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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

LIFE AFTER DEATH
A Perspective

Proving the Existence of God
THE BIG BANG THEORY

NO SHORTCUTS
A Tall Order

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

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ISSUE 13 JANUARY 2014

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Greetings of Peace!

Dear Friends,

We are grateful to God and thankful for the support and encouragement you have given us, enabling us to successfully complete one year of publication of our magazine, SPIRIT OF ISLAM.

To reiterate, the purpose of this magazine is neither to provide entertainment nor to cover topical news and current affairs. It is purely for serious readers and seekers of truth and peace. It aims at stimulating a desire for intellectual growth and spiritual development, while fostering love for wisdom and knowledge of the realities of life. Through this medium, we aspire to present answers to eternal questions like: Why am I here? Is there a God? What is my purpose in life? Is there any meaning in life? Did this universe happen by chance? What is the creation plan of God?

In keeping with our quest towards spiritual living, with this issue we introduce a new series entitled 'From the Spiritual Tree'—unique spiritual insights and personal discoveries of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan which are a special delight for the soul. In addition to seeking answers to questions, all of us also seek peace and happiness. Through the pages of this magazine the concept of peace is constantly in focus, and this will, God-willing be continued resolutely.

For our continuous improvement, we welcome and appreciate your valuable feedback. If you disapprove of anything in this magazine, please express your genuine feelings to us and give us the opportunity to improve. If you like this magazine and approve of it, please let others know about it.

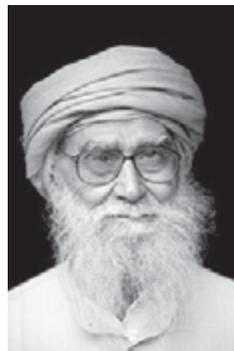
We wish you all happiness in the year 2014, and present to you the key to happiness through Maulana's Desk in the following pages.

Aijaz Ahmed
Associate Editor



FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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



THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

IF you are able to be happy with what you already have, then you can achieve happiness. If your happiness involves certain conditions, then you can never achieve happiness. Happiness is not a destination; it is a state of mind. No material good can give you happiness.

If you have a list of material things in your mind and you believe that only by obtaining all the things on this list, you can live in happiness, it is impossible for you to attain happiness. The fact is that this material list has an end on the paper on which you write it down, but it won't have any end in your mind! One should learn how to be content, otherwise your mind will keep adding new things to its wish-list. And then, you will always live with unsatisfied desires.

If you want to live with happiness, then learn the difference between need and desire. Our real needs are actually very limited. There is always a full-stop in the list of real needs, but the wish-list based on desire has no full-stop. It has only commas. Every day, you add a new comma to this list, and this will continue endlessly till your death.

The Prophet of Islam has said that if a man were given two mountains of gold, he will ask for a third one (Musnad Ahmad). This means that man

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

has an insatiable nature. So, it is only contentment that can give you happiness, not abundance.

About myself, I can say that I am living in happiness in the sense of contentment. I believe that what I have is quite enough for me. This formula has given me a great sense of fulfilment. This contentment has saved me from all kinds of distractions. And when you are saved from distractions, you have enough time to do all kinds of good things, for example, to study, to cultivate positive thinking, to engage in human service, etc.

Happiness is not just a personal quality; It is of great value in itself. If you are unhappy, you are bound to live in tension and stress. But if you are happy, you are tension-free. You will have no stress, and you will be free of pessimism. You will develop a positive personality. And a positive personality is the greatest need in human development.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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Creating History Anew

*We can create a nation
only if its inhabitants are imbued
with a sense of purpose. To that end,
we must educate our people: they must have
full knowledge of both the past and the present
if they are to progress towards an ideal future.*

*We have to inculcate in them the will to work
unitedly in spite of their disagreements.*

*We have to instill in them the courage
to sacrifice their personal feelings
and short-term interests
for long-term ones.*

*Only then will it be possible
to fashion history anew.*

NATURE, A MODEL OF PEACE

Towards Positive Living

THE root cause of most of our problems is our deviation from the peaceful model of Nature, which is the best model for us to follow. All the dilemmas we face today have arisen because we have not followed Nature's lead.

The stars and planets are in continual motion in their orbits, but they never collide with each other. This shows us how to proceed to our destination in life without coming into conflict with others. The sun, too, is an excellent model in this regard. It shows us how we should give life to others in a totally indiscriminating way. Trees are another shining example for us. They supply healthy and beneficial oxygen, in exchange for gases harmful to other creatures. Observe how flowers spread their fragrance all around them, regardless of whether they are appreciated for it or not! A flowing stream irrigates the fields without expecting anything in return. Without inculcating similar altruistic values within ourselves, no meaningful life is possible.

In short, positivity prevails throughout Nature. Negativity just does not exist in the natural world. This teaches us that we should respond positively at all times, even in negative situations.

In this world, positive living is of relevance not only as far as moral behaviour is concerned. It is incumbent upon us to follow a positive course at all times and in all situations. For, in this vast universe, there is only our tiny earth on which human beings may survive. To date, there is no other place in the cosmos where we have discovered life-supporting systems. Preserving Nature, therefore, is synonymous with sustaining Life, while destroying Nature will lead to total extinction.

This beautiful world of Nature created by God is well on its way to being ruined by Man. Widespread violence, ecological disturbance and global warming have together become a menace greater than that of a possible world war. Indeed, it is as if a third world war has already been thrust upon us. This is the biggest threat we are facing today. We have to work unitedly and sincerely to save Nature in the interest of all humanity. In short, consistently engaging in positive living amounts to saving Life, while failing to do so is a certain way of committing suicide. □

THE BIG BANG THEORY

Proving The Existence Of God

THE inventor of sociobiology, E.O. Wilson, once said in an interview that the Big Bang theory is more interesting than any religious theory regarding the origin of the universe. The Big Bang theory is clearly mentioned in the following verse of the Quran:

Do not those who deny the truth see that the heavens and
the earth were one solid mass which we tore asunder,
and that we have made every living thing of water?
Will they still not believe?

(THE QURAN 21: 30)

The Quran here address all mankind. It is speaking beyond the level of time to all mankind; it tells them that there is proof of the existence of the One God in the universe before their eyes. Why, then, do they deny it?

In 1912, the American astronomer Vesto Melvin Slipher discovered from his observation of the stars from Lowell Observatory in America, that some galaxies were rapidly moving outwards. This theory was later confirmed by Edwin Hubble and Milton Humanson. In fact, their observations through the 100-inch telescope at Mount Wilson showed that all galaxies were moving in an outward direction.

**The more science advances,
the closer it comes to God.**

The Dutch astronomer, Willem de Sitter later accumulated further evidence in support of the theory that the universe was exponentially expanding. Then in 1965, New Jersey scientists Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson discovered the cosmic microwave background radiation emitted by the Big Bang that marked the origin of the universe. So much evidence has accumulated in support of the Big Bang Theory that it has now come to be regarded as an established fact.

This theory implies that the universe is not infinite; it has a definite beginning. It shows that we live in an expanding universe. All around us galaxies are careering outwards at a stupendous pace. It has been

calculated that if this outward movement were to be reversed, it would take 20,000 million years for the whole strung out universe to converge into one mass.

The Big Bang theory is conclusive evidence that the universe is contingent. According to the prevailing scientific view of cosmology, the universe had a distinct and singular beginning about 14 billion years ago. The universe, therefore, appears to be an effect and, thus, is seemingly dependent upon something outside of and beyond itself.

This theory has proved the existence of God from the law of nature, for only an external agent at a specific instance in time could have made a point mass into an ever expanding universe.

Time and the Universe had a distinct and singular beginning. They are an effect and thus dependent upon a causal agent outside and beyond.

As Aristotle cogently argued, there must be a reality that causes but is itself uncaused or, a being that moves but is itself unmoved. Why? Because if there is an infinite regression of causes, then by definition the whole process could never begin.

The more science advances, the closer it comes to God. One is compelled to agree with what Dr. Maurice Bucaille writes in his book, *The Bible, the Qur'an & Science*:

In view of the level of knowledge in Muhammad's day it is inconceivable that many of the statements in the Quran which are connected with science could have been the work of a man. It is moreover, perfectly legitimate, not only to regard the Quran as the expression of a Revelation, but also to award it a very special place, on account of the guarantee of authenticity it provides and the presence in it of scientific statements which, when studied today, appear as a challenge to explanation in human terms. □



THE HUMAN RIGHT TO LIVE WITHOUT TERROR

Draft Charter

THE Human Right to 'Live Without Terror' is without doubt an urgent need of our times. From the First World War till now, a great number of charters and declarations of this nature have been issued by different international forums, including the United Nations. But, as we know, these charters and declarations have yielded no result.

Looking at this matter deeply, we find that this problem is not basically about the lack of a suitable charter, rather, it is essentially about the lack of results from the charters that we already have.

We need an ideology to counter the terrorist ideology.

The reason for this is that issuing a charter as a declaration of an agreement is only half the solution. The remaining part of the solution involves extensive ideological campaigning in its support. Since this task has never been effectively performed, the various charters have not yielded the desired results.

Let's take an example to illustrate this point. After the Second World War, the United States of America faced two major threats, one after another: one pertaining to communism, and the other to terrorism. As we know, America successfully solved the problem of communism, while it utterly failed to solve the problem of terrorism, even after spending trillions of dollars ostensibly for this purpose.

This difference in the results in the two cases was due to the difference of strategy adopted for dealing with these two issues. America launched a strong ideological campaign to counter the threat it faced from communism. This ideological campaign proved so successful that even the communist leaders themselves lost confidence in the communist philosophy. They began to prefer a liberal economy to a socialist economy, until in 1991 the communist empire collapsed at the hands of its own people.

On the other hand, in order to counter the menace of terrorism, America

has depended solely on guns and bombs. It has failed to produce an ideology to counter the terrorist ideology in the same way it had done earlier to counter the communist ideology.

That is why, in spite of great loss in terms of lives and resources, it has not been possible to extirpate the menace of terrorism. In such a situation, only a charter that utilizes past experiences of countering the communist ideology can successfully serve this purpose.

An appropriate charter in this regard can only be one that is based on realism. A draft based simply on sentiments is bound to fail. We have to convince the world that we need to cherish the concept of reconciliation between civilizations, as opposed to the concept of a clash of civilizations. To adopt a practical strategy one has to be realistic, and should not let emotions overrule one's judgment.

Terrorism begins from the mind, not from the gun. Terrorists have an ideal in their minds, and they resort to violence to achieve this ideal. They remain unaware of the fact that idealism is not achievable in this world. The only possible option for them is to accept the less than ideal situation. But because they refuse to accept this, they continue to engage in futile violence. They are also unaware of the fact that in the present world no positive result can be achieved through violence.

We must cherish the concept of reconciliation between civilizations, as opposed to the concept of a clash of civilizations.

The truth is that terrorism is the result of intellectual unawareness. This is what makes terrorists resort to violence. They are fired by the mistaken belief that in this way they can realize their false hopes. Terrorism can be brought to an end solely through intellectual awareness, based on religion and spirituality. The ideology of peace based on secularism has already been tried and it has failed.

It is from religion that we should draw our ideology of peace. Jesus Christ says in this regard:

Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to
God the things that are God's.

(LUKE 20: 25)

This is not simply a Christian formula of peace. Rather, it is a common formula, recognized by almost all the religions in one form or another. The Prophet of Islam has expressed the same principle in these words.

Render what is due to the rulers and
ask for your dues from God.

(Sahih al-Bukhari)

Similar is the case with other religions. Hinduism preaches *nishkam karma* or selfless service. Jewish scriptures say: "Blame thyself." According to Jainism and Buddhism, *ahimsa* or non-violence is the greatest virtue. The essence of all these teachings is the non-confrontational or non-political approach.

Non-political activism is only another name for non-violent activism. Political activism generates hate and violence while non-political activism brings about peace and brotherhood.

**Terrorism begins from the mind, not from the gun.
It must be countered with an ideology, not with guns.**

Religious ideology is based on the relationship between man and God. On the other hand, the ideology behind present terrorist movements is based on what can be called a 'man-versus-man' concept. It is this 'man-versus-man' activism that results in violence and terror. Contrary to this, activism based on the relationship between Man and God produces love and peace in society. This is not a passive attitude. Rather it is activism in the complete sense of the word. It leads us to avoid political conflict and to avail of the opportunities present in fields other than politics. It is a way of buying time. To put it briefly, it may be called 'positive status-quoism', that is, accepting the political status quo, and at the same time, availing of opportunities in non-political fields.

This religious formula provides the ideology by which we can achieve our goals through peaceful means.

If we are to succeed in ensuring the "Human Right to live without Terror", there are a few other matters that must be addressed. Here are some issues that must be considered in any draft charter for the "Human Right to Live without Terror".

1. 'Super-powers', will have to abandon the notion that they can play the role of global policemen. This notion is a complete anachronism. Such imperial thinking may have had some validity in the ancient age of kingship. But now, it has lost all relevance. It can produce only negative results. Today the formula of political adjustment or political coexistence alone is practicable. The concept of 'political master' ruling over 'political subjects' has no relevance in the modern age.
2. Wherever there is terrorism, it is, directly or indirectly, related to the question of ownership of and control over territory. Experience shows that in this matter it is the policy of give-and-take alone which is practicable. The concept of unilateral occupation is no longer workable. All nations must adopt the policy of give-and-take as soon as possible. This is the only practical solution to the problem of terrorism.

**It is from religion that we should draw
our Ideology of Peace.**

3. Time is now running out for the terrorist groups. They must learn a lesson from their past experience and realize the fact that in the post-industrial age they are left with no option at all but peaceful activism. Violent activism is not going to yield any positive results whatsoever.

The terrorist groups, therefore, should finally come to the conclusion that however rightful their struggle might be, it can only aggravate the problem. It cannot solve it. Therefore, they must switch over from violence to peace without any delay. They must at all times choose the peaceful method over violent methods.

4. Governments as well as non-governmental organizations, both must accept that if a dispute cannot be solved through mutual dialogue, the other option available to them is not confrontation but, rather, referral of the dispute to some forum for arbitration. Fortunately, this forum already exists in the form of the International Court of Justice. In the present circumstances, no other option is available either to governments or non-governmental organizations.
5. Whenever a controversy cannot be brought to an end by mutual

negotiations, it should be referred to the International Court of Justice and its verdict should be accepted unconditionally by both the parties.

6. Modern 'developed' nations spend trillions of dollars to produce weapons of mass destruction. None of them could, however, make use of the deadly weapons at their disposal. America dropped the atomic bomb only once. Later, despite involving itself in several wars, it could not make any use of the nuclear bomb.

The truth is that nuclear weapons can be used only once. Once such destructive weapons have been used, such deterrent factors emerge against their use, that it becomes impossible to employ them again. These weapons have now become a liability: they are no longer an asset for nations that once used to be proud of possessing them. These nations are now left with no option but to abandon them forever.

Given this state of affairs, what nations must do is to unilaterally abandon their programmes for weapons of mass destruction. The truth is that in this matter there exists practically no other option.

7. Along with adopting the above strategy, launching an effective and persistent ideological campaign in its support, making use of all modern means of communication, is also indispensable.

As we know, today, there are a number of national and international forums striving for the attainment of peace.

However, we would not be wrong in saying that their efforts have been marred to a great extent because of their having been politicised. That is why they have produced little or no results. For instance, all big peace prizes are given on a political basis. It is essential that efforts towards the promotion of peace should be separated from political interests, otherwise no such end can be accomplished. □



LIFE AFTER DEATH

A Perspective

ON December 6, 2013 the radio announced the news of the death of Nelson Mandela. Then, after a moment, the radio station broadcast the speech that Mandela had delivered as President in the South African Parliament on May 10, 1994. The speaker was physically no more, but his voice could still be heard by all without the slightest alteration.

On November 12, 1947, Gandhiji went to the studios of All-India Radio to deliver a live address to over two lakh refugees from Pakistan who had gathered at a camp in Haryana. This speech is still aired every year on November 12 on All-India Radio.

Death is like a door through which we go from the present world into the next world.

Experiences of this kind are very common. They remind us of the fact that when a person dies, he is still living through his voice. A person's voice is a part of his personality. And so, if a part of our personality is alive after our physical death, why cannot our whole personality be alive after our death?

According to the dictionary, death is the permanent end of life. However, the Quran maintains that the human being is an eternal being, and that death is only a phase in our eternal journey. Apart from other reasoning it offers for life after death, the Quran also expresses the above argument in these words:

And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth, it (life after death) is certainly the truth. It is as true as your ability to speak.

(THE QURAN 51: 23)

Speech is part of a person, and modern technology has proved that the speech of a person is repeatable. So, if someone's speech, uttered in the distant past, can be repeated, why not the rest of his personality? In previous centuries this seemed to be just a claim, but now it is a verified fact.

There is also a biological phenomenon that supports this concept. The

human body consists of about ten trillion tiny cells that can be seen only through a microscope. Every single cell in our body is replaced every seven to ten years. That is, after an average ten years our entire body is fully replaced. In other words, if a person is ninety years old, it means his physical body has been replaced nine times! But, his personality remains the same, without the slightest change.

**We are eternal beings.
Death is only a phase in our eternal journey.**

If in spite of nine 'deaths', the personality has remained intact, then why must it die when the physical body dies the tenth and final time? A philosopher has aptly stated this reality in these words:

Personality is changelessness in change.
(The Urantia Book)

Death is like a door through which we go from the present world into the next. Death is a reminder of the reality that there is a world in the Hereafter. We must prepare ourselves to be able to find a proper place in the next world. □



On Prayer

*If one prays in the true spirit of prayer,
then one's prayer will surely fend off
indecency and evil.*

*But if one's prayer is devoid of spirit,
it will be no more than a
perfunctory action which has
no connection with
one's real life.*

NO SHORTCUTS

A Tall Order

NOVEMBER 16, 2013 was a special day for the Indian cricket-star Sachin Tendulkar. After 24 years of his career in cricket, he emerged as a superhero. In a short speech, he credited his success to his late father, Mr. Ramesh Tendulkar. He disclosed that when he was eleven years old and started playing cricket, his father advised him: "Chase your dreams, but do not take shortcuts." Sachin Tendulkar adopted this advice and it worked successfully for him.

What is a shortcut? A shortcut is a by-pass only to reduce the distance to one's goal by avoiding the natural procedure to reach there. In this way, you try, to reach your destination in less time. This kind of by-pass is common in road journeys. But when it comes to the purposeful journey of human life, it is irrelevant.

For instance, if you are a student and you try to secure a Master's degree without doing your graduation, or if you are a money-less person and want to become a billionaire without working hard, or if you start your career in politics and try to rise up in the political system without doing the required fieldwork, these kinds of shortcuts will not take you anywhere. Planning on the lines of taking shortcuts is ill-planning and is destined to lead you nowhere.

This formula does not pertain only to the life of an individual. It is also true for the life of a community or a nation, too. Leaders of the Muslim community in India, for instance always insist that due to some reason or the other, the Indian Muslims have become a backward community. They say that the only way to give them a boost is to provide for them reservation in jobs and services, otherwise they will remain backward.

A demand of this nature is also a kind of shortcut. But according to the law of nature, it is not feasible. No amount of favours can uplift any community. The only way to empower a community is to make it capable of meeting the challenges that it faces. Life is based on competition and challenge. Without facing competition and challenge, no community can prosper. There is no escape for anyone in this regard. Offering a community certain favours only paralyses its abilities. On the other hand if a community can face challenges, it proves to be a boost for it. In real life, short-cuts can get you nowhere . ❑

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM

What Needs To Be Done

ONE of the greatest causes of anti-Islamic sentiment among many non-Muslims is the way many Muslims themselves understand, interpret and express Islam—for instance, in a highly supremacist, extremely ritualistic and sometimes violence-driven manner. But these phenomena, it must be clearly understood, are part of Muslim culture, not part of Islam. Muslims must abandon them and follow the true teachings of Islam. Islam cultivates equality and not supremacy; it is a spirit-based religion rather than being a form-based religion; and Islam exhorts its followers to adopt the peaceful method, as against the violent method.

Related to this above-mentioned issue, some Muslims claim that some non-Muslims are biased against Islam because, so they allege, such people are inherently opposed to God and the Truth. But these allegations are completely wrong. Simply by being born a Muslim one cannot become good. And, similarly, by merely being born a non-Muslim, one cannot inherently become an enemy of the Truth. Islam is a matter of discovery and choice for both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is not something that is received as an inheritance.

Islam cultivates equality, not supremacy.

In many parts of the world today, violent movements in the name of 'Islamic Jihad' are being fought. No doubt this has greatly contributed to anti-Islamic sentiments among many non-Muslims and to the wrong image of Islam as a violent religion. What is the way out of this situation?

The real solution is to disarm all non-governmental actors that engage in violence. According to Islam, only an established government has the right to possess and use arms. It is not permissible for non-state actors or non-governmental organizations to keep arms. Non-governmental actors or organizations have only one choice—which is of peaceful activism. No excuse whatsoever can make it lawful for non-state actors to pick up arms. Muslim governments must make sure that in their countries, no one other than the military, should have access to arms. This rule must be implemented effectively by Muslim governments.

Some people claim that the problem of radicalism in the name of Islam is mainly economic and political, and that only by addressing these issues can such militancy be solved. However, the reason for radicalism in the name of Islam is neither political nor economic. Rather, it is due to a wrong concept of Islam, which is the product of the political interpretation of Islam. It is this political interpretation that has sanctioned the use of arms in the name of establishing an Islamic system. The effective solution to counter militancy is for all Muslim leaders to disown this practice outright.

Islam exhorts its followers to adopt the peaceful method as against the violent method.

In this connection, all the Muslim religious scholars (*ulema*) must issue a verdict (*fatwa*), based on a consensus, stating that terrorism is unlawful in Islam. Muslim intellectuals also have an important role to play in this regard. They must disown all forms of terrorism, and openly write and speak against these activities. At present, this is not happening on the scale it should among Muslims. Perhaps the reason is fear in their minds. They are living in Muslim society, so they have developed fear that they may be persecuted by people of their community if they criticize them.

In this regard, however, Muslims must follow the advice given in this Quranic verse:

O Believers, turn you all together towards God.
(THE QURAN 24: 31)

Thus, all Muslims should collectively condemn the terrorism being engaged in the name of Islam.

The Muslim media, too, has its role to play in the struggle against terrorism in the name of Islam. Currently, the Muslim media is, however, highlighting the conspiracies and atrocities of others. Such news provokes Muslims further. And so, the Muslim media must immediately and entirely cease the publication of this kind of news and reporting. They must, instead, speak about the positive contributions of others. For example, many Muslims condemn the United States of America for its bombardment in Iraq, but hardly any Muslims ever acknowledge the fact that it is the U.S. that has ushered in the modern age of communication. Muslims extensively draw benefits from modern

technology invented by the West, yet they do not acknowledge the West or offer thanks. The Muslim media, must thus totally stop spreading negative news, and, instead, must engage in the task of highlighting positive news.

As for the general Muslim public, they must not participate in political, disputes and agitations at all. They should concentrate solely on earning their livelihood. They should remain indifferent in matters pertaining to politics. These are some ways in which the phenomenon of terrorism in the name of Islam can be combated.

**Islam is a spirit-based religion,
not a form-based religion.**

Terrorism in the name of Islam has definitely impacted wrongly on some Muslims' self-perceptions and self-confidence. In the face of the growing incidents of terror engaged in by self-styled Islamic groups in different countries, some Muslims hesitate to identify themselves as Muslims in front of people of other faiths. When in the company of non-Muslims, they tend to conceal or down play their Muslim identity. Some of them even develop feelings of self-hatred. Some have even lost interest in Islam. What is the solution for such people?

There is a better choice available to such Muslims—that is, to disown the terrorism done in the name of Islam and to present the true picture of Islam before non-Muslims. They should tell people that they need to differentiate between Islam and Muslims, and that they should judge Muslims in the light of Islamic teachings, not vice versa. They can take this as an opportunity for carrying out dialogue and *dawah* work, that is, inviting people to God's path. When people are now talking about Islam, even negatively, they can take this as an opportunity for presenting to them a true picture of Islam.

If Muslims remain silent on the wrongful interpretation of Islam that is employed to justify terrorism, they are giving non-Muslims an opportunity to form wrong notions regarding Islam. Thus, it is the duty of all Muslims to speak out and to correct this wrong image of Islam. Radical Islam is the product of the political theory of Islam. Those who are influenced by this interpretation, too, have to be explained that this is not the right interpretation of Islam. Once they are convinced, they will themselves abandon all activities directly or indirectly connected to militancy. □

DUTY BEFORE RIGHT

In The Right Order

THE guiding principle for nation-building was given by Mahatma Gandhi in these words: *Duty before Right*. It is not merely a Gandhian formula. Rather it is a historically tested formula applicable to every country.

The best society is a duty-conscious society. The worst society is a right-conscious society. This is a universal principle, and there is no exception in this regard.

Enjoying one's rights does not happen simply by demanding them. Rather, obtaining ones rights is an outcome of hard work. If you demand or protest for your rights, your efforts will be in vain because there is no one to hear your protest and fulfil them. In such a situation, demanding your rights is bound to be useless. Complaining or protesting for your rights is like crying in a desert where there is no one to hear your voice.

Perform your duties, and you will automatically receive all the things that you want.

On the other hand, when you perform your duties, you become deserving of obtaining your rights. Performing one's duty is like sowing a seed in fertile soil. Such a seed is destined to produce fruit according to the eternal law of nature. Abiding by one's duty always results in becoming able to accessing one's rights, but merely demanding your rights cannot bring you any positive results.

Our world is based on natural laws. One such law can be referred to as the Give and Take Principle. Saint Francis of Assisi has rightly said in his famous prayer:

For, it is in giving that we receive.

If you are a duty-conscious person, you give something to the society. And, according to the law of nature, you certainly deserve its return. But if you are a right's conscious person, you give nothing to the society. And so, you do not deserve to receive any favour from society.

All 'super-achievers' in history were the 'super-givers' of their times. Their 'super-giving' made them eligible for 'super-receiving'. If you want

to receive something from others without giving anything to them, you are living in a fanciful world of your own imagination. Your wishful thinking will not work in this world!

The best principle for a successful life can be expressed in these simple words: *Give your best, and find the best*. Your 'best' is like your money, and the world of opportunities is like a shopping centre. If you are ready to spend your money, you can obtain the things you desire from the shopping centre. But if you are not ready to spend your money, the doors of all shopping centres will remain closed to you. You cannot find entry into any shopping centre anywhere.

When you perform your duty, you become deserving of obtaining your rights.

Performing your duty means exerting the abilities given to you by nature. You have to use your abilities with full vigour, and only then will the world be ready to give you, your rights.

There is a saying: *Work works*. This is a simple rule for success in this world. If you are ready to do your job, this formula will certainly work and, sooner or later, you will obtain its results.

If others complain about you, take it seriously. Adopt the maxim: *Blame thyself*. Try to find out your own shortcomings. By removing your shortcomings you will become acceptable to others. Simply demanding your rights will not yield you any positive results.

Examples abound of people who engage in constant complaining and demanding for their rights from others, but who actually gain nothing at all. On the other hand, there are numerous examples of people who perform their duties without asking for any rights, and their work was immensely appreciated and they were given their due.

Perform your duties and you will automatically receive all the things that you want. Obtaining one's rights is subject to performing one's duties, but not vice versa. This is a universal principle. No one can achieve anything by going against this universal law. □



LESSONS FROM A ROAD BLOCK

Road Block, Not Mental Block

WHEN a road is under repair, a notice bearing the words 'ROAD CLOSED' is put up to warn unwary travellers. But this does not mean that the path to one's destination is irrevocably barred. There are always other highways and by-ways that one can take—it is just a question of looking around for them. Sometimes, one can reach one's destination just as well by zigzagging through narrow lanes and alley-ways. The only difference is that this takes somewhat longer, and one has to keep one's wits about one to negotiate the narrower roadways and sharper turnings. But arrive, one finally does.

Life's journey is very often like this. One would like to proceed by the broadest and straightest route, moving as fast as possible and reaching one's goal in the most direct possible way. But often such roads are blocked, and so getting to one's destination begins to seem very difficult, if not impossible. Yet, for every major route which is blocked, there are always several minor roads that are open. It is just a question of having to go about doing things in a slightly roundabout manner. This is particularly true if you meet with an adversary and feel that you are unable to confront him head-on. It is then that you must find some indirect means of dealing with him. Often, compromise or adjustment is the best solution.

For every major route which is blocked, there are always several minor roads that are open.

When in one particular field there seems to be a discouraging lack of opportunities, one can search for and certainly find opportunities in some other field. When you fail to find a place for yourself in the front row, you can always make do with a place in the rear until a place up ahead finally falls vacant for you. When you cannot find people to extend you a helping hand, press on fearlessly and strike out on your own. When you need things from people to help you in life and no one seems ready to be generous, stop thinking of how deprived you are and try, instead, to earn God's blessings.

For every closed door, there is always another which is open—but only to those who have the eyes to see it, and the courage to march through it. □

THE SPIRITUAL TREE

Personality Of A Believer

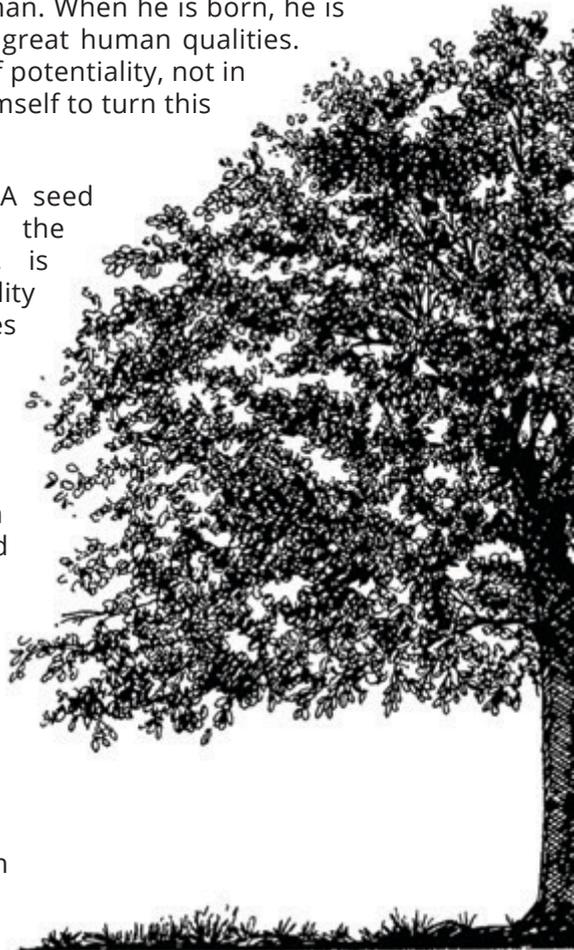
A TREE is a physical illustration of the spiritual life. It has a unique quality. It begins from a small seed, and then it grows and grows, until it becomes a full-fledged tree. How does this miracle take place? It is due to an inner quality of the tree. It is able to take food from everything: from soil, water, air, and sunlight.

A seed is small, less than half-an-inch perhaps, but when it grows, it becomes a large tree, sometimes a few hundred feet tall. Man, also, is initially a seed. He is born with great potential. When he grows up, he can become like a giant; a superman. When he is born, he is like a seed. He possesses all the great human qualities. But all these things are in terms of potentiality, not in terms of actuality. It is for Man himself to turn this potentiality into actuality.

But there is a difference here. A seed grows automatically, following the law of nature. Man however, is required to develop his personality by his own efforts. This requires conscious planning. Man should discover himself and plan for his development accordingly.

We live in a world where we face different situations, both negative and positive, wanted and unwanted. All these are like food for human beings, food for our growth. We must extract this nourishment for our development from all things, including negative things, and unwanted situations. We can learn much from these, too.

This is the course of human development in this world. Man must take food from everything.



When he is angry and controls his anger, he is developing in his personality the art of turning negativity into positivity. When he faces a crisis situation and manages to keep his patience, he is developing the ability of positive planning. If he faces a violent situation and refrains from reacting, he is developing his personality in such a way that he can maintain his peace of mind no matter what condition he finds himself in.

This gives Man the ability of not wasting his energies and, instead, of devoting himself totally to constructive work. When he faces a provocative situation and maintains his balance, he develops self-control. It is as if he has enrolled for a course in intellectual development.

By developing self-control he is developing in himself a mindset that will enable him to manage the crises everyone faces in life, at some time or another.

All these situations are like intellectual food for us. If you try to face these situations with a positive attitude, you will be helping yourself grow. You will be enhancing your creativity. You will be developing your personality on positive lines. One who adopts this course will surely emerge, sometime or the other, as a well-developed personality, like a full-grown tree.

Every person is born into this world with tremendous potential, but he or she has to work hard to unfold this innate potential. This potential is provided by nature, but its unfolding is entirely every person's own job to do.

Nature never discriminates against anyone with regard to the blessings that it showers on one and all. It is Man who makes himself either a success or a failure. □



ILLUSTRATION BY SETH MCWHORTER

SALAH

The Islamic Prayer

Salah is the second pillar of Islam. It consists of a series of movements and words repeated several times. Each series or cycle of this movement is called a *raka'a* (or 'bowing'). In *salah*, chosen passages of the Quran are recited. It is the duty of every adult Muslim to perform five daily prayers, individually or in congregation. For *salah* to be acceptable to God, it should be performed at the proper times, in purity, and facing the *Qibla*, the direction of the Kabah. These five obligatory prayers have to be observed at fixed times. Prayers which are missed at the correct times should be made up afterwards.

Prayer as a general duty or service is frequently enjoined in the Quran. Prayer is the second of the five fundamental principles or pillars of practical devotion in Islam. It is a devotional exercise which every Muslim is required to engage in five times a day

Prayers remind us five times daily that we are accountable to a God who is watching us.

The five daily prayers are:

- **Early morning prayer:** Two *raka'as*; — between dawn and sunrise.
- **Noon prayer:** Four *raka'as*, between noon and mid-afternoon.
- **Late afternoon prayer:** Four *raka'as*; — between the time when the shadow begins to be equal, until the setting of the sun.
- **Sunset prayer:** Three *raka'as*; — between sunset and early evening.
- **Evening prayer:** Four *raka'as*; — from the disappearance of twilight until dawn, but preferably before midnight.

In addition, every Friday there is a congregational *salah*. The Friday prayer brings together large numbers of people from different neighbourhoods. This increases their sense of community. This prayer has to be performed in congregation in a mosque, and consists of two *raka'as*, preceded by a sermon.

Other exceptional prayers are those that are performed on the occasion of festivals. On the morning of the festivals of Eid Al-Azha and Eid Al-

Fitr, there are special prayers of two *raka'as*. The whole community gathers together in a special prayer ground.

According to a *hadith*, the Angel Gabriel came and performed *salah* five times, at the right times of the day and night. The Prophet joined the Angel in prayer to learn it from him.

Salah is performed in the following manner: First of all, the believer performs ablutions. Then, he stands in the direction of the Kabah, in Makkah. He holds up his hands and says aloud:

God alone is great.

Then, he submits himself to the will of His Lord. After praising God by reciting some passages from the Quran, he begins to feel God's majesty. Then, he prostrates touching his forehead to the ground. Prostration is an acknowledgement of the majesty of God.

One who performs his prayer in its true spirit cannot be forgetful of God when his prayer is over.

Muslims have been advised in the Quran to be steadfast in their prayer (THE QURAN 29: 45), for prayer keeps away indecency and evil. When the Prophet of Islam was asked about this verse, he said: *If a person does not keep himself away from indecency and evil his prayer is not really prayer at all.*

How does prayer become the means for inculcating these virtues in the faithful? It is because prayers remind us five times daily that, we are accountable to a God, who is watching us.

One who performs his prayer in its true spirit cannot be forgetful of God when his prayer is over. Prayer is a manifestation of the fact that one's heart is full of the fear of, and love for, God. And so, if one prays in the true spirit of prayer, one's prayer will surely fend off indecency and evil.

The aim of prayer is to enjoin upon believers to think of God, to bring people closer to God, to keep them from indulging in indecent and forbidden activities, to purify the heart, develop the mind, to comfort the soul and to demonstrate obedience to the Creator.

The Prophet once asked his Companions, "Tell me, if any of you had a rivulet before his doors and bathed five times a day therein, would any dirt remain on his body?" The Companions replied, "Certainly not." The Prophet then explained that, in the same manner, the five daily prayers as ordered by God will erase all minor sins.

Prayer is a manifestation of the fact that one's heart is full of the fear of, and love for, God.

Prayer is frequently enjoined in the Quran, while the appointed times and the mode of saying prayers were clearly prescribed by the Prophet, exemplified in the manner he himself practiced them.

The Quran says:

Say your prayers morning and evening, and during parts of the night; surely good makes amends for evil. This is a reminder for people who pay heed.

(THE QURAN 11: 114)

Believers are under the obligation to say their prayers at the appointed hours.

(THE QURAN 4: 103)

The actual spirit of *salah* is the remembrance of God. The purpose of human life according to Islam is to worship God. However, there are other demands of life as well, which do not allow people to be engaged in worship twenty four hours a day. That is why it has been arranged that every day for a certain period of time, one should be able to spare time from one's daily engagements and engage in the worship of God. The time-bounded prayers are intended to refresh our remembrance of God, so that even when we are engaged in worldly activities we should remember God constantly. In this way, our entire life will be coloured in the hue of divine worship. Besides, *salah* is also a very effective means of moral training. It instils modesty and self-discipline, which are the root of all noble qualities. □



WHY THIS CONTRADICTION?

Endless Desires and Limited Fulfilment

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was an English poet. He wrote:

*Our sweetest songs are those
that tell of saddest thought.*

THIS is a common experience. Everyone likes sad stories and tragic songs. The most famous novels are ones that are tragic, not funny. Similarly, a singer who can sing the songs in a painful or plaintive tone often gains most prominence. What is the reason that sad stories, poems or songs hold this appeal of reaching out to people's hearts?

The reason for this is that every person usually lives in the psyche of non-fulfillment of desires and a sense of deprivation. Under such circumstances, happiness seems unreal, while misery seems real.

Studies reveal that Man is a 'pleasure-seeking animal.' In this vast universe, Man is an exceptional creature in every sense. He alone has the ability to feel pleasure. A unique gift to man given by his Creator is his ability to sense a wide variety of emotions and to enjoy them.

**The objects of enjoyment of Man's desires are unlimited.
But Man has a limited capacity to enjoy them.**

To think, to hear, to speak and to see and so on are all delights for man; moreover, to eat, to drink, to smell, to touch are all pleasures that man can avail of. But there arises a strange contradiction here. Man has an immense desire for pleasure, present within him, but to fully experience this in this world is not possible for him.

Man amasses wealth, achieves status, power and pomp, builds a lavish house for himself and wallows in luxury. But when he is done with all this, he realizes that between him and his enjoyment a definite barrier remains. He is not able to gain satisfaction from any luxury or material comfort. All objects of luxury fail to give him genuine peace and happiness.

The objects of enjoyment of Man's desires are unlimited. But Man has

limited capacity to enjoy them. It is this inability of Man that crops up between him and his object of enjoyment. Even after achieving everything, he continues to live with an acute sense of deprivation. Man's physical weakness, the aging process, disease, calamities and, eventually, death, all continually go on refuting his desires. After having acquired the objects of his desire, he loses the capacity to enjoy them.

If we do an in-depth study of this contradiction, we find that in actuality this is not a contradiction but the result of difference in chronology. The law of nature, prescribes that in his pre-death period Man will obtain just a preliminary introduction of the luxuries that he yearns for. Only in the post-death period will he be able to completely obtain and enjoy them.

Man has been endowed with an unlimited sense of enjoyment; but the objects of his happiness have all been kept for him in the Hereafter.

A farmer first sows seeds and then harvests them. Iron is first melted and then cast into steel. Likewise, everything in this world is accomplished on a step-by-step basis. Everything first passes through its preliminary stage and then reaches its final form. Nothing is an exception to this law.

The same holds true for Man. Man has been endowed with an unlimited sense of enjoyment; but the objects of his happiness have all been kept for him in the Hereafter. In the present world Man discovers his sense of enjoyment, but he can fully attain the objects of his happiness only in the Hereafter.

As per the creation plan of God, Man gets to see in this world a prototype of all possible joys and luxuries. In this way, God conveys to Man that if he wants to avail all of these joys eternally and completely, he has to qualify for it. What is this qualification? In one word, it is to make one self a purified soul. Man must keep himself away from all negative thoughts and tendencies, such as greed, selfishness, dishonesty, lying, anger, revenge, violence, hatred and so on. He should develop a totally positive personality, and in this way become worthy of entry into heaven.

Man's life is divided into two phases — the pre-death period and

the post-death period. A very tiny part of his life is spent in the pre-death period, and the rest of it, which carries on forever, is the life in the Hereafter. If Man's life is seen only from the point of view of his pre-death period, it appears as nothing but a tragedy; but if it is viewed from the point of view of the post-death period, it appears to be joyous.

According to the creation plan of God, Man is standing at a very delicate point. He faces two choices, and he has to pick one of them for himself. He can avail of the opportunities given to him and become entitled to eternal happiness in the life Hereafter, or he can lead his present life in ignorance and, thereby, entitle himself to a life of eternal deprivation. □



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THE PROPHET AND HIS MISSION

From The Quran

The Quran says of the Prophet of Islam:

Surely you have a sublime character.

(THE QURAN 68: 4)

BY far the best commentary on this verse has been provided by Aisha, the Prophet's wife. Her words have been recorded in different books of *Hadith*. Replying to a question on the character of the Prophet, Aisha, referring to this verse of the Quran, said: "His character was the Quran."

This shows that the truest picture of the Prophet of Islam is that which has been expressed in the holy scriptures. There is no doubt that the books of *Hadith* and *Seerah* (biographical accounts of the Prophet) too are an authentic source of information about the life of the Prophet. But the Quran remains the primary source. The picture of the Prophet which tallies with the relevant statements made in the Quran must be regarded as correct.

A Seeker of Truth

Addressing the Prophet, the Quran says:

By the light of day, and by the night when it falls, your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He abhor you. The life to come holds a richer prize for you than this present life. Surely your Lord will give you what will please you. Did he not find you an orphan and give you shelter? Did He not find you wandering and guide you? Did He not find you poor and enrich you?

Therefore, neither oppress the orphan, nor drive away the beggar. But proclaim the bounty of your Lord.

(THE QURAN 93:1-11)

The Prophet Muhammad received prophethood at the age of forty. His life prior to this has been thus alluded to in the Quran: "Did He not find you wandering?" The explanation of this verse by Islamic scholars has been recorded in the books of *tafsir* (commentary of the Quran). According to the *Tafsir Al- Qurtubi*, this has been explained variously, such as: We found you a seeker. We found you a wanderer. We found you a lover of guidance. (*Tafsir Al Qurtubi*, 20-97).

This state, in brief, may be called that of seeking the Truth. That is to say, before his being commissioned as a Messenger of God, he was a seeker of Truth, wandering hither and thither in search of it. In those days he used to withdraw to hills and deserts, and stay — engrossed in contemplation in the solitude of the cave of Hira. All this was a manifestation of this search for Truth welling up in his heart. This phase has been recorded in detail in the books of *Hadith* and *Seerah*.

From this we learn that, as a preliminary to the discovery of Truth, the proper course for an individual would be to go in search of it. As we learn from the Quran, one who sincerely seeks the Truth will definitely receive guidance, just as the Prophet Muhammad did. The difference between the Prophet and the common man is that the former received guidance with prophethood, while the latter will receive only guidance.

The Prophet as a Human Being

The Quran describes the Prophet of Islam as a human being like any other. What distinguished him from others was not his being something other than human, but, rather, his being a prophet, in addition to being a human being. This is illustrated by the following verses of the Quran:

Am I anything but a human apostle?

(THE QURAN 17: 93)

I am but a mortal like yourselves. It is revealed to me
that your God is one God.

(THE QURAN 18: 110)

Their apostles said to them: We are nothing
but mortals like you.

(THE QURAN 14: 11)

This gives credence to the practical example set by the Prophet for the benefit of all human beings. It is quite clear that his ability to convince people rested on his being a human like other people; on his having feelings of the same nature as other human beings; and on his being made of the same flesh and blood as others. If the Prophet had not shared all these things with other human beings, the commandment to follow the example of the Prophet would have been impracticable.

The greatness of the Prophet of Islam lay in adopting a superior code of ethics as a human being, so that he should come up to the

highest standard of conduct in all matters. Had he been cast in some superhuman mould, his exemplary character could not have served as a model for human beings to emulate.

The Prophet — A Test for People

The Quran refers to objections raised by opponents of the Prophet:

Thy ask 'Why has no angel been sent down to him?' If We had sent down an angel, their fate would have been sealed and they would have never been reprieved. If We had made him an angel, We would have given him the semblance of a man and would have thus added to their confusion.

(THE QURAN 6: 8-9)

In chapter 25 the Quran records a similar objection raised by doubters:

They say, How is it that this Apostle eats and walks about the market-place? Why has no angel been sent down with him to warn us? or (why) has no treasure been given him, no garden to provide his sustenance?

(THE QURAN 25: 7-8)

At another place, the Quran says:

Nothing prevents men from having faith when guidance is revealed to them but the excuse: 'Could God have sent a human being as an apostle?'

(THE QURAN 17: 94)

According to an Arabic saying 'Things can be understood properly only by their opposites.' In the light of this principle, two pictures of the Prophet, very different from each other, appear before us. One picture, according to the above verses, is that which was before his contemporaries. The other, the one we have today, has grown tremendously in stature over the fifteen centuries that have elapsed since his coming to the world. In the former picture, the Prophet appears as a common man, standing all alone. In vivid contrast, the picture of him that has emerged after 1500 years has become so sublime that modern attempts to describe him, if they are to do him justice, have to include such expressions as 'the pride of all existence', 'the emperor of both the worlds', 'the leader of the Universe', 'the crown king of Arabia', and so on.

What is the reason for these two starkly different pictures of one and the same personality? It is that in his lifetime, a prophet appears to his contemporaries as a common man. But over the centuries, he acquires the status of an established personality and thus attains historical grandeur.

In the first picture, the Prophet has yet to receive acclaim, while in the second, the Prophet is at the zenith of historical grandeur.

The Quran tells us that only that faith is acceptable to God which conforms to the example set by the Companions:

If they believe as you have done, they shall be rightly guided;
if they do not, they shall surely be in schism.

Against them, God is your all- sufficient defender.

He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.

(THE QURAN 2: 137)

The Companions are those believers who were the Prophet's contemporaries. They saw the initial picture of the Prophet when he had not yet acquired an aura of historical grandeur, and yet they recognized the greatness in him. At that time the Prophet appeared to be a common man like any other, and not at all like the extraordinary person that he is described as in today's superfluous terms. The first picture of the Prophet is the real one. The rest has been added to by history. The credit for believing in the Prophet can be given, in the real sense of the word, only to a person who eliminates the additions of history and recognizes him as he actually was.

The Knowledge of the Unseen

We learn from the Quran that God alone has knowledge of the Unseen. As the Quran states:

He alone has knowledge of what is hidden:

His secrets He reveals to none.

(THE QURAN 72: 26)

The Quran has repeatedly made it clear that the Prophet of Islam was not given full knowledge of the unseen world. On certain occasions God revealed something of the unseen world in advance to the Prophet through the Angel Gabriel, for instance, the result of the Hudaibiya treaty in the form of a 'clear victory' (THE QURAN 48: 1). But the Prophet

was not given the power to acquire knowledge of the unseen on his own. This is demonstrated by the following verses from the Quran:

Had I possessed knowledge of what is hidden, I would have
availed myself of much that is good.

(THE QURAN 7: 188)

I do not say to you that I possess God's treasures and I do not
know what is hidden.

(THE QURAN 11: 31)

Tell them, 'God alone has knowledge of the unseen.
So wait; I too will wait with you.'

(THE QURAN 10: 20)

"These are announcements of the unseen which We reveal to
you; neither you nor your people knew them."

(THE QURAN 11: 49)

These and other verses of this nature prove clearly that the Prophet of Islam had not been given knowledge of the unseen. God gave the Prophet only those things that were essential to the discharging of his responsibilities as a prophet. As this task did not relate to the metaphysical, he required no knowledge of the unseen.

It was not the Prophet's duty to perform miraculous feats for the sake of establishing his superiority. Rather, his duty was to guide people by means of *dawah* and counselling. This was the real task of the Prophet, and for this there was no need to possess any supernatural powers. That is why no prophet was endowed with such a faculty.

Ease in Difficulty

In chapter 94 of the Quran the Prophet is addressed thus:

Have We not lifted up and expanded your heart and relieved
you of the burden which weighed down your back? Have We
not given you high renown? So, surely with every hardship
there is ease; surely, with every hardship there is ease.

When you have finished, resume your toil,
and seek your Lord with all fervour.

(THE QURAN 94: 1-8)

One particular aspect of the life of the Prophet of Islam emerges before us in these verses. That is, the ability to see ease in difficulty which was bestowed on him by God's grace and guidance. He was able, by dint of

his courage and determination, to turn disadvantageous situations to his advantage, and could continue with his activities with hope, even in times of great difficulty.

The Prophet underwent great hardship. His experiences broadened his vision, making him more confident. Ironically, his opponents' false propaganda became the means of spreading his message far and wide.

The followers of the Prophet of Islam should also inculcate this same mentality among themselves. They should develop within themselves the capacity to turn minuses into pluses and to convert hardship into ease.

The Sustenance of God

Addressing the Prophet of Islam, the Quran states:

Do not strain your eyes towards the worldly benefits We have bestowed on some of them, for with these we seek only to try them. Your Lord's provision is better and more lasting. Enjoin prayer on your people and be diligent in its observance. We demand nothing of you: We shall Ourselves provide for you.

Blessed shall be the end of the devout.

(THE QURAN 20: 131-132)

The Prophet led a human life just like everyone else. However, where common men set their sights on accumulating worldly goods, the Prophet did not make this world his goal. He did not desire material benefits; rather, the world for him was a means of spiritual provision.

In this world, those who adopt a life of faith and engage in the task of conveying the message of God suffer considerable hardship. On the other hand, those who do not devote themselves to discharging such responsibilities wallow in material comfort and pleasure. By highlighting this difference between a life of comfort and a life of hardship, and by creating the impression that a worldly life is far better than the godly life, Satan tries to tempt and mislead the believers.

But a deeper examination shows that beyond this apparent difference there is another dimension, which is far worthier of consideration. It is that worldly possessions are for the purpose of putting human beings to the test, and as such, are of a temporary nature. Those who are preoccupied with material things have nothing in store for their eternal

life, while a believer receives by his association with God something more precious than all the things of the world. Remembrance of God, thought of the life hereafter, worship, a life of piety, devotion to God, and concern that the servants of God may be saved from His chastisement — all these are forms of provision, and of a far higher quality than material things, and will translate for the believer into endless bliss in the life Hereafter.

Basic Task

Addressing the Prophet, God says:

You who are wrapped up in your vestment, arise and give warning. Magnify your Lord, cleanse your garment and keep away from all pollution. Bestow no favours expecting gain.
Be patient for your Lord's sake.

(THE QURAN 74: 1-7)

From these we learn that the actual task of the Prophet was warning people of the serious consequences in the life to come, of their actions in this world. This duty could be performed only by one whose heart was filled with the greatness of God; who possessed a high moral character; who kept away from all evil; who did good without any hope of return, and who suffered patiently all the hardships inflicted by others.

Four Responsibilities

The Prophet of Islam is said to be the answer to Abraham's prayer. When Abraham settled his son Ismael and his wife Hajira in the deserts of the Hijaz, according to the Quran he prayed thus:

Send forth to them a messenger of their own people who shall declare to them Your revelations and instruct them in the book and in wisdom and purify them.
You are the Mighty, the Wise One.

(THE QURAN 2: 129)

The first task of the Prophet was to receive God's revelations and communicate them to people, i.e. he had to recite the verses of the Quran and explain them to his hearers. Innumerable signs, within human nature and in the outside world, have been placed, by God so that Man may realize Him through them. The second task of the Prophet was to reveal these signs and give people the insight to enable them to develop faith in their Lord.

Insight implies wisdom, so that when Man has developed the insight to see God's signs, when he has moulded his mind in such a way as to be able to understand the teachings of the Quran, a kind of intellectual light begins to shine within him. His cerebral level is raised to a point from where he is able to experience higher realities. In all matters he is able to arrive at the right conclusions as desired by God.

Finally, the Prophet strove to prepare people whose souls would be free from all preoccupations except devotion to God, who would also be free from psychological complexities so that they might be capable of finding the spiritual sustenance placed by God in the universe for His devoted servants.

The task of conveying the message, instructing the people in the Quran and wisdom and guiding them towards purifying their souls were the four basic parts of the mission of the Prophet of Islam. All his activities were directed solely to achieving these objectives. After the Prophet, those who rise to the task of reforming people have to work along the lines followed by the Prophet on the basis of divine guidance. Any addition to these tasks can only be considered as an innovation. □



Food for the Soul

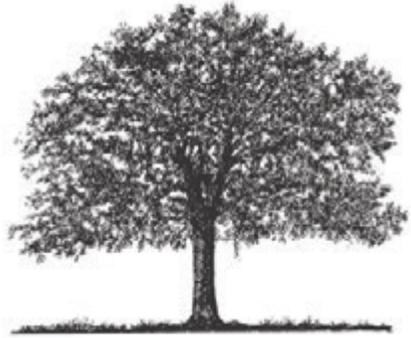
*At every moment certain incidents
take place in the life of a man.*

*These incidents appear at the level of society,
history, the universe, etc.*

*Thinking about these incidents or events
and deriving lessons from them,
is food for the soul.*

FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

There is a tree beside my house. I call it the 'Spiritual Tree'. I derive spiritual inspiration from it. A tree is an ever-growing being that was initially a seed possessing the potential of becoming a full-grown tree. A seed takes food from the universe around it and then grows into a tree. The same is true with spirituality, the desire for which is intrinsic to, and an integral part of, the very nature of, every human being. To realize this spirituality, Man must derive spiritual food from the universe around him. A tree converts carbon-dioxide into oxygen; a spiritual person is one who can take positive lessons from negative situations. From this perspective, a tree is an embodiment of a spiritual personality. — Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



Spirituality and Applied Spirituality

SPIRITUALITY is not a kind of ecstasy. Rather, it is about the sublimity of character. There are two facets of spirituality: internally, it is positive thinking and externally, it is living in peace.

Spirituality means giving more importance to non-material values than to material values. Spirituality promotes the culture of simple living and high thinking. A person with a simple lifestyle becomes a no-problem person. Someone who develops high thinking becomes a truly selfless person, concerned about the whole of humanity. Clashes between people over conflicting material interests often lead to all manner of inhuman actions. When you go beyond these interests by developing spiritually you will no longer find yourself constantly fighting with others. You will become a healthy member of society, and a society which consists of large numbers of people of this kind is bound to emerge as a peaceful society.

Spirituality is the culture of nature, as it were. Nature demonstrates this spiritual culture in various ways. Take the case of a rose bush.

It is a combination of two opposite parts: flowers and thorns. Both flowers and thorns live together on the branches of the bush. There is no clash between the two. It is this culture that makes a rose bush such a very beautiful scene to behold. This indicates what the better way to live in society is. Man should live in society as a rose bush lives in the wilderness.

Spirituality makes a person a true human being. But this is not enough. A person's spirituality must be manifested in his surroundings. He must behave with people according to the spiritual norm. He must manifest spiritual values in his dealings with others. In the face of conflict, he must choose peaceful adjustment over confrontation. He must be able to turn negative experiences into positive ones. And so on.

If positive men and women are like spiritual trees, their applied behaviour, or their applied spirituality, makes the society in which they live a spiritual garden. Applied spirituality is the multiplication of spiritual values. Applied spirituality is beneficial to both the spiritually-advanced person as well as his neighbour. It makes the person a happy person, and his neighbourhood a problem-free society.

Spirituality is a science, the science of mind. It nourishes positive thinking, positive tastes, positive habits, and positive behaviour. A positive person is a blessing for his home, his society and his nation. In secular terms, spirituality is positive thinking. In religious terms, it is divine discipline. □



Noble Personality

*The greatest thing for Man
to aim at in this world is the
nurturing of a noble personality.*

*Such is the individual considered
desirable by God according to
His creation plan.*

THE WORD OF GOD

From the Scriptures

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary
by **Maulana Wahiduddin Khan**

There are signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day for people of understanding; who remember God while standing, sitting and [lying] on their sides, and who ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying, 'Lord, You have not created all this without purpose. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire. Lord, those whom You condemn to enter the Fire You have surely brought to disgrace. Wrongdoers will have no supporters. (3: 190-192)

The whole universe is a silent declaration of God's presence. When Man removes the man-made veils from his eyes and ears, he starts seeing and hearing this silent announcement all around him. It then appears improbable to him that in a universe where the stars and the planets have continued to exist for millions of years, Man will cease to exist within fifty or a hundred years, taking with him to his grave all his desires and aspirations. In a world which abounds with the beauties of nature, where countless meaningful blessings, like air, water and the sun, have been provided, should Man's end be nothing but sorrow and suffering? Man also finds it unthinkable that in a world of limitless possibilities, where just by sowing seeds in the ground a whole forest of trees comes into existence, one should fail to receive the fruits of virtuous actions; that in a world where the sun shines daily after the dark night, centuries go by without being illuminated by the lustre of fairness and justice; that in a world where earthquakes and tempests lie dormant, Man should continue to perpetrate tyranny and oppression without ever being checked.

Lord, we have heard a caller calling to the true faith saying, "Believe

in your Lord," and we believed. Lord, forgive us our sins and remove from us our bad deeds and make us die with the virtuous. Our Lord! Grant us what You have promised to us through Your messengers, and do not humiliate us on the Day of Resurrection. Surely, You never fail to fulfil Your promise.' (3: 193-194)

Those who think deeply, seeking a more profound reality, find it unthinkable that a meaningful universe should have a meaningless end. They discover that the message conveyed by the preacher is the announcement, in human language, of the same reality which is being silently proclaimed by the whole universe. The greatest issue is that when the truth is unveiled, and the 'sun' of justice makes its appearance, they should not be left deprived and destitute. So when the truth appears, they rush towards it, remembering God. By breaking all personal bonds and ridding their thoughts of worldly considerations, they become one with the preacher of truth; so that in the next world, when the 'darkness' and the 'light' of the universe are separated, the Lord of the universe will make them inhabit the light, and will not abandon them to fumble eternally in the dark.

The true measure of wisdom, on the other hand, and folly, on the other, is wholly different from the one devised by human beings on their own. A wise man is one who lives in the remembrance of God, who can discover the divine meaningfulness at work in the creation plan of the universe. In contrast, an unwise man is one who keeps his mind engaged in other, material things, who lives in this world as if he is totally unaware of the creation plan of the Lord of the Universe. □

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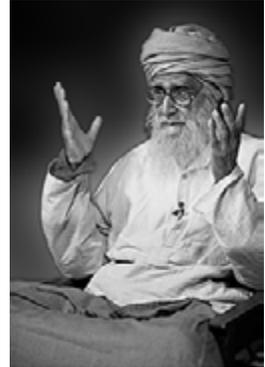
Your Questions, Answered

What is the greatest mark of an exalted nature?

The greatest mark of an exalted nature is the ability to set aside grievances and differences in order to support another person.

Is patience another name for retreat?

Patience is no retreat. Patience gives the strength to restrain one's emotions in delicate situations and to use one's mind to find a course of action along result-oriented lines.



What differentiates gentleness from haughtiness?

Gentleness is an attribute of successful people, while haughtiness signals imminent failure.

How does one survive highly charged situations in life?

The way to survive highly charged situations in life 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.

How should Man's actions be governed?

Man should be governed in thought, word and deed, not by the mere urge to pursue selfish aims, but by a deep and innate scrupulosity.

Why has suffering increased in modern times?

As far as I can gauge, physical suffering has not increased. It is still what it used to be. But it would be right to say that mental tension has increased in modern times, and this is chiefly due to the fact that people are not able to put a curb on their desires.

How do people who have faith in religion suffer less? Why does the present generation believe more in psychology than in religion?

I do not agree with this suggestion that religious people suffer less than others. However, it is true that religious beliefs inculcate a

spirit of acceptance of whatever is in one's fate. They bring a state of contentment in people. Because of this, religious people are more capable of bearing suffering.

It is also partially true that the present generation believes in psychology more than in religion. This is due to the thinking developed by this modern material civilization. The modern civilization attaches greater importance to the seen world than to the unseen world. This is how this way of thinking has developed. However, this is an unrealistic way of looking at the world, and, therefore, will not last.

What are the special and unique features in Islam that help you to deal with suffering?

According to Islam, the present world is a testing ground. It is not a place for receiving rewards. And so, a true believer accepts suffering as a trial. He develops patience, so that in the life after death God will reward him. Hence, it becomes possible for a believer to deal with suffering in a positive way.

How does helping others solve your problems?

Helping others is a great virtue in Islam. It is a source of great contentment in one's heart. According to Islam, one who helps others receives God's help in return. Members of a society who help each other make great progress.

Will the faith in religion end if there is no suffering?

Never! Religion is a permanent reality. It is a truth in itself. Whether there is suffering or not in this world, religion will always prevail, irrespective of circumstances. □



Glossary

Abraham also Ibrahim; prophet and patriarch of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. He was the first pioneer of Islam and the original founder-builder of the Kabah.

Ahimsa Sanskrit for 'do no harm'; denotes the principle of non-violence, one of the cardinal virtues of major Indian religions.

Aisha (612–678); daughter of Abu Bakr, wife of Prophet Muhammad; one of the most intellectual and influential women in Islamic history.

Al-Bukhari; Imam Al-Bukhari (810-870); Muhammad Al-Bukhari; Persian Islamic scholar who authored the *Hadith* collection known as Sahih al-Bukhari regarded as the most authentic collection of *Hadith*.

Al-Qurtubi (1214-1273); Abu Abdullah al-Qurtubi, Islamic scholar most famous for his commentary of the Quran, Tafsir al-Qurtubi.

Dawah communication of the message of God.

Eid al-Azha Festival of the sacrifice; one of the two festivals of Islam; It honours the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his young son Ismael as an act of submission to God's command.

Eid al-Fitr Festival of the breaking of the fast; one of the two festivals of Islam; It celebrates the conclusion of the month of fasting — Ramazan.

Fatwa legal opinion; judicial verdict.

Gabriel One of the archangels whom God sent to the prophets with His divine message.

Hadith sayings and deeds of the Prophet of Islam.

Hajira also Hagar; wife of prophet Abraham who bore his first son Ismael.

Hijaz desert region in western part of present day Saudi Arabia where the Islamic historical and holy cities of Makkah (Mecca) and Madinah (Medina) are located.

Hira or Cave of Hira; cave on the mount

Jabal al-Noor near Makkah where prophet Muhammad received the first revelation from God.

Hudaibiya a place just outside Makkah where the Treaty of Hudaibiya was made between Muhammad representing the state of Medina and the Quraysh tribe of Makkah in 628 AD.

Ismael also (Ishmael), firstborn son of Abraham, born to him from his wife Hajira (Hagar). Ismael was also a Prophet and ancestor of Prophet Muhammad, the last prophet of Islam.

Jihad struggle in the way of God.

Kabah the sacred house of God built originally by prophets Abraham and Ismael in present day Mecca (Makkah).

Musnad Ahmed a collection of *Hadith* reports by Islamic scholar Ahmad bin Hanbal (780–855)

Nishkam Karma Sanskrit for 'selfless service'; one of the central messages of the *Bhagavad Gita*—a key religious text of Hinduism.

Qiblah direction of the Kabah, the sacred house of God.

raka'a bowing; consisting of prescribed movements and words to be followed while offering *salah* (prayer).

Sahih Al-Bukhari *Hadith* collection by Imam Al-Bukhari; regarded as the most authentic *Hadith* collection.

Salah also *Salat*; the Islamic prayer.

Seerah also *Seerat* or *Seerath*; Prophet's biography.

status-quoism accepting the political status quo and at the same time availing of opportunities in non-political fields.

Tafsir commentary of the Quran.

Tafsir Al-Qurtubi commentary of the Quran by famous Islamic scholar Al-Qurtubi.

The Urantia Book a spiritual and philosophical book that originated in Chicago sometime between 1924–1955. The authorship is unknown.

Ulema also *ulama*; religious scholars.

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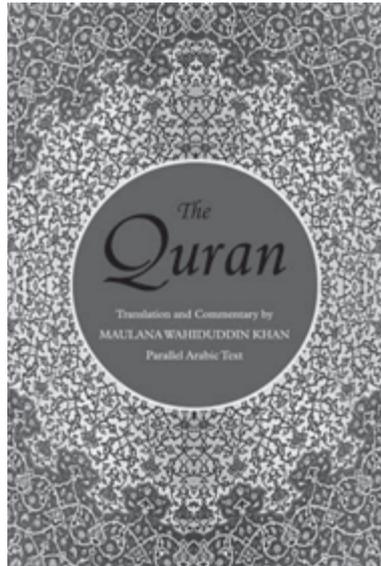
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PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

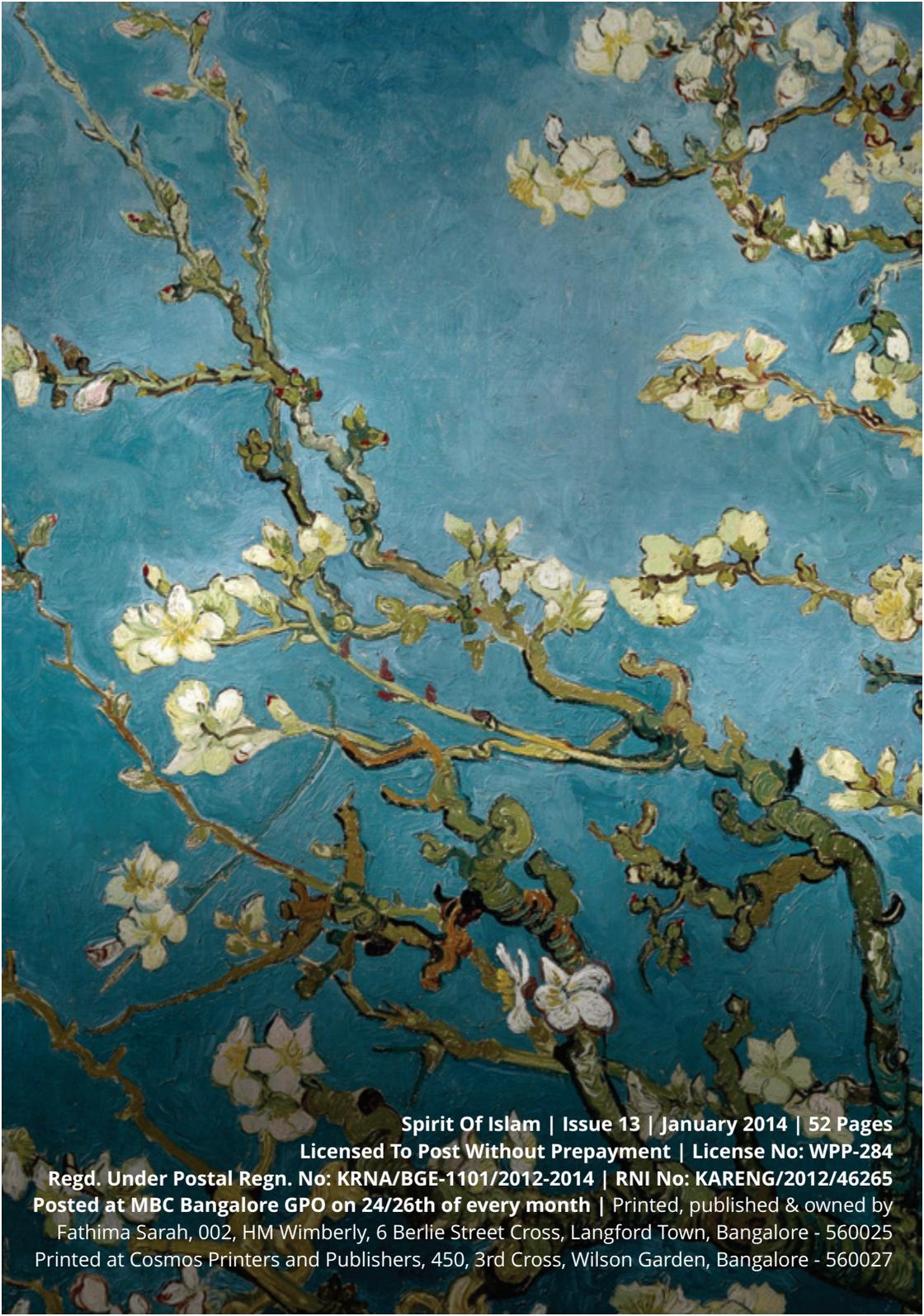
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