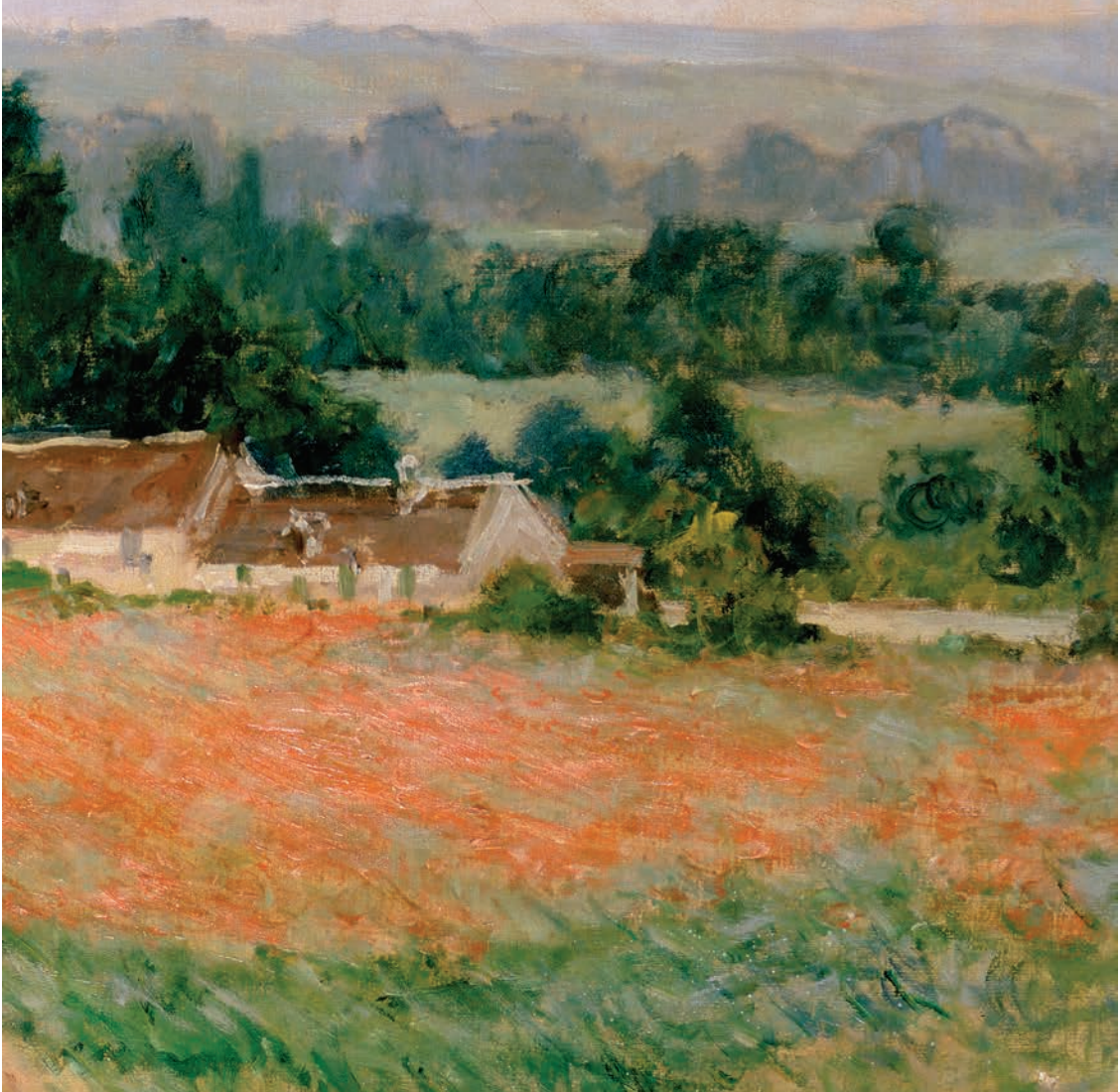




Spirit Of Islam | Volume 1, Issue 4 | April 2013 | 52 Pages | RNI No: KARENG/2012/46265
Registered under Postal Regn No: KRNA/BGE-1101/2012-2014 Posted at MBC Bangalore GPO
on 24/26th of every month | Printed, published, owned and edited by Fathima Sarah
002, HM Wimberly, 6 Berlie Street Cross, Langford Town, Bangalore, 560025
Printed at Cosmos Printers and Publishers, 450, 3rd Cross, Wilson Garden, Bangalore - 560027

ENGLISH MONTHLY | VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4 | APR 2013 | ₹ 35

SPIRIT OF ISLAM



GLOBAL WARMING OR
GLOBAL WARNING

Equal in Respect
WOMEN IN ISLAM

SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY
A Universe With God

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4, APRIL 2013

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'Haystack at Giverny', 1886
Claude MONET (1840-1926)

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM
002, HM WIMBERLY, 6, BERLIE STREET CROSS
LANGFORD TOWN, BANGALORE 560025, INDIA

PRINTED AT

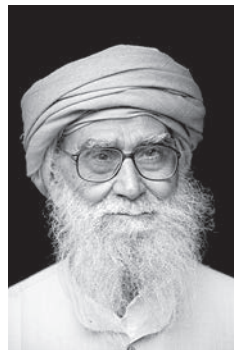
COSMOS PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS
450, 3RD CROSS, WILSON GARDEN, BANGALORE 560027

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FROM THE CHIEF EDITOR'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 Muslims'. 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.



ARAB SPRING

GULF countries are witnessing a turbulent phenomenon that is generally called the Arab Spring. Arab people themselves called it *sahwa* (resurgence). Everywhere there is debate regarding its result. Arab people are generally hopeful, but I am not.

According to my experience, every future result needs present preparation. Only a prepared society or educated society is the guarantee that this kind of upheaval may lead to a positive result. But I don't think that the present Arab society is a prepared society in that sense.

Secular-minded people generally believe that the present upheaval is a journey from dictatorship to democracy. But this kind of notion can be justified only through over-expectation. Democracy cannot be achieved through a jump, that is, suddenly from dictatorship to democracy.

Democracy is not simply a change of persons from military activists to political activists. The base of democracy are institutions. Before establishing democracy we need to establish institutions and provide educational training. Without education, democracy is bound to turn into anarchy. But it is a fact that Arab countries are lacking such institutions. Those who want to bring about democracy in Arab countries need to bring about a pre-democracy revolution. Before democratic institutions, political democracy will remain a distant dream.

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

Recent events in Egypt present a very relevant example. There was a similar kind of Arab movement in Egypt against Farouk, former king of Egypt. It was successful in dethroning King Farouk in 1952. But what happened was that kingship was replaced by a chain of military dictators: first General Naguib, then Gamal Abdul Nasser, Anwar Saadat and finally Hosni Mubarak. Now, the leader of a political party, Mohamed Morsi, has managed to take the same seat. But because the society was not educated in the democratic sense, again Mr. Morsi is facing the same kind of problems that were faced by the previous rulers. And, there is no sign that he will prove to be an exception.

Again democracy seems to be a distant dream. It is a fact that result is the criterion. Any movement that leads to positive result is good, otherwise it is not. Change is good, but when change results in worsening the situation then change is not advisable.

First of all, people have to be educated and then institutions have to be established; only then is it possible to hold free and fair elections. Only after this can a democratic system be established in any country. And without a doubt, the Arab world is no exception.

Arab Spring is nothing but a kind of political reaction. Reaction always leads to anarchy and not democracy. The basis of democracy is democratic education and non-governmental institutions. Through these non-political activities a society is formed, and when there is a democratic society, a time comes to hold fair and free elections. From this emerges a true democratic rule.

Democracy implies contesting of elections between two parties. It is but natural that one would win and the other would lose. Then the party that loses must accept this defeat by heart. This gives a chance to the winning party to rule the country for a limited period as prescribed by law. This is the spirit of democracy as demonstrated by developed countries, in that the loser is the first to announce the acceptance of his defeat and sends his best wishes to the winner.

Acceptance of defeat is the spirit of democracy. If this spirit is lacking then what will result after elections is not a democratic rule but a new kind of politics of opposition, and the whole democratic system will be shattered. Going by the past of Egypt and also its present, one can say with certainty that the coming of Mohamed Morsi to power does not mean the coming of democracy. In terms of result, it means the coming of a new form of politics of opposition. As far as nation building is concerned, it will surely remain a distant dream in Egypt.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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GOD, THE GREATEST

THE distinguished British mathematician, Sir Michael Francis Atiyah, has said that God is a mathematician. Likewise, Nobel Prize winning physicist, Paul Dirac has said 'God is a mathematician of a very high order.' This idea is not new. Over fifty years ago, English physicist and mathematician Sir James Jeans suggested that the universe was handiwork of a mathematician. Centuries before him Pythagoras said that all things are numbers. To Picasso, God was an artist. 'God is really another artist,' he said, 'He invented the giraffe, the elephant and the cat.' Einstein once said that the 'Lord is subtle and—though not malicious—is very clever.'

God's might is indeed manifest in a thousand ways.

One who observes the universe is confronted with the awesome feeling that there is a being greater than himself at work in it. A mathematician comes across such high mathematics as to make him aware of the triviality of his grasp of the subject. "God is a great mathematician!", he exclaims. To an artist, the art displayed in the universe appears so sublime as to make his art seem worthless and he spontaneously cries out, "God is the greatest artist!". The wisdom prevailing in the universe is such as to astonish a genius; he in turn discovers that there is a genius far greater than him at work.

The truth is that God is the greatest mathematician, the greatest artist and the greatest genius. One who fails to find the manifestations of God in the universe is blind, and one who does not believe in God after having seen Him, is insensate.

God's might is indeed manifest in a thousand ways, but it is only those who open their minds and hearts to Him who can be truly aware of His greatness.



VALIDITY OF A SUBJECTIVE ARGUMENT

ALBERT Einstein (1879–1955) was a great scientific mind. In one of his letters dated January 3, 1954 to philosopher Eric B. Gutkind, Einstein wrote about his concept of God. These are his words: “The word 'God' is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses.”

This statement is undoubtedly an unscientific statement by a scientific mind. This statement can be easily converted into another statement, that is — ‘Belief in God is a natural urge of a man. Instead of being a human weakness, it is truly a rational finding of man.’

Einstein, as a scientist, was a believer of the notion that only an objective argument is a valid argument; a subjective statement may reflect one’s belief but it has no credibility as a rational argument. In this sense, Einstein’s statement was against his own stand.

**Belief in God is a natural urge;
It is truly a rational finding of man.**

If we take Einstein’s statement as a scientific statement, then it means that it was a valid statement. It validates the veracity of subjective thinking. Here we have only two options: either reject Einstein’s statement as invalid, or if we accept it as a valid statement then we have no right to reject those subjective statements given by religious people. If one subjective statement is right, then all the subjective statements are right, provided they stand rational scrutiny.

When Einstein made this statement, perhaps he was not aware that by this he was demolishing the edifice of objective science. He was equating subjective argument with objective argument. The above example shows that this kind of contradiction in thought is widespread amongst scholars, not only among artists, but also among scientists.

One can say that in principle, an objective statement and a subjective statement can both be valid statements. The real criterion is whether they stand rational scrutiny or not. If it stands rational scrutiny, the subjective statement is as valid as the objective statement.

For example, if a person says, 'I am thirsty', one can say that this is a subjective statement. If you scrutinize the statement, you will discover that thirst is a natural need of man. No one, including Einstein can say that thirst is a human weakness.

This analysis will lead you to believe that the statement of the person was quite rational; consequently, a valid statement. Although, in logical categorization it was a subjective statement—that is, it was not demonstrable objectively.



Not a minute to spare

*When a man has a specific and
worthwhile goal before him,
he sets a great value upon his time,
but when bereft of a goal,
time hangs heavily
upon his hands.*

*It is then that ceremonial gatherings
and vain pursuits become
welcome occupations.
He makes no real life for himself,
but depends upon others
for occupation and distraction.*

*In this way, he drifts along,
like a ship without a rudder,
to the end of his useless life.*

*On the surface, he has led a full, busy life,
but, on closer inspection, he discovers, too late,
that his achievements are nil, and that he has
frittered away his precious existence in
empty, meaningless diversions.*

GLOBAL WARMING OR WARNING

GLOBAL warming is regarded as the greatest problem besetting mankind at the present time. Scientific investigations have revealed that the earth's life support system dependent upon the balance of nature is fast falling apart. It is greatly feared that soon a time will come when nothing will be left on earth to ensure the survival of life.

To mitigate the horrors of this forecast period, many strategies are being planned in advance. Since it is feared that—as a result of climatic change—all food crops may be wiped off the face of the earth, one of the strategies has been to build a vault for the safe storage of the different varieties of seeds in Norway. It will then be possible to cultivate crops at a later stage to fulfil the world's food requirements.

Soon, a time will come when nothing will be left on earth to ensure the survival of life.

The Global Seed Vault was established in 2008. On its inauguration, important international personalities were present, including the President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Baroso, as well as Wangari Matai, the Nobel Prize winning environmentalist, besides others. The event was widely reported with one report titled: 'Doomsday Vault Comes to Life'.

That is to say that the vault is a safe storage ready for doomsday. The report also tells us that out of fear of general crop devastation, the global seed vault has been built on a mountain on the island of Svalbard in Norway, 1000 km from the North Pole. Three spacious cold chambers—provide storage for some seven hundred and fifty thousand samples of seeds from all over the world. A Global Crop Diversity Trust has been formed to oversee this venture. One media report calls this storage facility, "a Noah's Ark of food in the event of a global catastrophe, an Arctic 'Doomsday Vault' filled with samples of vital seeds."

It would be more appropriate to compare the food storage vault built in Norway atop a mountain not with Noah's Ark but with the fate of Noah's son Kan'an.

The Quran states that in the last days of Noah's life, when the floods came Kan'an, the rebellious son of Noah, said:

'I will betake myself for refuge to a mountain that shall protect me from the water.' Noah replied to his son that the flood was a divine matter—'the flood waters are sent by God'—and no mountain could protect him from this.

THE QURAN, 11: 43

People make full use of divine blessings, but they fail to acknowledge the Giver of these blessings.

Events showed that what the Prophet Noah had said about the flood was true, and no one was saved from this flood except for the Prophet and his small group of companions. The same is true of the flood of Doomsday, from which no mountain top or Foodgrain Vault will be saved. The oncoming flood is going to alter the face of the world completely. After the onset of this flood no one will find any refuge.

In ancient times, human beings inhabited only the Mesopotamian region, situated between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. When perversion set in amongst these people, God sent them His messenger, Noah, to whom He granted a very long life.

He had a very long struggle trying to communicate God's message to his people. But with the exception of a few, the majority did not accept his message or mend their ways. Finally, the Prophet Noah gave them the last warning and told them that if they did not reform themselves, they would be destroyed by a flood. But they ignored his warning. Finally the great Flood came and drowned them all.

The present age has been one of an explosion of divine blessings. But the abundance of these blessings has only increased people's arrogance. People have made full use of these blessings, but they have become distanced to a very great extent from the Giver of these blessings. Perversion in the name of freedom has become the general culture of the present times.

Just as the Prophet Noah had given a prior warning of the ancient flood, now also modern science is giving a prior warning of the imminent flood of the present era. For the past several years, scientists from all

over the world have been giving us the news that as a result of global warming, huge reservoirs of ice are continuously melting. The glaciers and the ice of the North and South Poles are fast melting resulting in a rise in global sea levels.

It is 'Global Warming' which is causing all this climatic change. Scientists have also predicted that, very soon, all the ice will melt, resulting in a severe flood, which will be of a far greater magnitude than Noah's Flood. This flood will engulf the earth and the entire population of the world will be destroyed.

The Prophet made it clear that human beings had not been settled on earth for all eternity; that a time would come when the present inhabited world would come to an end and be replaced by another world. Here good will be rewarded and evil will be punished.

A time will come when the present inhabited world will come to an end and be replaced by another world.

In the 7th century, the Prophet of Islam said that the distance between him and Doomsday was only that between his two fingers (*Sahih al Bukhari, Kitab ar Riqaaq*).

The phenomenon of global warming shows that this distance has now been covered and that the climatic change, as the scientists have predicted, has now reached the point of being irreversible.

What was to happen has already happened. The final day has come very close. Now the time has ultimately come when man has to change himself: he has to abandon the way of disobedience to God and opt for the path of obedience to Him. Nature is silently calling upon man to mend his ways before he finds that he has no further opportunity to do so.



ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

What is Spirituality, or *Rabbaniyat*?

It is the elevation of the human condition to a plane on which the mind is focused on the higher, non-material realities of a godly existence. The opposite of spirituality is materialism, a course followed all too often in this world. One who takes this course, giving all his attention to worldly things; or one who centres his attention on mere appearances is regarded as being materialistic. Conversely, one who rises above material things or appearances, who finds his focus of interest in non-material things, is regarded as being spiritual or godly. The latter is one who obeys the injunction of the Quran:

O people, be devoted servants of God.

THE QURAN, 3: 79

A materialistic person is kindled with the desire to possess anything that is attractive to him, and this is a clear indication that materialism is a major motivating factor in his life. While, one who sees the same things, but remains unaffected by the notions of luxury that they convey, and feels no desire to acquire them, lives in a more rarefied sphere in which materialism plays no part. He sees no attraction in the lesser world of material appearances, being engrossed in the higher realities of the supremely spiritual life. The truly non-material person is never influenced by superficialities: his soul exists at a profound level of spirituality.

**The opposite of spirituality is materialism,
a course followed all too often in this world.**

Those who live for worldly pleasures believe that gratification cannot be had except from material things. Had they experienced spiritual pleasure, they would certainly have forgotten material pleasure. The pleasure derived from material things is limited in nature and very short-lived; whereas spiritual pleasure may be eternally savoured.

The materialistic person can find pleasure only in something which he or she actually experiences, but the spiritual person lives on a higher

plane. For him, even seeing things in another's possession, occasions an outpouring of his gratefulness to God from the innermost recesses of his heart. A materially-minded person sees only the creation, while a spiritually inclined person sees the splendour of the Creator through creation. The greatest source of pleasure is in the remembrance of God. It is this reality which finds expression in the following verse of the Quran:

It is only in the remembrance of God that hearts are comforted.

THE QURAN, 13: 28

Comfort means not just the temporary solace to be found in everyday convenience, but the real comfort with its implications of peace of mind that can stem only from God Almighty. Man by nature is an idealistic creature. Anything short of ideal can attract only fitful attention from him, whereas true and lasting comfort can be achieved only through the Perfect Being. If materialism is to live a life of limitations, spirituality is to live in limitlessness.

The pleasure derived from material things is limited in nature and very short-lived; whereas spiritual pleasure may be eternally savoured.

The universe has been fashioned by God in a way that it may become a source of spiritual inspiration for man. According to the Quran, it is the quality of '*tawassum*' that enables one to find inspiration in the universe. *Tawassum* is the ability to understand the signs of nature. That is, to observe the phenomena of the universe in order to draw lessons from them and receive spiritual nourishment from physical events. God is so generous that He has created the whole universe to be at our service, day and night.

A verse of the Quran:

And He gave you all that you asked for.

THE QURAN, 14: 34

This means that whatever is needed for Man to live a good life on this Earth has been prepared in advance by God, directly and indirectly. The only price to be made for these endless blessings is thankfulness; which is man's recognition from the depths of his heart, that God is the Giver and Man is the receiver. All these blessings of the Almighty are silently conveying the following message: "O man! Are you seeking something

greater than all this? Do you want spiritual peace in addition to material peace? Do you want a world of perfection after this imperfect world? Would you like to taste the blessings of God in the world of eternity after you have tasted them in this ephemeral world?"

God created a perfect and complete world as an eternal abode for man. This life is only a test, and man is under the observation of his Lord. With every utterance and movement, man is writing his own eternal destiny.

A materially-minded person sees only the creation, while a spiritually inclined person sees the splendour of the Creator through creation.

God has revealed himself in two books—*The Quran* and the *Universe*. The Quran is the literal version of God's word, while the universe or nature is a practical demonstration of it. These two are the basic sources of spiritual inspiration for a man who seeks to live a life according to the divine scheme.

The Quran says:

God is He who raised the Heavens without visible supports,
then He ascended the Throne. He has compelled the sun and
moon to be of service, each pursuing an appointed course;
He controls the Affairs (of the universe).

THE QURAN, 13: 2

When man sees the universe with its varied parts functioning in an absolutely coherent manner, he will spontaneously say: "There is no god but one God!" When he observes that the various parts of the universe function with absolute harmony, he realizes that, in like manner, he should also live in complete harmony with society, without hatred or malice towards anyone. When he sees the events of the universe always proceeding towards a meaningful result, he realizes that man's life too, must have a meaningful end.

From the Quran we learn that, in the very creation of the universe, the signs of God lie hidden all around us. A person, who is in a state of keen awareness when he reflects upon the things of the world, comes to see the Creator in the creation. The meaning of the creation of the universe is laid bare before him. Ultimately, the universe becomes a

permanent source of spiritual inspiration. In brief, the universe is a manifestation of the attributes of Almighty God. Hence, it is a source of spiritual nourishment for those who want to lead a divine life on earth.

There is nothing mysterious about spirituality in Islam. It is rather the direct result of the kind of intellectual development that takes place when a believer ponders over the Creator and His creation: he gains something in the process that may be termed spirituality. The source therefore, of Islamic spirituality is perusal and reflection rather than any sort of mysterious exercise. The Prophet Muhammad said: "God plants wisdom in the heart of one who shows disinclination for the world."

There is life for man, in spirituality: this is indeed the real life for man.



Knowledge and Truth

*There are two kinds of knowledge:
knowledge of things and knowledge of truth.*

*So far as 'things' are concerned, they display no attribute
which cannot be elucidated by direct argument.*

*But where truths are concerned, it is only
indirect argument which can throw any light upon them.*

*Indeed, in the case of scientific truths,
the validity of indirect, or inferential argument
is a matter of general acceptance.*

*Since religious truths are proved by the logic of similar
inferential argument, it may legitimately be argued that
they fall into the same intellectual bracket
as scientific truths.*

PROPHETIC WISDOM

ONE of the qualities of the Prophet of Islam was his great vision, as a result of which he urged his followers to adopt a wise approach in all their dealings. A number of sayings on this subject have appeared in books of *Hadith*. For instance he observed: 'We must not feel envy except for two kinds of people: those who, when given wealth, spend generously in the path of Truth, and those who, when given wisdom, judge accordingly and shed its light upon others.' A companion of the Prophet, Abdullah ibn Abbas said that the Prophet of Islam embraced him and prayed to God to grant him wisdom. (*Fathul Bari*, 7: 126)

A large number of traditions have been recorded which underscore the importance of wisdom. For instance, the Prophet of Islam said: 'How good is the gathering at which wise sayings are uttered.' Similarly, he said: 'There is no better gift than words of wisdom.' (*Ad Darmi*)

The importance of wisdom is so great that we are urged not to hesitate in accepting any words of wisdom, even from other nations or communities.

The Prophet once observed: 'A piece of wisdom is a believer's own lost possession, so wherever he finds it, he should adopt it as if he is the most deserving of it.'

In some traditions, wisdom and a deeper understanding have even more importance attached to them than worship. As recorded in the *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet);

One learned religious scholar carries more weight
than one thousand worshippers.

AI-TIRMIDHI and IBN MAJAH

The Prophet's entire life was filled with examples of wisdom. While discharging his responsibilities, he adopted the way of wisdom on all occasions and at all stages. Here is one example from his life:

On the occasion of confrontations

When the Prophet was thirty-five years old, before the time of his prophethood, a situation arose in Makkah, which called for tactful handling. The walls of the Kabah, which had collapsed for some reason,

were being rebuilt by the Quraysh tribe, and in the process a problem arose as to who should be given the privilege of laying the revered black stone in its place, in the Kabah wall. Since it was a matter of great prestige, everyone wanted this honour for himself.

The dispute on this question continued for several days without there being any amicable solution in sight. Finally, all the tribesmen concerned showed their willingness to accept a suggestion made by one of their senior members; namely, that the person who first entered the Kabah the following morning would be appointed as their arbitrator. The next morning when they all saw that the first person to enter the Kabah was the Prophet, they all chorused: "He is the trustworthy one (*Al-Ameen*). We shall all abide by his decision."

The Prophet then asked the people to bring a sheet of cloth. When it was produced, he spread it on the ground and placed the black stone on it. Then he asked the people to hold the sheet by the edges and carry it to the wall of the Kabah. The Prophet then placed the black stone in the wall with his own hands.

This act of the Prophet serves as a fine example of how a controversial matter can be amicably solved, and to everyone's entire satisfaction, by having everyone participate. Such matters often turn into prestige issues. But if the matter is wisely handled and people are assured that they will not lose face, no difficulty will be faced in addressing the problem.



Avoidance

*Reacting to provocation brings nothing but negative results;
whereas ignoring provocation leaves the way clear to
embark on planned construction and consolidation.*

*It is the law of this world that those who act make progress,
while those who react are doomed to failure.*

THINK, THINK, THINK

IF a living human being were to come out of a cave, where no living creature had previously entered, everyone would find that a breathtaking event. Everyone would start wondering how such a thing could happen. A live child born from its mother is an equally breathtaking event. People see this event happening every day, yet they do not give it a second thought.

Why is there this difference? The reason is that a child born to a mother is a daily occurrence. People have become used to this sight. They take it for granted. They do not see any need to think about it.

The freedom conferred upon man is for the purpose of finding out who leads a principled life and who leads an unprincipled life.

But if people were to think about this matter seriously, they would discover the Creator in the act of creation. On seeing the birth of a living, conscious human being, who can walk, see and speak, they would feel that every human child is a sign of the existence of the Creator. Every human being would appear to them as a living introduction to their Creator.

Similarly, when a human being comes to the planet earth, he finds that a whole life support system exists here for him. This life support system is so comprehensive that, without his having to pay any price, it fulfils all his requirements, both great and small. All of the earth as well as the sun and the moon are pressed into man's service in the most exceptional way.

Then the time comes when, all of a sudden, death draws near. Man, by his very nature desires an eternal life. But, within the span of a hundred years, every man and woman, against their will, must leave this world forever.

Every man born into this world has two major experiences: those of life and death. If man thinks seriously about these experiences, he will certainly discover a great reality, that is, that the settling of man on this world was not meant as a reward but rather as a test.

Man feels himself free in this present world. The freedom conferred upon him is for the purpose of finding out who makes proper use of his freedom and who makes wrong use of it, who leads a principled life and who leads an unprincipled life.

The pre-death period is for the purpose of testing man, while the post-death period is for reward or punishment.

If man thinks seriously, he will discover the reality that death is in fact the day of standing before his Creator. Man, in essence, is an eternal creature, but his lifespan has been divided into two parts—the pre-death period and the post-death period.

The pre-death period is for the purpose of testing us, while the post-death period is for reward or punishment, awarded on the basis of the record of our deeds in this life.

Today man finds himself in this world as a living, conscious being. This living, conscious existence is a permanent one. The day of death is the day where this live, conscious existence is taken out of this present, temporary world and is transferred to the next permanent world. Every man and woman will arrive at this stage. This will be an unimaginably grave moment. The present man will be resurrected after death, that is, during the second half of his lifespan. But all his material, worldly supports will have fallen away from him.

Behind him will be the world which is lost to him forever while, before him, will be the world where he must now lead an eternal life.

The wise man is the one who prepares himself for this day.



WOMEN IN ISLAM

by **Farida Khanam**

IN Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. There is no difference between man and woman as regards status, rights and blessings, both in this world and in the hereafter. Both are considered equal participants in the carrying out of the functions of daily living.

According to Islamic belief, both men and women are born as equal partners in life. In a fine expression of gender equality, the Quran declares:

Never will I waste the work of any of you, be they male or female:
You are members, one of another...

THE QURAN, 3: 195

We find the same definition in one of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam, (the *Hadith*):

Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit. (*Al Tirmizi*)

We see that both the sacred scriptures of Islam make it clear that neither sex is inferior or superior to the other. However, studies in biology and psychology show that the sexes are different in nature, each being designed for a different purpose. So, the Islamic maxim for men and women runs as:

Equal in respect, but different in role.

Men and women being equal, each has a different sphere of action. That is, in making their contribution to social activity, the men undertake whatever is physically harder, while the women deal with whatever is lighter.

Men and women can be likened to a cart running on two wheels. Each of the wheels contributes equally to the running of the cart. Even if only one of the wheels goes out of order, the cart will stop. The way a cart traverses its path with the help of the two wheels, exactly in the same way, with mutual cooperation of men and women, the system of life can be run efficiently.

It is a fact that women in general are not physically as strong as men but their physical weakness in no way implies their inferiority to men. The eyes are the most delicate parts of our body, while the nails by comparison are extremely hard. That does not mean that the nails are superior to the eyes. Just as two different kinds of fruits will differ in colour, taste, shape and texture, without one being superior or inferior to the other, so also do men and women have different qualities which distinguish male from female without there being any question of inferiority or superiority. They are endowed by nature with different capacities so that they may play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness.

This makes it clear that, although males and females differ from one another biologically, they are equal in terms of human status. No distinction is made between women and men as regards their respective rights. This is all for the good if they are to be lifetime companions.

Men and women in the eyes of Islam then are not equal duplicates of one another, but rather complement each other. This concept permits the shortcomings of one sex to be compensated for by the strengths of the other.

In respect of innate talents all individuals, be they men or women, differ from one another. Yet their need for each other is equal. All are of equal value. One is not more important or less important than the other. Similarly when it comes to the establishment of a home and raising a family, men and women have their separate roles to play. But each is vital. Each is indispensable to the other; and for them to come together, function in unison and live in harmony; there must be mutual respect. The prevailing sense is that a difference of biological function does not imply inequality. For the biological division of human beings into males and females is the result of the purposeful planning of our Creator.

In ancient times women had come to be considered inferior and were deprived, among other things, of the right to inherit property. Islam for the first time in human history gave them their due legal rights over property. According to the Quran

Women shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave;
whether it be little or much, it is legally theirs.

THE QURAN, 4: 7

In fact, Islam grants even more respect to women than to men. According to a *Hadith*, a man once came to the Prophet and asked him who rightfully deserved the best treatment from him.

“Your mother” ,said the Prophet.

“Who next?”, asked the man.

“Your mother.”

“Who comes next?”, the man asked again.

The Prophet again replied, “your mother.”

“Who after that?”, insisted the man.

“Your father”, said the Prophet.

Another example concerns Hajira, Prophet Abraham’s wife. Hajj, one of the forms of worship in Islam, entails the performance of *Sa’ee*, as one of the main rites of the Hajj. This is accomplished by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kabah. This running, enjoined upon every pilgrim, be they rich or poor, literate or illiterate, king or commoner, is an imitation of the desperate quest of Hajira, Prophet Abraham’s wife, for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant four thousand years ago. The performance of this rite is a lesson in struggling for the cause of God. It is of the utmost significance that this was an act performed by a woman. Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman’s greatness than God’s command to all men, literally to follow in her footsteps.

We can see that the principle applied by the expression ‘ladies first’ in modern times had already been established in Islam at the very outset.

If nature has decreed that man and woman should have different attributes and functions, it is so that, rather than duplicate each other, they should complement each other. And so long as they interact in life complementarily, the dictates of both nature and society are satisfactorily fulfilled.



SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

Part 2

Our universe is based on very firm laws. It is custom made for our habitation. The order, organisation and design evident in it is extraordinary. All of these compulsively lead us to accept that some agency outside the universe is responsible for its creation and functioning. Denying God's existence because of His being invisible is an anachronistic argument in the age of modern science. The choice does not lie between the universe without God and the universe with God; but rather between the universe with God and no universe at all.

..... Part 1 appeared in the previous issue

The Observation of Space

ONE of the new developments of modernity is space travel. A number of people have travelled into space and have studied the earth and many galaxies through high-powered telescopes, discovering many things which were hitherto unknown. One of these discoveries is that there is no planet similar to the earth anywhere in the vast universe. There is life on our earth with its totally balanced life support system. On the subject of how entirely appropriate this system was for human life on earth, one scientist typified it as "the right type of material at the right place."

The unique quality possessed by our earth is the life existing upon it, the highest form being that of human beings. In this respect the earth, where the existence of man is an exception, is a singularity in the vast universe. The existence of this kind of life is not a simple matter. Innumerable factors, making up the life support system, are essential to its survival and all of these factors must co-exist in exactly the right proportion to each other. This meaningful exception in the vast universe is undoubtedly the result of purposeful creation and proof of there being a Planner. The earth and its life support system could only have come into being as a result of Divine Intervention.

Earth: the Exception

If a space traveller could make a thorough survey of the entire universe, he would find that it was totally lifeless. In limitless space, he would

encounter terrible darkness, huge rocks and immense balls of fire — all in constant, frenzied movement. After passing through such a frightful scenario he would reach planet earth, where he would find an astonishing exception. Here, quite uniquely, there is water, vegetation; living things like fish, birds and animals, and human beings who are capable of thought. Even more astonishingly, there exists on Earth that factor which favours all these life forms — the ‘Life Support System’. Here exists a complete civilization which does not exist anywhere else in the vast universe. In other words — in a totally meaningless universe, here exists a highly meaningful world.

The meaningful exception of the Earth’s life support is undoubtedly the result of purposeful creation.

This set of circumstances tells us that planet Earth is a unique exception in the vast universe. This exception is no simple matter. This observation is proof of a great reality: the existence of God Almighty. This exception proves intervention; and intervention proves without doubt that an intervener exists, and when the existence of an intervener is proved, God’s existence is thereby also proved.

The Problem of Suffering Due to Evil

One of the problems regularly cited to cast doubt upon the existence of God is the problem of evil. This objection to belief in God is the result of the erroneous view: that evil in human life is God-made, whereas this is not true.

The actual reason for this misunderstanding is that when people observe human suffering due to evil, they seek an explanation. When, in many cases, this explanation is not immediately observable they allege that either there is no God controlling this world or, that if there is a God, He is unjust. But this attribution is quite wrong. This suffering which is found in human life is caused by people themselves, by others and often by the social system of which they are a part. Sometimes suffering has an immediate cause, and sometimes, the cause of the suffering can be traced back over several generations.

Making a Wrong Reference

The reason for these misapprehensions is that people study situations from the wrong angle. That is, they look at a phenomenon as if it

is related to God rather than to man. This goes entirely against scientific facts.

For instance, in modern times, there are many diseases known as 'lifestyle diseases' which are entirely man made. Corruption, pollution, adulteration, crime, oppression, greed and such man made evils have all been responsible for human suffering. Similarly, in the wake of violence, a number of people die or become disabled, all of which is due to human action.

The truth is that attributing entire human suffering to nature is unscientific. The study of all the branches of science tells us that nature is totally devoid of such evils. Laws of nature are so perfect that had it not been so, scientific research would become rudderless and come to an abrupt halt.

A Comparative Study

The first principle of the scientific study of the problem of evil is what may be called 'understanding in comparison'. This comparative study shows that this problem is limited purely to the human world, an extremely tiny part as compared to the entire universe. The rest of the universe with all its vastness is entirely a zero-defect world. There is evidence of innumerable happenings at all times throughout the universe, but we cannot find evil anywhere.

**The Earth is a unique exception in the vast universe.
Exception proves intervention and intervention
requires an Intervener.**

The human world is marred by disease, accidents, corruption, injustice, exploitation, hatred, war, enmity, arrogance, strife, crime, etc. In short, all kinds of evils are found in the human world. But the rest of the universe is totally free from such kinds of evil. It is this difference which proves that the problem of evil is a product of man himself rather than a product of nature. Had this problem been a product of nature, it would certainly be found throughout the universe.

Scientific Study

Scientific studies show that there is a clear difference between the human world and the rest of the universe. That is, the rest of the

universe is controlled by the eternal laws of nature. Contrary to this, man is free and leads his life according to his own free will. It is this difference which is, in actual fact, the real reason for what is called the 'problem of evil'.

A deeper study of this matter shows that all the evils of this human world are the result of the wrong use of human freedom. Corruption in social systems results in many kinds of diseases. Wars, global warming, pollution, ecological problems, etc, are all the result of the misuse of human freedom.

God's Creation Plan

Why did the Creator give man this freedom? To understand this point, we shall have to understand God's Creation Plan. According to this Plan, man has been given total freedom in this world. God has arranged this for the purpose of putting man to the test.

**Whenever there is freedom,
there is going to be the misuse of freedom.**

God wanted to bestow upon man a great reward. This great reward is Paradise – a place of eternal pleasure. Only those who make proper use of their freedom will be entitled to a place in Paradise. Those will be such individuals who practice self-discipline, in spite of having the freedom not to do so. Whenever there is freedom, there is going to be the misuse of freedom; but freedom is so precious that it cannot be taken away merely due to the risk of it being misused by man.

The Explanation of the Meaningfulness of the Universe

Another aspect of the discussion regarding God's existence relates to the meaningfulness of the universe.

Acceptance of God not only provides the explanation for the existence of this universe, but also gives complete meaningfulness to the universe. Not accepting the existence of God means reducing a meaningful universe to meaninglessness, whereas belief in God means having the conviction that the universe is ultimately going to reach a meaningful conclusion. The concepts of justice and injustice are part of a human being's mental make-up right from the moment he is born. Man has the inherent desire that whoever leads his life in accordance with the principles of justice should be rewarded and whoever leads a life of

injustice should be punished. This natural demand or urge finds its fulfilment only in acceptance of the concept of the universe with God. A denial of this concept provides no answer to this innate urge in man.

Every man, by birth, has an ocean of desires surging within him. In the present world, the fulfillment of these desires is not possible. According to the concept of the universe without God, man is fated to never have his desires fulfilled; but the concept of the universe with God, holds out the hope that man will find total fulfillment of his desires in the next stage of his life after death.

Consciousness of Time

The study of human psychology shows that man is a time-conscious creature. Man is the only creature cognizant of his past, present and future. But it is an undeniable fact that every one finds only the 'present' in his life. Deprived of his future, every man dies in depression. He acts for a better future throughout his present life. But in his limited life span, he cannot find his better future and he is forced to leave this world in despair. An internet search for, 'Risk Factor: Depression', lists over five hundred eminent people who have suffered depression, many of whom have died in a state of despair. The concept of the universe without God fails to provide any answer to the question of whether there is an after-life or not, whereas the concept of a universe with God provides satisfactory answers to all of man's questions on this subject.

The Principle of Pairs

The study of the universe shows that, here, everything has been created in pairs — negative electric particles are paired with positive electric particles, the flowers in the trees are divided into male and female, animals are both male and female, human beings are likewise male and female. This is a universal law. In this world everything has its pair.

Only a concept of a universe with God provides satisfactory answers to all of man's questions.

On a parallel with this, human life must also have its pair. That is, the incomplete life before death should be succeeded by a complete life after death. According to the concept of a universe with God, this 'pair' of human life exists; but according to the concept of a universe without God, this complementary pair does not exist.

The Failure of Idealism

All the philosophers and thinkers regard this present world as an eternal world. They believe that they will be able to build their desired world in this present world itself. The ideal society, the ideal state, the ideal system – all these concepts have stemmed from such a belief. These thinkers have been fascinated by such concepts all their lives. They persisted with the belief that civilization was the realization of this dream.

Acceptance of God not only provides the explanation for the existence of this universe, but also gives complete meaningfulness to the universe.

With modern industrial progress, people thought that civilizational development was finally going to lead them to their destination, when they would be able to build their paradise in the present world itself; but this notion has proved to be totally wrong.

The End of the World

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the founder of modern science, studied the laws of physics and predicted in 1704, that the modern world would come to an end in 2060. On the basis of this observation, scientists all over the world are saying that as a result of global warming, the end of the world has become certain. The further development of civilization is no longer possible. In his book, *Future Shock*, published in 1970, Alvin Toffler wrote that now the world had passed through the industrial age and was entering the super-industrial age. The next stage of civilization would be a stage of complete automation. Push-button culture would progress to the extent that everything would be done automatically. But the problem of global warming has brought the message not of the consummation of history but of the end of history. This turn of events is undoubtedly the most crucial issue of today. A satisfactory answer to the questions it raises is to be found only in the concept of the universe with God. Without this concept, it is just not possible to find a satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon.

This event is an argument in favour of the concept of the universe with God; an argument which fully satisfies reason and logic.

Such examples clearly prove that the concept of a Godless universe

has a very serious logical flaw. Such a concept would lead us to believe that our perfectly meaningful universe will come to a totally meaningless end.

On the other hand, the concept of the universe with God is totally free of this flaw. It is only when we believe in the concept of the universe with God that we can believe that this meaningful universe will culminate in a meaningful future.

Therefore we can say that:

The option that we have is not between a 'universe with God' and a 'universe without God'. The only option we have is between a 'universe with God' and 'no universe at all'.



Islamic Spirituality

Islam is a scheme of spiritual development.

*Its goal is to establish direct communion
between God and man
in order that man may become
the recipient of divine inspiration.*

*In such a religion
it is moderation
which is of the utmost importance,
not extremism or fundamentalism.*

*It is peace
which is of the utmost importance
and not violence.*

WORLD RELIGIONS AND THE SPIRIT OF TOLERANCE

The United Nations held the year 1995 as the year of tolerance. In a declaration signed in 1995 by 185 member nations, 16th November was dedicated as International Day for Tolerance. Tolerance was recognized as a permanent human requirement. And tolerance became a political, legal and moral duty to protect and preserve human rights.

ALL the great religions of the world can be broadly divided into two categories: Aryan religions and Semitic religions. Tolerance has been given equal importance in both these types of religions. Religion makes a man a spiritually developed human being. One who has elevated his spirituality cannot afford intolerance. The behaviour of a truly religious person is always one of tolerance.

As regards tolerance, the difference between the two types of religions is that of rationale of tolerance, instead of tolerance itself. The philosophic ground for tolerance in the Aryan religions is derived from their belief that truth is an all-pervading reality. According to this concept, the psychology of a religious person is that, 'If I am in the right, you too, according to your own tradition, are in the right.' That is to say, tolerance in Aryan religions is based on the concept of 'manyness' of reality.

The behaviour of a truly religious person is always one of tolerance.

The philosophic base for tolerance in Semitic religions is different from this, as these religions believe in the principle of oneness of reality. However, so far as the question of human respect is concerned, Semitic religions lay equal emphasis on this value. That is to say, the difference in this regard in both the branches of religions is one of philosophy not of practice. To put it differently the basis of tolerance in Aryan religions is on mutual recognition, while its basis in Semitic religions is on mutual respect. This difference is only one of philosophic explanation. So far as practical behaviour in this regard is concerned, there is no difference in either religion.

The spirit of tolerance is the essence of all religions. The man produced by religion can never be divested of it. Intolerance appears to be directed at others, but it is akin to killing man's own religious personality. Then how can a sincere person be willing to kill himself?

MAKING INSTANT HISTORY

IT is said that media is a powerful tool with respect to social reform. It is certainly true that the media has achieved the status of the greatest industry; It is present in every home, big or small. But there is no social reform. Everyone complains about the deterioration in human and social values. Why this failure of media in social reform? In spite of great expansion, media has little positive effect on our present society.

The reason lies in the very nature of media. The subject of media is to write instant history, it has no interest in the past or the future. The sole focus here is what is going on in the present. Due to this nature of media, it has failed to bring about any positive change in society.

Thinking about the past means taking lessons from previous experiences. The past is full of experiences and every experience has a lesson; but when we are not interested in the study of the past, we deprive ourselves from such lessons, and thus, reassessing our lives.

On the other hand, the future means thinking about tomorrow. The best planning is only one that is future-oriented, but media has no interest about future events.

In such a situation, media simply becomes a source of intellectual enjoyment on a daily basis. One who is engaged in it—both, in print and electronic forms, can only think about the present and their formula of life becomes, 'right here, right now'. This state of mind makes them self-centred; they cannot think about social values. Social betterment needs a mind that is socially-oriented but people of the above kind live with a self-oriented mind, and these kinds of people cannot play any role in social reform.

Another aspect of media is that it is not a mission; media is an industry. This nature of media makes it impotent for playing any role in terms of social reform. Social reform is a mission, it cannot be a business. And media, being an industry, like any other business organization cannot play a role in terms of social reform.

This is not a value judgment about media; it is simply an objective assessment. If it is expected that media will play a role in social reform,

that is an over-expectation; this kind of thinking will only create undue criticism towards the media. We should not expect that media is going to play any role in terms of social reform; but only take media as a provider of news. For this purpose, the media is doing its job, so why complain? Rather, we should say that anyone who has any complaints against the media with regard to social reform must themselves start a mission for that purpose. The media is not going to fulfil your hopes. It is the duty of the complainant and not of the media to do this job.

Media cannot be blamed; blame goes to those persons who know that it is our need to bring about reform in society, but they themselves do nothing. It is like transferring your duty to the media, in the form of a complaint. One has only two options in this regard; either take media as a provider of news or try to discharge their duty regarding social reform.

The above complaint is like asking for a third option, which is simply not an option in this world of reality. It is the same as uttering words which have no value.



The Will to Unite

*The feelings of love which cement family life
can be brought into being in social life
through conscious deliberations.*

*Unity can spring from a human awakening
to its ultimate necessity.*

*Where family life is governed by the heart,
social life is governed by the will.*

*There is nothing that cannot be endured
for the sake of unity, provided
there is the will to achieve it.*

RESERVATION: A SUICIDAL APPROACH

AFTER India's partition in 1947, the system of reservation was applied to Government jobs and education, on the grounds, ostensibly, that such a move was essential for the upliftment of the backward classes. The total reservation percentage in India is now about 52% with 27% towards OBC (Other Backward Classes). Muslims have availed this reservation and have been demanding for more. This system, however, has proved counter-productive. It has only led to Muslims becoming more backward, as they no longer had to compete to succeed.

RESERVATION MAKES US LETHARGIC

Such a policy implies 'achievement without hard work'. This eventually led to Muslim lethargy and the demand for privileged treatment. The Government of India has even approved 50% reservation for Muslim students in the Aligarh Muslim University. The reason? 'To promote the educational advancement of the Muslims of India'.

It is the spirit of competition which is the ladder to human progress.

It is illogical, however, to imagine that reservations will promote advancement. Only if the spirit of hard work is inculcated will this become a reality. In this age of meritocracy, any attempt to succeed through reservations is anachronistic.

COMPETITION LEADS TO PROGRESS

We live in a highly competitive world—a world in which our success, and sometimes our very survival, depends upon superior performance. It is the spirit of competition which is the ladder to human progress and without it, little advancement has been made in the history of mankind. The atomic age would have come much later, had it not been for America's determination to attain world leadership. The electronic age might not have seen such an exponential growth, had it not been for Japan's urge to climb to the top of the economic ladder. Imagine the scene if the Japanese had resorted to complaints and protests, instead of taking constructive action. Valuable time and energy would have been wasted and they would ultimately have faced ruination.

Indian Muslims should learn from this. In the last sixty years, on this predominantly Hindu sub-continent, the Indian Muslims, numbering over 175 million, have failed to benefit from being the largest minority group. At the time of partition, they opted to remain in India, but failed to adjust to their new situation. Although they could have become a truly creative minority, they missed the chance to prove their worth. Despite being the largest minority, they have become the most deprived of all the groups across the country.

With their creed, tradition, history and numbers, Muslims definitely had the moral stature to make a major contribution to the new India. The saying, 'in giving we receive', could well have been their motto. However, for this, they needed a period of harmony—a possibility only if they had unilaterally withdrawn all their grudges and complaints against the majority and risen above the reactionary psychology of the times. Unfortunately, however, they lacked dynamic and visionary leaders. As a result, Muslims became known as 'takers', rather than 'givers'.

AWAITING OPPORTUNITIES

Muslims have not yet realized that, from their 'back seat' position, they are quite free to exploit their own considerable potential. By putting aside notions of privilege and precedence, they could educate and develop themselves to keep pace with the fast-changing times. It is simply a question of getting their priorities right.

Reservation implies achievement without hard work.

Promod Batra, noted management author, when asked about the secret of success, said - "Starve the problems, feed the opportunities". This is sound advice for the Muslims as well. History, after all, abounds in examples of peoples who have successfully risen from the ashes of their dead selves. A case in point is modern Japan. Its denizens thought of themselves as 'children of the sun', genuinely superior to all other races and well within their rights in attempting to dominate other nations. Their slogan was 'East Asia for Japan'. Such thinking was responsible for Japanese aggression from 1937 to 1945, during which period they captured Manila, Singapore and Rangoon. However, they were finally crushed militarily with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by America.

On September 2nd 1945, Japan signed a document ratifying America's

supremacy over Japan. Yet Japan's subsequent success story is one of the greatest of modern times.

STRATEGIC RETREAT

It is only those who accept defeat and then do something positive about it that ultimately succeed. There is nothing to stop an individual, community or nation from working towards regaining, or even bettering its lost position, for a strategic retreat always makes it possible to return to the fray. Such tactics were very well understood by the Muslims 1,400 years ago while drafting up the peace treaty of Hudaibiya. This approach, although apparently over-conciliatory towards the opponent, ultimately facilitated the very positive progress of the Islamic mission.

In this competitive world, our success and sometimes our very survival, depends upon superior performance.

Sinking into a state of paranoid stagnation will achieve nothing. While there is nothing to be gained from pessimism, there is everything to be gained from a positive approach.



Flowers and Thorns

It is a fact of psychology that no single person can be an amalgam of all good qualities.

It is no simple matter to label a person wholly good or wholly bad. If there is to be harmony within a community, the bad side of its members must be tolerated, while their good side appreciated.

If we want to pluck flowers, we have also to bear the thorns that come with them. There is no way that one who cannot put up with thorns will be able to possess the flowers of this life.

INTRODUCTION TO THE QURAN

EVEN before the Prophet Muhammad was chosen by God as His messenger, he used to want to be all alone, so that he could think deeply about life. To do this, he used to retreat to the Cave of Hira on Mount An-Nur on the outskirts of Mecca. One night in the year A.D. 610, the Angel Gabriel appeared to him in this cave. He commanded him: "Read, in the name of your Lord!". Astonished, the Prophet replied: "I do not know how to read". The angel repeated these words three times, to which the Prophet gave the same reply. Then the angel said:

Read, in the name of your Lord, who created, who created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the most bountiful.

THE QURAN, 96: 1-3

The joys of this life should be taken as a foretaste of Paradise, and not as an unconditional blessing.

So began the revelation of the Holy Quran, in the Prophet's fortieth year. After memorizing each revelation, he instructed his companions to do likewise. He also called for a scribe (*katib al-wahy*) to write down every word. There were finally about twenty nine scribes all recording the divine revelations. The entire Quran, which took 23 years to complete, was later memorized by hundreds of the Prophet's companions during his lifetime.

The Earliest Copies of the Quran

The Caliph Uthman sent copies of the Quran to far-off places such as Damascus, Kufa and Basra, keeping one for himself and returning the original copy to Hafsa. Two of these very early copies, called *Mushaf Uthman*, still exist today, one in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul and the other in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Until the tenth century, Kufic, with its square-shaped letters, was the only script used to write the Quran. Later, in the eleventh century, the master calligrapher, Ibn al-Bawwab, developed new styles of writing based on the rules laid down by Ibn Muqla. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Arabic script continued to improve and often

the pages would be intricately decorated with gold and silver. The calligraphers were well rewarded for their work and this led to there being different schools of calligraphy in Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Iran. It is the modified *Maghribi* style of writing, developed in the period of the Ottoman Caliphs, which is now mostly in use.

The Quran was revealed to give glad tidings to the righteous and a warning to transgressors.

As early as the tenth century, wooden blocks were used to print the Quran. Moveable type was first used to print the Quran in Arabic in Germany in 1649. This was followed by copies printed during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries by Muslims in Russia, Kazan, Iran and Turkey.

The Early Translation of the Quran

To introduce Islam to neighbouring lands, the Prophet Muhammad sent to their various rulers, letters containing passages from the Quran. The following was included in the letter to the Negus of Abyssinia:

He is God besides whom there is no other deity. He is the sovereign Lord, the Most Pure, the Source of Peace, the Granter of Security, the Protector, the Mighty, the Subduer, the Supreme. Glory be to God, who is far above what they associate with Him.

THE QURAN, 59: 23

These letters were translated either by the messengers; that is, the Prophet's companions, or by the kings' interpreters. In this way, parts of the Quran began to be translated during the Prophet's own lifetime. Salman al-Farisi, a companion of the Prophet from Persia, translated the first Surah, *al-Fatiha*, into Persian. The first complete translations were done in Persian in the tenth century under the rule of the Samanid king. The first translation of the Quran into Latin was done in 1143 for Peter, the Abbot of the Monastery of Cluny, but was not published until 1543 at Basle. Over the centuries, this was followed by translations into German, Italian, Dutch, French and English. The first Muslim to translate the Quran into English was Muhammad Abdul-Hakim Khan of Patiala, India, in 1906. This was followed by a number of translations, the best of these being the translation with commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Lahore, 1934) and a translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (Hyderabad, India, 1938).

The Message of the Quran

The Quran, the true word of God, is an eternal guide for the whole of mankind. It answers all such questions as: 'Why has God placed humanity on earth? What is His scheme of things in creating such a vast universe? How should we lead our lives? What will happen to us after death?' etc. In it, man meets his Lord, beholds His promises and rejoices in His good tidings. It opens with the words: "Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe." This is a way of saying: "Thank You, God, Maker and Sustainer of all the creatures in the world." That is, He is One who, truly caring for His subjects, provides for all their needs.

The Quran, the true word of God, is an eternal guide for the whole of mankind.

One who discovers the Almighty in all His power and glory, suddenly finds the Lord forever in his heart and thoughts. This leads to a spontaneous outpouring of thanksgiving and adoration:

Inspire me, Lord, to render thanks for the favours.
You have bestowed on me and my parents, and to do
good works that will please You.

THE QURAN, 27: 19

The Divine Scheme of Things

The Quran was revealed to give glad tidings to the righteous and a warning to transgressors:

We have revealed to you this Book so that, by their Lord's will,
you may lead men from darkness to the light; to the path of
the Mighty, the Glorious One.

THE QURAN, 14: 1

Indeed, the Quranic mission is to make human beings fully understand God's plan. Although upright by nature, everyone must still undergo a period of testing during his short time on this earth, so that in the next world he may be justly rewarded or punished for his deeds or misdeeds in this life. For this trial to be valid, everyone has been given the freedom to choose either the right path, as is shown in the divine scriptures, or the wrong path—that of his own desires.

According to the Quran, as a part of the test for man, Satan will spring upon him from the front and from the rear, from the right and from the left. (THE QURAN, 7: 17)

But if he reads the Quran with understanding, he will never go astray. Moreover, the Quran shows that the joys of this life should be taken as a foretaste of Paradise, and not as an unconditional blessing. Man's freedom to savour these joys should never, therefore, be misused.

A Spiritual and Moral Guide

The Quran gives us rules for what is right and wrong in every aspect of daily life. It lays down man's duties not only to his Creator but also to himself and his fellow men. It defines true piety as belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book and the prophets and urges us to be kind to those in need.

The Quran is an eternal book, warning man of the coming of the Last Day. It is a verbal trumpet, blown before the actual last trumpet announcing the Day of Judgment.

The successful are those awakened by it.



Eternity is Better

*Successful is the person who purifies himself,
who remembers the name of his Lord, and prays.*

*Yet you prefer this life, although the life to come
is better and more lasting.*

*All this is written in earlier scriptures;
the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.*

(87: 14-19)

RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO THE TROUBLES OF OUR AGE

WHY is there widespread social and political upheaval in our present world? It is not due to injustice as is commonly assumed. It is due to an unrealistic concept of justice and an obsession with an unrealistic concept of human rights. People are living in a state of over-expectation and when they find that their expectations are not fulfilled, they react. This reaction begins from negative thinking, and then it takes the shape of protest and, finally, it takes a violent turn. The solution lies in reconsidering and correcting the generally accepted concept of human rights. This is where to begin. Without this, there can be no beginning at all.

The widespread social and political upheavals in our present world are due to an unrealistic concept of justice and human rights.

In the twentieth century, many movements were launched to champion human rights. But perhaps, there has been no significant movement based on the human duties. Through the print and electronic media, these movements gradually spread all over the world. Now, everyone is obsessed with the concept of human rights. With perhaps no exception, individuals and societies have become rights-conscious.

This is against the law of nature. The law of nature is based on the 'give-and-take' principle. But, the human rights concept has gone in a contrary direction, that is, 'taking without giving'—if not consciously, then unconsciously.

Under the influence of these movements, now everyone talks of ideal justice. But, our world is a world of competition and in a world of competition, ideal justice cannot be achieved. According to the law of nature, only working justice is achievable in this world and not ideal justice.

The only workable formula is that everyone should accept working justice. This will give one enough time to direct one's energies towards more important issues.

This law of nature is based on high wisdom, that is, everyone should be content with their needs and divert their ambitions to spiritual and ideological development.

The best formula for peace of mind is—as regards material things to remain contented and in spiritual matters, to be idealistic.

Man is an ideal-seeking animal. But the fact is that our world is a limited world. So, material idealism is not achievable in this world. On the contrary, spiritual idealism is completely achievable. So, the best formula for a successful life is; as regards material things, to remain contented, and in spiritual matters, to be idealistic.

This is the only formula that gives one peace of mind. This is the only formula that prevents a person from indulging in complaining and negative thinking.

It frees one of the desire to complain and helps in developing positive thinking. In other words, to live a successful life, a two point formula is: material 'status quoism' and spiritual idealism.



The Spiritual One

*One who is spiritually inclined
resorts constantly to his inner mental life —
something which no one can take away from him.*

*Such a man possesses inner contentment, and is
far above all material gain and loss.*

THE WORD OF GOD

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**

It is He who made the sun radiate a brilliant light and the moon shed its lustre, and ordained for it stages so that you may learn to count out the years and [to make other such] reckoning of time. God has not created all these without a purpose. He makes plain His revelations to men of understanding. 10: 5

In the alternation of night and day, and in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for a God-fearing people. 10: 6

The sun is at the most appropriate distance from our earth. That is why it has been a treasure-like source of light and heat for us. If a difference were to occur in this alignment, the sun would not be the sun for us: it would become the fire of hell. Instead of being the messenger of life, it would be the messenger of death. The moon rotates in its orbit in a precise, mathematical way. In spite of its being devoid of its own light, it not only gives us cool light, reflected from the sun, but also provides us with a natural calendar of months and days. These astronomical signs prove that there is strong purposefulness in the universe, and the fate of the purposeful universe cannot be purposeless.

Then, the appearance of day after night indicates, in the language of symbolism, the moral fact that, according to the law prevailing in this world of ours, light should prevail after the reign of darkness; the brightness of light should follow upon darkness. Where, before, human rights had been trampled upon, there will now ensue a system whereby rights will be honoured. Divine justice will dominate in place of human arrogance. Such a time is destined to come, when the prevalence of evil will come to an end and the recognition of truth will prevail everywhere.

God has revealed the realities of the Hereafter by means of symbols. Similarly, in the present world, God reveals Himself in the form of arguments, and not as a tangible manifestation. So, we can find God only in the manner and shape in which He reveals Himself and not in any other form.

In this world, God has offered mankind His guidance. But only those who are ready to follow it according to the godly plan are destined to receive this guidance. Only those who are ready to understand the truth presented in the language of reason and accept it will be inspired to tread the right path. Those who do not bow down before true argument fail to bow down, as it were, before God; it is like not accepting God. Such people may expect nothing but Hell as their reward.

In the heavens and on the earth, there are countless signs which become the elements of a lesson for those who are God-fearing. Fear, or apprehension, is a thing which makes a man serious. Unless a man is serious, he will not pay full attention to matters of importance and will not understand their various aspects.

The whole universe is held together in a creative balance. This is a clear indication of the fact that the Lord of the universe is One who has absolute power over man. Similarly, the initial life which we are now experiencing provides clear proof of the fact that a second life is also possible.

The appearance of material results in the present world and the non-appearance of moral results warrants the taking shape of another world where the moral results will be clearly in evidence. This is an unassailable truth, but this can be grasped only by one who looks at life in fear and apprehension.

Those who entertain no hope of meeting Us, being pleased and contented with the life of this world, and those who give no heed to Our signs, shall have their abode in the Fire in requital for their deeds. 10: 7-8

For whom is hell meant? It is for those who have forgotten that they will have to face God; those who have contented themselves with the temporary amenities of this world as opposed to the eternal bounties of the Hereafter; those who are satisfied with the things that purely as a matter of trial they have received in this world; those who attach themselves to ungodly things to such an extent that they become

completely unmindful of the realities revealed by God. All this amounts to treading the path of hell in the eyes of God, and those who adopt the way of hell will not arrive anywhere except in hell.

Those who believe and do good deeds will be guided by their Lord because of their faith. Rivers shall flow at their feet in the Gardens of Bliss. 10: 9

In that [state of happiness] they will call out; 'Glory be to You, O God!', while their greeting in it will be: 'Peace!' And the close of their call will be, 'All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe!' 10: 10

Literally, 'On account of their faith, God will lead them towards the goal of Paradise.' This shows that Faith is guidance for man; it prevents him from taking wrong paths and makes him tread the right way until it leads him to the real goal.

Faith is discovery of God. The thread of knowledge comes within the grasp of one who is blessed with faith. He becomes capable of starting his thinking from the right place on all matters. Never allowing his thoughts to err, he attains correctness in his thinking. Furthermore, belief in God is not simply acceptance of a bookish philosophy; it is belief in God Who is alive and Who is going to finally assemble all human beings before Him to take a final reckoning. In this way, Faith inculcates in man a sense of anxiety or apprehension about his future fate and this makes him extremely serious. He is forced to look at all his actions in the light of their being right or wrong, so that he may adopt only the right direction. In this way, Faith provides man with the right way of thinking as well as the power to distinguish between right and wrong, which acts as his permanent practical guide.

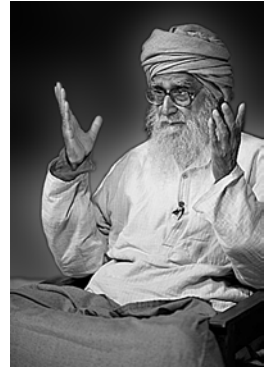
The Paradise of the Hereafter is for those who have, in this world, proved themselves to be deserving of it. The Hereafter is a place where one will directly experience and become directly immersed in the glories of God. So, the opportunity to live in Paradise will be given only to those who, in this world, had immersed themselves in the indirect manifestations of the glories of God. In the Hereafter, human hearts will be full of well-wishing and peace-desiring for each other. So, only those who, in this world had proved that in their hearts they had only such feelings for others, will find their abode in Paradise.



ASK MAULANA

When surrounded by problems, how can we remain positive?

It is very easy. If you become negative when you face problems, you become unable to tackle those problems, while if you remain positive you will be able to tackle it the right way. It is, therefore, quite counterproductive to become negative when facing problems. You simply cannot afford to be negative.



What, according to you, is Spirituality?

Spirituality is a discipline by which we can develop our personality along positive lines. Broadly speaking, there are two schools of spirituality. According to one school, spirituality is based on meditation; this spirituality may be called heart-based spirituality. I, however, believe in the other kind of spirituality that is based on contemplation. You may call it mind-based spirituality. Mind-based spirituality is based on thinking.

Could you give an example of mind-based spirituality?

For example, in our life there can be negative experiences at any moment. These experiences disturb our spirituality; but by applying our mind we can cause all this negativity and the tension generated by it to disappear and thus maintain our spirituality.

But, to develop ourselves spiritually, is it necessary to detach ourselves from the physical world?

No. The physical world can be helpful in developing spirituality. If you become a slave of material things, then the physical world becomes an obstacle to developing spirituality but if you become the master of the material world, you will be mature enough to squeeze spirituality from material things. For example, if someone abuses you, don't become upset. It is better to shake hands with him and say: 'My friend, there was a news item in today's paper and I would like to have your comments on it.' In this way, you can change the subject and so turn negativity into positivity.

How important is anti-self thinking?

Anti-self thinking means constantly reassessing your activities, constantly revising your own plan. It is said that 'to err is human.' This being so, it is a must for everyone to discover his errors and concede to having made wrong judgments. So, anti-self thinking is a self-correcting process. It means finding out where you went wrong, how you missed the bus.

It is often said that a person engrossed in spiritual issues is not very concerned with success in the material world. What is your comment on this?

I cannot subscribe to this notion. You know, Mahatma Gandhi was a spiritual person but was totally involved in national politics. So, there is no contradiction between these two areas. On the contrary, spirituality may help to achieve great success in fields other than that of spirituality. For spirituality makes you a mature person, and a mature person is in a better position to deal with the affairs of life.

So, is spirituality then a human need?

Yes, spirituality is our greatest need. Spirituality being a tool for normalizing a situation, it enables one to think positively and to live as a tension-free person. Spirituality makes one a mature person, one capable of taking healthy decisions.

Is science supportive of spirituality?

In a direct sense science cannot support spirituality, but in an indirect sense, it can very well do so. It can be a great supporter of spirituality. In every scientific discovery there are some implied spiritual lessons. By pondering over these discoveries, you can find the spiritual aspects of the lessons they teach.

Could you give an example?

For example, science has discovered that the heart is an organ for pumping blood and that this pumping is directly controlled by our unconscious mind. If it were up to me to cause the heart to pump by applying my conscious mind, I certainly would become so busy that I would have no time for anything else. This makes us realize the great gift of nature. It has made our conscious mind free. So, spiritual aspects in the discoveries of science are implied.

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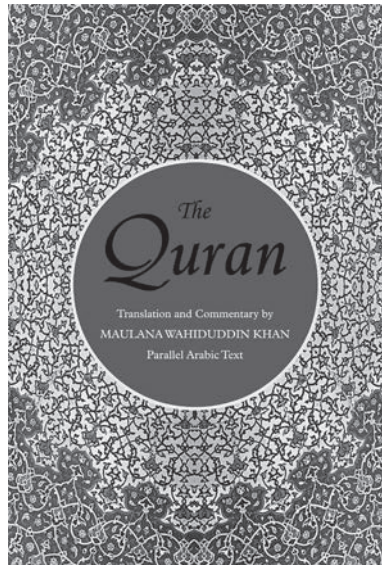
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The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

This concise, easy-to-read commentary will help you understand the deeper meaning of the Quran and its relevance in the world today. While focusing on the main themes of the Quran, such as God-realization, enlightenment, closeness to God, remembrance, prayer, peace and spirituality, this guide to the Quran will show you how through reflection and contemplation, you can learn divine lessons from the Signs of God that are a part of our world.



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