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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

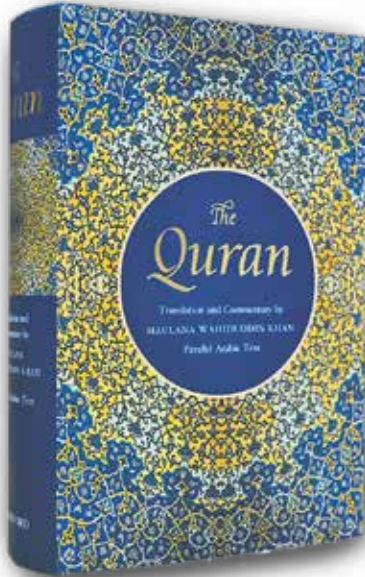


**The greater the learning,
the greater the progress in life.**

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

This commentary on the Quran is a concise, easy-to-read guide that enables today's readers to understand the deeper meanings of the Quran and to reflect upon its relevance in the present world. It focuses on the main themes of the Quran, such as God-realization, enlightenment, closeness to God, remembrance, prayer, peace and spirituality. It lays stress on the fact that through reflection, deep thinking and contemplation, divine lessons can be learnt from the signs of God scattered across the world.



This commentary thus explains the meaning of the Quran in such a way as to give readers a clearer understanding of the message of the Quran and helps them in finding their own way of making it relevant to themselves.

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ISSUE 38 FEBRUARY 2016

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MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

DR. FARIDA KHANAM

NAGHMA SIDDIQI

MARIA KHAN

PROF. ZAHEERUDDIN

AIJAZ AHMED

MOHAMMAD USMAN

PRINTER AND PUBLISHER

FATHIMA SARAH

OFFICE

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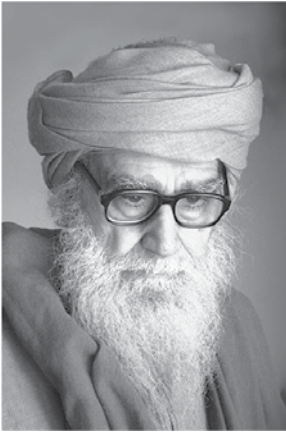
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. 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.

GERMAN statesman Otto von Bismarck observed that politics is the art of the possible. This aphorism can be extended to include planning. Planning should be done on the basis of what is available of what remains. Such planning can be termed as 'planning based on remnants'.

In chalking out a course of action, it is preferable to do one's best and accept whatever be the outcome. Quite often unrealistic expectations to see total fulfillment of one's expectations lead to disappointment. Discontentment with partial results makes it a case of 'it should be all or nothing'.

This goes against the law of nature. It is sensible to accept and be content with achieving even a part or a fraction of one's expectations. Nations which launched their initiatives with great enthusiasm, ended up as failed states. They could neither achieve what they set out to do, nor retain what they already possessed. The following Hindi maxim applies to their case: "Aadhi chhod ke sajji dhawe, aadhi rahe na sajji pave"- "One who runs after the whole, leaving behind the part, loses both the part and the whole".

A contrary example is the achievements of Japan and Germany. After World War II, both nations lost large areas of land. Germany lost to the

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

Soviet Union the eastern part of its country including part of Berlin. Japan had to surrender the Okinawa Islands, to the United States. Both countries made plans for their future economic development by first setting aside what they had lost. The result was miraculous: Germany, led by its first post-war Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, emerged as Europe's industrial leader. Similarly, Japan under the wise leadership of Emperor Hirohito, rose to be the economic superpower of Asia.

This is the miracle of planning based on the remaining part of a whole, unlike planning which entails the pursuit of an erstwhile whole. The best principle in life is not to be concerned with what has been lost, but by planning wisely to avail of what is still extant. Sooner or later, one will emerge as a super achiever. This holds true for both nations and individuals.

The best principle in life is not to be concerned with what has been lost, but by planning wisely to avail of what is still extant.

Another good example is Singapore. Previously part of Malaysia, Singapore was expelled from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 and became an independent state. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore likewise adopted the policy of planning based on remnants. Singapore though a small fraction of the size of Malaysia is today far more developed than Malaysia.

All individuals and nations have ambitions which they seek to fulfil. Wise planning for the fulfilment of a goal requires adjustment between personal ambition and available resources. Good planning is realistically weighing one's personal ambitions vis-à-vis available resources. We cannot change the course taken by the external world, nor can we master nature. Our only option is to make a realistic adjustment between our ambitions and the resources available in the real world. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org



Secret of Knowledge

To acquire higher knowledge, you need a mindset that admits that you do not know, not a mindset that insists that you do know.

ANOTHER DAY HOW WONDERFUL!

A Blessing of God

WHEN you wake up in the morning, jump out of bed and shout, "Great! Another day!" You are a success. This was a view expressed by a prominent businessman, but it could very well be the scholar, the sage, the ascetic depending upon how you interpret success. Anyone who regards, the new day with such optimism is surely well-equipped, mentally and emotionally, to tackle whatever life has in store. Have we ever thought of this alternation of day and night as a totally unique occurrence, and being part of the divine pattern which produces such advantageous conditions for human existence? Nowhere in the universe, are there prime conditions such as we have on earth for the emergence and development of life as we know it.

Other heavenly bodies are either too hot, too cold, too gaseous, too windswept or too fiery, or can be like Jupiter and the moon, proceeding in their respective orbits without rotating on their axes, so that one half of the globe is permanently illuminated while the other is forever plunged in darkness.

The denizen of such a sphere would have no rising sun to stir his enthusiasm and no peaceful sunset to signal the moment for rest. There would be no periods of vigour and achievement alternating with soothing periods of repose. For the human being, accustomed to his diurnal-nocturnal alternation, such existence would be one of utter staleness and weariness, with no refreshment ever in sight. Yet we take all this for granted, and do not consider it necessary to offer up our thanks. This unique ordering of day and night is God's own doing, for the especial benefit of man, and we would do well never to lose sight of what an extraordinary blessing it is. □

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Discuss Differences

Differences of opinion are immensely beneficial. They bring to the fore new dimensions of issues under discussion and uncover hitherto hidden aspects of a subject.

OUR POTENTIAL IS OUR WEALTH

Not the Materialistic Things

PSYCHOLOGISTS estimate that man uses only ten percent of his abilities. Professor William James of Harvard University aptly observed, "What we ought to be, we are not ready to be." In spite of the great qualities nature has endowed us with, we are content to lead inferior lives. Discontentment sets in and we blame others for not giving us our due. We should look within ourselves to find the reasons for life's deficiencies. Constantly viewing others with envy and a sense of grievance can turn us into our own worst enemies. The fact should be faced fairly and squarely that only if we exploit our own potential to the full can we taste success. All other courses will lead to failure.

Constantly viewing others with envy and a sense of grievance can turn us into our own worst enemies.

It is essential to ensure at the outset that our efforts are directed at worthwhile objectives. Else our potential will be wasted.

Up to medieval times, gold being greatly prized, the preoccupations of the "scientists" of those days was to convert base metals into gold. Dreams of instant wealth drove people over the centuries to superhuman efforts.

But all the time, money and energy was spent in vain. Death always overtook them before they could achieve anything. It never seemed to occur to any of them that these metals had a different and greater potential than anyone could ever have imagined. Iron, for example, was convertible, not into gold, but into machinery, and could be used as a versatile building material of great strength. Today, western nations, having learnt these secrets built up the relative technology, and succeeded in acquiring far greater wealth than mere silver and gold. □

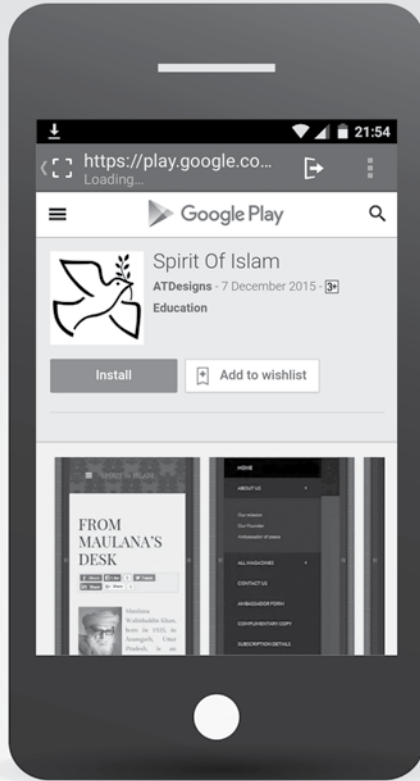


Scientific Attitude

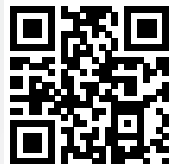
A scientific temper demands judging of matters on their true merit, not because they are for or against one.

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UNLOCKING THE GATES TO SUCCESS

Need the Right Key

THE guest struggled desperately to open the lock, and as he went on and on twisting and turning the key, his vexation finally turned to fury. "This lock is defective!" He shouted to anyone who cared to listen. Then he muttered under his breath that his host had been a fool to buy such a lock. The next to have his wrath vented on it was the lock-making industry, which produced worthless goods, not caring whether they worked or not and not caring whether people were put to trouble or not. Their business was only to make money out of unsuspecting consumers!

By this time he was at the end of his tether and decided to hammer it open. Just then, his host arrived and tried the key in the lock himself. "Oh, I am so sorry!" He exclaimed. "I quite forgot I had changed this lock, and gave you the wrong key." He then produced the right key and the lock opened instantly. The guest's ire had been quite misdirected and ultimately he achieved nothing by it except reduce himself to a state of utter exhaustion.

This modern age has changed the locks to life's doors, we cannot unlock new locks with old keys.

Many Muslims find themselves in this sorry predicament today. Faced with one impasse after another, finding areas which they urgently need to enter, difficult to access, nay, impenetrable, because they have the wrong keys. This modern age has changed the locks to life's doors, but we carry the same old keys, hopefully fitting them here and there, staring in frustration when locks do not snap open

for us, and then fritter our energies in senseless rage. We curse the lock-makers and the environment. But to no avail, because you just cannot unlock new locks with old keys.

Our leaders in their frustration, have thought fit to identify certain "enemies of Islam" and to trace all their woes to them—as if they were the sole purveyors of these impregnable locks. But in this world of God, there is no attitude more insensate than this. Here, if we feel deprived and thwarted, it is because we are suffering the punishments for our own negligence and shortcomings. In this world, most of our afflictions are due to our failure to live up to the standard of the times. The day we realise how much we are out of step with modernity, we shall be in a position to remove all obstacles from our path. We must fit the right keys to the locks on life's gates and all avenues will open before us. □

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND CONVERSION

An Islamic Perspective

Introduction

THERE is a heated debate on the issue of religious conversion, some being pro-conversion and others against it. This debate is based on a misunderstanding. Both the parties take conversion as proselytization, that is, one person attempting to change the religion of another person. But this is misleading. It portrays conversion as a bilateral issue, however it is not so.

To make one's choice is everyone's birthright. Today, this right of an individual has been established as an international norm. Every person is free to choose his education, his job, his business, his life partner, and so is the case of religion as well. Religion is also a matter of individual choice. No one has the right to apply curbs to religious freedom.

Modern concept of human rights says it is an individual's inalienable right to choose one's religion. It is affirmed in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and accepted by all the nations. The right to choose one's religion is also upheld by the Constitution of India.

Religious Conversion

Conversion in Islamic thinking takes place in a person's life as a result of intellectual revolution or spiritual transformation. It is not leaving one religious tradition for another. Conversion is the individual discovering the truth after an exhaustive search and then by choice, abandoning one religion for another.

Conversion, in its broadest sense goes much further ; it is a universal principle of nature. It is a historical process—healthy and inexorable and attempting to put a stop to it would be like trying to put a stop to history itself. Who in this world has the power to do so? Conversion is the birth of a new entity resulting from the encounter between old and new schools of thought. This is a universal law established by nature itself.

Modern concept of human rights says it is an individual's inalienable right to choose religion.

Study of human history reveals one process always at work. Karl Marx had wrongly called this dialectical materialism; It is a dialogue-

conversion process. That is, when two systems of thought clash, an intellectual revolution ensues. This dialogue-conversion process is the single ladder to all human progress. Whenever any revolutionary change has occurred or a group of people have succeeded in performing some great creative role, it has always come in the wake of this same dialogue-conversion process. There is no single form of this process. It can be religious or non-religious in nature. In the history of the last fifteen hundred years we find two major examples—one of religious conversion and the other of secular conversion.

The history of the Arabs provides the example of religious conversion. By the sixth century, A.D., the Arabs were leading a confined tribal life under the polytheist system. Then in the beginning of the seventh century Islam, the religion of monotheism, appeared. As a consequence, intensive dialogue began between the monotheists and polytheists. This dialogue assumed such an aggressive character that it came to the point of collision. As a result a new way of thinking was born among the Arabs, which kept growing till it took the form of a great intellectual revolution.

Conversion is the birth of a new entity resulting from the encounter between old and new schools of thought.

This intellectual revolution, the discovery of a new idea, resulted in the emergence of a new personality among the Arabs. In the words of a European historian, every one of them acquired such a revolutionary personality that their entire people became a nation of heroes. Within just fifty years they brought about that historical event which is called by a historian "the miracle of all miracles." *In The Making of Humanity* Robert Briffault (1876-

1948) puts this in a nutshell: "But for the Arabs, the western civilisation would never have arisen at all."

Another example is that of European Christian nations. After the crusades, a historical process extending several hundred years, these nations too went through a conversion process. This conversion was secular rather than religious. Intense conflict took place between science and religion. One report of this conflict can be seen in the book: *History of the Conflict between Science and Religion* by John William Draper (1811-1882).

This encounter continued for several hundred years in the form of dialogue and conflict until a new intellectual revolution was produced within the European nations and they finally bade good-bye to the

old and opted for the new. This revolution known as the Renaissance, enabled the European nations to emerge from the medieval to the modern age of science. The truth is that the human mind is a treasure house of unlimited power. In normal situations the human brain remains in a dormant state. It is only external shocks which awaken it, and the greater they are the greater the intellectual revolution within man. This shock treatment produces in man what psychologists call brainstorming. This brings about an intellectual change, a conversion that elevates a normal man to the level of superman who is then able to perform great feats.

Religious conversion is only a small part of this whole process. When the dialogue-conversion process is set in motion it cannot have limits set to it. It is not possible to allow one kind of conversion and to prohibit another. Being a stormy process, it is boundless.

TWO KINDS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

It must be appreciated that there are two major kinds of religious conversion—inner-faith conversion and inter faith conversion.

Let us take an example of inter-faith conversion. A multi-lingual Bengali Doctor of Philosophy, Nishi Kant Chattopadhyay, initially studied philosophy, then all major religions, faced intellectual confrontation with different faiths. Finally, he made an intellectual discovery, as a consequence of which he left his ancestral religion, in favour of Islam and changed his name to Azizuddin. He wrote a book, *Why I have embraced Islam*, which describes in detail the story of his intellectual development.

In normal situations the human brain remains in a dormant state. It is only external shocks which awaken it, and the greater they are the greater the intellectual revolution within man.

Examples of inner-faith conversion are several. Men and women born in Muslim families later left their family religion to turn into secularists or even atheists in some cases. However, sooner or later they approached a turning point in their lives when they came back to Islam as sincere practicing Muslims.

To sum up, conversion is a universal and inescapable law of nature. A study of psychology and history tells us that to give a new impetus to an individual or a group and to bring about a moral revolution, what is most effective is the sense of discovery. This feeling of having discovered some unknown truth, awakens the dormant powers of the

individual. This feeling turns an ordinary man into a superman. It is such supermen who cross the ocean, who scale mountains, and who by their heroic character let history enter a new age. Today human history is once again facing a deadlock and is in need of such people. Charged with new human power, they will give a strong push to human history to enter a new and better age.

Conversion in Islam

During his prophetic career in Makkah, wherever the Prophet saw a gathering, he would make it a point to address the people thus:

‘O people, say there is no god but God and you will attain God’s grace.

At first glance this may seem an invitation to people to change their religion. But the study of the Quran tells us that it was an invitation to a transformation in thinking, instead of a change of religion.

In the first phase of Islam, some Arab Bedouins had accepted Islam just by reciting the kalimah, or the creed of Islam, while they had not undergone any change in character at a deeper level. The Quran admonished them in strong terms:

‘The Arabs of the desert say, “We have believed.” Say to them, “You have not believed yet; say rather, “We have accepted Islam, for the true faith has not yet entered into your hearts.” (49: 14)

The feeling of having discovered some unknown truth, awakens the dormant powers of the individual.

Conversion to Islam means a thorough transformation of the person and not just a change of religion in the everyday sense. The Quran refuses to give its seal of approval to conversions which are mere formalities. In ancient Madinah about 300 people had become Muslims by reciting the Islamic creed. Apparently, they even said their prayers, and fasted, but they did all this in a hypocritical

manner, paying only lip service: their inner state did not correspond to their outward pronouncements.

They claimed verbal allegiance to Islam, but they lacked the Islamic spirit. The Quran brands the ‘Islam’ of such people as a falsity:

‘When the hypocrites come to you, they say: “We bear witness that you are God’s apostle.” God knows that you are indeed

His Messenger, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are lying.' (63: 1)

Religious conversion is the result of a realisation. When the individual's search for truth finds a convincing answer, his heart is intensely moved. His eyes are filled with tears. His whole existence is moulded in the hue of truth. He emerges a new and different person, having undergone a transformation. That is why the Quran uses no synonym for conversion. To express the act of conversion, more meaningful words have been used; for instance, the dawah mission (the communication of the message to others) of Islam finds mention in the Quran in these words:

Conversion to Islam means a thorough transformation of the person and not just a change of religion in the everyday sense.

'A light has come to you from God and a glorious Book with which He will guide to the paths of peace those that seek to please Him. He will lead them by His will from darkness to the light; He will guide them to a straight path.' (5: 15-16)

Those who enter the fold of Islam, influenced by their study of the Quran, are described thus:

Can one who knows that what ever has been sent down to you from your Lord is the Truth, be equal to one who is blind? It is only those who are endowed with insight who pay heed. (13: 19)

According to this verse, the real conversion takes place when the convert is aware he has entered the phase of gnosis and leaving behind the phase of ignorance. That is why a tradition of the Prophet speaks of the period prior to Islam as a period of ignorance.

Then there is the parable of the tree:

'Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree whose root is firm with its branches in the sky, yielding its fruit every season by God's leave? God gives parables to men so that they may become mindful. But an evil word is like an evil tree torn out of the earth, and has no stability. God will strengthen the faithful with His steadfast word, both in this life and in the Hereafter. He leaves the wrongdoers in error. God accomplishes what He pleases.' (14: 24-27)

These verses tell us the difference between one who has found the truth and one who has failed to do so. The latter is like the shrub growing on the upper surface of the soil: it is short-lived, either vanishing on its own or being pulled out, of no use to mankind. The former resembles a profitable, fruitful tree putting its roots deep down into the earth. It seems that it is for the earth and the earth is for it. Receiving sustenance from the earth and atmosphere, it benefits people immensely. Rooted as it is in the earth, it has a desirable and meaningful existence.

Religious Freedom in Islam

In 1948 the United Nations gave the world its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a universal charter for individuals as a matter of fundamental human dignity. Article 18 of this declaration reads as follows:

'Everyone has the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The real conversion takes place when the convert is aware that he has entered the phase of gnosis and leaving behind the phase of ignorance.

These ideas are in accordance with the principles of Islamic teaching, where man's intellectual development is firmly believed in and any system which favours intellectual development will, of necessity, uphold freedom of thought. Without this there would be no fruitful development of the human personality.

What is perhaps more important is the Islamic concept of predetermination. Man is born free while every other animate or inanimate object is subservient to God's will. Nothing in the heavens or on earth, except man, can decide the course of its own existence, this having been eternally predetermined. Everything, save man, must follow the path laid down by God, Islam requires man to make his own quest for truth. He should be fully conscious of this and impose upon himself as religious duty, to find that true nobility of character. External commands are for robots, not for fully mature human beings.

Real, live, human beings can never come into existence in an atmosphere of blinkered constraint. What truly moves the human

psyche is the feeling that their achievements have been the result of their own personal deliberations. Their opinions and beliefs are their own. This freedom of choice leads to their development as fully integrated personalities.

Compulsion Impermissible

According to the Quran, 'There is no compulsion in religion.' (2: 256)

This verse expresses a fundamental principle of Islam. If a person believes in the truth of something, he has every right to proclaim it, provided he supports it with logical arguments. His task is complete once he has described his belief clearly. But he has no right to compel others to accept it.

Freedom for All

Likewise, the Quran states:

'Say, the truth is from your Lord. Let him who will believe it, and let him who will reject it.' (18: 29)

This states that truth should be accepted or rejected by one's own decision, and not by imposition. The resulting belief is valid, since it is the outcome of one's own conscious decision. Forcing its acceptance upon unwilling or unprepared individuals is the negation of truth. Truth is acceptable only when man's reason, his intellect, attests to its being so. Imposition of a truth is the recognition of force. It is an insult to truth itself if people are bludgeoned into accepting it. A preacher's mission is to convey the truth to the members of his congregation. Once that is done, he has fulfilled his religious obligation. It is not his task to compel others to accept what he says. It is significant that in the Quran, God thus admonishes the Prophet:

Real, live, human beings can never come into existence in an atmosphere of blinkered constraint.

'Remind them, for you are only one of the warners. You are not at all a warder over them.' (88: 21-22)

This shows the respective roles of the preacher and his audience. It is the task of the preachers to convey the word of God, but his audience have the right to reject his message. The most that the preacher can do to convince his audience that he brings them the truth is to offer them logical arguments.

Respect for Others' Religions

A few Companions of the Prophet of Islam, in their zeal to propagate the new faith, began to abuse those who worshipped other gods. But this incurred God's displeasure, and a verse was revealed commanding them not to do so. (6: 108)

The freedom of religion advocated in this verse is a policy of mutual benefit. If we wish freedom for ourselves, the price we must pay is to grant the same right to others. There can be no exclusivity about freedom if there is to be justice in this world. By granting others their legal rights, they will be willing to reciprocate. But if we abuse or coerce, the result would be no religious freedom.

Truth is acceptable only when man's reason, his intellect, attests to its being so.

How far Islam goes along the road to religious freedom is made clear by an event in the Prophet's lifetime. The famous eighth century biographer, Ibn Ishaq, records how a delegation of Yemenese Christians came to see the Prophet of Islam and had a long dialogue with him in his mosque in Madinah, which went on until the Christians' hour for prayer. They desired to worship according

to their rites, in this mosque considered to be second in importance only to the Masjid-e-Haram in Makkah. As they were beginning their orations, one of the Muslims attempted to stop them from praying in the Christian way. But the Prophet intervened, permitting them to complete their prayers inside the mosque.

The Rights of Others

Islam gives serious consideration to religious freedom and takes pains to avoid infractions. There is an incident which illustrates this point. Umar Faruq, the second Caliph, travelled to Palestine at the request of the Christians to finalise the agreements between them and the Muslims. T.W. Arnold in his book, *The Preaching of Islam*, relates how

'In company with the Patriarch, Umar visited the holy places, and it is said while they were in the Church of the Resurrection, as it was the appointed hour of prayers, the Patriarch bade the Caliph offer his prayers there, but he thoughtfully refused, saying that if he were to do so, his followers might afterwards claim it as a place of Muslim worship.

He obviously foresaw later generations of Muslims being inspired to build a mosque on that very spot, thus setting up restrictions upon religious freedom. Umar's discretion is all the more remarkable for being the ruler of Palestine he could have done anything he wished. A man with less insight and forethought would have regarded praying inside the Church as harmless and that could in no way be interpreted as depriving anyone of his rights. Umar, in fact, moved a stone's throw away, and said his prayers at a discreet distance from the Church. Muslims did indeed come to this city later on, and as he had foreseen, built their mosque at the exact point where he had said his prayers. The mosque exists to this day, but presents no obstacle to Christian worship. It is true that in later times certain excessively zealous Muslims converted a number of non-Muslim places of worship into mosques. Such actions are to be deplored as deviations. Says Arnold,

'But such oppression was contrary to the tolerant spirit of Islam.'

Islam is the name given to teachings of the Quran and the Hadith, the finest example of living up to this standard was set by the Prophet and his Companions. The deeds of later generations, judged by these criteria, will be sadly deficient in true Islamic spirit. Those who make no attempt to live up to the Prophet's example are in no way representatives of Islam.

Imposition of a truth is the recognition of force. It is an insult to truth itself if people are bludgeoned into accepting it.

Religious tolerance requires that everyone be allowed to present his thoughts, and be given a quiet hearing. The truth is not to be forced upon one, but something which one is gently assisted to go in quest of personal discovery. In this respect, Islam is the greatest upholder of religious freedom.

The age of religious persecution has been replaced with that of total religious freedom all over the world. Post World War II, all the nations of the world came together to form the United Nations. They issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This charter emphasizes that

'Every man or woman enjoys the right to opt for any religion according to his or her will, and may propagate it peacefully.'

This declaration was accepted and signed by all the nations of the world. This Declaration of the United Nations was made part of the constitutions of all the signatory nations. For instance, the Indian

constitution, written after 1947, included article No. 18 in which every Indian citizen has been granted the freedom to practice and propagate his religion.

It will not be out of place to give the following news clip from Times of India Nov 20, 2015: 83% of Indians bat for religious freedom: Pew survey

NEW DELHI: India is among the countries that have highest support for religious freedom, with eight out of 10 Indians believing that it is very important to have the freedom to practice their faith compared to a global median of 74%, according to a survey by Pew Research Center.

The Indian Tradition of Tolerance

Tolerance is an integral part of India's tradition and shapes its national identity. India has a long history of tolerance, and is a multi-religious society. Almost all the major religions thrive in India with total harmony.

India has proved to be a peaceful haven for different religions and cultures.

Islam gives serious consideration to religious freedom and takes pains to avoid infractions.

This composite nature of the Indian society is not by accident. It is directly due to the Indian way of thinking. India believes in plurality. and in the words of the great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, "the manyness of reality." Hindus comprise the majority of the Indian population. The Hindu religion is based on *Advait Vad*, that is, monism. Monism means

that divine reality is one, manifested in different ways. The Hindus believe that everything in the cosmos is an *ansh*, or part, of divinity. They believe in the concept of an indwelling god, that is, every human being has a content of divinity. Due to this concept, the Hindu mind accords equal position to every man and woman. This is the genesis of the culture of tolerance in India.

Due to this mind set, the authorities of Hindu religion have given Islam a very honourable status. For example, Dr Bhagavan Das (1869-1958), a well-known Hindu scholar and author of several works on philosophy and religion, writes in his magnum opus, *Essential Unity of All Religions*: "The word *Islam* has a profound and noble meaning which is, indeed, by itself, the very essence of religion. Derived from *salm*, peace, shanti, it means 'peaceful acceptance' of God; calm resignation, submission, surrender."

The different religions of India have their own distinct history of how they reached this land. Islam reached India toward the end of the seventh century AD, that is, in the same period that is regarded among the three golden periods of Islam. This first group of Muslim Arabs came from Iraq by sea-route and settled in Kerala, a coastal state of India. Due to the above-mentioned Indian spirit, this group was hailed with respect. The Indians conferred on them the title of *Mappila*, which means a highly respectable person. Jawaharlal Nehru, in *The Discovery of India*, observes that when the Arabs came to India, they brought with them a brilliant culture.

Due to this reason, Islam found a very favourable atmosphere in India. Tara Chand, an eminent scholar of Ancient History and Culture has documented the advent and influence of Islam in India. His major contribution to Indo-Islamic culture and philosophy is the work *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*. The book, first published in 1922, has become a classic on this subject for researchers and historians.

Tolerance is an integral part of India's tradition and shapes its national identity. India has a long history of tolerance, and is a multi-religious society.

The Indian Constitution, which came into effect in January 1950, gives Muslims equal rights of citizenship and there is no discrimination on the basis of religion.

The President of India holds the highest office in the country. He is the head of the state and the first citizen of India. In the history of independent India, four Muslims have, to this date, held the office of the president. These were: Dr Zakir Hussain (1967-1969), Mohammad Hidayatullah (July-August 1969), Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed (1974-1977) and Dr APJ Abdul Kalam (2002-2007).

If there are some problems faced by the Muslim community in India, they are due to the law of nature. Differences are a part of the law of nature. Thus, it is but natural that there are problems in every society, including a Muslim society. It is impossible to have a country totally problem-free, and certainly India is not an exception.

(The above article is an abridged version of the paper of Dr. Farida Khanam, presented at South Asian Institute of Advanced Christian Studies-Bengaluru). □

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Leads to Success

THE chapter Al-Tin (The Fig) of the Quran is short, but has a great lesson, a universal message for a successful life. The relevant verse is as follows:

We have indeed created man In the best of moulds then We cast him down as the lowest of the low. (95: 4-5)

These verses have great meaning. Man has a unique personality with negative and positive aspects. One who makes the most of his plus points is successful, whereas one who becomes a victim of his minus points is doomed to failure. These two aspects can be termed reason and emotion. The path of reason leads to success, but the path of emotions leads to disaster. Reason, implying unbiased thinking, leads to a realistic approach. It makes you a mature person capable of giving well-considered responses and plan actions in a rational way. A life based on reason is invariably marked by success and salvation.

One who makes the most of his plus points is successful, whereas one who becomes a victim of his minus points is doomed to failure.

The emotional approach is another name for irrationality. Swayed by emotions, a person becomes unrealistic in his dealings. His actions are typified by the well-known saying: "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." A single word-change, and it reads: "Emotional people rush in where angels fear to tread."

The emotional approach can come at a great cost. Dealing with things emotionally is like mishandling glassware. Any human situation has to be handled with great care, otherwise the result will be like the smashing of delicate glassware. It will lead to breakdown in relationships.

The human personality is a unique combination of mind and body. It is up to you to use your personality to the best advantage and become a super achiever. Misusing your personality is like mishandling glassware. You are doomed to pay a heavy price for doing so. Freedom of choice if used with caution elevates man to the highest rank. On the other hand if it is misused then it makes one to fall to the lowest level. □

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 realise 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



GOD'S TREE

A TREE is but a manifestation of a seed's potential to derive sustenance from earth and water, and produce one of the most beautiful sights in the world in the form of a trunk, branches, leaves and flowers.

Man is much the same as a tree. He has been put on earth like a seed. But he can grow into a tree only by virtue of his own efforts. Providence however, has granted him innumerable sources of nourishment, and opportunities exist on earth for man to build an eternal future for himself. His efforts on earth will have the reward of the verdant gardens of Paradise in the next world. He will dwell there in eternal contentment.

For those who do not partake of this divine sustenance are like seeds, which are cast on to a rock or on barren land. Such seeds will never grow into trees. One who does not make use of the opportunities for growth in this world is like a defective seed, which never

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grows into a tree. Such a person will meet with eternal failure. The world he will inherit in the next life will be a total desert.

A heavenly soul is like a fine tree which grows in this world and is then transplanted in God's evergreen garden in the after-life. □



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THE CREATION PLAN OF GOD

Plan in the light of this Plan

EVERYONE asks the same questions. Who am I? Why am I here on this planet earth? What is the purpose of life? What is success and what is failure? These questions may be summed up in a single sentence: What is the creation plan of the Creator?

Chapter sixty seven of the Quran, Al Mulk (The Kingdom) answers this question. It is as follows: God created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. He is the Mighty the Most Forgiving One.

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

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

This test is also for a high purpose. Before creating man, God created an ideal world, Paradise. He wanted ideal men and women who would merit being settled in this Paradise for eternity. The present world is a selection ground for Paradise.

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

The divine scheme gives man great hope. This world is full of sorrows, pains and unwanted situations. But the divine scheme of life prescribed in the Quran gives us great solace, a bright light in the darkness. All those sorrows we experience in the present world are temporary, a period of testing, and once they qualify in the test, they will be fortunate candidates for eternal Paradise.

God created man with a well thought-out plan, the essence of which is to give man complete freedom—not simply as a gift, but as a test.

The Quran explains not only the existence of man, but also the misadventures that he faces in this world. It gives great meaning to all the good and the bad in life. Man is born with unique qualities, he is born with unlimited desires, his mind has enormous capacity but, before realising his potential and before fulfilling his desires, his life comes to an end.

This divine scheme gives man great hope, the present world may be one of problems, for in this world there are sorrows, pains and unwanted situations. But the divine scheme of life prescribed in the Quran gives us a great solace. Given his often untimely demise, man seems to be an inexplicable phenomenon, but in the light of the above divine scheme, human life becomes understandable. Keeping this in mind, one sees how everything falls into place. □



Not Unfavourable

Favourable external conditions make people complacent and inactive. Facing unfavourable external conditions develops discontentment, which, in turn, drives him to make efforts to change things for the better.

Gratefulness

From birth, all factors of life are made available to us in a perfectly balanced manner. It is heedlessness to fail to ponder over and appreciate God's greatness.

WOMANHOOD IN ISLAM

Totally Misunderstood

An anthology of the Quran prepared by English orientalist Edward William Lane (1801-1876) was published in 1843. It carried a foreword by way of introduction to Islamic teaching, which inter alia, stated that “the fatal point in Islam is the degradation of woman.”

This ill-considered observation gained such currency that it was commonly repeated as if it were an established fact. Almost a century and a half has elapsed, but this conviction has only deepened. It has even been quoted as if it were gospel truth by a prominent person in one of the court cases.

To interpret the Islamic concept of woman as “degradation”, is to distort the actual issue. Islam has never asserted that woman is inferior to man: it has only made the point that woman is differently constituted.

Suppose a doctor tells his patient that his eye is a very delicate organ of the body, to be treated gently and with great care, unlike his fingernails, which can be cut and filed if necessary. The doctor’s instruction does not mean that he is degrading the eye vis a vis the nail. He is only pointing out the difference between the nail and the eye.

If all laws in Islam are based on this fundamental reality that men and women are of two different genders, it is because their distinctive differences are established biological facts. This being so, male and female spheres of activity cannot be one and the same, whether in family or in social life. There must necessarily be differences in the kind of work that they do, and also in their places of work.

Islam has never asserted that woman is inferior to man: it has only made the point that woman is differently constituted.

All scriptures have held the same concept of woman without its ever having been doubted. In modern times it has been challenged by the women’s liberation movement, which holds that men and women are alike in every respect and that both should, therefore, be given equal opportunities.

This movement first reared its head in Britain in the 18th century, later spread across Europe and America. In 1772, the momentum increased with the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft. The author asserts that women should receive the

same treatment as men in education, work opportunities and politics, and the same moral standards should be applied to both genders. Such was the zeal and fervour with which this movement was launched that it spread far and wide. Both men and women participated, and differences between man and woman were brushed aside as being a sign of backwardness. By the beginning of the 20th century, this trend established its hold all over the world, and laws were made or modified accordingly. All doors were to be thrown open to men and women alike.

In practice, however, this experiment has been a failure. Even after a struggle of almost 200 years, women have failed to achieve equal status to that of men. The situation is the same today as it was before the launching of the "women's lib" movement. The only practical result has been that women have become a part of every field and work side by side with men. This has given rise to new problems and society is paying a heavy price for it.

Anyone who studies the islamic concept of woman hood will know that Islam considers the two genders as "Equal in respect but different in roles" .

The failure of women's liberation has led to wide-ranging research being carried out, employing strictly scientific methods. Finally the patent biological differences between men and women have been scientifically proved. These differences have all along been a reason for women's failure to find an equal place in every department of life. Where philosophers had doubted the religious concept of women erroneously—scientific findings have now re-established this concept's veracity.

For instance the following research though specifically related to the medical field is a point which can draw our attention to understanding the facts that the differences between the genders are a part of nature and not a creation of the society. They are real and one cannot just wish them away.

Catherine Woolley is the William Deering Chair in Biological Sciences, professor of neurobiology in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and a member of the Women's Health Research Institute at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

This is what she has to say:

"The importance of studying gender differences in the brain is about making biology and medicine relevant to everyone, to both men and women," said Catherine S. Woolley, senior author of the study. "It is not

about things such as who is better at reading a map or why more men than women choose to enter certain professions.”

Male and female brains operate differently at a molecular level, the research team reports in a new study of a brain function involved in learning and memory, responses to stress etc.

For 20 years, Woolley actively avoided studying gender differences in the brain until her own data showed her that differences between females and males were real.

“Being a scientist is about changing your mind in the face of new evidence,” Woolley said. “I had to change my mind in the face of this evidence.”

“We are not doing women—and specifically women’s health—any favors by pretending that things are the same if they are not,” Woolley said.

Currently a lot of research is focusing on these differences. Science has supported the religious concept of man and woman being different, as being the right one. Still the allegation continues to be made that Islam has ‘degraded’ woman. Anyone who studies the islamic concept of womanhood will know that Islam considers the two genders as “Equal in respect but different in roles”

Science has supported the religious concept of man and woman being different, as being the right one.

It is very unfortunate that well read people have said that religious laws pertaining to women were socially reactionary. Such remarks are made so indiscriminately and so frequently that is it time one considers the possible root causes. One of the root causes is that the results of research on the differences between man and woman have remained only an academic finding and need to be transformed into a popular intellectual revolution. The social penetration of these ideas will have to take place on a very large scale. It calls for an intellectual revolution. This is not far fetched since modern science has provided all the arguments in favour. It is only a question of engaging wholeheartedly in the dissemination of those findings. □



RESPECT ALL CULTURES

Do not Discriminate

GOD Almighty sent more than one hundred thousand prophets or messengers to every group of people. All the messengers of God enjoy the same status. In the chapter Al-Baqarah (The Heifer), the Quran refers to these messengers:

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and (so do) believers. They all believe in God and His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. They say, "We do not differentiate between any of His messengers. We hear and obey. Grant us your forgiveness. Lord, to You we shall all return". (2: 285)

The verse relates directly to the messengers or the prophets of God. It also has a broader significance that, everyone is worthy of respect, regardless of his creed or culture.

A healthy society is not necessarily uni-religious but one based on religious freedom and religious tolerance.

Respect for all cultures is greatly supportive of intellectual development.

Such belief promotes a culture of equal respect among mankind. Difference in belief is necessarily subject to discussion, but not a reason for discrimination. If your belief is different from that of others, you have the right to engage in discussion and dialogue on the subject, but no right to show disrespect. This holds true, even if you feel that your personal ideology enshrines the supreme truth. The culture of discrimination is alien to the divine religion.

Islam has two aims regarding society—dissemination of the truth as set forth in the Quran, and maintaining a healthy society that honours the principles of respect and peaceful co-existence. To this end, the Quran lays great emphasis on restraint and discipline—conflict and extremism being completely alien to the Islamic system of thought.

In everyday life, everyone should be disciplined and tolerant, for others have a right to live according to their convictions, just as you do. This is the best way to build a healthy society, one that is not necessarily a uni-religious society; one which is based on religious freedom and tolerance.

Mutual respect is not about moral value, it is also a great source of intellectual advancement. When you tolerate the ideology of others, you give free rein to express their views, creating an atmosphere conducive to positive discussion and peaceful dialogue. This invariably leads to intellectual challenges and ideological questioning. Respect for all cultures is greatly supportive of intellectual development.

It eliminates negative thinking and helps you to discover the beauty of other's thinking and way of life, vital for a healthy society.□



Ephemeral Life

Man tries to lead a prosperous life in this world without pausing to think that this life and all its achievements are limited to this world. They cease to exist at death.

Our Duty

There are millions of things that have been bestowed on us by the Creator. To acknowledge and be grateful for these blessings is the biggest duty of ours.

LOVE—THE COMMON POINT

Of the Three Semitic Religions

THERE are three religions in the Semitic family: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In historical order, Judaism comes first, Christianity second and Islam third. Common to all the three religions is love. During a visit to the US, I was invited by an American Church to deliver a lecture on Islam and peace. After my lecture, a Christian scholar asked: 'In Christianity, there is a moral injunction: 'Love your enemy'. Can you cite any such teaching from the Islamic scripture?'

Friends With All

I replied in the affirmative. In fact, all three Semitic religions have this precept in common. For example, the Old Testament, which is the sacred book of Judaism, says: 'Hatred stirs up dissension, but love overlooks all offences.' (Proverbs 10: 12) It is recorded in the Bible that Jesus once said: 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you.' (Mathew 5: 43-44) In one of its chapters, the Quran says: 'Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend.' (41: 34) This Quranic teaching dispels the 'we and they' concept. By nature, everyone is your friend, some are your actual friends while others are your potential friends. So try to turn this potential into actuality. This is the best principle for universal brotherhood and is common to all the three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Love is the greatest human virtue. Where there is love, everything is in harmony, and where there is hate, all that is good remains in jeopardy.

Love is the greatest human virtue. Where there is love, everything is in harmony, and where there is hate, all that is good remains in jeopardy. The fact is that difference is part of nature. It has rightly been said: 'Nature abhors uniformity.' This being so, differences will arise between individuals and groups. Then what is

the solution? Love is the only answer. What is the rationale behind the 'love-all' formula? It is that every other person is your benefactor. It is your lack of awareness of this fact that makes you unable to adopt this love-all culture. We are living in a civilisation. Whatever we make use of is a gift of this civilisation. What is civilisation? It is an advanced stage of

refinement in ethical and material matters, resulting from continuous effort on the part of all mankind. For example, when man started his life on planet earth, human existence was in a primitive state. It took thousands of years of joint efforts of humanity to bring in civilisation. For example, in the beginning, man used to walk on his own two legs, then travelled on horseback. Thanks to the development of the wheel travel by car was made possible.

Love All

The discovery of steam power made travel by steamship and rail possible. Man then produced airplanes and further facilitated the means of contact and communication. All this was not the work of any single human being: all of humanity was involved in this process. The discovery of this reality about history gives rise to the culture of 'love all', while unawareness of this leads to the 'hate all' culture. The most sensible formula is 'love all'. This is why all three Semitic religions teach us that we should love all others—even if they appear to be our 'enemies'. □

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a civilisation.
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On Anger

When provoked we get angry and release a great amount of energy. We can either channelise this energy towards the positive or the negative. On directing it towards the negative, we will develop feelings of revenge and hatred. By directing it towards the positive, we will grow intellectually.

FALSE PRIDE

Source of all Evils

SUCCESS always comes after great sacrifice. If you take success as including sacrifice, it will lead to the development of a realistic approach. On the contrary, if you think success should follow without sacrifice, you will develop false pride. False pride is disastrous and ruins the whole personality of a person. False pride always creates the psyche of paranoia.

Currently Muslims suffer from this problem. In the second-half of the seventh century and the first-half of the eighth century Muslims achieved great political success. Within a short period they brought an end to the Sassanid and Byzantine empires. They established Muslim rule in vast areas of Asia and Africa and built an empire that lasted for about one thousand years.

Muslims have done one-sided reporting in narrating their political achievements. They enumerated their achievements without mentioning the sacrifices that went into achieving it. Muslim scholars, overwhelmed with these achievements, wrote books about these events. Instead of titling them as books on history, they preferred titles with the word "victory". Their accounts were a chronology of victories; we see titles such as, *Futuh al-Sham* (Conquests of Syria), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* (Book of the Conquests of the Lands), and so on.

False pride is disastrous and ruins the whole personality of a person. False pride always creates the psyche of paranoia.

This was a fatal mistake as it reported success but excluded the sacrifice preceding it. Muslim historians claim that the history of Islam begins with the conquest of Makkah in the year AD 630. The fact is that it began more than two thousand years ago, when the Prophet Abraham settled his wife Hajira and their son Ishmael in the desert of Arabia. From here began a 'desert therapy'—that is, the growing up of the people of Arabia in the

lap of nature. This helped develop very fine qualities in them and it was among them that the Prophet of Islam and the Companions of the Prophet took birth.

It is these very special kind of people whom Philip K. Hitti calls a 'nursery of heroes'. From this nursery, people known as *sahaba*, or the Companions of the Prophet were chosen, and *tabeen*, or the companions

of the Companions. This heroic group created the history of Islam. Historian M N Roy in his book *Historical Role of Islam* has acknowledged their contributions in these glorious words: "The expansion of Islam is the most miraculous of all miracles."

Muslims of later generations reading these histories develop false pride and focus on the victories that accompanied the expansion of Islam, but ignore the sacrifice. □



'As It Is' Thinking

If a matter goes against us, we tend to play it down, and if it is in our favour, we make too much of it. This is insincerity. One must think as it is and speak as it is.

Speak With Caution

Never repeat or spread any information unless convinced of its authenticity. Maintain silence and investigate the truth of the matter before deciding to publicize it.

TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

We often talk of peace in the context of war. But this is a very narrow and restricted notion of peace. Peace is deeply linked with the entirety of human life. Peace is a complete ideology in itself. Peace is the only religion for both-man and the universe. It is the master-key that opens the doors to every success. Peace creates a favourable atmosphere for success in every endeavour. Without peace, no positive action—small or big—is possible.



SUICIDE BOMBING

TODAY, suicide bombing is a unique and terrible manifestation of violence. The deadliest instance took place in New York, commonly referred to as 9/11, when the famous Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre (WTC) were destroyed by a group of Muslim militants. They hijacked four passenger airplanes, two of which were flown into the towers of the WTC. The attack resulted in the death of about 3,000 people and brought down the 110-storey buildings, besides causing severe damage to surrounding buildings and structures.

It is apparent that Muslims top the list of those using such deadly methods of suicide bombing. Yet, suicide is completely forbidden in Islam. According to a tradition recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari, a badly injured Muslim, unable to bear the consequent pain, killed himself with his own sword. This was the first case of suicide in Islam. The Prophet said to his Companions that this person would be among the people of Hell.

Islam believes that the whole world including the Muslim world is dar al-insaan (the abode of human beings).

According to Islamic texts, suicide is absolutely unlawful. This being so, how is it that Muslims have established large organizations which train young people to carry out suicide attacks? A great amount of funding is required for such activities. And, it is Muslims who are funding them. Thus, in this organised activity the whole Muslim community is, directly or indirectly, involved. A saying of the Lebanese-

American writer Khalil Gibran (1883–1931) applies in this case:

‘A leaf does not fall without the silent consent of the tree.’ The root cause is that the Muslim community thinks of the world as being divided between Muslims and *kafirs* (non-believers); that, besides Muslims, everyone else is *kafir*; that the countries ruled by Muslims are *dar as-salam* (Land of Islam) while countries ruled by people other than Muslims are *dar al-kufr* (Land of Disbelief). This mindset makes Muslims think that any heinous act may be perpetrated with impunity against supposed disbelievers.

It is because of this negative mentality of the present day Muslims that the *ulama*, or Muslim scholars, have become emboldened to publicly declare suicide bombing as lawful—an act which has always been unlawful in the absolute sense.

Moreover, there are certain Muslim scholars who have gone to the extent of openly issuing fatwas, or verdicts, claiming that suicide is lawful. They have coined a new term—*istishhad* (to seek martyrdom)—justifying suicide bombing.

Such fatwas are undoubtedly wrong. And it is strange that the entire community of religious scholars has not openly condemned this patently wrong fatwa. The method of suicide bombing—known as hara-kiri—was first adopted in a big way by Japan. Traditionally practiced in that country, it was a ritual form of suicide carried out by slashing one’s abdomen.

According to Islamic texts, suicide is absolutely unlawful.

Japan adopted hara-kiri during the Second World War which turned out to be ineffective, and was subsequently abandoned. The practice of suicide bombing by Muslim militants has likewise become totally ineffective. By such attacks, they end several innocent lives, and eventually have nothing positive to show as results. Then why does this deadly suicide bombing still continue?

Muslims have developed a baseless belief that a believer killed in a battle becomes a martyr, and therefore goes straight to heaven. This is a false belief. Islamic teachings clearly show that, Muslims who kill themselves in suicide bombing will die an unlawful death. No heaven is waiting to welcome them.

Islam believes that the whole world including the Muslim world is *dar al-insaan* (the abode of human beings). It is Muslims' bounden duty to regard all human beings as God's creatures. Once, in Madinah, the Prophet of Islam, on seeing the funeral procession of a Jew, stood up in deference to it. One of his Companions asked him why he did so, to which he replied:

'Was he not a human being?'

The Prophet Muhammad thus recognised a commonality between himself and a Jew—that the God who had created him had also created the Jew. This is the real basis of human equality.

Today the armament industry is one of the most flourishing enterprises in the world. Who has made it so? It is clearly the buyers of arms. God gave them minds so that they might use it for a healthy purpose. But they have instead used them for a destructive purpose, which is against the divine will. The Creator will question them on how they used their minds—to a constructive end or a destructive end? The Creator will point out to them that He had given them their precious minds to be used for constructive purposes, but they used them instead for destructive purposes. Will they have any answer to this? □



An advertisement for 'Spirit of Islam Online'. On the left, a laptop is shown with its screen displaying text from 'THE GREATER JIHAD'. To the right, the text reads 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE' in large, bold, white letters. Below this, there is a hand cursor icon pointing at the word 'ONLINE', followed by an '@' symbol and the website address 'www.spiritofislam.co.in'.

THE YOUNG ARE A GREAT FORCE FOR GOOD

If Nurtured

YOUNG people, because of their high energy, are more enthusiastic and courageous. They respond easily to a new mission. This natural trait is demonstrated in the Quran, chapter Yunus (Jonah).

But none save a few youths declared their faith in Moses, (while others held back) for fear that Pharoah and his nobles would persecute them. Pharoah was high and mighty in the land and one who transgressed all bounds. (10: 83)

The history of missions, both religious and secular, shows that the central force has been the community of youth. Generally, a mission is started by a senior person, and those who respond are invariably the younger generation. It is a direct result of the divine scheme, a phenomenon specifically created by God Almighty.

Every mission, at least in the initial stages, needs young people. They may have energy but lack experience. Senior people must share their experience and the younger generation must share its energy. This brings a healthy blend that ensures success.

The Prophet Muhammad has set us an example. He was a senior person, but most of his adherents were young and called the Companions of the prophet. These Companions, fully aware of their limitations, followed the Prophet of Islam. This made it possible to bring about a revolution in the 7th century Arabia.

This revolution was unparalleled in its all-embracing scope. The Belgian historian Henri Pirenne observed: The Islamic revolution changed the face of the globe: the traditional order of history was overthrown.

Youth form a great positive force but they must not be over-confident. Confidence is good but over-confidence is a failing.

Senior people must share their experience and the younger generation must share its energy. This brings a healthy blend that ensures success.

Young people must know their limitations, accept the leadership of senior people and heed their advice. Modest young people are a huge asset but if arrogance prevents them from doing so, they become a liability to society. Great tasks call for unity and the concerted efforts of many people. It takes a leader to co-ordinate these efforts. Leaders must respect the young people and thereby get the acceptance of their leadership. □



Relationships

When a relationship fails to work, it is due to shortcomings in both the partners. But we tend to become critical of the other person—his actions, behaviour, attitude—and overlook our own shortcomings.

Giver Person

Man must target to be a giver to society and not merely a taker . While achieving his own interests, his actions must prove to be beneficial to society as well.

THE LESSON OF DEATH

Take it Seriously

THE moment a culprit hears the death sentence, he is as good as dead. It matters not whether his execution is the very next day or weeks later. Life loses all meaning. He falls silent and his smiles fade. Those hands, which were so freely raised to strike the weak and vulnerable, fall limp and lifeless by his sides.

Everyone alive today is to be “hanged” tomorrow. But everyone is lost in his today and blissfully unaware of his tomorrow. In this world, everyone is in some sense a culprit, but few pay heed to the fact that death can catch us unawares—it can even strike tomorrow.

Man lives in this world, an unthinking, pleasure-loving, materially ambitious creature, who enjoys having friends and riches. He revels in this. Then a strange event takes place. Death comes unannounced, he stops in his tracks and his eyes become sightless. In an instant he is bereft of all his worldly possessions—all that he holds dear—and he is carried away to the solitude of the grave.

This event makes plain the reality. It wordlessly conveys man’s sudden fall from power to powerlessness, from light to darkness,. Before death he finds himself in a world where his will is his own. After death he will be ushered into a world where he will be forced to bow to the will of Another.

Everyone is lost in his today and blissfully unaware of his tomorrow.

Were man to remember this reality, his life would be transformed. It would then appear inane to oppress the poor, hapless individuals in his clutches. He would realise that it was fruitless to oppress others if tomorrow he himself was to come under the control of Another. He would feel ashamed of having indulged in the idea of his own greatness, because greatness which does not endure is of no value. □



BOOK REVIEW

By Somali K Chakrabarti

SOME books entertain, some educate, and some leave a lasting impression on the mind. *The Age of Peace*, written by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, is one such book that falls in the latter category.

It is an enlightening and well researched book, which conveys the message of peace in a very rational, simple and convincing manner. The book has changed my perception that achieving social peace will always be an ever elusive condition that finds mention, perhaps only in mythological stories.

The Age of Peace not only upholds the need for peace, it also provides the rationale for establishing peace, and outlines the general principles based on which it is possible to establish peace in the society.

The author, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is a noted Islamic scholar and the founder of Centre of Peace and Spirituality in New Delhi, who has been internationally recognised for his contribution to world peace.

Peace, the author says, is a pre-condition for progress and social development. It is the '*summum bonum*' or the greatest good that is devoid of any negative effects. The author writes about individual peace (peace of mind) which results from self-management, and social peace, for which social management is needed.

It is an enlightening and well researched book, which conveys the message of peace in a very rational, simple and convincing manner.

Negating the general perception that peace would ensue from social justice, the author says, that this is an obscure theory, for as long as we think of peace as a derivative of social justice, it will remain elusive. The key, he says, is to accept peace as the status quo.

Just like most of us recognise the contribution of our family in shaping up our lives, similarly if we recognise the contribution of humanity at large and its role in providing us with the comfort and luxuries that we enjoy, then

gratitude and compassion would replace negativism and serve as an intrinsic check to violence.

Peace brings normalcy, it throws opens the door for opportunities, which when availed increase the chances of success. With peace one can achieve what one cannot achieve with violence.

This very thought changed my perception of peace. Accepting peace as the status quo, the present for what it is rather than what it should be, not living in denial and working calmly towards the goal is a very balanced approach, which is advocated by all religions.

Backed by innumerable examples from different parts of the world, from the past centuries to the modern age, the author advocates the use of non-confrontational method, peaceful activism, and spreading the message of peace through education and awareness.

The author touches upon sensitive issues such as the menace of terrorism, political dichotomy of Muslims and issues facing the Muslim community, militancy, misinterpretation of 'jihad' to legitimise militancy, and suicide bombings. Stressing upon the need for a counter ideology, the author says that the present militancy has no sanction in Islam.

He also talks about the futility of wars, and stresses upon the role of third party in putting an end to wars. Fighting, he says, is an archaic and outdated concept in the present age that provides people with alternatives to fulfil their ambitions without resorting to violence.

With peace one can achieve what one cannot achieve with violence.

Quoting some excerpts from the book:

The human mind has greatest potential, but it can only work in a peaceful atmosphere. In the absence of a peaceful environment for work, the mind's capability will remain unutilised.

The secret of success in life is not to make others suffer losses at your hands. The secret of success in life is to plan one's time and energy wisely to avail of the opportunities within one's reach.

History tells us that war is like a rootless tree. A storm can completely uproot it. But a peaceful plan is like a tree which stands upright on its own strong roots and remains unaffected by storms.

Violence or terrorism is a negation of God's creation plan.

Terrorism is an unnatural act. Neither reason nor conscience can ever sanction it. Terrorism always ends in repentance.

I had received a copy of this book from a blogger friend and after going through it, I found that it is a very relevant book for all particularly the youth in the turbulent times that we are living in.

The book has reinforced my belief that no religion can preach violence.

Extremism, terrorism and wars are all a fallout of greed of a few, who misinterpret religion and use it to their convenience.

It is a book that I would like to read over and over again. □

(The editorial committee of Spirit of Islam is highly grateful to the writer of this article).



Responsible Behaviour

Man's eyes should be set on shouldering his own responsibilities, rather than on the right or wrong attitude adopted by others.

Be Dutiful

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.

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**

But those of you who obey God and His Messenger and do good deeds, shall be doubly rewarded. For them We have made an excellent provision. Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women. If you fear God, do not be too soft-spoken in case the ill-intentioned should feel tempted. Speak in an appropriate manner. (33: 31-32)

The consorts of the Prophet had the position of leaders in the society. Such people have to make greater sacrifices than ordinary people. That is why God has promised a double reward for them. They use more will power than others in the performance of a (good) deed and hence receive greater credit for it.

The Prophet's consorts in view of their qualities came in contact with others often. People came seeking guidance on religious matters. That is why they were instructed to adopt a slightly dry tone while talking to others and not talk to them informally and familiarly, as one is likely to do in the case of near relatives (with whom marriage is not permissible).

Stay in your homes and do not flaunt your charms as in the former times of ignorance. Attend to your prayers, pay the zakat and obey God and His Messenger. Women of the [Prophet's] Household, God seeks only to remove all impurity from you, and to make you completely pure. Bear in mind all that is recited in your homes of the revelations of God and of wisdom. God is all pervading and all aware.

(33: 33-34)

Addressing the Prophet's consorts on correct behaviour, instruction is indirectly given to Muslim women on how they should conduct themselves. Unlike worldly women, their aim is not to display their charms and finery.

Their entire attention should be directed towards the worship of God. They should spend their wealth for the cause of God and their time in understanding the teachings of Islam.

This style of life makes one pure and righteous and it is only the pure and righteous who are approved of by Almighty God.

Surely, for men and women who have surrendered [to God]— believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, men and women who are ever mindful of God—God is ready with forgiveness and an immense reward. (33: 35)

This verse shows what Almighty God wishes a man or woman to be and the ten virtues He would like them to possess are: Islam (submission to God), Faith in God, obedience, truthfulness, patience, sincerity, charity, fasting, chastity and remembrance of God.

These ten virtues encompass all aspects of Islamic faith and character. Briefly speaking, one who hopes to receive God's pardon and His rewards should bow to His injunctions, showing his total belief in God. There should be no contradiction between his words and deeds and stand firm, regardless of the circumstances. The realisation of God's greatness should have made him modest and he should consider the meeting of others' needs as his own responsibility. He must fast regularly and be chaste and pure. His days and nights are spent in the remembrance of God.

Just as these qualities are required of men, so also are they required of women. Although their manifestation may be different, the qualities are the same for both. A human being, will be considered acceptable to God only when he or she approaches God endowed with these ten qualities. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in Interaction with Centre for Peace and Spirituality Team

Q: Maulana, you say that dishonest people will not go to Paradise. What is dishonesty to God?

A: Dishonesty is hypocrisy. It is not to act according to what your heart regards as true while pretending that you are acting according to it.

Some study God's Book and the life of the Prophet and act according to what they find therein. Others may not fully act according to what they have learnt but repent for this. They admit their weaknesses and accept they were wrong. They do not conceal their reality. They keep doing dua to God. If God wills, these people will be forgiven by Him. But God will not forgive those who knew the Truth but did not follow it and, yet, at the same time, made a show of following it. This is what is called hypocrisy, and for hypocrites there is no forgiveness from God.

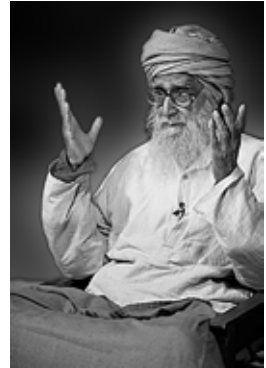
Q: How do we inculcate contentment?

A: According to a hadith report, the Prophet said: "Look at those who are lesser than you and do not look at those who are higher than you. That is more likely to prevent you underestimating the blessing of God on you." (Bukhari)

There is a very simple method for this. Do not compare yourself with someone above you. If you do that, you will develop discontentment. You will think, 'He has so much, and I have so little. He has such a big house, and the house I live in is so small. He has a fancy car, and I have just an ordinary one.' That will make you miserable. Instead compare yourself with people below you, to develop contentment. You will realise how much better off you are than others, and this will make you contented.

Q: What is the real sign of modesty?

A: It is very difficult to recognise genuine modesty. People show themselves to be very modest, but the reality is different. You can find out the reality of someone when they are tested. At such moments, people's masks fall off and they show themselves to be as they are.



A man once went to a 'saint', who was famed for supposedly being exceedingly modest, and asked him a question. The 'saint' replied, 'I know nothing. What can I say?' The man responded, 'Yes, sir, really you know nothing at all!'

And do you know how the so-called saint reacted? He burst out in anger! He could not stand someone telling him that he was ignorant! So much for his modesty! When he was tested, he revealed his true self.

People are adept at acting. But if you live with someone for some days, you can realise what they truly are.

Once, a person praised someone before Umar ibn al-Khattab, saying that that person was very modest, very nice. Umar asked the person if he had had any dealings with him. He replied that he had not. Umar then asked him if he had ever travelled with the person he was praising. Again, he replied that he had not. Then, Umar told the person that he knew nothing about the man whom he had been praising and that he must have only observed him standing up and sitting down in the mosque.

You know a person's reality when he is put to a test. Standing up and sitting down is not a test of someone's character! Prostrating before God in a mosque is not a test. The test is when you have to bow before a fellow human being. Remember this: Satan used to bow before God. He did not bow before Adam. From this I learn that man's test is not in bowing before God, but in bowing before other human beings.

If you want to know how a person truly is—modest or whatever—spend some days in his company, or observe him when he faces a test.

Q: Many young people today are mainly concerned with earning name and fame. They think that if at all they will think about spirituality, it will be only after they have 'achieved it all'.

How do we reach out to such people?

A: This is not a new issue. It has always been there. The Quran says: "Truly, you love immediate gain." (16: 20)

People think that immediate gain is everything, and they are all running after more money. This money-culture or materialistic culture has always been there. It isn't something new. The only difference, I think, is that earlier people wanted many horses, and now they want many cars.

According to the Quran, this mindset has always been there—giving most importance to material wealth, running after material gain. So, the method that was used when the Quran was revealed should be used today, too. We don't need to invent any new method. The people whom the Quran addresses—they were told that their race to hoard money was useless. Death will overtake us some day. Just today, I was thinking of this politician who established a multi-crore empire and was shot dead. He wasn't very old. And his son is in the intensive care unit in a hospital, hovering between life and death.

Ask them what they have gained from this race for name and fame. Ask them what they have got out of all the money and fame they have earned. The Quran says: "Greed for more and more distracted you till you reached the grave." (102: 1-2) □



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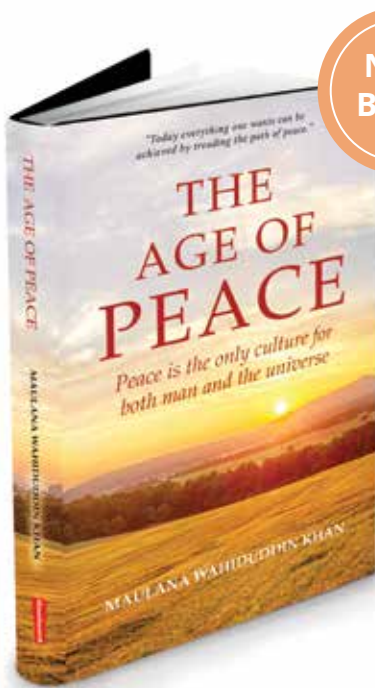
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World Peace is not just a dream

Since the ancient Greek philosophers to the present day nobody has provided a solution to it.

Now,
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
presents the answer in his new book.



**NEW
Book!**

In this book:

Maulana has developed a unique concept of peace from the Quran and Hadith, from observations in nature and the universe, from a study of history and human psychology and from rational thinking.

It is the only ideological and practical method of obtaining peace that has ever been proposed.

Find brief view about the book in this video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWiemels290>

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