities that we can achieve anything in this world. Man has a tongue and a pen with which he can express whatever he wants to. But man must remember that his tongue and pen can only shape words and not the realities of life. Words are reduced to dots or symbols on the paper. Words have to be translated into realities by our own efforts, determination and actions. Otherwise, all will be lost.

DUCKING BELOW THE WAVES

Confrontation seldom brings us anything positive. This is a principle which might well be applied to the whole spectrum of human activity. When a typhoon approaches, even the fishes dive deep.

Two young friends, both good swimmers, once went swimming off the coast of Madras. The day was pleasant, the sea calm, and sometimes skimming along the surface, sometimes plunging below, they had soon left the shore far behind. Then, quite without warning, they found themselves struggling against enormous waves which bore down on them with tremendous force. One of the young men struck out strongly against the waves, battling his way to the shore. But try as he might, he could not make the distance to the beach and he was drowned. The waves had proved stronger than him. His friend also struck out in the same way, but soon realized his efforts would be futile. Luckily, he remembered that the force of the waves was felt more on the surface and much

less underneath, so he immediately plunged, kicking and struggling, to a depth where he was no longer buffeted about. Now he began literally to swim for his life, his lungs bursting and his muscles aching. By straining every fibre of his being, he managed to reach the shallows, where he was picked up unconscious by some sailors. They brought him safely to dry land, where he was taken to the hospital. He was given emergency treatment and soon recovered. It had certainly been lucky for him that there had been a boat in the vicinity to haul him out, and that he could have immediate medical attention. But what had really saved his life was his change of tactics when he realized that the waves were going to be too powerful for him.

Both the young men had struggled valiantly to survive, but it was the one who had not depended only on physical strength but also on his intelligence who lived to tell the tale. He had understood almost immediately that a confrontation of his own human strength with the enormous powers of nature would be inane and futile.

This is a principle which might well be applied to the whole spectrum of human activity, for confrontation seldom brings us anything positive. When a typhoon approaches, even the fishes dive deep.

THE JAPANESE EXPERIENCE

It is undoubtedly the greatest force that contributes to the success of a nation. In the words of an expert on Japanese affairs, the secret of Japan's success lies in "never quarrelling amongst themselves, always doing everything together."

In August 1945, the U.S.A. dropped two atom bombs on Japan, thereby reducing two of its major cities to ruins. Strangely enough, the Japanese seem to bear no grudge against the Americans, for, they say, it had only reacted to Japan's violence in the arena of war. The responsibility, therefore, needs to be shared by each side. This realistic attitude on the part of the Japanese has seen them through all kinds of adversity and brought them to extraordinary heights of progress in modern times.

Both the big industrial cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, bustling with life, became enormous areas of devastation in a matter of minutes. Within a ten-mile radius, every kind of life—human, animal and vegetable was blown to bits. One and half million

people died on the spot. Ten thousand of them simply disappeared. Yet these cities have now been built up once again with wide streets, spacious houses, parks and gardens, all of which have a modern look. Only one ruined building has been left as it was, in order to remind one of the grim punishment meted out to the Japanese during the Second World War.

When Mr. Khushwant Singh visited Japan, he learnt, much to his astonishment, that the Japanese do not exploit the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in order to discredit the U.S.A. It is other nations, on the contrary, who have exploited these events for this purpose. When Khushwant Singh asked the reason for this attitude, a Japanese replied in a surprisingly calm tone:

“We hit them first at Pearl Harbour. We killed a lot of them. They warned us of what they were going to do, but we thought they were only bluffing. They beat us fair and square. We were quits, and now we are friends.” (*The Hindustan Times*, April 4, 1981)

A memorial has been erected to commemorate the dead, the victims of a gruesome tragedy. In the museum are displayed photographs depicting death and destruction on a mass scale. About 70-lakh Japanese visit Hiroshima every year to witness this spectacle. In the course of conversation with the

Japanese, however, one can sense the hidden feelings of hatred against Americans. But they do not let it rule their lives.

By virtue of such a temperament, they have scaled great heights of progress in a very short span of time. They own neither petrol resources nor mineral wealth, most of their raw materials having to be imported. Keeping all these drawbacks in view, it is most amazing that they have dominated world markets. This is mainly owing to the superior quality of their goods.

Mr. Khushwant Singh also enquired about the prospects of the legal profession there. He was told that it was not a flourishing business, the reason being that the Japanese preferred settling disputes on their own to suing in the courts. Willingness to admit faults by each party is the surest way to bring quarrels to an end. It is only when either party seeks to place the whole blame on the other side that the quarrel takes a turn for the worse. The very gesture of shouldering the blame softens up the other side, with the result that the dispute dies a natural death.

This realistic attitude has greatly benefited the Japanese in many respects. For instance, this makes it possible for them to place their trust in one another. They thus save the time and money they would otherwise expend on lengthy legal documents. There are more

than one million lawyers in the U.S.A., while there are only 23000 in Japan. Such legal experts are just not in demand.

Most of the commercial institutions place their trust in verbal understandings. Formerly it was practised only among the Japanese, but now foreign investors have also started to take advantage of this practice. Avoidance of unnecessary legal obligations invariably speeds up the work.

Essentially, such an outlook gives rise to unity. It is undoubtedly the greatest force that contributes to the success of a nation. In the words of an expert on Japanese affairs, the secret of Japan's success lies in "never quarrelling amongst themselves, always doing everything together." (*The Hindustan Times*, April 4, 1981)

AIMING HIGH

Once launched upon life with superior knowledge and skills, there is no question of your failing to find the place you deserve. Every door will open to you, because it is invariably the highly qualified who are in demand.

Several disgruntled Muslim youths stood in an agitated group outside the University offices, loudly bewailing the fact that they had not been admitted to the various academic courses they had chosen. Without exception, they blamed circumstances for their failure to gain entry to the University. Some also blamed the environment for their having remained out of work for so long. An elderly gentleman, who was sitting close by, could not help overhearing their lamentations. Finally, he could contain himself no longer, and he intervened with them, "I am sure you feel your complaints are well-founded, but why compete at a level where the seats are all bound to be taken already? That will get you nowhere. You should attempt to enter at the top, for that is where you will

find the vacant seats. Produce distinctive qualifications and there will be no question of your being rejected. There are always places at the top for people of merit. Be you a student, businessman, lawyer or doctor, try to distinguish yourself in whatever field you have chosen, for that is the sure way to success. Even if it is only something like a mousetrap that you have the reputation for making well, people will come knocking at your door for it. The real mistake is to produce the same quality of goods with which the market is already flooded. It is pointless to do this, then complain about being discriminated against. If you work hard and bend your brains to producing something superior in design and quality to what is already in the market, people will flock to buy it.

“No society is ever free of prejudice and narrow-mindedness; it is just one unfortunate aspect of community-living. The difference in this from one society to another is only one of degree. But these are barriers which can definitely be surmounted through diligence and application. Let us suppose that you have passed an examination with 45 percent marks, giving you a very slight advantage over a rival who only has forty percent. In such a case, it is quite conceivable that prejudice could come in your way, and your application could be rejected in favour of

your rival's. But let us suppose that you had eighty percent marks. All the walls of prejudice would then have to crumble and fall in the face of superior talent. No one would then dare deny you your rights. Does it not make sense then to try your hardest to reach the highest pinnacles of academic success? It is only a question of working much harder than your rival. Then the world will be convinced that you have not only set yourself the highest standards but have also lived up to them.

Once launched upon life with superior knowledge and skills, there is no question of your failing to find the place you deserve. Every door will open to you, because it is invariably the highly qualified who are in demand.”

THE GREATEST ASSET

The Taj Mahal's virtue lies in its beauty, while man's beauty lies in a virtuous nature. But man's beauty should not be like that of a snake—a beautiful appearance marred by a venomous sting.

Lord William Wintock, the British governor-general in India from 1828 to 1835, has the dubious distinction of being remembered as the man who ordered the destruction of the Taj Mahal in Agra—an order which happily, he was never able to have carried out. This was revealed at the turn of the century by the then viceroy, Lord Curzon. The East India Company had been going through hard times, Lord Curzon explained, and it was suggested to Lord Wintock that a sale of the Taj would fetch Rs. 100,000/—, a sum enough to extricate the company from its financial crisis. News of the Company's intentions circulated, and there was stiff opposition to such a move. This infuriated Lord Wintock, who now went one step further and gave orders for the total destruction of the Taj. Opposition to the

imperial command stepped up, with both Hindus and Muslims joining in one massive voice of the protest. The danger that full-scale rebellion would ensue if the Taj was destroyed prompted the governor-general's advisers to persuade Lord Wintock to withdraw the order. (*Navbharat Times*, June 18, 1969)

The people did not save the Taj Mahal, it was saved by its own beauty. If the Taj Mahal had not been beautiful, it would not have won such overwhelming support; Hindus and Muslims would not have united behind it to foil the British government's designs.

Had the constructors of the Taj Mahal been able to reproduce in themselves the beauty which they produced so perfectly in their work of construction, they too would have been protected by their own quality. Just as virtue in a thing wins support for its cause, so virtue in humans has the same effect. It wins one friends from the enemy camp, appreciation even from strangers.

The Taj Mahal's virtue lies in its beauty, while man's beauty lies in a virtuous nature. But man's beauty should not be like that of a snake—a beautiful appearance marred by a venomous sting. How do men “sting”? By presenting a challenge to people's political and economic interests; by repeatedly resorting to violence in their dealings with others; by constantly

alienating people with senseless, impulsive actions. Any virtue that one might have is cancelled out by such a “sting” and prevents one from winning people’s affection.

It is the Taj Mahal’s silent beauty that has won people’s hearts. Who would have time for it if, in all its beauty, it tormented those who looked upon it?

TWO INSTEAD OF ONE

The secret of all success is patience. The cause of all failure is impatience.

William II (1859-1941) became King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany on the death of his grandfather William I in 1888. Intelligent but impetuous, he believed in military power. The military might that Germany developed during the reign of William II did not succeed in saving his empire from eclipse. In 1914, his support for Austria helped to precipitate the European war, and Germany's resulting defeat brought his abdication. He retired to Doorn in Holland, where he lived quietly until his death in 1941. His abdication and death in exile provide living proof of the fact that it is not military might that keeps kings in power. Rather, it is the ability to correctly interpret national and international circumstances, and deal with them effectively.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, William II went on an official visit to Switzerland, where he

was profoundly impressed by the discipline displayed by the Swiss army. While inspecting a military parade, he jokingly said to one of the soldiers: "Germany's army is twice the size of yours. If the Germans were to attack your country, what would you do?" "Sir, we would have to fire twice instead of once," came the Swiss soldier's grave reply.

If the Swiss soldier was able to reply with such confidence and equanimity, it was because of a certain resoluteness of character backed up by military expertise. Whether faced by numerical superiority or by other daunting factors, it is clear that a combination of expertise and determination can win the day. Some are fortunate enough to be innately resolute, but those who are lacking in this quality can achieve much by prayer. Prayer firms one up in one's resolutions and sees them through to the achievement of ultimate goals. Expertise, on the other hand, is something which must be acquired by struggle, effort and the constant application of intelligence. No problems should be regarded as insuperable, no situation so adverse that it cannot be turned to good account. It is endeavour which matters, and it should be constantly borne in mind that no amount of protest, whether social or political, can make up for a lack of endeavour.

The secret of all success is patience.

The cause of all failure is impatience.

PERSEVERANCE PAYS

In all circumstances, persevere steadfastly in constructive activities. In the end, you will emerge victorious.

Waking up in the morning to the noisy chirruping of the birds, the man noticed a broken egg lying on the ground. It had obviously fallen from the nest built by sparrows just under the ceiling of his modest dwelling. Wearily he removed the broken egg, then, noting with disgust the straws which were eternally littering his floor, he stood up on a piece of furniture, and swiped the nest out of its niche. Then he spent quite some time and effort cleaning up the whole place.

The very next day, he found more straws dirtying his newly cleaned floor and, looking up, he saw that the birds were again building their nest under his roof. He felt he was going mad with their chirruping and the perpetual mess they made, so he destroyed the new nest before it was even half-completed. That way he thought he could drive them away forever.

But the tragedy of the devastated home only spurred the birds on to greater efforts, and showing great daring, they worked faster than ever. They did not waste a single moment on lamenting their loss. Nor did they go away to collect a whole flock of birds to come and make a united attack on the house owner. They simply flew to and from the home, quietly and incessantly picking up fresh straws and fixing them in position. They did not waste a single moment.

This self-same story was repeated from day to day for over a month. The house owner would angrily destroy their home and moments later the sparrows would reappear with straws in their beaks to begin their labour all over again. Their efforts seemed fruitless. Their incessant gathering of straws was apparently futile. But regardless of consequences, they went on steadily with their work. It was the birds' answer to the unmitigated hatred of the man. Although he was stronger of the two parties, they always seemed somehow to foil him. And finally, their silent endeavours gained the upper hand. The man realized that his resistance was futile, and he stopped destroying the nests. Now they have completed their nest and have successfully laid and hatched their eggs. Their chirruping no longer incenses the man. He has simply ceased to mind them, for they

have taught him a priceless lesson—never hate your enemy. In all circumstances, persevere steadfastly in constructive activities. In the end, you will emerge victorious.

SIMPLY A MATTER OF TIME

A definite span of time has been appointed for all of nature's happenings. Nothing can come into being or fructify before that appointed time.

Oxford University, which was established in 1163, is surrounded by lush, green lawns. Once a visiting American millionaire, who had been quite charmed by them, asked the gardener at Oxford, how much it would cost him to have the same kind of lawns around his mansion in the U.S.A. "Nothing," replied the gardener. "How?" asked the millionaire in astonishment. "You have only to level the ground and grow the grass. Then you cut it and roll it." "Oh, really!" said the millionaire, feeling reassured. But then the gardener went on in all seriousness, "Repeat this process for five hundred years and your lawn is ready." Meeting the steady gaze of the gardener, the milli-onaire realized that not only do the English have their own special sense of humour, but that there are things which money cannot buy.

There are things for which time is of the essence. In the evening, when the sun has set, if we have a sudden desire to see the sun again, there is no way that we can do so except wait through the long night for dawn. If we plant a seed and hope to see more than just the sapling which will spring from it, we have to wait for one hundred years, before we can see the full-grown tree, in all its might and glory.

A definite span of time has been appointed for all of nature's happenings. Nothing can come into being or fructify before that appointed time.

MESSAGE WITHOUT WORDS

Such “stones” as point out man’s shortcomings and failures, can teach him a lesson provided he shows sufficient receptiveness to the message it conveys.

A certain student from Rajasthan had failed in his high school examinations. He appeared again the following year but failed again. After having failed for the third time the next year, he was so ashamed of his performance that he left his home, unable to show his face to his family.

He just kept walking about aimlessly. After a long time, he stopped at a well to quench his thirst. Women and children had gathered around it, filling their pots by turns. There he caught sight of something. Something small, but of great significance. He was deeply moved, and his thirst was gone. All of a sudden, he felt as though he had found something far greater than the water he had come for. What had happened was quite simple. The villagers who visited the well for water usually brought two earthen pots. They would place

one pot on a stone near the well while letting the other down on a rope inside the well to draw water. To his astonishment, the part of the stone on which the pot was placed had rubbed away and there was a hollow there. The pot was made of earth, he thought, but when it was placed on the same spot over and over again, it had worn away the stone which was a far harder a substance. The strong element had given way to the weak, just through constant action. "Then why should I not succeed in my examinations if I too persevere? I can surely overcome my shortcomings by putting greater effort into my studies!"

Such thoughts brought him to a halt. He immediately decided to go back home and start working hard on his studies once again. The following year he appeared for the fourth time in his high school examinations. This time the result, astonishingly, was the opposite of the previous one.

He had done his papers so well this time that he had secured first class marks. After having failed three times, he had finally distinguished himself. The lesson of the stone had worked like a miracle and this had altered his attitude altogether. The same student, who had run away from home, unable to face defeat, had come to stand first in all the examinations he took. When he topped in his M.A. examinations, he was

given a scholarship to study abroad and from there he earned his doctorate.

This may be a solitary instance that occurred in an isolated village, but, indeed, in every place there exists such a “stone” which, by pointing out man’s shortcomings and failures, can teach him a lesson provided he shows sufficient receptiveness to the message it conveys. If he only cares to look, he will find around him some such “stones” which will set him on the right course again.

II

The Road to Success

HUMAN POTENTIAL

It is quite possible that the very circumstances in man he seemed to be heading towards complete annihilation, could serve to unfold a new and brighter phase of his existence.

“The reality of events suggests that human beings are amazingly controlled and resilient in the face of adversity. Perhaps heroism—not panic or shock—is the right word to describe their most common behaviour in times of disaster.” (Report: Disaster Research Centre, Ohio State University)

In the Ohio State University of U.S.A. there is a department known as the Disaster Research Centre. It was established in 1963, and so far, studied over one hundred different calamities affecting human beings on a vast scale. It was discovered that at moments of crisis, an extraordinary new potential develops in people which saves them from succumbing to disasters and their aftermath. For example, in 1961, Texas was struck by a severe coastal tempest, but less than half

of the inhabitants opted to vacate the area. Over 50 percent of the inhabitants had the confidence to stay on in spite of the storm warnings issued to them four days in advance. In 1971, a big dam was weakened considerably following an earthquake, which seriously endangered the lives of 70,000 people, but at that very critical time, only 7 percent of the population chose to leave their hearths and homes.

Such research has also revealed that the victims of such disasters, still maintain high hopes for the future. The citizens of the two affected areas of Texas, having witnessed the destruction caused by horrible floods, were interviewed about what they felt were their future prospects. Surprisingly, less than ten percent expressed apprehension and misgivings. The rest of them, irrespective of the large-scale destruction, were hopeful about their future. The above-mentioned institute sums up the report of the research it has conducted on disasters in the following words: “In conclusion, the reality of events suggests that human beings are amazingly controlled and resilient in the face of adversity. Perhaps heroism—not panic or shock—is the right word to describe their most common behaviour in times of disaster.”

The Creator has endowed his creature—man—with extraordinary capabilities, one of which is his capacity

to plan his life anew with tremendous vigour, even when threatened with total annihilation. Man can do more than compensate for his losses. The discovery of this natural, hidden potential in man serves to teach a great lesson, that is, that no individual, whether singly or as part of a group who suffers trials and tribulations, should ever waste a moment's time in lamenting and grieving over his losses. Instead, he should press God-given capabilities into service to reconstruct his life. It is quite possible that the very circumstances in which he seemed to be heading towards complete annihilation, could serve to unfold a new and brighter phase of his existence.

TRY, TRY, TRY AGAIN

The only condition of success is continuous effort. That is, to make such unflagging efforts, as are essential to achieve the desired objectives in the world of God according to the law of nature set by God.

A person who was employed as an ordinary worker in a Bidi (tobacco) factory soon learnt the entire art of the business and set up his own factory. He initially invested only Rs. 5000/- in his business but then by dint of fifteen years' hard work, his business progressively increased until it expanded into a big factory. One day, narrating his life story to his friends, he said: "Just as a young child grows into boyhood after fifteen years, so does a business. I have not reached this stage in one day. It has been a fifteen-year struggle."

In truth, every piece of work is accomplished in "fifteen" years, be it of an individual or a nation, be it a business or a social service. Those who long for a recipe for instant success are, in fact, living in a fool's paradise. It is all very well to say that a hop,

step and jump can take you right to your destination. But as soon as one comes face to face with reality, one realizes that this is just an illusion. Gleun Cunningham, a sportsman who became champion of the one-mile race, saw the school in which he was studying, go up in flames. His own experience was terrible. His feet were so badly burnt that he could not even move his legs. The doctors lost all hope of his ever walking or running. They said that only a miracle could save him. Surprisingly, Gleun Cunningham's incapacity excited in him a new zeal and eagerness to walk and run. All his mental faculties concentrated on his decision to walk. So, he began to experiment with different kinds of exercises till he hit upon a novel idea. It was to drag himself along by holding on to the handle of a moving plough. When his feet could even so much as rest on the ground, he felt encouraged, and intensified his efforts. Finally, the miracle of which the doctors had so despaired, took place. The new technique was a tremendous success and, ultimately, he could not only walk, but could also run. Later he entered a race. He set up a new record and became a champion of the one-mile race. But this grand success was not achieved in a few days. He had to spend "fifteen years" realizing his goal. Only after a fifteen-year stint had it been possible for him to become a flat racing champion.

In truth, no success is possible in this world without working for “fifteen years”. It is God alone who has the power to achieve instant success. But God has not created this world on the basis of instant success. Man must learn his lesson and should not fritter away his time in futile efforts. In this world of God, innumerable events are taking place, all of which are based on eternal, immutable laws. Not even a blade of grass grows here on the ground as a result of wishful thinking, not even an ant can manage to live by ignoring the realities of life. How is it possible then for man to change the divine laws? The only condition of success is continuous effort, that is, to make such unflagging efforts, as are essential to achieve the desired objectives in the world of God according to the law of God. By following the same principle, we can achieve success in this world; it is the same principle which will bring us success in the next world.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

You can only make progress step by step. By means of the ladder, you can progress even to the stage of owning the lift, but you cannot make a success of your life by starting with the lift and expecting it to do everything for you.

“I have reached my present position by climbing a ladder and not by coming up to it in a lift.” This observation was made by a tailor who had started with nothing but his own two hands and the will to work, and who had become eminently successful in his line of business. “Making a good coat is not a child’s play. The whole process is so complicated that without detailed information as to how to proceed, long experience and a high degree of skill, it is almost impossible to accomplish. It is only after a lifetime of hard work that I have succeeded in running a prosperous shop in the city.”

The tailor went on to explain how he had served his apprenticeship under the guidance of an expert tailor. Just learning the art of cutting and sewing had taken

him five long years. When he opened his own little shop, he discovered that he had difficulty in giving his customers a good fitting. This was because during his apprenticeship he had never really grasped the fact that people could be of such different shapes and sizes. He therefore set himself to the task of studying human anatomy, but it was only after many years of effort that he could make a coat with an absolutely perfect fitting. He eventually became so expert in this that he could give perfect fittings to even those who unfortunately suffered from deformities—such as hunchbacks. “In any type of work, there are many things which one has to learn on one’s own. Often one cannot foresee these things at the outset, and each obstacle has to be overcome by hard work and ingenuity.”

The tailor talked of many things of this nature concerning his skills, and it seemed to me as though I was listening to a lecture on the building of the nation by some very experienced person.

In truth, the only way to solve our economic and social problems is to follow the example of the tailor. After this initial apprenticeship, he had gone ahead and done things on his own. He had gone up by the stairs and not by the lift. There are no buttons which you can push and then automatically reach your goals. You can only make progress step by step. Progress can

seldom be made by leaps and bounds. By means of the ladder, you can progress even to the stage of owning the lift, but you cannot make a success of your life by starting with the lift and expecting it to do everything for you.

PROCEEDING WITH CAUTION

A purposeful man always looks ahead to the future—straight forward and not towards right or left. He always thinks of long-lasting consequences rather than momentary considerations.

When rivers have to be crossed, small animals can swim across and larger lightweight animals can swiftly walk by. But watch an elephant who is about to make the crossing. He does not step out briskly like other creatures. First, he tests the riverbed for hardness or softness, making sure not to put his whole weight on his forefoot, then, when he is sure of his ground, he sets forth. Even once launched, his progress is slow for he is still afraid of becoming irremediably stuck in soft mud. He proceeds with caution, testing the riverbed at every step.

Who taught the elephant to do this? Surely it must have been God who gave him his instinct for survival, thus setting upon him His seal of divine approval.

God has given us this example to show us that when there are signs of danger on our path, we should not advance carelessly, but should move with similar caution gauging the nature of the “ground ahead”.

Man is endowed with far greater brain power than the elephant. No one lights a fire near reserves of gun powder. No engine driver is careless in shunting petrol bogies. But most of us tend to forget that this is a principle to be followed in social life. Every society is comprised of a variety of people who create different types of environment. In every society there are ‘marshy places’, there is ‘petrol’, there are ‘thorns’ and there are ‘pits’. The wise are those who try to avoid such difficult, even explosive situations thus saving themselves from the trammels of confrontation.

Those who have some goal or the other before them never allow themselves to become enmeshed in such things because that would mean being diverted from their objective. A purposeful man always looks ahead to the future—straight forward and not towards right or left. He always thinks of long-lasting consequences rather than momentary considerations. He looks at things not from the point of view of personal desires and whims, but from the point of view of reality.

KEEPING CALM IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

Man's success depends upon his being able to make a well-considered choice of whatever material and mental resources are available to him and then putting them to proper use.

When Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) escaped from the Island of Elba after his first term of imprisonment, he was accompanied only by a small group of loyal soldiers. Once dethroned, he now again aspired to the throne of France. But in the very first encounter, he found himself face to face with 20,000 French soldiers.

Napoleon, although considered one of the most courageous leaders the world has known, avoided a direct confrontation with his opponents. He did not make the mistake of foolishly ignoring his own military weakness. At the crucial moment, when he and his little band of men stood face to face with this enormous army, he stepped forward, completely

unarmed and stood calmly before his enemies. Then with great composure he unbuttoned his coat and bared his chest. In a voice charged with emotion, he addressed the great throng of soldiers—many of whom had served under him in the past: “Which one of you is willing to fire at the naked chest of his father?’ The battlefield rang with shouts of ‘No one!’” (*The Moral Vision*, p. 159) Almost all of the soldiers belonging to the enemy camp rushed to the side of Napoleon, who emerged victorious and once more ascended the throne of France. If, in the destitute state he was in at that time, he had attempted to do battle with the French army, he would surely have been slaughtered on that very battlefield.

Whatever a man’s resources, if he has to deal effectively with a situation, he must be able to make a proper assessment of it. And he will not be able to do this if he panics in the face of danger. It is only if he does not lose his nerve and keeps his mind open to what is practical that he will be able to overcome the obstacles in his path. Inevitably, his success depends upon his being able to make a well-considered choice of whatever material and mental resources are available to him and then putting them to proper use. History abounds in instances of the weak overcoming the strong, simply by strategic

deployment of resources. The reason for such success is not far to seek: often the enemy is not as strong as he appears to be. Everyone has his Achilles' heel. It is just a question of finding it and then ruthlessly exploiting it. Just as Napoleon exploited the French troops' old and sentimental loyalty to himself—that being his only mainstay—so can ordinary individuals take advantage of their enemies' vulnerability in order to gain their point without the kind of confrontation which could be disastrous to both sides.

LESSON FROM A TIGER

If one does not make oneself a target for another's vengeance but lets everyone continue pursuing their own goal in life, then one is not going to find one's own path blocked by others.

Jim Corbett, after whom a famous national park in India has been named, was an expert on the nature of tigers. He once wrote that: "No tiger attacks a human being unless provoked." People who live in jungle areas where tigers roam will confirm the truth of Jim Corbett's words. There is usually no cause for concern when one comes face to face with a tiger. Unless it is provoked or harbours deep-rooted suspicion of human beings—the beast will ignore one and continue on its way.

And how does this suspicion form in some tigers? Tigers are by nature not ill-disposed towards human beings. Only very few of them can be called man-eaters, and even they are not born as such. They become man-eaters, not through any fault of their

own, but through the folly of human beings. Usually, it is inexperienced hunters who do the damage. They shoot at a beast, wounding but not killing it. A tiger injured in this manner becomes man's enemy. Wherever it sees a human being, it attacks and kills. The same is true of most beasts of prey. They only attack man when they have already been wounded by him.

This information from the world of nature holds deep significance for man. It shows that one should not think of anyone—not even the most savage people—as one's enemy in advance. One will only be treated as an enemy if that is how one sees others. If one does not view them with animosity, then they will not do so either.

The second lesson is that one should not take measures against anyone without sufficient preparation. If the measures that one takes are indecisive then they are sure to be counterproductive. The other party will only become further provoked, and tension between the two will deepen further.

Everyone has certain needs and desires in this world, which they remain busy fulfilling. The secret of life is not to stand in a person's way. If one does not make oneself a target for another's vengeance but lets everyone continue pursuing their own goal in life,

then one is not going to find one's own path blocked by others. One will find everyone so absorbed in minding their own business that they have no time to interfere with that of others.

STAYING COOL

If one remains inwardly calm and composed, then one will be able to survive the heat of external circumstances, and safely reach one's destination.

The most delicate and dangerous part of space journeys is when the spacecraft returns to the earth's atmosphere. Take the case of the Apollo-8 spacecraft, for instance. Before the capsule touched down on December 27, 1968, it had to negotiate a precipitous return to the earth's atmosphere. Because of the earth's gravity—seven times that of outer space—the speed of the spacecraft soared, reaching an astronomical 39,000 kilometres per hour. Because of its extraordinary speed, the heat of the spacecraft rose to terrifying proportions. Air friction started heating up the space vessel as soon as it entered the earth's atmosphere. Soon it became literally red hot, reaching a temperature of 3,300 degrees Celsius.

No animal can survive at such a temperature. How was it, then, that the three American astronauts

aboard the craft were able to remain unaffected by the blazing inferno that had built up around them? The reason that they were able to return safely to earth was that the spacecraft in which they were traveling had been constructed in such a way that its interior would not be affected by the severity of conditions on the outside. In spite of the incredible heat on the outside, the temperature inside the craft was just 21 degrees Celsius. Imagine—3,300 degrees on the outside and 21 degrees on the inside.

This event out of the realm of space travel has an important lesson to teach us in our lives on earth. Time and time again we run into highly charged situations in life. Outwardly, it seems impossible to go on. There is only one way to survive under such conditions, and that is by not letting oneself be inwardly affected by one's outward situation; by suppressing one's emotions and keeping one's feelings under control. Only then will one be able to maintain one's inward cool. One will not be able to survive crises in life if one lets one's inward condition become as highly charged as one's outward situation. If, on the other hand, one remains inwardly calm and composed, then one will be able to survive the heat of external circumstances, and safely reach one's destination.

If there is hate and anger directed against someone from the outside, he must not let such feelings get inside himself; instead, he should cultivate feelings of pardon and forgiveness in his own heart. If the whole world wishes one evil, still he should only have good feelings for others. There is no other way of succeeding in life. If someone adopts the same feelings as his outside environment, then the challenges of life are sure to be more than he can bear.

A SIMPLE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

You can reach the peak of success just by your polite words, hard work, making good use of your limited resources and patiently doing your work, with perseverance. None of these things are too big or difficult for the common man to achieve.

A man who had opened a shop selling locks, used to see people passing by his shop every day in the market. They just glanced at his shop and moved on. One day something happened which gave him a lesson on the secret of business. He went to a cloth market to buy some clothes. There were many shops close to one another, but he was undecided as to which shop he should enter. In the meanwhile, a shopkeeper who saw him passing by his shop called out, “Sir, come inside and have a closer look.” This encouraged him to enter the shop.

He realized from this experience that when customers come to the market, they are unfamiliar with it. They just pass by the shops, for they can’t decide which

shop to enter. But when someone sympathetically calls them inside his shop, that helps them decide.

Such a person will most probably succeed in getting customers inside his shop. Many people do not have an exact idea of what they want to buy. If you learn this secret, it will only take average intelligence for you to be able to have plenty of customers. This may be called customer-friendly behaviour. The seller of locks began to follow this principle in his shop. He used to sit in the doorway of his shop and would read the facial expressions of the passer-by. His vision became so sharp that he was able to tell from the customers' faces whether they were looking for a lock or were just walking along there for some other purpose. When he guessed someone was a customer for a lock or any other lock-related item, he would immediately invite him to step inside his shop. In this way, his business suddenly began making good progress. A time came when he became the best salesman in the market.

The secret of success lies in following simple rules. People generally think that success is something which can be achieved only by doing something great, or by utilizing great means or resources. But you can reach the peak of success just by your polite words, hard work, making good use of your limited resources and

patiently doing your work, with perseverance. None of these things are too big or difficult for the common man to achieve.

BE FAIR TO THE CUSTOMER

A better way of doing business is for the retailer to avail of the lowest possible wholesale prices so that after selling his goods at a fair price, he is still able to make his profit.

In a certain locality of Delhi which I have been passing through for the last ten years, there are several hotels owned by Muslims. But out of this entire number, there is only one which has made continuous progress during this period, the others having suffered a decline in clientele. One day, I asked the proprietor of the successful hotel the secret of his success. "Very simple," he replied. "What other hotels buy by the kilo, we buy by the quintal. For any purchase we make, we explore the entire market and buy only from where we find the prices are the most reasonable. By buying in bulk and paying cash, we acquire things quite cheaply." Then he smiled and said, "If you want to make a profit, make it from the market and not from the customer."

Usually, shopkeepers make their profits by selling their goods at inflated prices. But this is not good business. This is exploitation of the customer. When it becomes known that a shopkeeper exploits his customers, people start boycotting his shop. That is why such shopkeepers are ultimately unsuccessful. A better way of doing business is for the retailer to avail of the lowest possible wholesale prices so that after selling his goods at a fair price, he is still able to make his profit.

This principle holds true for all branches of commerce. In most businesses, whatever the businessman sells to his customers has been previously received from elsewhere. Often, shopkeepers opt for the easy way out, and buy goods from some nearby place for the sake of convenience, but if they were to devote a little more time and energy to this task, and go somewhat further afield in search of merchandise, they would be able to purchase the same goods at more favourable prices.

Usually, shopkeepers try to compensate for their own laziness by charging the customers more, but that is a way of doing business which is hardly calculated to lead to success. The immediate returns on money invested in this way may be high, but they cannot continue to be so, and in the long term are bound to dwindle. Steps should then at once be taken to ensure greater profit margins, not from the customer, but from the wholesale market.

EASE ALWAYS COMES AFTER HARDSHIP

When an individual tries to accomplish instantly what should be worked for over a long period, he is condemning himself to destruction. When the leaders of a nation do likewise, they are spelling doom for all those who follow their lead.

Anyone who has experienced a dust or sandstorm in desert regions will know what traumatic experiences they are. There does not appear to be anything good about the scorching, blinding winds. But Soviet meteorologists have—in the Karakoram desert—made investigations into the properties of dust storms and found that they are nature's way of controlling extreme climates. The strong winds raise the dust up to form a screen in the atmosphere, guarding the earth from the intensity of the sun's heat. The surface of the desert, scalded by the summer sun, is considerably cooled when it erupts in a dust storm. Sometimes the resultant change of temperature can

be felt, say, in Arabia and central Asia as far afield as Southern America and the Arctic.

Such is the order of nature. In this world just as ease always follows hardship, so fruitful results come only from arduous, painstaking processes. This is the way nature works, and from it we can see how we should live on earth. We should be prepared for a period of hard struggle before we can expect to reap the results we desire. This is a law established by the Maker of the universe, and it is only by complying with it that we can advance towards our goal in life. If we want to accomplish things in an easier way, we should have to create another world, one in which cooling clouds—for instance—are not preceded by scorching winds.

There is no doubting the fact that failure in life usually results from the quest for immediate success. The word “short-cut” may be applicable to the world of roads and footpaths, but there are no short-cuts in the struggles of life.

Take the instance of a young man in the town of Surat, in Gujarat, who entered a jeweller’s shop, stole a piece of jewellery, then tried to make a quick exit. His line of retreat to the staircase being cut off by the suspicious shopkeeper, he made a dash for the nearest window and crashed his way—as he thought—to freedom. But

this bold attempt ended disastrously. His leap from the second-floor window resulted in his instant death (*The Times of India*, January 21, 1980).

This might appear to be just an isolated incident involving a foolhardy youth, but one finds people, generally considered to be intelligent, committing the same mistake in their lives. When an individual tries to accomplish instantly what should be worked for over a long period—like the youth who sought to reach the ground level by jumping instead of walking down the stair—he is condemning himself to destruction. When the leaders of a nation do likewise, they are spelling doom for all those who follow their lead.

THE LESSONS OF NATURE

At the very beginning of human history, God communicated to man the necessity to interpret His signs in the world around him. Everywhere there are lessons to be learnt from nature.

In ancient times, one of Adam's two sons killed the other. Now the murderer was faced with the problem of what to do with his brother's dead body. It was not until he saw a crow dig a hole in the ground to bury the carcass of another crow that he realized what he must do. Nature had taught him the way. (*The Quran*, 5:31)

Thus, at the very beginning of human history, God communicated to man the necessity to interpret His signs in the world around him. Everywhere there are lessons to be learnt from nature.

One of the most important lessons that we can learn is from the habits of migratory birds:

“Most birds are gregarious during migration, even those that display a fierce individualism

at all other times, such as many birds of prey and insectivorous passerines. Birds with similar habits sometimes travel together, a phenomenon observed among various species of shorebirds. Flocks sometimes show a remarkable cohesion, the most characteristic migratory formation of geese, ducks, pelicans, and cranes in a 'V' with the point turned in the direction of flights." (*Encyclopedia, Britannica*, 12/181).

'Unity in diversity' an aphorism which should be known and appreciated by all mankind, is a matter of sheer instinct with other living creatures. Man, to his great discredit, appears to be the only creature in this world who has not been able to learn this great universal reality from the lessons of nature.

PER ARDUA AD ASTRA

(Through Hardship to the Stars)

It is not ease, but effort, not facility, but difficulty which makes a man what he is.

According to an English scholar, Ian Nash, who spent eleven years in Japan making a detailed study of the language and the nation, what shook the Japanese most profoundly was not upheavals in politics, but the great Kanto earthquake, which devastated the whole of the most populated eastern part of Japan on the first of September 1923. In his book, *The Story of Japan*, he explains that another terrible blow was the reduction of two of the great cities of Japan to smouldering mounds of waste by the dropping of atomic bombs. This led to the ultimate defeat of Japan in the Second World War in 1945.

One might imagine that any country which has been dealt with such shattering blows would never be able to rise again from its ashes. But this is far from being true, for Japan has not only rehabilitated itself, but

now figures most prominently of all on the world commercial and industrial scene. Japan has become a great hive of technological activity in spite of having launched itself on an industrial course long after Britain, Europe and America. This is all the more remarkable considering that Japan has none of the natural resources that the older established industrial nations have, buried right there in their own soil just waiting to be extracted.

In man's life the most important thing is the will to act. Had the Japanese succumbed to a sense of loss and frustration and frittered their energies away in futile political protest, their country would have been doomed to decline and ruination. But as it was, they conquered any sense of victimization they might have had and set about reconstructing their national life with a will and a way. Although earthquakes had brought them death and destruction, they had also galvanized them into building their lives afresh.

In such situations of grim affliction, provided one has the will, all one's hidden potential and latent faculties are brought into play. One can think better, plan more successfully and make the greater efforts needed to bring one's plans to fruition. One who lacks the will to improve his life is just like an idling motor which is going nowhere.

Experience has also shown that complacency and a sense of comfort can be even greater vitiating factors in man's progress through life than devastation and despair. This does not mean that adversity by itself is beneficial. No. It is simply the spark which ignites the fuel of man's soul and drives him on to greater things. It is the mainspring of his initiative and the force which propels him relentlessly forward. In the face of adversity his hidden capacities come to the fore and it is possible for him to reach undreamt of heights. But first and foremost, there has to be the *will* to do so. There has to be the *will* to stop wallowing in self-pity and to get up and take action.

It is not ease, but effort, not facility, but difficulty which makes a man what he is.

MAKING THE BEST OF THINGS

Adverse circumstances should be seen for what they are—steppingstones to newer and better horizons.

When a certain young Mullaji was appointed the Imam of a mosque, he was expected, as a matter of duty, not only to lead the congregation in prayer, but also to give daily lessons from the Quran. For this, his remuneration was a mere Rs. 100 per month, but because he was also given a room to live in and two meals a day, he tried to make the best of it. Having a roof over his head gave him a much-needed sense of security, and he also hoped that his situation in the mosque would, eventually, provide better opportunities for his son's education.

However, the treatment meted out to this young Imam by the *Namazis* (devotees at prayer) was very far from being cordial, for they tended to regard him as their servant. For very minor things, he was taken to task and humiliated. Why was there no *lota* (pot for water)

to be seen, where had the broom gone, and why could the place not be kept cleaner, etc.? The young Imam could put up with financial constraints but when it came to suffering continual humiliation, that was another matter. He finally decided that in order to keep his mental balance, and to improve his situation, he must find some additional occupation which was not associated with his work at the mosque. He knew that he could not immediately relinquish his duties there, for that would have meant having nowhere to stay. He therefore enrolled in the Tibbiya (Medical) College, and, side by side with his tasks at the mosque, he launched himself on a course of study. It took him five years to complete his medical studies, during which time he would console himself, in the face of disrespectful treatment, with the thought that he was striving to provide himself with a happier alternative, that he was fitting himself for a worthy career. A time would come, he told himself, when he would never again have to hang his head before any member of the congregation.

Finally, the day dawned when he received his medical degree. His success had taken great patience, fortitude and single-mindedness. So that his energies should never flag, he had to keep his attention firmly focused on his ultimate objective of extricating himself from a

life of constant mortification. Now with the degree in his possession, he was ready to start his practice. After thanking the people of the mosque, he submitted his resignation and went off to hire a small clinic in the city. He went with a certain quiet confidence, and firmness of purpose, for the bitter experiences of his life and his struggle for betterment had taught him many a useful lesson.

In the running of his clinic, his hard work and intelligence soon enabled him to earn enough to buy a house for his family. A year later, he was offered a lectureship in the local college. This was an event which changed his entire life. Yesterday's 'Mullaji' was now the honoured and respected 'Doctor Sahib,' and what was equally important was that he now had no financial worries. If, in his early years, he had negatively responded to the adversity of his circumstances with mere bitterness and complaints and had taken no positive action to overcome his difficulties, he could never have had anything better to look forward to in his future life.

Adverse circumstances should be seen for what they are—steppingstones to new and better horizons.

NO SECOND CHANCES

Only if you enter life with the requisite competence will you receive your rightful place in it. Being well-equipped and having the technical knowhow are indispensable to personal progress.

A senior college teacher once commented to me with considerable bitterness, "There are no second chances in life. Wonderful opportunities to advance myself are coming my way at the moment, but I can't take advantage of them." I was rather surprised at this outburst and asked him the reason. "It's all because I rushed into taking up a job immediately after I had done my B. Sc. You see, I never did my M.Sc. Of course, I always meant to at later stage, but somehow the circumstances were never just right for me to leave work and start studying again." I had to agree with him that without higher qualifications one cannot aspire to higher things in life.

This is unfortunately true of about 99 percent of our society. The early part of one's life should be devoted to intensive preparation for adult responsibilities, but

most people fritter away their energies in fruitless activities, more intent on enjoying life than on giving any thought to the future. Having failed in their youth, through ignorance or negligence, to develop their potential to the fullest, they can seldom make a decent start in life, and even if they do, they find it almost impossible to make any progress. More often than not, they find themselves at an impasse. All doors are closed to them.

When you enter the field of life inadequately prepared for it, you cannot expect to reap a harvest if the seeds for it have never been sown. When the time has come for harvesting, you cannot then rush to sow seeds. Time once lost can never be brought back again, and once opportunities have slipped from your hands they can never again be recaptured. Fortune only knocks once; it does not knock again.

There are few useful tasks which can be performed without preparation, for preparation equips one, gives one the tools for the job. If you try to break a stone with your bare hands you will surely fail. But if you take a pickaxe to it, and have learned how to wield it, it will only be a matter of minutes before you have swashed the stone into small pieces. Being well-equipped and having the technical knowhow are indispensable to personal progress.

Only if you enter life with the requisite competence will you receive your rightful place in it. Bemoaning your losses and protesting against imagined enemies will be of no avail. It is pointless counting upon the environment to provide the necessities of life, and complaints against it are usually an expression of one's own incapacity. They convey the desire to possess, to reach heights of honour and glory without having put in the necessary groundwork.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

The really important thing in life is to make a proper start. When a man is willing to start his journey from the right point, every step amount to making progress. Nothing then can stop him from reaching his goal.

A twelve-year old boy came running home one evening hoping for something to eat, for he felt ravenously hungry. His mother replied to him sadly. “I have nothing to give you,” she said. “There is not a thing in the house you can eat, and I have no money to buy food.” Tears of despair began to fall from her eyes. Her husband was a poor man—a daily labourer—and when days passed and he could not find work, it meant that everyone went hungry. The young boy thought for a moment, then asked his mother if she didn’t even have twenty-five paisa. “I do”, she said, “But what can you buy for a whole family with just twenty-five paisa?” Her son told her not to worry and begged her to give him her last coin. Too weary and hopeless even to argue with him, she handed it over

and he rushed outside with a look of determination on his face. He collected a bucket of drinking water and a glass on the way out, then bought a piece of ice from a nearby stall and cooled the water with it. Then he made straight for a cinema queue where people were standing in a line, sweating, waiting to buy their tickets. He started walking up and down the line shouting, 'Water! Cold Water!' and soon attracted the crowd's attention. Gratefully, people began to buy his glasses of cold water. Some kind souls even paid him more than he asked for. With part of his earnings, he bought more ice, and went back and sold more glasses of cold water. He kept this up indefatigably until the queues had disappeared. By this time, he had managed to earn rupees fifteen, with which he went home triumphantly to his mother.

From that time onwards he started selling something or the other every day. During the day, he worked hard at school and in the evening, he would go out and do his best to make money. He kept this up for ten long years, somehow managing to study while he met the household expenses.

Now he has completed his education. Although he is employed on a monthly salary of Rs. 950/-, he is still continuing with his side business in the evening and owing to his hard-earned money, has now even been

able to rebuild his house. His neighbours, friends and relatives respect him, and his parents bless him.

Difficult circumstances can be used as a spur to success, provided that such arduous and trying periods in one's life inspire in him a new sense of determination and do not fill him with a sense of frustration. The really important thing in life is to make a proper start. When a man is willing to start his journey from the right point, every step amounts to making progress. Nothing then can stop him from reaching his goal. It only takes twenty-five paise to start your journey—something which is surely possible for all of us. Such a journey will lead nowhere, if not to success.

III

Life Management

HOW TO ATTAIN A PEACEFUL MIND?

Depression is the result of non-acceptance of reality. The real solution to this problem is then acceptance of reality. While non-acceptance creates the problem, acceptance of reality will solve it.

Depression is a common problem of modern times. Both the rich and the poor suffer from it. According to the World Health Organization, by the year 2020 depression will become the second leading cause of disease in the world. Many solutions have been prescribed for the problem of depression but have proved to be ineffective. They may offer temporary relief but fail to resolve the problem permanently.

Meditation is often advised to treat this problem of depression. But meditation focuses on the heart, and the modern scientific age has discarded this solution. Science has established that the heart is merely an organ that pumps blood, whereas depression is a mental problem. It is the mind that controls the heart

and not vice versa. Depression is non-physical and the heart is physical. How can a physical organ resolve a non-physical problem?

We also often hear about physical techniques to counter depression. But the reach of physical techniques is confined to the body and does not extend to the mind. How can these physical techniques then address the issues of the mind?

Depression is the result of non-acceptance of reality. The real solution to this problem is then acceptance of reality. While non-acceptance creates the problem, acceptance of reality will solve it.

Our world is a world of freedom, competition, challenge and clash of interests. This nature of human life is bound to create problems. No one is exempted from this process. This being so, there is only one formula for de-stressing – learn the art of stress management rather than trying to eliminate the stress.

A person may become sad upon facing a loss in business or feeling discriminated against at work. He may give in to anxiety and frustration if he suffers a loss in an election, or his love marriage turns into a problem marriage or if he is offended by criticism. In all such cases, a person becomes negative because of being unaware of the real cause. He attributes the cause to

another person and holds this person responsible for his difficulties. He fails to realize that all these instances are due to the law of nature. If you attribute the cause of the problem to the law of nature laid down by the Creator, it will arouse no negativity, but when you attribute it to a person, it brings on negative thinking. This is because the law of nature is not your rival, whereas another person is your competitor.

When you attribute the cause of your problem to a person, who is your rival, it will invariably arouse negative thoughts and lead you to anger. But when you attribute the cause to the law of nature, because the law of nature is not your rival and equal in its treatment of all, it will lead to introspection.

When you follow nature-based thinking instead of person-based thinking, you will try to discover its wisdom and will realize that whatever has happened is actually for your betterment. The purpose of this occurrence was to activate your mind and enhance its creativity. It was a means of developing a realistic approach, fostering incentive, making you realize your mistake and helping you to re-plan along the correct lines.

When this thought comes to you, your mind will automatically change from the negative to the positive.

You will be grateful towards the law of nature for bestowing this blessing in disguise. What transpired was for your benefit and not to your detriment. This thought will eliminate your stress and you will be able to live with a normal mind. This is the only method of de-stressing. There is no other technique or method that can help de-stress the mind.

HOW TO OVERCOME ANXIETY?

Anxiety is not a physical problem. It is a way of thinking. If you are an intellectually awakened person and are able to change your thinking pattern, anxiety will not be a problem.

Anxiety is a form of distress, sometimes occasioned by the sad memories of losses suffered in the past and at other times by uncertainties regarding the future. Anxiety is a common phenomenon. Most men and women have lived in a state of anxiety at one time or another.

Anxiety is a killer. It defeats all logic. In most cases of anxiety, there is no external agent that is causing you to live with a sense of affliction. It is you yourself who induce this baneful mental state.

There are certain problems inflicted by the external world, which you are incapable of either solving or simply dismissing. However, as far as anxiety about them is concerned, this is a self-created problem.

This being so, it means that the solution lies in your own hands rather than in the hands of others. So, why complain? Concentrate on doing your best, and having done so, you will be free of all kinds of anxiety.

Anxiety is not a physical problem. It is a way of thinking. If you are an intellectually awakened person and are able to change your thinking pattern, anxiety will not be a problem.

For example, if you are sad about a loss you incurred in the past, you can gain nothing by constantly thinking about something which cannot come back. The easiest way to calm your mind is to accept the fact that what you have lost is irretrievable. And, if it is the future that worries you, you can restore your mental balance by saying, 'Why do I bother about something which has not yet happened? Maybe it will never happen at all.'

Anxiety is not a real problem. It is a product of a way of thinking. Change your mental habits and adopt a positive pattern of thinking, then you will have no anxiety.

Problems are of three kinds. If a problem relates to the present, you can solve it by wise planning. If the problem relates to the past, there is always a simple solution: forget it, and the problem will instantly

disappear. If the problem concerns the future, it is not a problem at all, it is simply a baseless fear. In other words, it has no valid existence. And if something is non-existent, how can it create a problem for you?

Discover the genesis of anxiety and you will easily be able to rid yourself of it. Anxiety is not a physical problem. It begins in the mind and it is only in the mind that it can be buried.

FIGHTING FRUSTRATION

We may find that some doors are locked along the way, but there are always others that remain open and it is just a question of entering the right one to reach our destination.

Just a few years ago, a Muslim girl of our acquaintance suffered the frustration of being denied modern school education by an overly religious-minded father who refused to send her to a convent school. She was particularly keen on learning English, and rather than waste her time brooding over the fact that certain avenues were now closed to her, she began studying on her own. By dint of constant effort, she became proficient enough in the language to sit the matriculation examination—of course, as a private candidate. Unfortunately, she failed in one subject at her first attempt, but this did not make her lose heart. It had the effect rather of making her work even harder than before and, the following year, she passed the examination with flying colours. She continued her

studies in this way with whatever little help she could get in the vicinity and, after successfully passing the pre-university examination, she did her B.A. (Hons) in English and then went on to do her M.A. Still, she did not feel satisfied with her prowess, for even though she had a university degree to her credit, she had somehow not really developed her skills in writing English to any high degree. It seemed impossible to do this without the help of an able teacher, but she remembered the saying: 'Where there's a will, there's a way!' And she did not lose heart. The strong and unshaken belief that God helps those who help themselves did not fail her. In the course of her struggles, she chanced upon a book published in London, which seemed to solve the problem of not being able to have a teacher. The author, an Englishman, advised foreigners who were interested in learning English, to practice writing with the help of a good book, where no teacher was available. They were first to translate selected passages from the book into their own mother tongue. This book was not to be referred to again until these passages had been translated back into English by the students. Then a comparison was to be made with the original. Corrections made, and the correction committed to memory. Recognizing the value of this technique, she put it into practice over a period of two

years, selecting passages from books and magazines with a wide range of topics, vocabulary and styles. This approach proved so successful that she could not only handle all her correspondence independently but could even write persuasively on topics of general interest to newspapers and magazines. Her skills also made her of great assistance to her brother in his export business.

The technique she employed is one that can be applied to the learning of any foreign language. So, it is clear that there are many different avenues which can take us to the top—not just the known, the traditional and the easy-of-reach. We may find that some doors are locked along the way, but there are always others that remain open and it is just a question of entering the right one to reach our destination. In the world of today, success lies within the grasp of those who are alert to the opportunities around them. Failure is the result not so much of lack of opportunities but the lack of will to grasp such opportunities as exists, and to pursue one's course with determination and energy.

STRESS A POSITIVE PHENOMENON

Stress is not an evil. It is an integral part of nature and a positive activity. Our body needs movement. If there were no physical activity in the body, it would be rendered lifeless.

Nowadays stress is a common concern. Despite the use of all kinds of de-stressing techniques, it remains unrelieved. In fact, most methods of de-stressing bring on a new form of stress – like holiday stress. The reason for this failure is that people are going against nature and that is why they are unsuccessful.

Stress is not an evil. It is an integral part of nature and a positive activity. Our body needs movement. If there were no physical activity in the body, it would be rendered lifeless. The same is true of the effect that stress has on the mind. Stress is an intellectual activity. It is a sign of a healthy mind. It is only if one is intellectually awakened that one is able to treat stress as a normal phenomenon, just like physical

movement. It is stress that makes one's mind alive. Without stress, intellectual processes come to a halt and this results in intellectual stagnation.

After making a detailed study of human history, Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) propounded a theory according to which, 'Man achieves civilization, not as a result of superior biological endowment, but as a response to a challenge in a situation of special difficulty which rouses him to make a hitherto unprecedented effort.' Toynbee categorized challenge as either 'crippling' or 'non-crippling'. A crippling challenge is bad, whereas a non-crippling challenge is equally good in that it stimulates nations to produce a civilization.

The same is true of stress. If man is unable to control stress, it will reach an abnormal state that is crippling; this kind of stress is fatal. But if one is able to control stress, it will remain within non-crippling limits and turn out to be a boon.

Let me give you an example. During the pre-independence era, there were two kinds of leaders: pro-Congress and pro-Muslim League. In those days, on a journey to Baharaich (Uttar Pradesh), I met a Mr. Mehmood (LLB), a pro-Muslim League leader. He introduced me to an individual who was pro-Congress. I said to Mr. Mehmood, "Both of you belong to different rival groups and yet you are keeping

up your friendship. How is this?” He replied with a smile, “We have agreed to disagree.” By adopting this formula, they saved themselves from stress.

During a visit to the US, I stayed for a few days with a businessman who had been living there for forty years. I found that he remained stress-free at all times. Upon undergoing an unwanted experience, he would promptly say, “*Chalo ye bhi theek hai!*” (This is also okay!)

I experienced this myself. One day, I suggested that we should go sight-seeing the following day. The next morning, he came to tell me that he was ready and had cancelled all his engagements for that day. I told him that I was not in a mood to go and would rather stay at home. Without any complaint, he instantly said, “*Chalo, ye bhi theek hai!*” I told him, “You seem to be a different kind of person. Why?” He laughed and said, “God Almighty made me and threw the mould away!”

In life, you should not try to eliminate stress. Instead you should learn the art of stress management. Most often, stress is caused due to complaints against another person. Instead of developing a complaint, we must take it easy. Taking it as a complaint would turn it into ‘crippling stress.’ Taking it normally would turn it into a ‘non-crippling stress.’ Crippling stress causes problems whereas non-crippling stress keeps

the mind active. Stress is a healthy sign. The only condition is to detach it from complaints and take it as a normal phenomenon.

SHOCK A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Shock is a great educator. It sets off such a process of brainstorming that a whole new mindset takes shape and as a consequence a new human personality emerges.

Alfred Nobel (1833-1896) was the first person to invent dynamite. He went on to establish 90 armament factories and amassed huge amounts of wealth through the arms trade. Then an incident took place which totally changed the course of his life.

In 1888, the death of his brother caused several newspapers to mistakenly publish obituaries of Alfred. One French obituary stated: *Le marchand de la mort est mort* ('The merchant of death is dead'). The obituary went on to say, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday." Alfred, shocked at what he read, then took a positive decision about his life. In 1895, at the Swedish-Norwegian Club in Paris, Nobel

signed his last will and testament and set aside the bulk of his estate to establish the five Nobel Prizes, including the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize.

Shock is a great educator. It sets off such a process of brainstorming that a whole new mindset takes shape and as a consequence a new human personality emerges: if in the pre-shock period he was just a man, in the post-shock period he emerges as a superman.

Shocks, great or small, are very common. Almost everyone has had experience of them. But the majority of people take these as negative experiences and are unable to learn a lesson from them.

However, shock is not an accident: shock is the language of nature. Nature speaks in the language of shocks. If one saves oneself from becoming negative after suffering a shock, this can be a highly creative experience. Shock will stimulate your mind, and will unfold your potential. It initiates creative thinking processes. It helps you to take better decisions in your life by bringing you from a state of total derailment to being right back on track. In other words, it makes you realistic in your approach.

Shock is the greatest positive factor in one's life, provided one responds positively to it. Everyone can play a high role like Alfred Nobel; the only condition

being that one should take shocks as a source of learning rather than a source of anger. History is replete with instances of people who received shocks, but were able to face them with a positive mind. Shock had proved a booster to their uplift.

One such example is that of Mahatma Gandhi, who spent twenty years in South Africa. In June 1893, he had to undertake a trip to Pretoria in the Transvaal, a journey which took Gandhi to Pietermaritzburg. There, Gandhi took his seat in a first-class compartment, since he had purchased a first-class ticket. The railway officials ordered Gandhi to remove himself to the van compartment, since non-whites were not permitted in first-class compartments. As Gandhi refused to comply with the order, he was pushed out of the train, and his luggage was tossed out on to the platform in the extremely bitter cold of the winter.

What happened with Gandhi was an example of violence. Yet he decided to work for peace. He returned to India and started his movement which was based on *ahimsa*, that is, non-violence. Soon, he became a champion of non-violent activism.

According to the law of nature, life is not a smooth journey: it is a journey through shocks. One has no option but to accept this as a reality. Indeed, the course

nature takes is determined by shocks and challenges. Anyone who seeks to make himself successful should understand this reality and take shocks as stepping stones in life.

LOOKING AHEAD

The mind has to be trained to selflessness and infinite compassion, to save it from falling into the error of seeking liberation for self alone

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Delivering a speech at a public function in New Delhi, Admiral S.N. Kohli, former Navy Chief said, “Success is wholly a thing of the mind. When one has the will, one will find ways and means to achieve one’s goals, but in its absence one will simply say, ‘It’s just not possible.’” As an example, he cited an incident which had taken place during the Indo-Pak war of December 1971. An attack had to be made on Karachi harbour and the only war planes the Indian navy had were designed basically for defensive roles. The attack was nevertheless carried out quite successfully—much to the astonishment of the enemy. This success was obviously not the result of superior equipment but of the available equipment having been “intelligently used.” (*Spirit of Islam*, Issue 96, December 2020, p. 44)

The principle so aptly illustrated by Admiral Kohli applies to individuals and nations alike. Success comes to those who firstly have the determination to achieve their ends and who, secondly, put the resources at their disposal to the best use. In the process, much care, intelligence, ingenuity and farsightedness are vital. Conversely, failure often results not so much from lack of resources as from available resources having been underexploited or wrongly used. Take the case of the villager who decided to build himself a brick house in his village. Unmindful of the fact that his resources were severely limited, he dug the foundations of his modest dwelling so deep that people began to wonder if it was a house he was building or a fortress. Friends began to express their doubts about his ability to complete it, and unluckily for him, they proved to be right. So much building material had been used in the base that there was little left for construction above ground-level. With great difficulty, he managed to build the walls, but then there was nothing left to roof them over with. Finally, he managed somehow or the other to provide a roof for just one room so that he could start living in it, but the rest of the rooms remained forever open to the sky. Had he not squandered precious materials in the foundations, he would have had enough material

to complete his house. As it was, his bad planning had left him almost without a roof over his head.

Unless the mind be trained to selflessness and infinite compassion, one is apt to fall into the error of seeking liberation for self alone.

YOU ARE NOT POOR, YOU ARE RICH

Even when man is resourceless, he has a great deal to invest. The body and the brain which we possess are beyond all price.

A beggar was calling out for alms on the street. Hearing his call, a passerby turned towards him only to find that he was in no way disabled. So, he asked how he was entitled to charity. The beggar replied, "I'm poor." The man said, "No you are not. You are, on the contrary, very rich." The beggar pleaded with him not to make fun of him, as he was really poor. The man said again, "All right, give me whatever you have, and in return, I'll pay you Rs. 50,000." The beggar happily handed over to him his dirty bag containing a few coins and said, "That's all I have, you can take it." The man said, "No, you have much more besides this. You have two feet. Give me one of them and I'll pay you Rs. 10,000 in exchange." The beggar refused. Then the man said, "You have got two hands, give me

one hand, and I'll pay you Rs. 20,000." The beggar again refused to comply with his request. So, the man said, "You have got two eyes, give me one eye and I'll pay you Rs. 20,000." The beggar refused again. The man now said, "Look, you have got two feet, two hands, two eyes. I wanted only one of each which together add up to Rs. 50,000. If we set a price on the pairs, it will be rupees one lakh. That means that the price of only three parts of your body is at least one lakh rupees. Then how can you say you are poor? You are extremely wealthy. Stop begging, invest this great wealth that God has bestowed on you and you will be reckoned amongst the wealthiest people in the world."

God has endowed man with extraordinary capabilities, but we do not realize their true importance under normal conditions. It is only when we lose any one of them, then we learn how priceless it was. Take the case of James Thomas, twenty-four years of age and a machine operator by profession. Due to some illness both his kidneys started malfunctioning. He was admitted into the AIIMS, (New Delhi) where doctors told him that the only way to survive was to obtain a kidney from a donor. Now, a kidney is a product of nature which cannot be built in a human factory, even if we were in a position to spend millions and billions

of rupees to make one. And even after receiving the priceless gift of a kidney, if there were no doctors' or surgery fees, he still needed Rs. 45,000 just to have it transplanted. Here was part of his body which he had never given any particular thought to before, and now its value had been brought home to him in no uncertain manner. (*The Times of India*, 10 January 1980)

In truth, even when man is resourceless, he has a great deal to invest. The body and the brain which we possess are beyond all price. If man exploits his capabilities to the fullest, there is no success which he cannot attain in this world. For him nothing is impossible. When you have hands to hold things, when you have feet to walk with, when you have a tongue to speak, you really have all that you want in this world. And because everything else can be obtained by material means, there is nothing that is beyond one's reach.

HE WAS EXPELLED FROM SCHOOL

Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes,
and adversity is not without comforts and hopes.

The ordinary circumstances of life—if we could but realize it—are the stepping stones to success. But before we launch ourselves on that path, we would do well to listen to Sir Francis Bacon’s final words of caution—and consolation: “Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes, and Adversity is not without comforts and hopes.”

Although his beginnings were humble, Albert Einstein succeeded in revolutionizing 20th century science. The ordinary son of an ordinary father, he could not speak until the age of three, and showed no signs of having even average abilities up to the age of nine. He was even expelled from school once because his teacher feared that his poor academic performance might have a bad influence on the other pupils.

On completion of his school studies, he failed to qualify for admission to the Zurich Technical College. It was only on his second attempt, after due preparation, that he met with success.

Up to the age of twenty, Einstein showed no exceptional potential. In fact, ‘Albert was a lazy dog,’ was how a teacher once described him. Later, by dint of sheer hard work, he rose to such heights as no other modern scientist has been able to surpass. His biographer writes: “We may take heart that it is not necessary to be a good student to become Einstein.”

Einstein’s first scientific book was published when he was 26 years of age, after which his fame spread far and wide. He led a simple life, ate simple food, but often worked late into the night. At one stage, he was offered the presidency of Israel, but he declined. He believed, in fact, that politics was the cancer of humanity. He left Hitler’s Germany with a price on his head—a reward of twenty thousand marks offered by Hitler’s government (at that time a great deal of money)—but Einstein’s standing was such in the scientific world that no one dared come forward to claim it.

Countless instances have been recorded in history which show that to achieve greatness, it is not necessary to be born great. A man can rise to greatness from the

most obscure of beginnings—provided he is willing to strive for it. It is worth remembering that those who have to put up a struggle in the face of severe difficulties are more likely to develop in estimable ways, because adversity calls forth their hidden potential. It throws down a challenge which the aspirant to greatness must accept, failing which, he will sink into oblivion, if not actually perish. Where the comforts and convenience of prosperity will cause him to become sluggish and unenterprising, the whiplash of adversity will drive him into purposeful action. In short, it will bring out the best in him. As Sir Francis Bacon observes in his essay, ‘Of Adversity,’ “Prosperity doth best discover vice, but Adversity doth best discover Virtue.”

In the realm of God’s creation, there are no limits to the humanly possible. Having had an undistinguished start in life should never, therefore, be a cause for despair. The ordinary circumstances of life—if we could but realize it—are the stepping stones to success. But before we launch ourselves on that path, we would do well to listen to Sir Francis Bacon’s final words of caution—and consolation: “Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes, and Adversity is not without comforts and hopes.”

MORAL INHERITANCE

Most fathers think that the best legacy they can give their children is wealth and property. But, in truth, the most fortunate children are those whose parents leave them a model for principled living.

Karim Bux was an unpretentious, religious gentleman who lived quietly in a village on a modest income. When he finally passed away at the age of 65, he left no material inheritance worth the name to his family. After his death his eldest son, Rahim, left the village and went to settle in the city so that he could make a living for his family. Whatever meagre resources he had, went into the small business he set up there.

Karim Bux may have left no money to his family, what he did bequeath to them was of inestimable value. What he left to them was an ideal of contentment. Simple living and avoidance of confrontations. By virtue of these things, Rahim managed to make slow but steady progress, despite his initial investment

being negligible. His innate desire to avoid clashes was a major factor in smoothing the path for his business to go forward. Needless to say, everyone was happy with him. Everyone helped him in times of need.

In spite of Rahim's resources being limited, he never lacked credit, thanks to his fair-dealing and his reputation for always fulfilling his promises. Whenever there was any friction, he would pray for anyone who wronged him. Whenever he was tempted to do anything dishonest or unfair, the innocent face of his father would appear before him and he would be keenly aware of, how his wrongdoing would torment the spirit of his poor father in his grave. Such thoughts immediately caused him to dismiss all temptations from his mind and he would regain sufficient mental poise to continue to tread the same path as his father had trodden.

Rahim's business may have been a very ordinary one, but such was his courtesy, honesty and selflessness that he could command the same respect and live with the same honour and dignity as a top business magnate.

When his business began to flourish, he felt the need of assistance. So, he invited his brothers one by one to come from the village and stay with him. Finally, all the four brothers were united. The business,

for convenience, was divided into four separate departments, each one being placed in the charge of one of his brothers. For a time, they all lived happily together in a joint family although, in their respective spheres, they worked independently of each other.

But after some time, Rahim Bux felt that his brothers were not taking as much interest in the business as they should. At first, only two options appeared to be open to him. Either, as the eldest and owner of the business, he could continue to keep everything firmly in his own hands and remove his brothers from their positions of trust, thus incurring their immediate wrath and unending hostility, or he could allow things to go on as they were and then ultimately face the consequences of allowing a joint-family concern to be irresponsibly run. Inevitably it would mean mutual grievances coming to a head, great deal of bitterness and a final splitting up of the business.

Rahim Bux gave this matter careful consideration for several days, then a third option having become clear to him, he gathered his brothers together and put the whole matter before them. His suggestion was that the best course would be for each brother to become the proprietor of his own department and then to run it independently of the main business. "In this way," he said, "Our father's spirit will be at peace and it is my

sincere hope that this will prove a blessing to all of us, for it is only by the grace of God that no disaster has as yet befallen us.” All of his brothers then expressed their gratitude and approval and gave him a free hand to apportion the business as he saw fit. After a brief discussion it was decided that the fairest way would be to draw lots for the different departments and the distribution was subsequently carried out to the satisfaction of everyone.

All the four brothers then set themselves to their tasks with a will and a way, working hard day in and day out. And now their children have been brought into the business to assist them.

All the four brothers have improved their relationship with one another, being at all times prepared to give their unstinting assistance to each other. Although they have all had separate accommodation built for themselves, Rahim Bux still commands respect as the eldest brother, and he can always have his say. The women and children also help one another when the need arises, for they still think of themselves as one big family.

Most fathers think that the best legacy they can give their children is wealth and property. But, in truth, the most fortunate children are those whose parents leave them a model for principled living. Those who, before

leaving this world, have taught their children to have faith in hard work, to avoid confrontation, to remain content, to look forward to future opportunities rather than immediate gains and to adopt a realistic attitude rather than indulge in wishful thinking, have left behind them a moral inheritance that is far more lasting and of much greater value than the greatest fortunes in the world. But how many fathers are there who realize this great truth?

THE INVERTED PYRAMID

If society is to be properly built, we cannot begin at the top floor. We must begin at the foundations and work our way painstakingly upwards.

Creativity from the Base Upwards

If society is to be properly built, we cannot begin at the top floor. We must begin at the foundations and work our way painstakingly upwards.

When Vikas Minar, the tallest modern building of Delhi was completed, the newspapers reported that “the city’s twenty-one-storey building is ready.” The attention of the reader was thus focused on the twenty-first storey, although it was only after years of foundation-laying, and floor-by-floor additions to the building that it was possible for the topmost storey to be built. This is the ‘inverted pyramid’ style of modern reporting, which offers the most eye-catching piece of information first, in order to rivet the attention of readers. It takes no account

of the normal progress of work, which would have a clearly distinguishable beginning, middle and end.

This has become such a common journalistic technique, that often the reality of the situation is lost sight of. After all, it is always a certain degree of sensationalism which sells a newspaper, and who, on the editorial staff, cares if the public receives a lopsided view of what is actually happening, provided the circulation goes on increasing.

The 'inverted pyramid' is an accepted part of news presentation, but, because it is resorted to by the media, that does not mean that we should allow ourselves to slip into accepting it as a formula to be applied to the destiny of a whole people. If society is to be properly built, we cannot begin at the top floor. We must begin at the foundations and work our way painstakingly upwards. The makers of promises are wont to make fine speeches about the top floor, but can anyone put the roof on a building before even the first foundation stone has been laid? True creativity has to begin at the base. Solid construction must stand on solid foundations.

SOCIAL HARMONY

Confrontation should be avoided at all costs and no factor which can produce positive results should be rejected or ignored. Even if such an approach seems lengthy and complicated, it is the only procedure which can lead to harmonious living in society.

Once, a dispute arose between two farmers, over the boundary of their fields. The dispute, which to begin with, concerned a piece of land, developed into an issue of honour. Withdrawing the respective claims, they thought, amounted to losing face. Thus, the quarrel which had started on a petty issue was blown out of proportion, and neither party was willing to make a compromise. Things went from bad to worse. Murders were committed on either side, and fields were cut and burnt, until eventually the matter was brought to court. The procedure was lengthy, and the cases were brought to an end only when both the parties had lost everything in the process—fields, orchards, jewels and so on. To recover something of lesser value, they had lost everything.

Another farmer found himself in a similar situation. But, instead of taking immediate action, he chose to stop and give the matter very serious consideration. He consulted his friends as well, as to what steps he should take. Finally, he came to the conclusion that the boundary dispute should be settled not actually at the boundary, but on some other front.

He started to think over the issue not in terms of today but in terms of yesterday. He was deeply hurt at the usurpation of a part of his farm and he felt the same sense of dishonour and material loss as the men who had opted for quick action.

How was it that his rival had the daring to infringe upon his land, he thought. A great deal of cogitation led him to the conclusion that it was his own weakness that had made his enemy bold in this matter. It was not so much a matter of a boundary as of his lowly position in society. His position being weak; he could not inspire sufficient awe in his neighbour to keep him from laying hands on his rightful property. Thinking coolly, he arrived at the conclusion that if he were able to improve his status, he would be better equipped to combat his rival in a weaponless battle.

Then his rival would not venture to appropriate his rights. So, having restrained the impulse to retaliate automatically, he began to work harder than before

on his fields. The strength which would have been wasted on destroying the enemy was now utilized in constructive activities. Such positive thinking inspired in him new hope and courage. Not only did he work harder in his fields, but he started a side business as well. His newly awakened consciousness had inspired in him a new zeal to construct his life afresh and cutting down on his expenses, he put all his efforts into increasing his income. In addition, he sent all his children to school and resolved to give them the best possible education.

Like the first farmer who continued to sue his rival over a period of twenty years, this farmer too had to work for twenty years for his efforts to come to fruition. For the former, twenty years of effort had amounted to nothing but destruction, whereas, for the latter they meant a period of great achievement. His children having received a fine education, were employed in important posts. He himself had developed his farm so much that he had to buy a tractor to replace the pair of oxen which had formerly tilled his land. His resources had increased considerably. The very farmer who once had humiliated him, sold all his land along with the disputed boundary area.

The one who had wanted to settle the boundary dispute at the boundary was a loser; on the other

hand, the one who tried to solve the problem on other fronts not only came to possess the disputed land but the whole field belonging to his rival.

When an electric bulb or an electric fan stops working, we do not devote our efforts only to the bulb or the fan to make them work again, because we know that the reason often lies outside the bulb and the fan. Simply by carrying out repairs at the proper place, we can set matters right. For example, by replacing a fuse, we can re-light the lamp and set the fan in motion again. Human affairs too are often of this nature. But it is a pity that what one remembers in terms of material matters, often forgets while solving social problems.

The normal practice, when a problem arises, is to attempt to solve it then and there and in terms of the prevailing circumstances. But since present events so often stem from past events and sets of circumstances, it is more circumspect to seek out the root causes elsewhere.

Confrontation should be avoided at all costs and no factor which can produce positive results should be rejected or ignored. Even if such an approach seems lengthy and complicated, it is the only procedure which can lead to harmonious living in society.

ADJUSTMENT THE GOLDEN RULE

The only realistic option for you is to adjust with other people. Here, adjustment means refraining from reacting, not trying to change others, not becoming negative, and not imagining issues to be insurmountable, but rather managing the situation with aplomb.

Adjustment is a way of life. What is adjustment? To all intents and purposes, adjustment is a form of accommodating or palliative behaviour that you adopt – ostensibly towards someone else, while it is actually for your own benefit and your own peace of mind. Once equable adjustments have been made in undesirable situations, one may live in a state of mental equilibrium.

The problem is that, in accordance with the creation plan of God, our world is a world of differences. Every human being is either Mr. Different or Ms. Different. Moreover, all human beings have the freedom of choice to behave in whichever way they want. This being so,

everyone must live perforce in a jungle of differences. And it has to be conceded that the creation plan is immutable. Then, what to do in such circumstances?

The only realistic option for you is to adjust with other people. Here, adjustment means refraining from reacting, not trying to change others, not becoming negative, and not imagining issues to be insurmountable, but rather managing the situation with aplomb.

In every situation you have two options: either to adjust with others or remain at loggerheads with them. If you decide not to make any adjustments, that will only aggravate your problems. You will go on living in a state of tension, feel mentally disturbed and will waste your time and energy. But, if you opt for adjustment, you will be able instantly to relax mentally and will be able to save yourself from all kinds of negativity.

Adjustment gives you a chance to proceed with your own affairs. While the policy of being unaccommodating is bound to interfere with the smooth running of your life, either temporarily or permanently.

Adjustment does not mean adopting a submissive attitude. It rather shows wisdom. It is the same principle which everyone follows when they are on

the street. On the street, there is traffic moving in opposite directions. So, everyone opts for the keep-right or keep-left policy, in accordance with the traffic rules of their country. This is a way of adjustment on the roads. If you refuse to follow these traffic rules, you are certain to face a disastrous situation, perhaps even death. Adjustment is based on a natural formula: 'Save yourself'. When you are not in the position to change others, change yourself. It is this behaviour that is called adjustment.

According to the law of nature, settlement is the best way of life. When you face any kind of difference with another, rather than get into a confrontational situation, go for adjustment. This is best for you in terms of the result. By adopting this formula, you will reach your goal without any delay. Be practical and do not waste your time and energy. Tread the path of adjustment, and ensure your success.

PLANTING THE TREE OF THE NATION

The two great virtues which are indispensable in the struggle are patience and fortitude.

The former U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, referring to Lyautey, once remarked: ‘I once asked my gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected that the tree was slow growing and would not reach maturity for a hundred years. I replied, “In that case there is no time to lose, plant it in the afternoon ...”’ (Address at the University of California, Berkeley, California, 23rd March, 1962)

The growth and development of a nation is likewise a lengthy affair, and there has to be a tremendous input at both the individual and national levels before it finally bursts into blossom and finds the position of honour and glory that it merits in world affairs. But whenever any such proposition is put to the people, they are quick to point out that no one can wait

for a national policy to mature if it is going to take a hundred years. The only answer to this is: "In that case, we cannot afford to lose even a single moment. We must plant our 'tree' this very minute."

If it takes a mighty tree one hundred years to reach its full stature, whoever wishes to possess such a tree has no option but to tend it for that period. If instead of nurturing it with care and skill, people come out on to the streets and launch a strike campaign in the name of trees or gather in some open place or march through the streets shouting slogans about it, they will never possess a single tree, far less own an orchard.

Similarly, you cannot own a house by making eloquent speeches about the need for one. It would be the crassest stupidity to do so. Neither can a nation fortify itself by working miracles only in the field of politics. In the rarefied world of poetry, revolutions can occur as a result of a mere play on words. A demagogue can make impassioned speeches and attract great crowds. But real results can be achieved only by long-term planning and continuing and dedicated effort. Needless to say, the two great virtues which are indispensable in the struggle are patience and fortitude.

IV

Living in Hope

NEVER DESPAIR IN THE WORLD OF HOPE

This world is a world of hope, not a world of despair.
Wise is the one who realizes this, so he is able to
reach the heights of success.

The British scientist Isaac Newton (b. 1643) is considered to be the founder of modern science. Three months before he was born, his father died. His mother remarried and went off to live with her new husband. And so, Newton was deprived of parental love in early childhood itself. One of his biographers' comments: "Basically treated as an orphan, Isaac did not have a happy childhood."

Because of these conditions that he had to face, the surroundings held little attraction for Newton. Consequently, he began living in the world of his own mind. He became a serious thinker. He would spend long hours pondering on various aspects of the universe. Many people thought that this young boy was a lost dreamer and referred to him as a 'wool-gatherer'.

But later on it came to be known that he and the extraordinary capability of concentration and had become a profound thinker. In this way, Newton grew up, able to maximize the use of his intellectual potential and discover aspects of the universe that had hitherto remained hidden to humanity.

But this is not the story of Newton alone. It is nature's story, too. This story tells us that no matter what experiences we go through—even seemingly negative ones—there is always a positive aspect or plus point contained in them. One should discover this plus point, and, using it, should seek to reach the heights of success.

This world is a world of hope, not a world of despair. Wise is the one who realizes this.

SECRET OF HAPPINESS

The one who believes happiness to be his goal in life will never find it. Happiness is only for the one who can learn to be happy without happiness.

Margaret Lee Runbeck (1905-1956), American author, teacher and humanitarian has said: “Happiness is not a state you arrive at, but a manner of travelling.”

Every man desires happiness, but nobody gets real happiness in this world. This world was not created for man to build his castle of happiness in it. The one who believes it to be his goal in life will never find it. It is only for the one who can learn to be happy without happiness.

Were man to discover that sorrow is inevitable in life he will learn to live with sorrow. If he experiences suffering or wrongdoing, he will not complain or mourn, instead he will imbibe valuable lessons from the experience. If his hopes and desires are dashed, he is not depressed. Instead the experience gives him the

maturity to acknowledge that in this world there is no one whose every desire is fulfilled, whether rich or poor, king or subject.

If something is to be gained by success and happiness then much can be achieved with failure and sorrow as well. The experience of failure and sorrow makes a man sincere. They turn one into a serious thinker capable of grasping new lessons about life. Sorrow and failure change one's personality creating a new and stronger person. If there was only success and happiness in the world then the world would only be a burial ground of weak and insensitive people. It is only sorrow and failure that make for strong and courageous individuals in this world.

The troubles of the world act like the furnace required for the purification of ores. Heat from the furnace purifies and extracts pure forms of gold and silver. Likewise, hardship and difficult experiences forge the personality of an individual. They turn a dull and lifeless person into a shining personality.

THE FORMULA FOR A HAPPY LIFE

Every problem begins in the mind, and it is also in the mind where problems can be solved. So it is like changing your intellectual gear. If you are able to change your intellectual gear, then you have found the super-formula for de-stressing.

On a visit to the USA I happened to meet an Asian immigrant, a Mr. S.A. I found that he was a man with a difference. At all times he was in a happy mood. His colleagues also affirm that he is quite different from other people.

In the course of conversation, I asked him how he was such a stress-free person, while others were living in stress. He smiled and said: “God Almighty made me and threw the mould away.”

It was then my good fortune to be invited by Mr. S.A. to stay with him for a few days. Accepting this offer allowed me to discover the secret of his different personality. My stay with him proved to be one of

discovery. I discovered the formula for his happy, stress-free life.

When I was with him at his home, one of his relatives came to him in an angry mood. He said, “Mr. So and So is trying to distort your image. He is engaged in negative propaganda against you.” The visitor continued in this way, but Mr. S.A. listened to him dispassionately. Finally the man said in annoyance, “I am telling you something as serious as this, and you are not responding.” Mr. S.A. said in an unruffled way: *Yeh unka problem hai, mera problem to nahin.* (It is his problem, and not mine.)

The next day we had planned a sight-seeing trip to a number of places, but for some reason at the eleventh hour, I said, “I’m not in a mood to go out. Let’s stay at home.” Mr. S.A. replied very calmly: *Chalo yeh bhi theek hai.* (No problem, this is also okay.)

During my stay with Mr. S.A., I discovered these two formulas for his happiness. I think these are applicable to every man and woman. Everyone can adopt these formulas, achieve a stress-free life and live in happiness.

The first principle (‘It is his problem, and not mine’) can be formulated in these words: the art of problem management. In life there are always problems, and

the best formula is to try to manage them rather than try to eliminate them. You have to learn the art of problem management, and then you can have a life where there is no stress or tension.

The second principle ('No problem, this is also okay') can be formulated in these words: if you don't get the first good, be content with the second good. It is a fact that in every situation there is always something that can be called the 'second good'. All that is required is to opt for the second good and forget the first good.

According to psychological studies, every problem begins in the mind, and it is also in the mind where problems can be solved. So it is like changing your intellectual gear. If you are able to change your intellectual gear, then you have found the super-formula for de-stressing.

Man is greater than everything. You are more precious than everything else. So always try to save yourself. If in any situation, you have lost something, even then you have something, and that is yourself. So forget what is lost and take that which still exists for you. This is the best formula for attaining a happy life.

A happy life can often only be achieved in unhappy conditions. Life is an art of management. You cannot

change the world, but you can manage yourself in order to find a happy place for yourself in the world. This is the only workable formula for happiness in this world.

SUICIDE NOT AN OPTION

The present world is one in which everyone has their moments of pain and grief. But these should be recognized as a transient phase, and borne with stoicism and courage.

General Atiqur Rahman, former Chairman of the Pakistan Federal Service Commission, came to Delhi on an official visit in February 1984. An emigrant to Pakistan, he had worked before partition during the Second World War with Field Marshal Manekshaw in Burma. At a meeting with journalists, he told of how, during his stay in Burma, Manekshaw had once been badly wounded, and the pain having become unbearable, he decided to put an end to his life by shooting himself. He asked Rahman to give him a pistol for this purpose, but Rahman refused. The General added, laughing, "Had I known at the time what Field Marshal Manekshaw was going to do to us during the 1971 war, I would certainly have given him my pistol!"

Manekshaw's state of despair was such, during the Second World War, that he wanted to commit suicide; quite unaware of the fact that 25 years later, he was to emerge the victor in the 1971 war.

If Islam holds suicide to be unlawful, it is because committing suicide means having despaired totally of any succour from God. What is equally bad is that it also signifies a refusal of the world hereafter. But if a man is convinced that he will not face extinction upon the death of the body, and that he will experience a rebirth in the world hereafter, he will never commit suicide. For one who is fully aware of life after the present life, the anguish of this life will pale into insignificance.

Beside this, there is another aspect to holding suicide unlawful—it conveys a message to man not to be forgetful of the future because of temporary hardships. The present world is one in which every person has their moments of pain and grief. But these should be recognized as transient phase, and borne with stoicism and courage. Just think of Manekshaw who wished to annihilate himself, little realizing that his name was to be emblazoned in the pages of history as a latter-day conqueror.

WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO BOUNCE BACK

Remain silent, make your mind empty and the mind will pacify everything within a minute. Very soon your mind will make you normal.

Resilience is a law of nature. It means the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune. It can be found everywhere – in the physical world, the plant world, the animal world and the human world.

Resilience in physics means the ability to return to the original form after being bent, compressed or stretched. The same is true of the plant world and the animal world. Every creature inherently possesses the power of resilience.

Man has the lion's share in this gift of nature. Dr. Bruce McEwen, Head of Laboratory of Neuroendocrinology at the Rockefeller University has researched this subject and has concluded: "The human brain is very

resilient. Give it a chance and it will make every effort to repair itself.”

We are living in a world of challenge and competition. Due to this, every day we experience something unpleasant. Every day we suffer some kind of damage both intellectually and materially. This is a problem for every man and woman. Such problems are a part of nature. But nature has also provided the remedy for this problem, and that is, the power of resilience.

The only thing that is required is an eight-lettered mantra, that is, patience. When you suffer some kind of damage, either internally or externally, keep your patience. Be empty-minded for a while. This is what Dr. McEwen has called giving the mind a chance. If you give this chance to your mind, it will soon release a strong energy and this energy will provide you the help required in any untoward situation. For example, in the case of anger, the mind will readily manage it, in the case of material loss, it will enlighten you as to how to do new planning, in the case of tension, it will provide you the formula to forget, and within minutes you will become tension-free.

The formula of resilience is also applicable to the problems of nations. One such example is the recent history of Japan. Japan was the first to suffer the dire effects of the nuclear bomb. During the Second World

War, the Allied powers dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, and apparently Japan became a ruined country. But the Japanese leaders, consciously or unconsciously, followed the formula of resilience. They were able to re-plan their national targets and the result was miraculous: after just thirty years, Japan emerged as an economic superpower.

A recent example of the power of resilience is what happened in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in the US. During this catastrophe the US lost about 110 lives and suffered losses of \$50 billion. But, within a month, the US was able to bring things back almost to normal. How did this miracle happen? The answer is again that it was due to the secret power of resilience.

Studies show that our mind has enormous potential, perhaps unlimited potential. And that potential is tapped by the power of resilience. In a normal situation, this potential remains dormant. When one has any kind of unusual experience, the brain becomes active and starts unfolding its hidden energy. And if it is given a chance, it will certainly recover all the losses. The only condition is that you should not disturb its natural process or stop it by some unnatural activity.

A simple demonstration of resilience is your remaining silent when you become angry. Remain silent, make your mind empty and the mind will pacify everything

within a minute. Very soon your mind will make you normal. On the contrary, if you become provoked and react negatively, your anger will persist, and will very soon turn into malice and even violence.

LIFE IS A CHALLENGE

It is also important that the moment we feel we have taken a wrong step, we must immediately take a U-turn in order to save ourselves from disaster.

The British historian Arnold Toynbee has rightly pointed out that nations must inevitably face challenges. But, there are two categories of challenges: either that which is so severely adverse as to be insuperable, or that which is – within limits – quite surmountable. The latter challenge can prove to be a stepping stone to further progress, but if the challenge is so enormous as to be of a crippling nature, it can reach unmanageable proportions and, it goes without saying, can have disastrous consequences.

As a rule, challenges fall into two categories – the tractable and the intractable. The former kind of challenge is a regular feature of nature's functioning or is part of the scheme of things as laid down by the Creator. It is the way of nature to create such situations as will result in the kind of challenges which motivate

people to strive to their utmost, thus unfolding their hidden potential.

As a rule, challenges which are reasonably easy to deal with result from some natural process, but in the case of any insurmountable challenge, it is invariably the result of man's own unrealistic policies. There is a well-known saying, 'To err is human'. And it is not unusual for an individual or nation to make mistakes. But, it is also important that the moment we feel we have taken a wrong step, we must immediately take a U-turn in order to save ourselves from disaster.

There are several examples of this in the recent past. For instance, in 1965, due to internal pressure, Singapore separated from Malaysia. This event was a loss for Malaysia in terms of territory. It did present major problems, but had no devastating effect, because Malaysia adopted the realistic approach of accepting this as a challenge and dealt with it head on. It thus remained within manageable limits and led to development for both countries.

The other example is that of Germany, which, in the early years of the twentieth century, beset by political and economic problems, had initially to meet the challenge of solving serious internal issues. But when matters further deteriorated, the German leadership eventually opted for confrontation with neighbouring

countries, which escalated into WWII – a challenge of such overwhelming proportions that it ultimately caused Germany to suffer a crushing defeat. However, in 1945, at the end of the second world war, the German leadership, having accepted the reality of their defeat, lost no time in taking a U-turn. That is, they set about the vigorous reconstruction of their nation, and within a very short space of time Germany emerged as the most powerful nation of Europe.

Life is a kind of trial for both individuals and nations in the sense that they are put to the test by challenges of varying degrees of tractability. At such times, every individual and nation has to opt for one of two courses: the realistic or the unrealistic course of action, or in other words, must target the achievable or the unachievable goal. This is the crucial test that confronts every individual and nation. One who opts for the realistic course of action will reach his goal, while one who strives to achieve what is in reality unattainable will certainly be doomed to failure.

REMEMBER, EVERYTHING IS TEMPORARY

Optimism means knowing that one will eventually be rescued: that the waiting period will only be temporary in nature.

Ernest Shackleton (1874-1922) is best known for his expeditions to Antarctica. On his third expedition, he faced a very serious situation when his ship sank. He and his group of twenty-seven men were literally stranded on ice, drifting aimlessly in the wild southern seas. Apparently, they had no hope of survival. They remained on the floating ice for six months and spent the next four months on Elephant Island before they were rescued. Yet, in the end they returned safely to their homes.

Now the question is: how did this miraculous escape come about? Alfred Lansing in his book *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage* explained it in these words: 'Underlying the optimism of the party was the confidence that their situation was only temporary.'

This miraculous formula is applicable not only to Shackleton's crew, but to every single man and woman. Everyone has the experience of facing serious situations in life. But if you believe that every situation is only temporary, and that it will last for only a limited number of days, then you are able to repeat the story of Shackleton's party.

Every dark night is a temporary phase in this world, and the same is true of human difficulties. Every human difficulty is temporary in nature. Every difficulty is bound to disappear after some time. It is a law of nature that no difficulty goes on and on forever. So, you have to feed this simple formula into your thinking: 'It is all but temporary'.

Ghalib, the Urdu poet, says in one of his verses: *Raat din gardish mein hain saat asmaan, ho rahega kuch na kuch ghabrayein kya*. (The seven heavens are active every day and night, something new will emerge, then why this anxiety?) History only verifies this formula. Difficulties come and go, just like day and night. This is the universal law that applies equally to every human being.

Optimism means knowing that one will eventually be rescued: that the waiting period will only be temporary in nature. The only thing that can create a serious problem for you is to lose your patience or

to lose your hope or to forget that the situation is temporary and not permanent.

When you save yourself from being upset, you are in a better position to keep your energy intact, to keep yourself from being a victim to frustration, for frustration is certainly a killer frame of mind to be in.

At every point in life there are serious difficulties, on the home front, the social front, the national front and the international front. The simple formula for facing these difficulties successfully is: think that, like the human being himself, one's problem is also temporary, that is, lasting for only a limited period of time, not permanent. Death is the ultimate fate of man, and the same goes for his difficulties. Difficulties are also doomed to pass away, sooner or later.

In fact, difficulty is state of mind. It is the mind where difficulties are created, and where they can be killed too. When one faces a difficulty, one generally forgets a very important fact: that man himself possesses a difficulty-solving machine, that is, his mind. The mind is greater than everything, including difficulty, however severe it may be. So, in such situations, try to focus on your mind rather than on the difficulty. And very soon you will find that the difficulty has disappeared, first psychologically and then physically.

Moreover, difficulty has a plus point. Difficulty unfolds your hidden qualities: it is a boon rather than an evil. Difficulty makes an ordinary Shackleton into a hero Shackleton.

HERE IS GOOD NEWS FOR EVERYONE!

No failure can stop you on your journey, provided you maintain your positivity. It is your positive thinking that matters and not the negative experience.

Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (1839-1904) was an Indian pioneer industrialist, best known as the founder of the Tata Group, India's biggest conglomerate company. His story gives us a great lesson. Once he wanted to book a room in the Watson's Hotel in Bombay. At that time, the hotel did not permit Indians, who were non-white. In British India, hotels accepted only European guests.

Apparently, this was a sad experience for Jamsetji Tata. But he did not become negative about it. He decided rather to open up his own grand hotel, greater than the Watson's Hotel. For this he drew up a unique plan. He travelled to London, Paris, Berlin and Düsseldorf to take ideas and arrange for materials and pieces of art, furniture and interior artefacts for

his hotel. Jamsetji Tata was denied entry in a Bombay hotel, but his vision gave him a greater entry into the whole world. The result was that after a long effort, he opened the greater grand luxury hotel Taj Mahal Palace & Tower on December 16, 1903. This was the first Taj property and the first Taj hotel. The building overlooks the Arabian Sea.

This is a historical example that tells us a great secret of life. If you have a sad experience, don't become negative or react, and don't complain against anyone. Rather re-plan your course of action on positive lines. Expend all your energy on constructive activities rather than complain or protest. And the result will be miraculous: maybe you will gain in the future more than what you had lost in the past.

The story of Jamsetji Tata is not a story of luck. It is the story of positive thinking. It was not accidental luck that helped Tata. It was his own creative planning that led to the above result. Tata's success was not a personal event. It was an example of how one's mind can unfold its hidden potential at the time of crisis.

It is a law of nature that the quantum of scope is more than the quantum of failure. No failure can stop you on your journey, provided you maintain your positivity. It is your positive thinking that matters and not the negative experience. If your first plan fails, that is

good news for you. According to the law of nature, your experience of failure will activate your mind. It will open up new windows that were until now closed. Your failure enables you to work in a better way and attain greater success. Thus, it is a blessing in disguise.

History tells us of many individuals who emerged as heroes after their failure. Failure simply enabled them to re-plan their lives, and then to touch new heights of success. Almost all super-achievers were super-losers in the beginning. The journey of great achievement begins from great failure. In its final stage, success is an external phenomenon. But in its primary stage, it is the result of an internal decision.

It is said that no one can reach the heights of success if he hasn't experienced failure. If you maintain your positivity, then failure gives you a good vision, new ideas for planning, and new ways to proceed on your journey. This is the lesson of the whole of human history.

Super-achievement is everyone's dream, but super-achievement does not suddenly knock at your door. It requires hard labour, continuous effort, well-considered planning, the utilization of full energy on a single focus, and, most importantly, unshakable positive planning. Success always comes to those who

are true seekers of success. Make yourself a true seeker of success and you will certainly reach your destination.

HOW TO DEVELOP POSITIVE THINKING?

Negative thinking can all too easily overwhelm one's better self, therefore, concerted effort is required to keep it at bay. For positive thinking you need only to 'open your eyes'.

Positive thinking, the source of all kinds of good things, is the most important habit in a man or a woman. It ensures good health and a sound mind, it enables you to plan competently and helps you in crisis management. Indeed, positive thinking results in super achievement.

Positive thinking is the other name for natural thinking. Positive thinking cannot be acquired from the external world. It is your inner nature that provides a reservoir of positive thought. Preserve your inborn nature and you will surely emerge as a positive thinker. Every human being is born with great potential. Allow your potential to unfold and you will become a positive thinker in the perfect sense of the word.

Why are men and women so often incapable of positive thinking? The sole reason for this is that they fail to draw upon the reservoir nature has given them. Everyone is born with eyes, but if he closes his eyes, he will not be able to see anything. The same is true of positive thinking; it comes naturally to every individual, provided he does not 'close his eyes' to it.

The opposite of positive thinking, negative thinking, is like shutting one's eyes. If you want to live as a positive thinker, try to distance yourself from negative thought. Positive thinking enhances the inner qualities of every human being, while negative thinking does the very opposite. Negative thinking can all too easily overwhelm one's better self, therefore, concerted effort is required to keep it at bay. For positive thinking you need only to 'open your eyes'.

The problem here is that we are living in society. Man is a social animal. He is bound to live in society. What is society? Society is a construct whereby human beings live in congregation for mutual benefit. But all of its members have their differences. Difference is a part of nature. Every man is born as Mr. Different and every woman is born as Ms. Different. Indeed, society is an amalgam of highly disparate elements.

It is this difference that creates problems. When you face a situation which is not in accordance with your

desires, you become irritated. Then a chain reaction sets in—leading to anger, vengefulness, negative thinking, and violence. It is this phenomenon that prevents you from thinking positively.

Then, the other problem is that everyone is prone to conditioning. The process of conditioning starts with every negative experience. And, conditioning gradually becomes a part of the unconscious mind. The occasional negative experience, because of the conditioning process, comes to affect one whole side of our personality, until a time comes when it becomes integral to one's personality. One loses sight of the fact that it is an evil of which one should rid oneself as soon as possible.

To overcome this problem, one has to learn the art of remaining silent. When any negative thought comes to your mind, do not react. Say nothing. Make your mind empty for a moment. Then the whole matter will settle down. If someone makes a harsh remark about you, you should not take it seriously. Things not taken seriously do not become registered in the mind and thus do not continue to rankle.

Fortunately, nature is very helpful towards us in this regard. Apart from other qualities, there is a unique quality in human nature, that is, the ability to cool down. The only condition is that we should give nature

a chance. When we are faced with some unwanted situation, our powers of reasoning are generally swamped by a flood of negative thoughts. But if we can only keep quiet, the cooling down faculty of its own dispels the negativity. It changes the direction of the flood and within seconds, it is gone. Keep silent for thirty seconds. Everything will return to normal, as if nothing at all had happened.

PROBLEMS BLESSING IN DISGUISE

If he takes the problems that arise as challenges, he will consider them in a level-headed way and, by using his powers of reasoning, will be able to solve them successfully.

The British MP Enoch Powell once said: “For a politician to complain about the media is like a ship’s captain complaining about the sea.” This comment by the British MP is very true. It applies not only to politicians, but to all human beings, both men and women.

The truth is that life is a challenge and everyone, regardless of their sphere of action, is faced with this problem. There is no escaping from it. If the captain of a ship takes the waves of the ocean to be a problem, he will be beset by frustration. But, when he takes the situation as a challenge, he will be able to face it with optimism.

The same is true of every individual. According to the law of nature, everyone is faced with problems, both inside and outside the home. If he takes problems as problems, he will lose hope and end in failure. However, if he takes the problems that arise as challenges, he will consider them in a level-headed way and, by using his powers of reasoning, will be able to solve them successfully.

The existence of problems in life is no evil. It is rather a blessing in disguise. In actual fact, it is problems that activate our minds. The occurrence of problems always leads to brainstorming; they save us from intellectual stagnation by stimulating intellectual awakening. The fact that problems result in creative thinking is the greatest blessing for all human beings. If you attribute problems to the instrumentality of others, you will become negative in your thinking. On the contrary, if you regard problems as integral to the law of nature, you will tackle them in a cool and calm fashion.

Problem-oriented thinking develops a negative mindset. On the other hand, challenge-oriented thinking develops a positive outlook, which is far more precious than gold or diamonds.

THE HAVES AND THE HAVE-NOTS

The greater the incentive, the greater the development, the poorer the incentive, the poorer the development.

It is said that Mr. So and So was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and that Mr. Such and Such was not. In this way, people generally fall into two groups—the haves and the have-nots. But history shows that this kind of categorization fails to explain the real situation. There are many people who were born in the have-not group but, by the time they died, they had become honourable members of the group of haves.

One great example of this is the late Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam. Dr. Kalam was born into a family so poor that they were unable to pay his school fees. Yet, in the latter part of his life, he rose to the highest position in the country, that is, he became the President of India. In his youth, he was an unknown person whereas, towards the end of his life, he became an internationally well-known figure.

This means that the ‘haves and have-nots’ equation is wrong. It is better to categorize people as ‘potential haves’ and ‘actual haves’. When Dr. Kalam was born, he was a member of the ‘potential haves’ category but, at a later stage, he became a member of the ‘actual haves’ category.

The fact is that all men and women are born with great potential but it lies dormant. In this sense everyone belongs to the ‘potential haves’ category. If one is able to activate one’s capacity, and is able to plan one’s life, one is bound to become a member of the ‘actual haves’ category. Almost all the super achievers were super failures in the early phase of their lives but, in the later phase, they emerged as super achievers. If you have been born into a so-called poor family, don’t say that you belong to a poor family. You should say rather that you belong to the ‘potential haves’ group.

Nature is not unjust to anyone. It is generous to all men and women. But nature gives you things in potential terms and not in actual terms. It is up to you to turn your potential into a reality. Don’t blame destiny but discover your own capacity: you can create your destiny on your own. The only condition is that you have to discover your potential and translate it into an actuality.

The word 'have-not' is only a negative name for those who are born with a differently-abled personality. Those who are born in poor conditions, have a greater incentive to improve their lot in life. This is in accordance with the law of nature. It is this incentive that is basically responsible for all kinds of progress. Therefore, the natural formula in this regard is: the greater the incentive, the greater the development, the poorer the incentive, the poorer the development.

Those who are categorized as have-nots are, in fact, people of who have to struggle, and it is by struggling that you can achieve all kinds of success. According to a survey, people who were born in poor African or Asian countries and then migrated to the U.S.A. are now earning more than the average American. This is the miracle of hard labour. In the past they were poor people and now they are rich people living in greatly improved conditions. What is the reason for this? It is nothing but having an incentive to do better. It is a fact that rich people are deprived of such an incentive. Incentive is the monopoly of poor people.

Seen in this perspective, the have-nots are more fortunate than the haves. In fact, the have-nots are the super haves. The have-nots have an incentive to do better, they have to struggle, they experience an intellectual awakening, and must necessarily lead an

active life. They are people of vision, and this precious virtue is generally lacking in the haves.

The most important factor in our lives is the law of nature. It is the law of nature that determines the occurrence and the outcome of all events and it is a fact that the law of nature is on the side of the so-called have-nots. If you see people in terms of the future, you can say that today's have-nots are tomorrow's haves and today's haves are tomorrow's have-nots.

DISCOVER YOUR POTENTIAL

God has blessed human beings with unlimited capacities. The law of nature leads their hidden capacities to reveal themselves, so despite difficulties or handicaps they are able to do great things.

According to recent research, one can absorb information better by closing one's eyes. This and other such findings indicate that God has blessed human beings with unlimited capacities.

In the past, people who were physically challenged were called 'blind', 'dumb', 'deaf', 'crippled; and 'lame'. These words conveyed the image that those who suffered from such challenges were disabled. But today, after modern scientific research has indicated that such people possess many other gifts, they are referred to as 'differently-abled'.

It is a law of nature that if someone loses one part of his body, he develops new capacities in compensation. Despite his apparent 'disability', he is able to do some

really amazing things which he may not have been able to do before.

If you reflect on this phenomenon of nature you may understand the significance of this Hadith, (sayings of the Prophet) in which the Prophet is said to have noted: “God says, ‘If I put a person to the test and deprive him of his two eyes, and he remains patient, I will grant him entry to Paradise as recompense.’” (Bukhari)

The Hadith report uses the term “ibtila”, which literally means to put to the test. But, in its real sense, the word “ibtila” means to experience something. In other words, the above Hadith refers to a person who experiences loss of vision, but remains patient instead of giving up hope.

Patience means tolerance. But in this context it means that such a person takes his loss of vision in a positive sense, as a result of which his intellectual capacities are awakened. His hidden potentials begin to unfold.

People with awakened minds are able to enjoy such positive experiences. The law of nature leads their hidden capacities to reveal themselves, and so despite difficulties or handicaps they are able to do great things.

MOTIVATION IS GREATER THAN FAVOUR

One who is born in a state of affluence is bound to become intellectually dwarfed, while one who is born in poor circumstances emerges as an intellectual giant.

According to a survey, out of the world's hundred richest people today, 27 are heirs and 73 are self-made. Of the self-made, 18 have no college degree and 36 are children of poor parents, but some billionaires had neither a degree nor wealthy parents. (*The Times of India*, August 18, 2013).

In other words, super-achievers are not born, they are self-made people. It is not external favour that makes one a super-achiever, but one's own struggle. Super-achievement is not achieved through inheritance, but is a self-acquired success.

It is a fact that no one is a born billionaire, but it is also a fact that everyone is a potential billionaire. It is the unfolding of one's own potential that makes

one a billionaire or super-achiever. Nature does not discriminate between one person and another. Nature's gifts come to everyone on an equal basis. It is the receiver himself who either utilizes them or fails to do so.

The so-called deprived persons are in fact privileged persons. Their state of deprivation serves as an inner motivation. When they see others are progressing, it creates a strong incentive in their minds. It is this incentive that makes a man a superman. It inculcates in him a strong urge to make himself successful.

Their state of deprivation brings about a kind of brainstorming which enhances their inner spirit. They enter the world of competition working to their full capacity. They develop the spirit of do or die. It is this great spirit that leads them to great success.

There is a saying that 'Mr. So and So was born with a silver spoon in his mouth'. This kind of birth creates a kind of contentment in the concerned person, and contentment is the killer of motivation. While one who was born in a poor family without a silver or golden spoon, develops a kind of discontent. And it is a psychological fact that discontent activates one's mind and triggers a fire within one to do hard work.

You can seldom find a family that started its history

with a treasure of gold and diamonds. For every family, the treasure of gold is a phenomenon of the future, not of the present. Every family initially started its history from rags, and not from riches. The story of rags to riches is not the story of some exceptional persons, but is common to all. In fact, the story of rags to riches is the story of every successful family or successful person.

There are numerous examples of one rising to a high position through one's own struggle, while one's children turned out to be dull. The reason was very simple. The father started his life with the spirit of discontent, while his children started their lives with the spirit of contentment. It was this reason that was responsible for the difference between father and sons. A person who is born into a poor family and achieves success by way of struggle, achieves one more thing, which is more important than wealth – that is, intellectual development. His circumstances automatically develop an intellectual struggle in his mind. This struggle unfolds his inner capacity, and consequently he emerges as an intellectually developed person.

One who is born in a state of affluence is bound to become intellectually dwarfed, while one who is born in poor circumstances emerges as an intellectual

giant. The laws of nature are greater than everything else. They are eternal: they cannot be changed. The law of nature in this regard tells that it is not ease but effort, not facility but difficulty that makes men.

NEVER LOSE HOPE STAYING MOTIVATED

Victory in this world is only for the one who has the courage to accept defeat. Just have the courage to convert failure into success.

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was one of the founders of modern America. He is an iconic figure in the political history of America ranked as one of the country's greatest presidents. But Lincoln did not get this success by chance. To achieve this success and acclaim, he had to cross untold and uncounted failures. His struggles have been related in a few words below by one of his many biographers. This man had failed in business in '31. He was defeated in politics in '32, he failed once again in business in 1834. He had a nervous breakdown in '41. In '43 he hoped to receive his party's nomination for Congress but didn't. He ran for Senate and lost in '55; he was defeated again in '58. A hopeless lose, some said. But Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in 1860.

He knew how to accept defeat—temporarily.

Success always comes only after failures. Victory in this world is only for the one who has the courage to accept defeat. Everything has a price and the acceptance of failure is the true price of success. Those who are not willing to pay this price will never be able to reach the heights of success in this world.

The only secret of success in this world is the acknowledgement and acceptance that failure is only temporary. Never lose courage in your capacity of converting failure into success.

WHAT MAKES MAN A SUPERMAN?

One who proves to be courageous enough to face the shock of unpleasant situations and takes them as challenges will find that his mind is activated by the experience and this will certainly unfold his potential.

MK Gandhi, a great leader of India, said at a meeting in New Delhi on June 28, 1946, that he was born in India but was made in South Africa. (*Gandhi and South Africa 1914-1948*, edited by E S Reddy and Gopalkrishna Gandhi)

This statement is correct, but it only tells us the location of a great event, and not its real reason. It was not the soil of South Africa that gave rise to this miracle, but rather the workings of nature. And, almost all the super-achievers were created by the same natural process.

When the American missionary Dr. John Mott visited Mahatma Gandhi at his Sevagram Ashram in central India, he asked him, “What have been the

most creative experiences in your life?” Gandhiji replied, “Such experiences are in multitudes. But as you put the question to me, I recall one experience that changed the course of my life.” Then he related the Pietermaritzburg incident. (*Gandhi Katha*, Umashankar Joshi)

In 1893 Gandhi went to South Africa to take up a job in the legal profession. In June 1893, he had to go by train to Pretoria in the Transvaal, a journey which would take him to Pietermaritzburg. Having purchased a first-class ticket, Gandhi took his seat in a first-class compartment. He was thereupon ordered by the railway officials to remove himself to the van compartment, since non-whites were not permitted in first-class compartments. Gandhi protested and produced his ticket, but was warned that he would be forcibly removed if he did not make a gracious exit. As Gandhi refused to comply with the order, he was pushed out of the train, in the extreme cold of winter, and his luggage was tossed out on to the platform

It was this shocking incident that made him decide to remove racism from the world. He became a man with a mission and, in 1920, began to take action in India, where at that time India was ruled by the same racist colonial power. When he went to South Africa, he was Mr. Gandhi, but when he started his mission

in India, he very soon emerged as Mahatma Gandhi.

History tells us that many individuals attained to greatness because of having received some kind of shock. This is a law of nature, and it is this law of nature that has produced so many great personalities of history.

It is a fact that shock treatment is the greatest factor in the process of 'man-making'. But, there is a condition. This law of nature works only in the case of those who take shocks in a positive manner. If an individual takes the 'shock treatment' negatively and becomes dejected, he will develop a negative mindset and will go on living in a state of total frustration or will ultimately die by his own hand.

On the contrary, one who proves to be courageous enough to face the shock of unpleasant situations and takes them as challenges will find that his mind is activated by the experience and this will certainly unfold his potential. His sense of shock will give rise to a new kind of motivation to deal effectively with the situation, and, in the process, this will lead to the development of a creative personality.

One who gives this kind of positive response to shocks, will be enabled to initiate a new, great struggle in his life. If, in the pre-shock period he was just a

man, then in the post-shock period he will become a superman. Shock treatment is obviously an unwanted occurrence, but it is this very shock treatment that leads to the kind of superlative creativity which can be of immense benefit to humanity at large.

BEING MASTER OF THE SITUATION

Control your emotions and you will be able to deal effectively with all kinds of situations. This is the master formula for high achievement.

Who is the master of any given situation? One who is able to turn an unfavourable situation to good account. This is possible for anyone. One just has to control one's feelings and be able to think in an unbiased manner.

Swami Vivekananda, a great soul of India who lived in the nineteenth century, was once put to the test by a friend of his. He invited him to his house and asked him to sit in a room where there was a table laden with books. These books were the ten sacred books of different religions, one on top of the other. The sacred book of the Christians, the Bible, was placed on the top, and the sacred book of the Hindus, the Gita, was placed at the bottom. Obviously, this arrangement was intended to provoke his guest. Pointing to the pile of

books, the host asked Swamiji to give his comments. Swamiji just smiled and said: “The foundation is really good.”

This story gives a good example of how one can become the master of a situation. Basically, it requires us not to become provoked, even in a provocative situation. When you become provoked, your mind suffers a kind of paralysis; it cannot work properly, so you find yourself at the mercy of the situation. But, when you do not allow provocative situations to affect you, your mind can work at its full capacity. When the mind is free to work, it is like a super computer and can solve all problems.

The most powerful faculty of a man or a woman is his or her mind. In capacity, it is of unimaginable scope. It is the mind that successfully controls the body and, through scientific advances, has come to grips with the vastness of space. Through the mind, man becomes a superman. By contrast, it is the feelings, or emotions, that render human beings vulnerable. They are the weakest part of the human personality. He who can prevail over his own feelings can prevail over the whole world. This is the simple formula for mastering a situation: control your emotions and you will be able to deal effectively with all kinds of situations. This is the master formula for high achievement.

Man's personality is paradoxical. He is intellectually the strongest creature in the world but, at the same time, he is the weakest of all creatures. He who is controlled by his mind, is a strong person, while he who becomes the victim of his emotions, is a weak person. It is in your own hands to become either strong or weak.

People generally complain about others; but no one is stronger than you. No one can create problems for you. It is your own unwise or emotional actions that give others the scope to do mischief. So don't complain. Always look to yourself, always review your own actions, and be ready at all times to re-assess your planning and then you will have no complaint against anyone.

There is a terse but meaningful saying: 'Blame thyself.' This means that in all situations you should not try to see others' mistakes but identify and acknowledge your own mistakes. This is the simplest formula for a successful life.

Never say that this situation is favourable or that situation is unfavourable for you. It is you yourself and not the situation that can create a better future for you. So learn the art of situation management. Those who can manage situations successfully are bound to emerge as masters of their own destinies.

Almost all the great men were born in unfavourable conditions, but they took control of their circumstances and became super achievers.

V

God-Given Hope

GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

Anyone who wants success to come his way in this world of God, will first have to make himself deserving of it. He must organize and channelize his energies properly.

A young aspiring Muslim student from Azamgarh, A.M. Khan by name, stood nervously before the Principal of Hindu College. "Sir, I would very much like to be admitted to the B.Sc. course in your college." The reaction was sharp. "The admissions are closed. How do you expect to be admitted in the month of October when you are already several months late with your applications?" Unforeseen circumstances had prevented young Khan from applying sooner, but he simply said, "It would be extremely kind of you if you would help me." Then he added hesitatingly, "One whole year will be wasted for me if I am not granted admission." The Principal's reply was stern, "There is just no question of further admissions."

The Principal talked in such an offhand manner that it should have been obvious that there was no point in persisting. Even so the student was determined to try his luck, although all he really expected was to be asked to leave the room immediately. On seeing the insistence of the student, the Principal finally asked him rather dryly what his marks had been in the previous examinations, because he felt certain that he must have failed to get admission elsewhere due to his low marks. If this were the case, the Principal would have good grounds for rejecting his application. But the student's reply was just the opposite of what he expected. He said, "Eighty five percent, Sir."

These words worked like a miracle. The Principal's mood changed all of a sudden, and he asked the student to sit down and show him his certificates. When he had seen them and was satisfied that the student's claim was true, he told him to write out an ante-dated application.

Not only was the student then given admission in spite of such a long delay in applying, but he was also granted a scholarship by this very same Principal who had been so reluctant to even give him a hearing.

Had the same student approached the Principal with a third-class degree, and had been refused admission as a result, he would surely have gone away full of hatred

for the Principal concerned and would have remarked to his friends that it was prejudice which had come in his way. He would not have admitted that he had been refused admission because of his poor results. We tend to attribute the evils afflicting us to society so that we may shake ourselves free of the blame. Aspirants to high positions must understand that the response of the society we live in is usually an echo of our own condition.

When a man enters life fully prepared to meet its challenges, the world cannot but give him due recognition. Never in any environment does he fail to receive the position of honour which is his due. This results in his being able to maintain high moral standards. His conduct is then marked by bravery, confidence, broad-mindedness, gentlemanliness, acknowledgement of others' worth and a realistic approach to life. He has the will and the capacity to enter into proper human relationships. Society having recognized his talents and he in turn having given due acknowledgement to society, he can rise above the negative attitudes of hatred and prejudice.

The reverse is true when, because he cannot come up to the required standards, he fails to prove his worth; when he enters life with inadequate training, he surely fails to find a place of his choice in the world. As a

depressed personality, he almost certainly develops a low moral character. He falls a prey to negative psychology—anger, complaint, even criminality. Failure in life gives birth to this negative psychology, because it is seldom that the person concerned blames himself for his failure. He almost always lays the blame on others for his own shortcomings. Inadequate preparation for life brings two evils simultaneously—failure on one's own part and uncalled-for complaint against others.

A stone is hard to all and sundry. But it presents no problems to anyone who has a tool which can break it. The same is true of the more complex obstacles that we face in life, for it is only if you enter the field of life equipped with the proper skills, that you feel entitled to claim what is your due. Even after the “last date” you can be given admission to a college without anyone else intervening to help you. But without the necessary skills and ability, you will fail to find the place you truly deserve.

Anyone who wants success to come his way in this world of God, will first have to make himself deserving of it. He must know himself and his circumstances. He must organize and channelize his energies properly. He must enter the field fully armed in every respect,

then others cannot fail to recognize his true value. He must be like the tree which forces its way up through the undergrowth to take its place in the sun.

GOD-GIVEN HOPE

Everyone can construct his life through his own efforts. With God given hope and a change in strategy through wise planning, our past failures can be converted into success.

If a misfortune befalls you, it is the fruit of your own labours. He forgives much. (*The Quran*, 42:30)

This verse of the Quran tells us that when a man is afflicted by misfortune, it is necessarily the result of one or more of his own actions. Blaming others for this is meaningless. Making protests and complaints is a waste of time and in no way solves the problem.

If our problems had been caused by others, then we should have been dependent upon others for their solution and wait for their kindness. God's system for this world is that He has made each one of us responsible for our own personal affairs. That is, an individual can construct his life by dint of his own efforts. Each one's future is in his own hands.

Sometimes one incurs a loss due to one's own foolishness; much harm can be avoided by adopting wise ways. At times an initiative goes awry for lack of planning. But there will be other opportunities in future to plan better. By being hasty a man invites trouble, but it is possible to remedy the situation through patience and fortitude. Being too emotional can also ruin people; such people too can taste success by remaining cool and rational in their approach on subsequent occasions.

Failure is never final or fatal. With God given hope and a change in strategy through wise planning our past failures can be converted into success.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

Most people are blessed with a healthy body at birth. But they take this for granted. Rarely do they recognize that their healthy body is entirely a gift from God.

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

Most people are blessed with a healthy body at birth. But they take this for granted. Rarely do they recognize

that their healthy body is entirely a gift from God. Seldom do they think that they should bow before God in acknowledgment of this gift.

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

A person who is aware of this reality constantly remembers that one day he has to die and meet his Maker. He recognizes that everything that he has been given is as a gift from the Lord of the worlds. It is such a person who will be successful in the test that human beings are being put to. In contrast, someone who doesn't acknowledge God and is completely heedless that he has to die one day miserably fails the test of life.

COPING WITH DEATH

It is only by realizing that death is the beginning of real life that we can begin to cope with the distress and suffering that death leaves in its wake.

Two books, published in the US, look at death from a scientific perspective. One of them, *On Children and Death*, is written by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who drew material for her work from the families of dying children. The second book is co-authored by Colin Murray Parkes, a senior lecturer in psychiatry at the London Hospital Medical College, and Robert S. Weiss, a professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts. Titled, *Recovery from Bereavement*, the book grew out of work done by the Harvard Bereavement Study. It looks at the way widows and widowers under 45 mourn their losses, and asks the question: Why do some get over their grief, while others do not? Both books, then, are the result of entirely scientific research, and aim to provide solace to the bereaved families by adopting a scientific approach.

Do these books succeed in their aim of offering consolation to those who have been robbed off their near and dear ones? Suzanne Fields, reviewing both works thinks not. "These two books by these priests of science and reason, she writes, address the griefs and protocols of dealing with the dead and dying. Well-meaning books both, concerned with offering practical psychological advice as well as solace, they nevertheless—perhaps inevitably—are useful but not elevating, sensible but never soaring. Grounded in the earth of observation, they are offered to wounded spirits that crave not advice but inspiration." (*Guardian Weekly*, January 1, 1984)

The shortcoming of these books is that they attempt to tackle scientifically a problem that can only be dealt with by religion. It is only by realizing that death—far from being the end of life—is the beginning of real life that we can begin to cope with the distress and suffering that death leaves in its wake. We have been allotted a short while in this world so that we may be put to the test. We are required to realize here that, though we seem to have power, we are in fact helpless before the will of God; though we seem to have possessions and attachments, everything belongs to Him. It is only those who feel they own something

who fear its loss. If one believes that everything and everybody is owned by God, then what is there to lose and lament?

GOD JUST A CALL AWAY

The Creator created man in such a way that there is no distance between the two: both are very near to each other.

Once went on a condolence visit to two young people, a sister and a brother, whose father had died, leaving them alone in their flat in New Delhi. Naturally, both of these young people were very sad. One of the visitors, who was a family friend, spoke some words of solace. He said: “Don’t worry, I am just a call away.” Suddenly, a thought came to my mind. God Almighty is also just a call away from every man and woman.

The Creator created man in such a way that there is no distance between the two: both are very near to each other. It is possible for man to contact God Almighty at any moment, from wherever he may be. This concept gives every man and woman unshakable confidence. It gives every man and woman a source of help in every situation.

If you have a mobile phone in your pocket when you leave home, you will confidently believe that you are not far away from your family. You can make instant contact with your family from anywhere in the world. The same holds true for the relationship between man and God.

I am a great believer in God. I can recall many instances when I have found myself in a state of helplessness. Then I prayed and asked God for His help and, invariably, I realized that God Almighty was with me. He solved my problem, and turned around the situation in my favour.

This belief gives me conviction and determination. In my experience, everyone is in need of such a source of conviction. In our daily lives, we frequently face situations where we feel that, with our limited resources, we cannot cope with them. We need, therefore, to believe in a supernatural source of help.

This belief energizes our minds. It gives us new courage to continue with the task in hand. This belief plays a great role in our lives in that it adds immeasurable hope to our struggle. It makes us able to tap our hidden energy.

Life is full of disadvantages. Frequently, we face areas of existence with which we are totally unfamiliar.

Dealing with them takes thought and planning and, at that time, we need some pointers to a future line of action. In such a situation, belief in God serves as a lighthouse. We are like the captain of an ocean-going vessel, who finds himself in a state of loneliness and isolation. Then he spots a lighthouse on the coastline. Its light gives him new hope, and he decides to follow the path it illuminates. The result is that he is successful in reaching his destination.

Indeed, life is like sailing across a great ocean. We need to believe that there is someone on the coast who can give us help when we are at our most helpless. This is the role of God in the life of every man and woman. One's success is fifty per cent struggle and fifty per cent hope. It is a source of great hope for everyone that God is with us. There is no distance between man and God. He is just a call away from us.

I am 91 years old, and I can say that my life has been full of challenges, full of problems, and the only thing that has saved me from succumbing in any situation is my belief in God.

DEATH AND GOD'S CREATION PLAN

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

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

Paradise is an ideal world, free of all limitations. In Paradise, all of a person's hopes and aspirations will be fulfilled. But only some selected people will be given admission to this perfect world, on the basis of merit. Without the necessary merit, no one will be able to enter Paradise. This is part of God's creation plan.

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

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

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

In the present world, every person is in a continuous state of test. In accordance with God's creation plan, a detailed record of every person is continuously being prepared. On the basis of this record, God will decide

the eternal future of every person after death. On the Day of Judgment, some people will be settled in eternal Paradise, while the rest will be consigned to Hell. Conditions tell us that this day has now come very near. The final hour has now arrived when a person should awake and prepare himself.

AN ABRUPT END TO THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

Man strives to make himself comfortable in this world, to see his ambitions fulfilled and his life a successful one. But death comes just as his dreams are nearing completion.

After a long journey, the express train was approaching its destination. The view from the train indicated that the final station was near. Hundreds of passengers were filled with new life. Some were fastening their bedding; some were changing clothes; some were just peering expectantly out of the window. All were excited, eagerly awaiting their journey's end.

Suddenly, there was a violent thud. The express had collided with a train waiting in the yard. One can easily imagine what would have happened after the collision; happiness suddenly turned to grief, and vibrant lives were faced with violent death; hope was transformed into despair. A story, which seemed to be

heading for a happy ending, became a tragedy at the final moment.

So it is with life. Man strives to make himself comfortable in this world, to see his ambitions fulfilled and his life a successful one. But death comes just as his dreams are nearing completion.

He leaves his lavish mansion for the desolation of the grave, his glistening body to be devoured by earth and worms. His life's labour vanishes without a trace as if there was no connection between him and all that he had strived for on earth.

Visions of greatness had occupied his mind, but he is forced to enter the grave, and from there proceed to God's court of justice. This world is quite different from the one he had sought to construct for himself on earth.

Here he is destitute, without money to fulfil his needs, or clothes to hide his body. All his worldly earnings come to nothing. His friends desert him. He is left powerless, with nothing that he had depended on in the world to help him. What a tragic outcome to such a long, arduous journey.

BEFORE OLD AGE ARRIVES

The period that comes after the age of 40 is actually the best period of one's life. In this stage, an individual has been cut down to size. He has a more prepared mind. Wise is the person who uses this precious period of his life to prepare himself for the Hereafter.

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

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

The period that comes after the age of 40 is actually the best period of one's life. By this stage, one has become

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

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

TURNING LOSS INTO GAIN

Man's life is divided into two phases. In the pre-death life, things are according to man's needs. In the post-death period, things will be in accordance with man's desires.

There are 114 Chapters in the Quran. Chapter 103 speaks of an important aspect of human life. The translation of this Chapter is as follows: "Time is a witness that man is in loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds and exhort one another to hold fast to the truth, and who exhort one another to steadfastness."

Here, "time" refers to human history. This Quranic verse gives a picture of the whole of human history. The verse was revealed in the first quarter of the seventh century, that is, the period before the modern-day civilization. More than one thousand years before this development the Quran gave a sweeping remark that man has been in loss throughout human history. It is very strange that this statement proved to be true.

Even the modern developed world is not an exception to this experience.

Loss, mentioned here, is not meant in the sense of physical loss, but in the sense of a feeling of loss. It is a historical experience that every person—rich or poor—does not find fulfilment in spite of achieving all worldly gains.

Why does one have this feeling of loss? It is because man, by nature, has unlimited desires but the achievable things in this world are limited. It is this gap between his desires and achievable things of the world that develops a feeling of loss. But this phenomenon is not an evil, it is rather a great blessing.

If this phenomenon is seen in the light of the Creation Plan of God, it can be explained successfully. Man is born with a high faculty—high taste and high desires. But as faculties do not find satisfaction in this world, it gives us a clue that man's life is divided into two phases. In pre-death life, things are according to man's needs. In the post-death period, things will be in accordance with man's desires.

This situation is not an evil. After understanding this reality, man's frustration gets transformed into hope. It gives one the strength to spend this waiting period as a beautiful period. For instance, if you have a first

class air ticket and you are waiting in the lounge at the airport, the short waiting period would be spent pleasantly because you know that in a little while you would be travelling first class in the airplane. This thinking would surely turn your sense of loss into a sense of gain.

MAKING LIFE MEANINGFUL

The right formula of life is that which can give a person satisfaction till the end of life, and not just for some temporary period.

There is an English proverb, ‘The end justifies the means’. Perhaps, there is another more relevant principle which may be expressed thus: ‘The end justifies the beginning.’ It is the end result that proves whether the beginning was right or wrong.

Many people have started their lives with great enthusiasm. But the latter period of their life has proved that their beginning was not the right one. Their case was a case of miscalculation, rather than one of right calculation. For example, the Greek emperor Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) was a very ambitious person. His goal was to conquer the world. But, his human limitations overcame him and he died at the age of 32 in Babylon, about 3,000 km away from his homeland. The same is true of Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) who, likewise an ambitious man,

rose to the position of Chancellor of Germany. Then he decided to rule the whole of Europe, for which he initiated a war which escalated into the Second World War. Yet, Hitler could not fulfil his dream, and committed suicide at the age of 56 in a bunker.

There are thousands of such examples throughout history. Certain individual started out in life with high hopes, but failed to achieve their goal and died in a state of frustration. In the beginning they were hopeful, but in the end they died in a state of utter hopelessness.

‘Right here, right now’ is a formula of life that has gained popularity in the present age. This seems to be a beautiful formula. I know a number of persons, both men and women, who have adopted this principle. Although in the beginning they were very happy, in the latter period of their lives they felt that they had been unsuccessful in achieving their goals. Finally, they fell a prey to frustration and died of some fatal disease, and in a state where they had lost all their hopes and enthusiasm.

Happiness in the present is not the criterion of success. The right criterion is whether a person is able to maintain his happiness and sense of satisfaction right to the end of his life. The value of a tree is gauged by the fruit that it offers when it has reached the stage of

full growth. Similarly, the right formula of life is that which can give a person satisfaction till the end of life, and not just for some temporary period.

A tree is known by its fruit, which is the final phase of the tree's life. Similarly, the pattern of human life will be judged on what it turns out to be in its final days. Never make the mistake of planning for life by taking only immediate gain into consideration. A person should always plan by keeping the future in mind. It is the future that counts and not the present.

An individual should first of all discover his own self and then plan accordingly for his life. People generally set their goals out of zeal, but this is certainly not a mature way of making decisions. The better way to decide one's goal is to understand the realities of life, and then act in accordance with them. Failure to do so is the main reason for people dying in frustration after having set out full of enthusiasm: when they set themselves goals, it was under the influence of emotions, without due consideration. Such a plan does not work for long. It is like a sandcastle which is destined in the long run to fall apart.

THE CONCEPT OF A BETTER TOMORROW

Just as the night cannot prevent the day from following it, no untoward circumstances can ever deprive man of the hope of a better tomorrow.

The concept of a better tomorrow is ingrained in human nature. Every day man witnesses the fact that day follows night. And will always follow night. The same is true of life. In human life there is no full-stop. There are only commas until it reaches the final destination.

The concept of tomorrow is only relevant for human beings, not for animals. Humans always think by taking the future into consideration. No setback can take away this tomorrow-oriented concept. It is because of this concept that the struggles of human life are never given up as being futile. Just as the night cannot prevent the day from following it, no untoward circumstances can ever deprive man of the hope of a better tomorrow.

This tomorrow-based concept begins from individual life, covers national struggle, then goes on to the global hope of building a civilization. It is this continuity of hope which is man's most distinctive feature.

It is generally held that death puts a stop to this continuity. But, the reason to believe in the eternal continuity of life is: if this process continues up to death, then why not after death? Death only comes to the physical dimension of the human personality. The other dimension, that is, the mind, is an eternal phenomenon. It is quite certain that the mind-based personality continues to exist even after the apparent death of the physical aspect of human life.

IN SEARCH OF MEANING

Everyone, knowingly or unknowingly, is in search of God. And when he finds Him, he becomes calm and content. It is only the self-discovered God that can give you conviction.

In 1946, the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Emil Frankl (1905 – 1997) authored a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*, and over the years, many books with similar titles have been written. During the more than three hundred years of the printing press, billions of similar books have been published in different languages and if a common title were to be given to all these books, it would, without doubt, be: *In Search of Meaning*.

A human being, by nature, is a seeker after meaning. Everyone tries to find answers to his questions, for everyone is born with an enquiring mind. And, it is this quest which has resulted in the writing of so many books on the subject, in both fictional and non-fictional genres. All, directly or indirectly, have as their central theme the quest for truth.

When an individual reaches the age of maturity, his first concern is to earn his livelihood. He takes up various kinds of jobs or engages in different types of economic activity. And when he becomes engrossed in some venture, he has a period of satisfaction. Then, gradually, a time comes when he realizes that his job is not giving him what he had been looking for. Certainly, his work puts bread on the table but, as Jesus Christ once rightly said: 'Man cannot live by bread alone.' (Matthew 4:4) To earn one's bread is everyone's first need. But, 'bread' can satisfy only one's physical requirements; it fails to give one intellectual satisfaction. This is the main cause of frustration and despair experienced by almost everyone today.

According to the Big Bang theory, the universe came into existence about 13 billion years ago. Just being in possession of this fact causes everyone to think: 'Billions of years ago, I was a non-existent entity in this vast universe. Then, I was born and nature made me part of the population of the world.' Almost every person, consciously or unconsciously, yearns to know how and why he came into existence. There are few who have not frequently reflected on existence, trying to understand the meaning of their presence in this world.

When a person is born, he immediately finds himself in a world with a life support system which he personally

did not struggle to create. He then realizes that nature potentially had an entire technology already hidden within it. This technology was one of mankind's later discoveries, which was developed and refined to the point of being able to create the civilization we see around us.

Then, man questions himself: Who is behind this living drama? What is the relationship between me and that superb artist? Furthermore, there is the question of death: Why does man die and what lies in the post-death period?

If you try to explain this phenomenon, you will find a single, overarching title for it, which in religious terms is expressed as 'God'. If we accept this term, we can say that, in fact, everyone is in search of God. It is God who gives meaning to all phenomena, and, after finding God, everything falls into place.

Once I was in a crowd where I saw a little boy running around anxiously because he had been separated from his mother. He was crying and continually asking: "*Meri mummy kahan hain?*" (Where is my mother?) When he found his mother, she took him in her arms. Instantly the boy stopped crying and became calm and content.

This incident illustrates the case of man. Everyone, knowingly or unknowingly, is in search of God. And

when he finds Him, he becomes calm and content. But all too often, during this search, when he runs towards various things, he very soon realizes once they come within his reach that he has not found what he was searching for. This has been true of almost every human being throughout the entire history of mankind. It is essential to re-focus his endeavours after mature consideration.

Everyone's life has two parts. The first part is a comedy, but if the seeker cannot set himself upon the right course, that is, one which will lead him to God, the second part may turn out to be a tragedy. That is because 'God' is not something which one has to be told about from outside: it is a matter of self-discovery. God can only be discovered by the individual himself. It is only the self-discovered God that can give you conviction. If you want to make your life meaningful, you have to take up this question on a priority basis. It is only your own study and your own contemplation that can give you your God. The criterion of having found God is that once you have found Him, you should become completely at peace, like the little boy in the above incident.

Jesus Christ once said: 'Seek and you will find.' (Matthew 7:7) This is not so much a religious saying as it is a law of nature. But the ultimate success of the

search has an important condition to it, and that is, sincerity. One who is truly sincere in his search will certainly reach his goal.

BEING GOD-CONSCIOUS

The combination of these two sentiments, your love for God and your realization of God's greatness, manifests in a unique form. All the words of the dictionary fall short of expressing this sentiment.

Jim Corbett (1875-1955) was a legendary British hunter. He authored a famous book *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. It details the experiences that Corbett had in the Kumaon region of India from the 1900s to the 1930s, while hunting man-eating tigers and leopards. In one instance he observes the dreadfulness of the tiger thus: "The near proximity of a tiger in daylight, even when it has not seen you, causes a disturbance in the blood stream. When the tiger is not an ordinary one, however, but a man-eater and the time is ten o'clock on a dark night, and you know the man-eater is watching you, the disturbance in the blood stream becomes a storm." (*The Mukhtesar Man-eater*)

This storm in the bloodstream is due to fear of the tiger. Fear of the same kind is also an attribute of a

true believer for God. There is a verse in chapter *Al-Anfal* (The Spoils of War) of the Quran in this regard: True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe at the mention of God. (8:2)

Both the fear of the tiger and the fear of God appear to be the same. But, there is a qualitative difference between the two. The fear of the tiger is negative fear, while the fear of God is totally positive fear. The fear of tiger has no positive aspect, while the fear of God is positive fear in the greatest sense of the word. Fear of the tiger is fear of an animal that can only harm you, while fear of God is fear of a Being that can bestow on you all kinds of favour. Tiger's fear is fear for the sake of fear, while the fear of God is for the sake of salvation, for the sake of Paradise, and for the sake of the eternal blessings of God Almighty.

The fear of God is fear, only in form; but in spirit, it is a high kind of love and high kind of strong affection. Fear of God is full of hope. Fear of God gives you high motivation for doing good works, so that you may be selected for being settled in Paradise.

God Almighty is the treasure-house of all kinds of blessings. He is the only giver. At the same time He is *Arham ur-rahimin* (7:151), that is, the Most Merciful of the merciful.

When you discover God Almighty and realize that He has all these high attributes, you will be filled with feelings of love for Him. At the same time, you know that God is the greatest, God is all-powerful, and God is the Lord of everything. The combination of these two sentiments, your love for God and your realization of God's greatness, manifests in a unique form. All the words of the dictionary fall short of expressing this sentiment. This sentiment is full of affection, at the same time, it is full of awe.

In human language, it is impossible to find a word that can express this noble spirit. This spirit is fear in its appearance, but love in its inner content. This is the highest stage of faith in God.

God-consciousness is the highest form of man's sentimental expression. When a person reaches this level of consciousness, he is so overwhelmed by his feelings that he forgets all words from his memory. If he tries to express this in the word "love", he finds that the feeling is also full of fear; and when he tries to express it in the word "fear", he finds that it is also full of love. In the dictionary of inner feelings, it is a completely known experience, but as far as words are concerned, there is no word in any dictionary that can fully express this sublime sentiment.

GOD A SOURCE OF CONVICTION

In this vast universe, God is our support. He is the one who supports us in the journey across the river of life and brings us to the other shore. Faith in God is everything for man. Without this conviction, man is nothing.

If you are somewhere in space and you look into a powerful telescope, you will notice our exceptional and relatively tiny planet—earth—standing out amidst an otherwise vast lifeless universe and filled with all things that are needed to sustain life. This amazing sight will leave you stunned!

If you look closer, you will notice even more startling things. For instance, you will notice that Earth and its moon and other planets are constantly moving. You will see them rotating on their own axes, as well as revolving around the sun. Moreover, you will see the entire solar system orbiting around the centre of the galaxy of which it is a part. And, further still, you will

find that this galaxy itself is also moving, along with many more such galaxies across the vast universe.

You are bound to be awe-struck seeing all of this! And when you find innumerable and massive balls of fire that we call stars racing about, here and there, and in front of which our Earth appears as just a tiny speck, you will find the scene so frighteningly amazing that you will be forced to admit that in front of all of this you are absolutely valueless and insignificant!

This experience will lead you to realize that there is a mighty God of this entire cosmos, who is its Creator as well as its Sustainer. If you try to visualize the vast expanse of the cosmos in your mind, your heart will cry out, declaring that the cosmos itself is a clear proof of its Creator. After this, there is no need for any more such proof. And along with this, you will realize that in this vast cosmos, human beings are actually utterly helpless and insignificant creatures and that God is an indispensable necessity for us, for without God, it is simply impossible for us to exist.

This, undoubtedly, is the most important fact of life. When someone realizes this fact, he throws all inhibitions to the wind and rushes towards God. He cries out with his whole being, “O God! Help me! Without Your help, I can do nothing.”

In this vast universe, God is our support. He is the one who supports us in the journey across the river of life and brings us to the other shore. Faith in God is everything for man. Without this conviction, man is nothing.

All of us experience in our daily lives something of the utter helplessness that one experiences on seeing the enormous cosmos through a powerful telescope. Every person repeatedly faces experiences that force him or her to become a victim of limitations. For instance, we do not always get what we want. We often find ourselves in situations where we feel totally helpless. We all experience fear of loss, sickness, injury, old age and death. All of these give us a feeling that we are dependent on some superior force, and that without the help of this superior power we cannot succeed in any way. This feeling can be said to be a psychological proof of God's existence.

Every person definitely experiences this feeling. Every one of us finds within our own selves indisputable evidence for God's existence.

The inner being or nature of every person tells him or her, "You need God. Without God, your life cannot be complete. Without God, you cannot succeed."

THE CREATION PLAN OF GOD

According to the Quran, man was created as an eternal being and his life divided into two parts: a pre-death period where he can qualify for Paradise and the post-death period to be settled in eternal paradise, if he proves himself as a deserving candidate.

Everyone asks the same questions: Who am I? Why I am here on this planet earth? What is the purpose of man? What is success and what is failure? These questions may be summed up in a single sentence: What is the creation plan of the Creator? Chapter sixty-seven of the Quran, *Al-Mulk* (The Kingdom), gives the answer to this question. The translation of the relevant verse is as follows:

God created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving One. (67:2)

According to the Quran, man was created as an eternal being. In the above Quranic verse ‘death and life’ represent both the pre-death period of life and the post-death period of human life. So, death and life cover the entire eternal life span of human beings.

The fact is that God created man with a well thought-out plan, the essence of which is to give man complete freedom—not simply as a gift, but as a test. The result of this test would enable God to know who misused his freedom and who put his freedom to the best use. This was, and still is, the divine scheme of things for man.

This test is not just for the sake of testing mankind. It is for a high purpose. Before creating man, God created an ideal world, that is, Paradise. Now God wanted ideal men and women who would merit being settled in this Paradise for all eternity. Therefore, the present world is a selection ground for Paradise.

According to this divine scheme, the present human lifetime affords a great opportunity to man. In the pre-death period of life, man has the chance to qualify himself for Paradise, so that in the post-death period of life he may be settled as a deserving candidate in this perfect world.

This divine scheme gives man great hope. The present world may be one of problems, for in this world there

are sorrows, pains and unwanted situations. But the divine scheme of life prescribed in the Quran gives us a great solace. It is like a bright light in the darkness. It gives men and women great hope that all those sorrows they experience in the present world are for the temporary period of testing, and that once they qualify in the test, they will be fortunate candidates for eternal Paradise.

This Quranic notion explains human life. It explains not only the existence of man, but also all the misadventures that he faces in this world. It gives great meaning to all the good and the bad in life.

Man is born with unique qualities, he is born with unlimited desires, his mind has enormous capacity but, before realizing his potential and before fulfilling his desires, his life comes to an end.

Given his often untimely demise, man seems to be a completely inexplicable phenomenon, but in the light of the above divine scheme, human life becomes completely explainable and understandable. Keeping this in mind, one sees how everything falls into place.

PARADISE ONLY IMMUNITY FROM SORROW

No matter what you acquire or achieve in this world, there will always be an aspect of sorrow. It is only Paradise that delivers immunity from all these worldly deficiencies. Paradise is a place eternally free from sorrow, the ultimate destination for man.

When the inhabitants of Paradise behold its bounties, they will exclaim: All Praise be to God who has taken away all grief from us. Surely, our Lord is most forgiving and most appreciative. (*The Quran*, 35:34)

A unique feature of Paradise is that there will be no sorrow. If this present world is a sorrow-filled world, Paradise will be a sorrow free world. There will no physical or psychological sorrow in Paradise.

According to the Quran, in this world man has been given all that he requires (14:34). But there is one thing that is an integral and necessary part of this world—and that is sorrow.

No matter what you acquire or achieve in this world, an aspect of sorrow in some way or the other will always be included—through physical discomfort, psychological distress, fear of loss, sickness, boredom, accidents, unfulfilled desires, old age, death, apprehension about the future, the imperfectness of things, uncertainty, human limitations, lack of control over the results of one's actions, fear of others, tension, and so on.

Paradise delivers immunity from all these worldly deficiencies. A place eternally free from sorrow is without a doubt, the ultimate destination for man. Anything less than that can certainly not be his ultimate destination.

DESERVING CANDIDATE FOR PARADISE

Paradise is not anyone's birth right, nor will one receive entry into it through recommendation or wishful thinking. Entry into Paradise is totally a matter of selection, and this selection will be done by none other than God Almighty in the world hereafter.

Who is a deserving candidate for the eternal world of Paradise? The Quran is a revealed book which gives the answer to this question. According to the Quran, only a *muzakka* (20:76) person will be selected for being settled into Paradise. *Muzakka* means a purified soul. The *muzakka* person is one who prepares himself in terms of the Paradise culture, who develops his personality on the lines required for living in the society of Paradise. Paradise is an ideal society. Everything in Paradise will be perfect and up to a high standard. The qualities that are required in a *muzakka* person are given in the Quran in detail.

The hearts of the people of Paradise will be filled with the glory of God. (39:75) This is the first quality of a *muzakka* person. That is, he must discover the glory of God in the present world and acknowledge it from deep within his heart. Glorifying God is always a result of discovery. It means that a person should adopt the culture of contemplation (*tadabbur*), and through thinking and reflection, discover God as the Lord of the Universe. This discovery must be intellectually so deep that it should bring about a revolutionary change in his personality. In this way he becomes a *rabbani* (3:79) person, as defined in the Quran.

A scene from Paradise has been given in the Quran in chapter *Al-Qamar* (The Moon) in these words:

The God-fearing will find themselves in gardens and rivers, in the seat of truth with an all-powerful sovereign. (54:55)

It means that the people of Paradise will have the qualities of truthfulness and sincerity in the complete sense of the word. Those who have proved that they possess this high quality will be enrolled in the bright list of entrants to Paradise.

The Quran refers to Paradise as *dar as-salam* (10:25). *Dar as-salam* means the home of peace. According to this, every member of the high society of Paradise will

be a peaceful person in the complete sense of the word. Only that person will be selected for Paradise who has proved in the present world that he is so intellectually developed that he can live in society with peace and compassion. No excuse, whatsoever, would develop the slightest feelings of hate and violence against anyone in his heart.

Regarding the atmosphere of Paradise, the Quran says: "They will not hear therein any vain or sinful talk." (56:25) Anyone who does not stand up to this criterion will be declared as disqualified from entering Paradise.

About the sublime society of Paradise, there is a very meaningful verse in the Quran in chapter *Al-Nisa* (Women). It says:

Whoever obeys God and the Prophet will be among those He has blessed: the prophets, the truthful, the witnesses for God, and the righteous. What excellent companions these are! (4:69)

This is the picture given in the Quran. It means that the society of Paradise will be a collection of the best individuals from the whole of human history. These Quranic statements illustrate that Paradise will be a society of high standard in the extreme sense of the word. Every member of this society will possess the

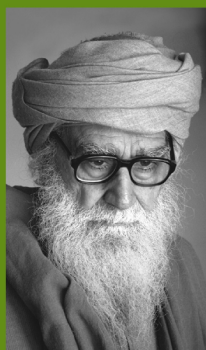
fine qualities of positive thinking, peaceful behaviour, sublime character, truthfulness, sincerity and amiable personality, idealist in thought and perfectionist in behaviour. Every person of Paradise will be like a beautiful flower of the divine garden.

Those who have developed this kind of personality in the present world are competent members of their society. Only those persons will find entry into Paradise who have qualified themselves in the present world.

Paradise is not anyone's birth right, nor will one receive entry into it through recommendation or wishful thinking. Entry into Paradise is totally a matter of selection, and this selection will be done by none other than God Almighty in the world hereafter. This criterion has been given in the Quran in these words: "[In the Hereafter] man shall have only that for which he strives." (53:39). It means only that person will find entry into Paradise who qualifies for it. Paradise is a perfect world, and only perfect character will find entry into it.

The Quranic interpretation of life gives man such great hope. One who discovers this reality will make striving for eternal Paradise one's ultimate goal of life.

In the book, *Living in Hope*, the author, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, explains that God has created this world full of wonderful opportunities. Here, when matter perishes, it becomes energy; when darkness comes, a new light emerges from its depths; when one building falls, it leaves a place for another construction. So it is with events in the life of man. From every failure emerges the chance of new success. Everywhere in this world the paths to progress are open to everyone. In no situation are the paths to progress ever closed for anyone. According to the creation plan of God, this world is a world of possibilities and not a world of frustration. This means that no one need lose heart in this world of God. One should simply look for and grasp such opportunities as exist and pursue one's course with determination and energy. Life is full of disadvantages. Frequently, we face areas of existence with which we are totally unfamiliar. Dealing with them takes thought and planning and, at that time, we need some pointers to a future line of action. In such a situation, belief in God serves as a lighthouse for our 'ocean-going' vessel. God is a source of great hope for everyone. In our most vulnerable moments, we should remember that God is just a call away from us.



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.

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