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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

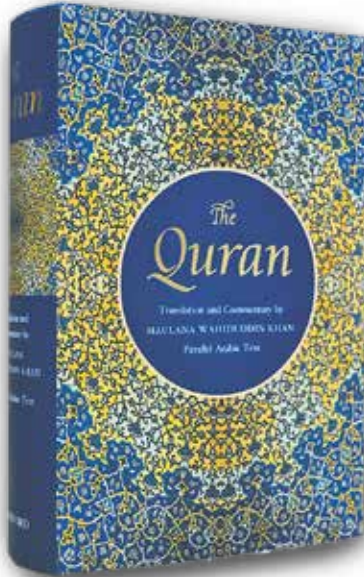


**Practical wisdom means opting for the less than ideal
when the ideal is not achievable.**

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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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 31, JULY 2015

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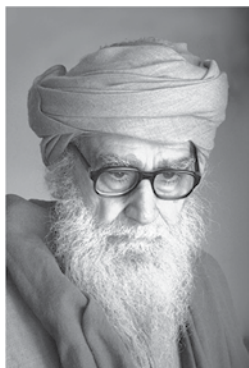
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 third highest civilian honour in India, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Ibn Ali 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 Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

DATES ON A CALENDAR

*A day that you have lived fully was truly your day.
All other days are simply dates on your calendar!*

THERE are two ways to lead your life. One is to simply pass your time. The other is to use your time meaningfully. If you fall into the first category, you are just wasting your life. By spending your days meaningfully, you are truly living and making proper use of this amazing blessing that is life.

Every new day that dawns brings with it many opportunities. These opportunities do not loudly announce themselves. It is for us to recognize and use them in a fruitful manner that can spread benefit to others.

You need to skilfully discern the opportunities that come your way every day. Recognize those that are truly for you and those that are not. Learn to appreciate these opportunities and avail them in the best and most realistic way, but be aware of the limits within which you

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

must remain. You need to be sensitive that in the process you do not transgress into another's territory.

***A day that you
have lived fully
was truly your day.
All other days are
simply dates on
your calendar.***

The many opportunities that come your way are not exclusively for you. There are several others who are equally motivated. Success in your life can happen only by cooperating with others, never through conflict. Develop the skill of navigating your life without clashing with them.

Just as you have some interests, others do too.

A smart person carefully avoids clashing with other people's interests and sails ahead to attain his life goals. □

Maulana Wahiddudin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org



It depends on you

Mutual conflicts have always been a feature of human society, there is no escape from this situation. Whether you entangle yourself in such conflicts or keep away from them depends totally on you.

Prepare Today

Death is a reminder of the reality that there is a world Hereafter. We must prepare ourselves in this world to be able to find a proper place in the next world.

EVIDENCE OF GOD

In The Beginning

AERICAN Nobel-prize winning physicist Charles Townes (1915-2015) wrote in *The Times of India* on January 31, 2015 an article titled: *A Physicist's Faith in Science and God*. He says:

“No one can deny that the universe is the outcome of intelligent placing. It is unusual. We too are unusual. For life to exist, special physical laws are required. So I would say that this is a very special universe, intelligently planned. How can anyone refute that? There is indeed a spiritual world and a Creator. Most people fail to realise that science, like religion, requires faith. We make so many assumptions. We believe that the laws of physics are reliable—that’s a kind of faith. I do believe there is a spiritual presence in the universe. It is difficult to define God, but I can feel an Omnipresence everywhere. People ask if God created the universe, who created God? So there’s always a problem with a beginning.”

Everyone admits that our universe is an intelligently designed universe. Thus, there must be a beginning of such a universe. The Existence of a meaningful universe is an undeniable fact. Some people are sceptical about its beginning—how did it begin and who is the beginner? However, when looked at deeply this question seems illogical. It is an obvious fact that where there is a beginning, there is a beginner. The phenomenon of beginning itself proves the existence of a beginner. If we are compelled to believe in the beginning, then we must also, out of the same compulsion, believe in the beginner.

If we are compelled to believe in the beginning of the universe, then we must also—out of the same compulsion believe in the beginner.

All our knowledge points to the fact that there is a world that exists outside of us. When we accept the existence of the world, it becomes necessary to accept that this world has had a beginning. Since a beginning without a beginner is impossible, we are compelled to believe in the existence of the beginner. □



FINALLY, IN THE GRAVE

Ultimate Destination

DESPITE our efforts and actions, one day we all will find ourselves in the grave. After we die, we will not take any of the things we have accumulated when we were alive.

Bill Gates, said to be the richest person in the world in terms of material wealth, makes this very telling remark:

I can understand wanting to have a million dollars...but once you get beyond that, I have to tell you, it's the same hamburger.

No matter how big and lavish a palace you may live in, you can occupy just one room at a time. An emperor might rule over a huge empire, but he can sit only on one throne at a time. No matter how much material wealth you may have, you will take nothing at all of it along with you when you die and have to face the eternal Hereafter.

If you are aware of the Hereafter, you will realise that if you lead your life in this world in the proper manner, there is a limitless world that you can enter after your death.

From a worldly point of view, your final destination is your grave. But if you are aware of the Hereafter, you will realise that living a meaningful life would lead you to a world without limitations after your death.

Therefore, the wise thing to do is to make the Hereafter your destination, and not the material things of this world. Wise is the one who takes from the things of the world only that which is necessary and makes the Hereafter the focus of his efforts and hopes. This is true realism and wisdom. □



Life's Journey

Constructing a really solid foundation requires a long period of time. You cannot have such a foundation by just taking wild leaps.

FASTING AS A FORM OF WORSHIP

Spiritual Training

FASTING as a form of worship, has well laid rules generally known to people. Every year during the month of *Ramazan*, the details of this worship is communicated to people through writings and speeches.

Although the Prophet and his companions fasted for some days every month, the command to fast during the month of *Ramazan* was revealed in Madinah in 2 A.H. and forms part of the second chapter of the Quran.

O believers! Fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you so that you may guard yourself against evil.

THE QURAN 2: 183

Fasting has been prescribed in all the revealed religions in every age. When a person fasts, he keeps alive a historical practice, a part of the spiritual life of the faithful in every age. This makes him a part of the universal caravan of the faithful, travelling from this world to the Hereafter under the guidance of the Prophet.

Fasting is a special training where one is being prepared to lead a principled life—not merely during the month of fasting, but, in fact, for the whole year round.

The System of Fasting

The sighting of the moon on the last evening of the month of Shaban (the eighth month of the lunar calendar) marks the commencement of the month of fasting—*Ramazan* (the ninth month of the lunar calendar).

Sighting the moon is meant to psychologically prepare believers to be ready for the month of fasting. Seeing the moon evokes the feeling that the time has come to revolutionize their lives.

The month of fasting, starting from the evening of the 29th of Shaban (the last day of Shaban) is a period of “total activity”—a time of special religious observances. In other months, they could eat and drink anytime, hunger and thirst being their guide, but now ‘principle’ becomes their guide.

Fasting is a special training to help distinguish between what is allowed and forbidden—a preparation to lead a principled life—not merely during the month of fasting but for the whole year round.

Before commencing the fast, the intention (*niyyah*) to keep the fast must be expressed. The Prophet observed: “A fast should be kept by one who has expressed his intention to do so before dawn.”

Fasting is a conscious act not a mere ritual. It is performed with full consciousness of its implications—the mark of a truly religious person. *Sehri* is the meal eaten before commencing the fast. The Prophet asked his companions to eat *Sehri*, calling this a blessing. The Prophet invited a companion to partake of *Sehri* saying “Have the blessed *Sehri*.” Another companion says, “Once I went to the Prophet before dawn and he was eating *Sehri*.” The Prophet observed: “*Sehri* is a blessing bestowed on you by God, so you should partake of it.”

Fasting gives a strong powerful lesson that you have to abstain from all the things God has forbidden you, however much it may go against your wishes.

Eating *Sehri* before dawn is a reminder that when God gives us a difficult command, He also grants some concessions along with it. Together with the command of fasting God gives the concession of *Sehri*. Any commandment of God, however difficult, requires absolute trust in Him.

Routine daily activities go on but in a state of fasting; the difference being that the same activities are now conducted with a new frame of mind. The one who fasts now performs prayers, studies the Quran, remembers God, and deals with people during the course of the day. These routine activities are performed with a spiritual state of mind, giving them the status of spiritual acts.

Sunset is the time for breaking the fast. As he does so, he thanks God with the following words of prayer used by the Prophet:

“May the Lord be thanked and praised with Whose help I was able to fast, and now I am breaking the fast with the food and drink that He has provided. May God accept it. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.”

This prayer expresses the feelings that surge within a believer while breaking his fast.

Abstaining from food and drink during the month of *Ramazan* is aimed to awaken the '*sawm spirit*' of the believer. *Sawm* means abstinence. Food and drink are two of man's basic necessities. These are the last things one should be asked to abstain from. Asking a person to abstain from them is like giving a strong and powerful message that you have to abstain from all the things God has forbidden you, much as this may go against your wishes.

There are many *Ahadith* (plural of *Hadith*—words of the Prophet) highlighting the importance of the spirit of fasting. According to a *Hadith*, God does not accept the fast of one who does not desist from lying and dishonest practices. A fast which is devoid of the *sawm* spirit will not be acceptable to God or be rewarded.

Another *Hadith* tells us that, 'The fasting person if abused or provoked should not retaliate. True fasting acts as a shield for evils. God will shield such a person from hellfire'. This *Hadith* tells us that fasting saves us from negative psychology, inculcates positive thinking and enables one to stay calm even when provoked. Faced with evil, one should return good for evil.

God does not accept the fast of one who does not desist from lying and dishonest practices.

One of the special features of *Ramazan* is the '*Lailatul Qadr*'. It means the 'Night of Decisions'. God takes decisions on this night. This night falls on one of the last ten nights of *Ramazan*. Great importance is attached to this night and the Quran calls it 'better than a thousand months'.

Flocks of angels descend on the earth on this night, producing a heightened spiritual atmosphere. This enhances the spirituality of the people and adds more value to their worship.

Once Aisha (the wife of the Prophet), asked the Prophet as to how she should pray during *Lailatul Qadr*. The Prophet gave this prayer:

"O God, You are the forgiver, You love to forgive Your servants, so You forgive me".

The greatest thing to ask God is forgiveness. It is forgiveness which leads one to eternal Paradise.

This in essence, is the spirit of *Ramazan*. □

LOSING THE OPPORTUNITY

Differentiate Between Islam and Muslims

THE White House in February 17-19, 2015 invited law enforcement officials, Muslim leaders and lawmakers for a three-day conference titled "Countering Violent Extremism".

This was a great opportunity for Muslims. However, Muslims failed to avail this opportunity for two reasons: some of their organizations boycotted the conference, while those who participated engaged in only registering their complaints and resentments against the West.

This was a negative response that goes totally against the Islamic spirit. Islamic teachings categorically ask Muslims to face every situation with a positive mind and utilize the opportunities present with any situation.

Muslims should have participated in the White House conference with a positive mind and used it to present the universal teachings of Islam. But, they lost this great chance.

This was not the first time that Muslim leaders failed to avail such an opportunity. The reason for this lies in confusion—the inability to differentiate between Islam and the Muslim community. They try to show Islam as a true religion, but justify practices of Muslims which are not in accordance with Islam. This bigotry will not work. It has caused great harm to Muslims in modern times as they have not been able to present the true face of Islam to the world.

Today's age is one of openness. It offers numerous opportunities and platforms to freely present the message of Islam. The community-based thinking of Muslim leaders has become a self-defeating hurdle in availing these opportunities.

Islam needs to be understood according to the Quranic teachings and the Muslim community should be judged in this light rather than by the principle—'my community, right or wrong'.

There is double jeopardy trying to prove Muslims as innocent—first, no such endeavour will prove Muslims as innocent in the eyes of others and second, Muslims will be unable to present the true teachings of Islam to people. This is the tragedy why Muslims have suspended the Islamic mission of conveying the message of God to people. □

TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

We often talk of peace in the context of war. But this is a very narrow and restricted notion of peace. The fact is that peace is deeply linked with the whole 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 at all possible.



THE GENESIS OF MUSLIM MILITANCY

THE Quran says: 'Do great *jihad* with the help of the Quran.' (25: 52) '*Jihad*' refers to the peaceful mission of spreading the ideology of the Quran. The message of the Quran is given in Chapter Jonah in these words: "*Wallahu yadu ila dar as-salam.*" (10: 25) That is, 'And God calls to the home of peace.'

Peace is the central theme of the Quran. Where there is peace there is a peaceful mind, and where there is a peaceful mind there is positive thinking. Positive thinking helps in the building of a positive personality. A peaceful society is composed of members who are positive thinking individuals.

Islam has nothing to do with violence. The Islamic target is peace, and peace can be established only by peaceful methods. The Islamic mission referred to in the Quran as *dawah ilallah* is the peaceful dissemination of the divine message. Jihad refers to the peaceful spirit of this mission, that is, to exert one's utmost effort to spread this peaceful message.

If the ideological base of the political interpretation of Islam is shown to be wrong through rational argument, the problem of Muslim violence will also automatically disappear.

Modern Muslim militancy in the name of *jihad* is a total distortion of Islam. This phenomenon is a twentieth century concept. Muslim writers such as Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979) of Pakistan and Syed Qutb (1906-1966) of Egypt, provided a political interpretation

of Islam. Those influenced by this interpretation tried to establish an Islamic state in Muslim countries. This being the age of communication it spread rapidly throughout the Muslim world.

The aim of establishing such a state began as a literary campaign. Its proponents sought to overthrow existing regimes led by secular Muslims and establish in its place what they called *Khilafah* or *Hukumat-e Ilahiyyah* (Divine Rule). They totally failed in this endeavour. They assumed the Muslim masses were on their side and oblivious that the secular Muslim rulers were supported by the West. They developed negative thinking against the West. De-stabilizing the Western world seemed to be the only way to achieve their target. 9/11 was a result of this thinking. Suicide bombings by Muslims throughout the world is also an example of this thinking. The genesis of current Muslim militancy lies squarely in this political interpretation of Islam.

The genesis of present-day Muslim militancy lies in the political interpretation of Islam.

It is imperative to dispel this interpretation and completely eradicate this political thinking from the Muslim mind. We have to provide them the peaceful literature of Islam. Only this can root out the menace of Muslim militancy.

UNESCO says, 'Violence begins from the mind.' The present Muslim militancy begins from the wrong interpretation of Islam. This militancy can be countered by spreading literature that represents the true ideology of Islam based on peace, and put to end Muslim militancy.

Using rational argument, it has to be shown how the political interpretation of Islam is wrong and has no ideological base. This would be the cure to end the scourge of Muslim violence. □



Stay Positive

No mistake can close the door to your achievement, provided that you are able to keep your thinking positive.

PEACE-BASED EMPIRE

Avail the Opportunities

EARLIER just one form of empire was known, and that was a political empire. Today, politics has been decentralized, leading to opportunities for establishing large empires in new fields—education, industry, missionary work etc.



Strangely though, many are unaware of these new opportunities. This is one reason why many of them take to violence in an effort to fulfil their goals. Had they known that in today's age violence can only lead to destruction and can produce no constructive result whatsoever, they would have definitely acted differently. They would have used peaceful means to achieve their aims, realizing that violence is futile, and even counter-productive.

History is witness to the fact that violence can only produce negative results. Violence can destroy, but not build. Muslims in different parts of the world are engaged in violent movements. Yet these movements have not brought about anything positive for anyone.

The method of violence is against the very law of nature. Look at the world of nature where the myriad creations of God are busy, absorbed in their own activity. There is no evidence of deliberate violence. Nature represents a beautiful blend of cooperation and harmony producing a positive environment of tolerance. Violence occurs only in the human world, not in the world of nature. Reflect on this fact and you will realize that human beings must abandon violence, because in the natural world only the peaceful method which nature abides by produces positive results. Going against nature can only lead to failure and destruction. □

With the decentralisation of politics in today's world there are many opportunities for establishing large empires in non-political fields.

High thinking

People of high thinking can live on their own without becoming affected by the external world.

MURDER OF HUMANITY

Sanctity of Human Life

THE Quran (5: 32) states that killing a human being, except as punishment for murder or for spreading corruption, shall be regarded as having killed all humankind. The Divine law mandates respect of human life and considers the killing of another human being without a legitimate reason as the most serious crime. This is because just one incident of this sort can deprive people of the respect for the sanctity of human life.



God is man's Creator, not man himself. And so, no human being has the right to slay a fellow human. It is permissible for a human life to be taken only in a case when this is proven to be legitimate after a proper trial in a court of law. In no other case is this at all permissible.

We humans have not created water. Hence, it isn't legitimate for us to waste even one drop of it. Nor did we create food grains. And so, it isn't right to waste even a single grain of rice. The same holds good—but with much greater severity—in the case of human life. We humans have not created ourselves or other human beings. Hence, we have no right to deprive another human being of life.

***Just one incident
of killing can
deprive people of
the respect for the
sanctity of human
life.***

Killing someone is an enormously heinous crime. It is tantamount to murdering God's Creation Plan. Man is God's most precious creation and for a special purpose. Each person is sent to this world for some great purpose. Therefore, slaying even a single human being can never be considered trivial. □



What really matters

*Losing and winning are not in themselves important.
What is of actual importance is how people conduct
themselves when facing these experiences.*

RAMAZAN AND WARFARE

Far Removed From Each Other

A section of Muslims subscribe to the notion that *Ramazan* is the month of *Furqan*, the month of victory. This line of thought ensures victory if *jihad*, in the sense of war (*qital*), is waged during *Ramazan*.



Hence battles were waged against supposed enemies during *Ramazan* over the last few years. Such wars have invariably ended in the destruction and defeat of the *Mujahideen* or aggressors themselves. Even with such devastating evidence to the contrary, they have not changed their opinion or reconsidered their stand. It is strange indeed that they still connect war with this sacrosanct period.

What is the basis or source for reckoning the month of *Ramazan* as the month of victory?

It is the fact that the battle of Badr took place during the life of the Prophet in the month of *Ramazan*, in 2 A.H. In this battle, the Prophet and his companions emerged victorious. This was the logic used to regard *Ramazan* as the month of victory.

But this is a flawed assumption. The battle of Badr was not a matter of choice for the Prophet of Islam. It was a war fought to defend against an enemy who had marched towards Madinah in this month to attack the Prophet and his companions. This armed aggression led to the defensive war at Badr.

None of the other battles in the initial history of Islam were fought during *Ramazan*. For instance, the battle of Uhud took place near Madinah on the 6th Shawwal, 3 A.H., and the battle of Hunain took place on 11th Shawwal, in 8 A.H. This is a clear proof that the month of *Ramazan* has nothing to do with war.

War is never the choice of believers. Islam states that war can be waged only in defence. And it is more than clear that it is the aggressor who fixes the date according to his choice, leaving no option to the defender.

The Prophet observed:

Do not wish for confrontation with the enemy, instead ask for peace from God. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

This illustrates the basic principle of Islam vis-a-vis war. Peace is the rule and war an exception. In Islam, war is an act of compulsion rather than an option. The situation of war is not created by the believers but forced on them requiring a response in self-defence.

The month of *Ramazan* is called the month of patience. It is the month of self-control; curbing desire; not being provoked in spite of provocation; developing spirituality by enduring the pangs of hunger and thirst; and

Peace in Islam is the rule and war an exception. In Islam war is an act of compulsion rather than an option.

striving to come closer to God by remembering Him through prayer and the reading of the Quran. This is possible only when man distances himself from the human world and brings himself closer to the spiritual world of God.

These dictums amply make it clear that *Ramazan* is the month of peace. This is the month of awakening one's inner nature, to be engrossed in thoughts of God, rather than in embroiling oneself in worldly matters.

On sighting the new moon of *Ramazan*, the Prophet Muhammad observed:

'O God, let the moon of the month of *Ramazan* appear on us with peace and security.' (*At-Tirmizi, Ad-Darmi, Musnad Ahmad*).

The above *Dua* (supplication) shows the feelings with which the Prophet of Islam welcomed the month of *Ramazan*. These words of the Prophet provide a definite proof that *Ramazan* has nothing to do with war. Rather it aims at building a society in which peace and goodwill flourish.

On fasting during *Ramazan*, the Quran says: "So that you may guard yourselves" (2: 183). Fasting has been prescribed to enable people to follow the right path; to receive training for a life of righteousness (*Taqwa*).

Taqwa, guarding oneself, is explained in a *Hadith*. Umar Farooq, the second Caliph once asked Ubayy ibn Kaab, a senior Companion to explain the meaning of *taqwa*.

He replied, "O, Leader of the believers, have you ever taken a path flanked by thorny bushes?"

Umar replied in the affirmative. Ubayy ibn Kaab wished to know how he protected himself.

He said, "I gathered my clothes close to me and went on my way".

Ubayy ibn Kaab said, "It is this cautious attitude which is called *taqwa*." (Al Qurtubi)

Ramazan is the month of *taqwa*; it is the month of guarding oneself against 'thorns'. It would be strange to think of *Ramazan* as the time for embroiling oneself in thorns, instead of guarding oneself from them! □

Ramazan is the month of training in self-control; of refraining from being provoked in spite of provocation and striving to come closer to God.



Wise Adjustment

Always remember that it is not your intention or your desire that determines the course taken by the external world. It is a wise adjustment between your desires and external realities that leads to great success.

COMPLETE PERSON

Principled Personality

WHO is a complete person? Someone in whom the human attributes are found in abundance. He embodies these attributes to the fullest. Such a person is emotionally balanced and free from psychological complexes. His conscience prevails over his ego in all situations and is an emblem of a soul at peace. (THE QURAN 89: 27)

A complete person goes beyond the materialistic world, lives in the higher realms of life. Rising above the superficial, he engages himself in matters of deeper significance. He reaches the stage of perception described in a *Hadith* as the ability to “see things as they are” rather than as they appear to be. He willingly concedes a reasoned argument. He judges matters objectively with no subjective bias. Despite having great capabilities, he develops modesty in himself. He is totally free from negative emotion. He relates to people evenly, be they ‘friend’ and ‘stranger’. He is completely above personal interests. He lives by the higher principles of life.

***A complete person
lets his conscience
prevail over his ego
in every situation,
until he becomes an
emblem of a soul
at peace.***

All human beings were created as potentially complete persons. To turn this potential ‘completeness’ into a character reality, is left to each person. A verse in the Quran speaks of this reality: “We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low” (95: 4-5). According to this verse, man is born with great potential referred to as the ‘best of mould’ but becomes a case of the ‘lowest of the low’ in this imperfect world. Only his own conscious effort can make him realize his potential to become a complete person worthy of inhabiting Paradise.

The secret of becoming a complete person lies in inculcating a sense of deep God-consciousness. It is the fear of God makes one a complete person. There is no other way. □



AIRPORT OF THE HEREAFTER

Smooth Check-in

A group of passengers at an Airport were stopped by the authorities for special checking. Based on confidential information received, the Airport authorities had to treat them with suspicion. This incident at the Airport reminds us of a verse from the Quran:

Stop them there for questioning. (37: 24)

The course of life is also similar to the above incident. The earth is travelling in its orbit at the speed of 67,000 miles per hour. It is as if we are aboard an aeroplane heading towards an airport at great speed. This is the airport of the Hereafter. A time will come when all human beings will land at the airport of the Hereafter. There some will be stopped for questioning. On the other hand, there will be some blessed, fortunate souls who will be welcomed by the angels saying:

Peace be upon you; you have done well,
enter Paradise and dwell in it forever.

(THE QURAN 39: 73)

This situation will be faced by all. The timings of worldly journeys are known but not for the journey to the Hereafter. It can come upon us at any moment. When life's aeroplane lands at the airport of the Hereafter, some will be stopped for questioning while others will be welcomed and led into Paradise. This is undoubtedly the greatest fact on which every person should seriously reflect, and consciously lead their lives accordingly. The time will come without any announcement and with no opportunity to backtrack to the world they have left behind. □

***The time will
come without any
announcement
and then no one
will have any
opportunity to go
back to the world
they have left
behind.***



Losing and Gaining

One can always overcome one's misfortunes, provided one remains patient and perseveres in one's struggles, never losing hope of God's succour.

UNDERSTANDING THE MODERN AGE

Freedom And Progress

THE modern age evolved through a long historical process. It began with the revolution ushered in by Islam in the 7th century CE, and reached its fruition in the 20th century. The modern civilization is favourable to Islam, not opposed to it contrary to what some think. However it does not mean that all aspects of this civilization are fully compatible with Islamic teachings.

No revolution ever puts a complete end to human freedom, nor is any revolution completely ideal. It would be a mixed bag of the inviolable and flexible aspects to accommodate human freedom. To properly evaluate a revolution, one must bear in mind that it always has certain basic or essential aspects, while there are other aspects which become part of it on account of human freedom.

The Islamic revolution of the 7th century CE gave humanity many valuable gifts. It ended the age of nature worship and brought in the worship of one God. With the passage of time, certain undesirable developments also occurred—hereditary monarchy replacing the Caliphate that was based on mutual consultation and Muslims fighting amongst themselves in the name of Islam. These undesirable developments were a result of the exercise of human freedom. The emergence of Islam was undoubtedly a great blessing for humankind. But one must view the history of Islam separately from these developments alluded to above, to properly appreciate this blessing.

To properly appreciate the contribution of Islam, one must view the history of Islam separately from the developments that were a result of the exercise of human free-will.

The same is true of modern culture. Western civilization has gifted humanity many wonderful things—the discovery of natural laws that had hitherto remained hidden, the replacing of monarchy with democracy, the ending of religious persecution, the development of scientific methodology, many new scientific disciplines, the establishment of the United Nations as a forum to resolve international disputes etc.

Freedom gives power to use one's discretion. A hallmark of Western civilization, its benefits depend on the motives behind its use good

or bad, significant or petty. War and the accompanying violence and destruction driven by political ambition to dominate and exploit, aggression produced by a materialistic mentality, exploitation and various ills produced by the relentless pursuit of personal and communal interests; are all examples of the negative use of freedom. The positives are several—democracy, scientific discoveries, and great literary works have benefited humanity immensely. But to lump together all the undesirable elements and label them as a definite ‘Western agenda’ would be unrealistic.

***The God given
right of freedom of
choice will not be
abrogated till the
Day of Judgment.***

A balanced evaluation should consider both aspects. A lopsided view could end in choking freedom. The result would be the classic case of throwing away the baby with the bathwater.

If this notion of an ‘agenda’ is accepted as true, the same analysis would apply to Muslim history. Critics might claim that while Islam championed the oneness of God, it has established hereditary rule in the name of the Caliphate, promoted internecine conflict on the basis of different interpretations of Islam, promoting ill-will against non-Muslim peoples by manufacturing the notion of *Dar-ul-Islam* (Abode of Islam) and *Dar-ul-Kufr* (Abode of disbelief).

Clearly, it is important to differentiate between the revolution brought about by Islam and those issues that became associated with it because of the exercise of human free-will. Labelling of the latter as a part of the ‘agenda of Islam’ is, therefore, incorrect. In the same way, it is also incorrect to conflate the undesirable elements associated with modern Western civilization, and to label them as a ‘Western agenda’.

Revolutions bring in new thinking, some may be desirable and some not. The former measure up to an ideal standard; the latter, on account of the exercise of human freedom, come to be associated with the revolution.

God has blessed human beings with the freedom to choose. This right will not be abrogated till the Day of Judgment. This freedom is termed ‘the Trust’ in the Quran (33: 72). Human beings are free to use this God-given freedom as they wish, with or without others approval.

The use of free-will is visible in all activities in our lives. Both Muslim and modern Western civilization have explored this freedom. To properly understand human history, this factor must be given due consideration. □

FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

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



ACCEPTANCE OF SUPPLICATIONS

A young man once said “I have so many problems! I keep praying to God to have them solved but my prayers are never accepted. I've spent many years supplicating to God, but not a single problem of mine has been solved. I have really no idea as to what I should do now.”

He is one of many who pray to God for material things or for a solution to their economic problems. And when their problems are not solved the way they want them to be, they lose hope.

The acceptance of supplications depends on God's will, not our desire.

Supplication to God (*dua*) is a form of worship. The acceptance of these supplications depends on God's will, not our desire.

Material things are like examination question papers. God decides who will be tested with which examination paper. Our preference makes no difference whatsoever. A student appearing for an examination cannot demand that the examination paper should be as he wants it to be. The paper is set

not by him, but, rather, by the educational authorities. Likewise, the examinations that God sets for us to face in this world are decided by Him. We can't expect them to be as we like them.

The right thing would be to continue beseeching God, and leave the matter entirely to Him. If our supplications are not accepted, this is what God wills. God knows better what is good for His servants. We are concerned only with our desires and do not know what is truly good for us.

The ideal prayer would be "O God! Please grant me whatever is best for me!" and then to willingly accept whatever is given. □



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BIOGRAPHERS OF THE PROPHET

The True Mission Overlooked

MUSLIM scholars, past and present, have tried to author books on the life of the Prophet of Islam, some compressed into small booklets and others as comprehensive books consisting of several volumes. They studied extensively all available records on the life of the Prophet of Islam. But strangely, no Islamic scholar has been able to discover and present a true representation of the Prophet of Islam. The word *rasulullah* (the Messenger of God) itself denotes that the Prophet was a messenger of God. His sole duty was to convey the message of God to mankind. The Quran is very clear about this role of the Prophet. Sadly these Islamic scholars and biographers seem unaware of this fact.

An analysis will reveal the reason for this tragedy.

Studying the books of these Islamic scholars, it becomes apparent that their compositions on the Prophet's life were mainly for seeking reward (*sawab*) from God. An objective study of this subject was not their interest. One well-known scholar has admitted that he compiled his book on the life of the Prophet to get himself included in the golden list of the Prophet's biographers. Another scholar says, 'When God Almighty asks me on the Day of Judgement, 'Do you have something to present here?' I will present my book on the Prophet's life'.

***The sole duty of
the Prophet was to
convey the message
of God to mankind.***

These Muslim biographers of the Prophet composed their books to inform Muslims about their Prophet's personality, to establish their glory with reference to their Prophet and to defend their Prophet against the so-called allegations made by Western writers.

The primary desire of these scholars was to glorify their Prophet, in other words, they wanted to feed their sense of pride. No wonder they failed to discover the true picture of the Prophet as one who was on a mission, the messenger of God to mankind.

This psyche of the biographers can be understood from this narrative. Many youngsters frequented a popular library to read the newspapers. It was quite encouraging to see them here and it was presumed that they were interested in world news. An interaction with them revealed that they were unemployed youth seeking job vacancies. Their reading was confined to things of their interest, the employment column and appointments page. Such was the case of the Muslim biographers, whose study of the Prophet's life was confined only to their interests.

The principal mission of the Prophet remained neglected in the later periods of history.

Non-Muslim biographers present a different angle. Their objective study helped them identify the fundamental mission of the Prophet as a Messenger but being non-believers, it was not their concern to follow this *Sunnah* (practice) of the Prophet. So, the principal mission of the Prophet remained neglected in the later periods of history.

Muslim biographers state that the Prophet's purpose was to spread the message of Islam but they were unable to convey the true significance of the Prophet's role as being the Messenger of God. Likewise, although the non-Muslim biographers acknowledged the fact that the Prophet's mission was a messenger of God to mankind, they could not engage in this mission as it was not their concern. Hence, the principal mission of the Prophet has remained obscured. □



Final Abode

Death reminds us that the present world is not our final abode. We have to prepare ourselves for the world Hereafter. Death is only a reminder of the fact that everyone is doomed to enter the other world.

A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES

Creation Plan of God

*God created this world as a 'testing ground' for man.
What is the reason for this test?*

THIS test of life is not a test for its own sake. It is a measure of each one's response to the situations and challenges we face in our lives and identify those deserving of eternal life in heaven. Looked at from this perspective, this world is one of opportunities.

The attributes of the denizens of heaven are described in detail in the Quran and the books of *Hadith*. A person who is considered deserving of heaven is someone who acknowledges the Truth and is characterized by positive thinking in the complete sense of the term. He does not create any nuisance for others, remains a peaceful member of society, deeply and genuinely concerned about the welfare of all. Modesty and honesty is his second nature.

The test of life is a means to record how each one of us responds to the different situations we face in our lives and to identify who among us is deserving of eternal life in heaven.

Those living in this world and yet are able to display such divine characteristics are the ones who will be selected to enter and settle for eternity in Paradise.□



Don't Make Money Your Master

Money swallows one's mind. When one focuses more and more on money, one has no time to acquire knowledge of higher realities and become intellectually developed.

PLAGIARISM AND THE END OF HUMAN HISTORY

Divine Laws or Scientific Laws

DOOMSDAY will bring human history to an end, marking the transition to the beginning of another. There are several indicative *Hadith* (words of the prophet) which predict many instances before Doomsday. Some have come to pass in present times. One such *Hadith* can be understood by an incident that was reported in some news publications under the headline, 'American journalist suspended for plagiarism.' The suspended Indo-American journalist was CNN host, *Newsweek* columnist, and editor-at-large of *TIME* magazine, Fareed Zakaria. He was suspended for a week in August 2012 by *TIME* and CNN while they investigated charges of plagiarism.

The entire history of modern technical development is nothing but a case of super-plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the imitation and use of another's language, thoughts, ideas, or expressions and representing them as one's own work. It was alleged that the suspended journalist had copied several passages from an article published in the *New Yorker* magazine by historian Jill Lepore of Yale University. Copying someone's idea without acknowledging the original author is a crime in the literary world.

Plagiarism can be taken to a higher level and looked at in a larger connotation. It goes beyond the simple act of an individual copying another's work. There is a much larger plagiarism happening which none seem to be complaining about—the plagiarism of God's creation by humans and claiming it as their original work. The predictions that have occurred are an admonition and warning to mankind that the Lord of the Universe will soon terminate human civilization for the acts of super-plagiarism humans have been practicing.

Not Acknowledging the Creator

Nature follows the divine laws ordained by its Creator. On reaching boiling temperature water transforms into steam, a source of energy that is put to various uses. Man did not invent steam; he only discovered this law of nature and used it to his advantage. Similarly, all technical developments (steam ships, cars, airplanes, photography,

telecommunications etc.) were actually a case of discovering and applying the laws of nature. Human civilization used divine ideas, without duly acknowledging their Creator!

In fact, whenever a law of nature was discovered it was attributed to the scientist who discovered it. Newton discovered a law and it came to be known as the Newtonian law. Did these scientists create these laws? They merely discovered their existence in nature. Given this, it was mandatory for scientists to acknowledge that their discoveries were divine principles. They failed to do so, making the entire history of modern technical development a case of super-plagiarism.

These discoveries known as scientific laws are actually divine laws. To uncover the divine laws in nature and present them as our own scientific laws is without doubt super plagiarism. The American journalist had indulged in plagiarism in just one article; whereas the entire development of the modern human civilization is one of super plagiarism. One is individual plagiarism, the other is global plagiarism.

Man discovered the laws present in nature ushering in a civilization full of technological developments. But in doing so, he attributed these greatest of scientific feats to himself and did not acknowledge God's blessings. Modern science discovered a world referred to as the 'intelligent universe'. The notion of a mechanical model of universe—prevalent at the time of Newton—is no longer endorsed in scientific circles. The current model accepts that the universe has an intelligent design. (Refer to Fred Hoyle's book, '*The Intelligent Universe*'). With intelligent design established, the existence of an Intelligent Designer was proved. The scientific fraternity came close to discovering God but failed to acknowledge Him. When a scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory made public a statement referring to 'Intelligent Design', he was sacked!

The Theory of Evolution, seeks to explain the phenomena of life without God. This is another act of plagiarism. A relevant verse of the Quran and a related *Hadith* are mentioned here:

The wonders of the Quran will not end; newer meanings will forever be discovered. (*Mishkat*)

No just estimate have they made of God, as is due to Him. But on the Day of Resurrection the whole Earth will lie in His grasp, while heaven will be folded up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above all that they associate with Him. (39: 67)

The commentators have interpreted the above verse in the context of Polytheism. "No just estimates have they made of God" refers to *shirk* (associating others with God), an act of attributing to human beings what was to be attributed to God. This phenomenon is referred to as 'humanism' (transfer of credit from God to man), an extreme case of plagiarism.

Expulsion of Man from the Earth

This scientific plagiarism in the garb of development of civilization has been propagated across the world. No individual has challenged this or claimed that all modern developments have been possible because of the divine laws in nature. This truth has to be openly acknowledged.

The matter of denial of God has reached its limit. The time has come when the Lord will remove mankind from this Earth and establish a new world order.

This fate of the world had been predicted. God had announced symbolically that the responsibility for the earth given to man would be terminated and a new system would be enforced. Man seems to believe the world is his and shall live here forever. The Quranic verse quoted above unequivocally states that man has under-estimated the Creator and that he will be held accountable for this. This is explained in another verse of the Quran:

*Those who misused
their freedom
and failed to
acknowledge
God's beneficence
would be called
to account before
their Lord.*

Do you imagine that We created you without any purpose and that you would not be brought back to Us? (23: 115)

The phrase 'brought back' refers to accountability. The entire human civilization is guilty of not acknowledging God despite availing divine blessings. Such ingratitude will not be tolerated forever and the day of reckoning will come.

The above verse metaphorically describes this event, when God will encompass the entire galaxy on one side and the universe on the other. Man has achieved great progress, developed a civilization and taken credit for everything, without acknowledging God. A time shall come when God will take away the charge of Earth from man. On that day, God Himself will assume all charge. The Prophet Muhammad, while explaining a verse of the Quran said:

On the Day of Resurrection God will hold the whole earth and fold the heaven with His right hand and say, 'I am the King: where are the kings of the earth?' (*Tafseer Ibn Kathir*)

The Prophet's companions who heard this explanation noticed that the Prophet Muhammad was so shaken up with awe for God that it looked like he was going to fall down.

Heading Towards the End of History

Earth's life support system is fast depleting and scientists predict that we are heading towards our end. Renowned physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking is reported to have said that man should abandon Earth or face extinction. These dire statements support the veracity of Quranic prediction, imploring man to reflect before doom strikes, a time when we shall be held accountable.

The entire human civilization is guilty of not acknowledging God despite availing of divine blessings.

Plagiarism is a common malady that plagues the literary world. Fareed Zakaria's case came into limelight because it involved a renowned journalist. A struggling journalist would not have made the news. Man must reflect and realize that modern civilization itself is a grave case of plagiarism and God shall make man account for it.

Given this, man must do two things. Firstly must lead an introspective life and correct his course, to earn his pardon on the day of reckoning. Secondly he must disseminate God's message worldwide to all mankind.

Sadly, prosperity and the attending materialistic culture has made people transgressors. Why would God let this world so full of insensitive people and transgressors, continue? According to a *Hadith* (words of the prophet), one of the signs of Doomsday approaching would be

the disappearance of honesty from society. (*Al Bukhari*). This *Hadith* is a proof of Prophet Muhammad's prophet hood, because it was a prediction whose truth would be established after a period of 1400 years.

The End of Life-support System

The earth is a unique planet in the vast Universe. It provides in abundance everything that is required to support life. This has enabled human beings to inhabit it and develop civilizations. But the Quran says that a time will come when the earth will lose all its greenery and vegetation and become an arid waste.

Recent scientific research has established that global warming has damaged the life-support system on earth to dangerous levels. Scientists have repeatedly warned that man's existence on Earth will be difficult. The renowned scientist Stephen Hawking has acknowledged this warning and advised mankind to colonise space, although he and all other scientists know that this is impractical.

Recent scientific research has established that due to the effects of global warming, the life-support system on the earth has been impaired to dangerous levels.

Global warming—a result of increase in carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere is causing rapid melting of the polar ice caps, mountain glaciers and land based snow cover. This has caused the level of water in the seas to rise. The Arctic region with its ice cover and treeless permafrost plays a very important role in maintaining the climatic balance on the Earth. But over the last quarter of the 20th century, the effects of global warming have been the strongest in the Arctic with the continuing retreat of glaciers, permafrost and sea ice.

Climate scientists forecast that within the next 10 years, Arctic summers could be ice-free with all Arctic glaciers having melted and disappeared into the oceans. This would result in dangerous consequences soon rendering the Earth unsuitable for human habitation.

Conclusion

This world is approaching its end. Despite enjoying the benefits of modern civilization by drawing on divine blessings, man has failed to acknowledge God. This act of plagiarism is so great that it is not worthy of being forgiven!

God has decided that man must be removed from Earth for this crime. This is gradually becoming evident through the disintegrating life support system.

Man must lead an alert and introspective life and correct his course so that on the day when He is called to account before God, he is pardoned.

The first verse of the Quran is: All Praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe. (1: 2)

The above verse makes us conscious of the fact that, the Creator must be thanked and acknowledged for creating everything to make life comfortable. To do this Man has to reflect about the universe and the events of the world around him.

According to the creation plan this world being a selection ground, those who fulfil the criterion of not misusing their freedom would be selected to inhabit the world of God eternally. One other verse of the Quran reminds man of this fact.

It is for the like of this that all should strive. (37: 61)

Each of us has to mend our ways and convey the divine message to others. These two aspects cannot be under estimated. We need to undertake self-evaluation to know how we spend our time, energy and money. According to the words of the Prophet:

Weigh yourself before you are weighed. (*Tirmidhi*)

It is advisable for us to evaluate ourselves before we die because the evaluation of the angels would be unforgiving. Pray that God grants us the ability to traverse on the straight path, forgive us and inhabit us in His eternal world of Paradise! □



Dual World

When one raises oneself to a level where material things become secondary; and inner meanings become of prime importance, then one is a spiritual person.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION OR RELIGIOUS CHOICE?

Universal Human Right

THERE is a heated debate on the issue of religious conversion. This is based on misunderstanding. Both parties take conversion as proselytization—one person attempting to change the religion of another person. It portrays conversion as a bilateral issue, while it is not actually so.

Making choices is everyone's birth right. An individual is free to choose his education, his job, his business, his life partner, and religion as well. Religion is also a matter of individual choice. No one has the right to apply curbs to religious freedom.

Individual choice of religion has been 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.

Human development fully depends on whether or not one has full freedom to pursue one's goals.

Freedom of choice is not something to do only with religion. Human development fully depends on full freedom to pursue one's goals. Placing curbs on any kind of freedom is not as simple as people think. It is not correct to single out religious freedom. □



Exalted Conduct

When a man is enraged at anything which goes against his will, tolerance as a priority becomes paramount. The true superman is one who, in really trying situations, can demonstrate his super-tolerance

LAILATUL QADR (THE NIGHT OF DESTINY)

A Long Arduous Search

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

We sent it [Quran] down on the Night of Destiny. And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; on that night, the angels and the Spirit come down by the permission of their Lord with His decrees for all matters; it is all peace till the break of dawn. (QURAN 97: 1-5)

THE 'Night of Destiny' falls towards the end of the month of *Ramazan*. The Prophet's wife Aisha, asked Prophet Muhammad what she should do if she finds the Night. Prophet Muhammad said she should pray:

O God! Certainly You are the One who grants forgiveness for sins. You love to forgive, so forgive me. (*Al Bukhari*)

The act of seeking forgiveness is so significant because by doing so, a believer realises the smallness of his being and the greatness of God. He realizes that God alone has the power to forgive, and none else.

Common belief is that the Night of Destiny can be found in the final phase of *Ramazan*. This is wishful thinking! Similar to scientific discoveries, finding is the result of a long and arduous process of seeking.

A believer is required to spend a lifetime so that such a prepared mind comes into being, only then can he be hopeful of his prayer being accepted by God.

To belittle scientific discoveries, some say these are serendipitous occurrences. But such accidents happen only to scientists! 'Finding' is an outcome of long preparation and search. A scientist spends years studying the subject and researching it, and after a long, gruelling effort, he makes that one discovery! Similarly to find the Night of Destiny one must prepare the mind. This involves years of effort and *dua* (supplication), at the end of which a believer is able to realize his insignificance and the supreme greatness of God.

The prayer that Prophet Muhammad advised Aisha represents the gist of life. Muslims think that staying awake an entire night would ensure finding the Night of Destiny. This is a far-fetched idea. A believer has to spend a lifetime to attain a prepared mind and then hope his prayer will be accepted by God.

According to another *Hadith* report, Prophet was in *etkaaf* (seclusion practiced in the final phase of *Ramazan*), then he came out of Masjid an-Nabawi (Prophet's mosque in Madinah) but went back again. He later told his companions that an angel had come to pass on the knowledge about the Night of Destiny. When the Prophet came out to inform the believers, he saw two of his people fighting amongst each other. Instantly, the knowledge of the Night was taken away from the Prophet's mind. This incident has a great lesson for the believers! The fight was not an armed battle; the two believers were merely arguing, but even fighting with words is enough to have the divine knowledge taken away. Those who adopt the path of suicide bombing and violence can never become the recipients of divine blessings.

Positivity is the most important trait that makes a man worthy of receiving God's blessings.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word. Else the blessings may be showered, but not on him! Positivity is the most important trait that makes a man worthy of receiving God's blessings. A positive mind will not engage in conflicts and would remain free of revenge, hatred, lust and negative thoughts. (*Al Bukhari*) .□



Journey through Shocks

Life is not a smooth journey: it is a journey through shocks. Anyone who seeks to make himself successful should understand this reality and take shocks as stepping stones in life.

THE MIRACLE OF A REALISTIC POLICY

Positive Wise Planning

LEE KUAN YEOW, founder and Prime minister of Singapore died on March 23, 2015, at the age of 91. Earlier Singapore was a part of Malaysia. On seceding from Malaysia in 1965, Mr. Lee became Singapore's first Prime Minister when it was an underdeveloped country and lacked natural resources. Mr. Lee's tremendous efforts transformed Singapore into a major commercial hub in a single generation.

An educated Singaporean remarked that to those who sought Lee Kuan Yew's monument, Singaporeans could proudly reply: "Look around you."

The extraordinary progress and development of Singapore is well known. People generally give credit to the first Prime Minister of Singapore. In reality, it is the result of right policies having been adopted and implemented. Mr. Lee was a highly educated person and, through his studies, he learnt the difference between the possible and the impossible. He understood that the key to Singapore's progress was through drafting national policies that were positive; that it should not complain of the dearth of resources or adopt a policy of confrontation against supposed enemies.

The secret to success is to discover the eternal laws of nature and to develop an action plan accordingly.

Mr. Lee put a complete end to negative thinking. He developed the available resources of Singapore in an intelligent manner. He did not spend a single day seeking resources that were unavailable but planned on resources which were currently available.

This positive approach brought fantastic results in a very short period of time, an unparalleled feat of development.

The world is governed by the laws of nature. The secret to success is to discover the eternal laws of nature and to develop an action plan accordingly. This world is God's creation and functions according to the laws of the Creator. One law is that opportunities that are plentiful

in nature, should be discovered and developed, rather than protesting about lack of opportunities.

Singapore, a relatively small island is a city-state. Singapore's greatest concern should have been to extend its geographical area. In his wisdom, the leader of Singapore realized that the present age is one of new opportunities.

Today, even with limited area at your disposal, you can opt for vertical growth in the form of multi-storey buildings. If you have only a local office, you can extend its functioning across the world through virtual offices. If business opportunities in your country are not aplenty, you can extend your business globally by sea and air. Singapore's wise leader discovered the new opportunities and availed of them fully. In a limited period of time, Singapore became a highly developed country.

The awareness of realities will lead to success, while a lack of such awareness will reduce individuals, communities, and nations to a state of ineffectuality.

A law of nature reveals that the secret to success does not lie in discovering the plots and conspiracies against one. Such aspirants have failed to discover both the laws of nature and the opportunities available to them. They are deprived of both knowledge of God and man. The law of the Creator requires one to be aware of realities that will lead to success, while a lack of such awareness will reduce individuals, communities, and nations to a state of ineffectiveness, marked by complaints and protests. □



Trigger for the Mind

If you are an intellectually awakened person, then every experience or observation is bound to trigger your mind and it would compel you to engage in serious contemplation.

ZAKAT—THE PRESCRIBED CHARITY

Social Welfare

ZAKAT, or the alms-tax, is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. Its payment is obligatory, at the minimum fixed rate of 2.5% per annum, on all wealth that is subject to growth. It takes the form of the giving of alms out of one's own private means. This amount is given in the name of God and is to be spent on worthy religious causes and on meeting the needs of the poor and the helpless.

Zakat is an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God, and that nothing should, therefore, be withheld from Him.

Man himself plays only a very small part in obtaining whatever he owns in this world. Were he not to have the benefit of God's endless bounty, he would neither be able to grow grain, raise cattle, set up industries nor accomplish any other work of a useful nature.

The system of life created for him by God, fulfilling all of his requirements from those of his inner being to those of his external environment, is one of greatest perfection. Were God to withdraw even a single one of His blessings, all man's schemes would lie in ruins and all his efforts would be in vain. All productivity would grind to a halt, and life itself would come to a standstill.

Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers.

The observance of *Zakat* is a way of acknowledging this fact of life. Islam desires that private wealth should be considered as belonging to God, and therefore should be spent in the way as ordained by God.

In doing so, no one should consider that he is conferring a great favour upon those less well-endowed than himself, and should in no way be condescending to the recipients of his charity. When a man gives alms to others, he should do so with the knowledge that they have a rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained. He is doing no more than giving others their due. But when he gives, he can feel reassured that he himself will be given succour by his Maker on the Day of Judgment. In giving to others, he knows for certain that he will not be denied by God at the Last Reckoning.

Responsibilities To Others

Zakat gives a clear indication of what one's responsibilities to others should be. Everyone is required to recognize the rights of others, just as everyone is expected to sympathize with those afflicted by adversity. This feeling should be so well developed that one has no hesitancy about sharing one's possessions with others, or coming to their assistance, even when it is clear that nothing can be expected in return. Even where there are no ties of friendship, one should be a well-wisher of others and guard their honour as if it were one's own.

Gifts From God

Zakat brings the realization that all of one's possessions are gifts from God and makes one more keenly aware of the virtues of devotion to God. In the light of such awareness, one cannot remain insensitive to the needs of the society in which one lives. *Zakat* is a perennial reminder that a selfish stance is a wrong stance, and that others must be given their rightful share of our earnings.

Zakat is in the nature of an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God.

One unfortunate aspect of human relationships is that people tend to give to others only when they hope to gain something in return. Money, they feel, should be returned with interest. When such an understanding becomes a factor in our social organization, exploitation becomes rampant; everyone is ready to plunder everyone else. This results in society falling prey to oppression and disorder.

No one—no matter whether they are rich or poor—can be at peace in a society stricken with this malaise. Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers, in the knowledge that they will ultimately be rewarded by God. Believers have the assurance of God that if they give to others, whatever they give will be returned to them many times over in the next world; their trust in God's promise is complete. In a society ordered in this way, feelings of antagonism and indifference are not allowed to develop; people are not bent on exploiting one another. There is never an atmosphere of mutual resentment and dissatisfaction, for everyone lives in peace with his neighbour. Such a society, in short, is a haven of contentment and well-being.

In its external form then, *Zakat* is an annual tax. But in its essence, it is the principle on which God and his creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

The *Ramazan* Charity

Zakat-al-Fitr is specifically related to the month of fasting and is given before the special *Eid* prayer. The reason for this *Zakat* is two-fold.

According to a *Hadith* reported by Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet made *Zakat-al-Fitr* obligatory for the fasting person to keep him from idle talk and indecent conversation and to provide food for the needy. Discharging the duty before the prayer is an accepted *Zakat* while discharging it after the prayer is just *sadaqah* (voluntary charity).

In its external form then, Zakat is an annual tax. But, in essence it is the principle on which God and his creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

Zakat-al-Fitr perfects the fast of *Ramazan* and purifies the fast of any indecent act or speech. It is obligatory on all Muslims: young, old, male and female. Every Muslim who possesses over and above what is needed as basic food for the duration of one day and night must pay *Zakat-al-Fitr* for himself and his dependants and distribute it amongst the poor and needy. The earlier it is given the easier it is for them to make arrangements, so that they may also take part in the celebrations of *Eid* without any difficulties. □

An advertisement for the 'Spirit of Islam' website. On the left, a laptop displays a page titled 'THE GREATER JIHAD' with text. To the right, the text reads: 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE'. Below this, a hand cursor icon points to the text 'Download ebook at: www.newshunt.com'. At the bottom right, the website address 'www.spiritofislam.co.in' is displayed.

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SPIRIT OF THE AGE

Scientific Validity

THE American Nobel laureate, biologist James Watson (b. 1928) sold his Nobel medal on December 4, 2014. Watson said he sold his medal for redemption over the remarks about Africa he made seven years ago. He said these remarks had made him an “unperson” in the scientific community. Seven years ago Watson had told *The Sunday Times of London* that he was pessimistic about Africa because “all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours, whereas all the testing says not really.” Watson apologized saying: “To those who have drawn the inference from my words that Africa, as a continent, is somehow genetically inferior, I can only apologize unreservedly. More importantly from my point of view, there is no scientific basis for such a belief.” (*The Times of India*, New Delhi, December 6, 2014)

Universal acceptance is only for something that has scientific or rational basis.

This is no ordinary event. It reflects the spirit of this scientific age. Without scientific support a claim loses validity and is deemed invalid. Today, a person is free to follow whatever he wishes as a matter of belief. To get acceptance however, he has to provide scientific reasoning for it.

This is an important learning for everyone, including Muslims. Muslims speak against writings or remarks that have hurt their sentiments. Such statements are totally invalid today. If Muslims are hurt by something, it is entirely their personal matter and have no right to impose curbs on others' freedom of speech. Universal acceptance is only for something that has scientific basis. □



Flowers amidst Thorns

Spiritual behaviour is like the behaviour of the flowers that can live with all their fragrance in the neighbourhood of thorns.

LEARNING LESSONS FROM MATERIAL THINGS

Spiritual Development

*It's a very odd thing -
As odd as can be -
That whatever Miss T eats
Turns into Miss T.*

BRITISH writer Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) wrote a poem called 'Miss T'. Few lines of the poem are presented above. The poet suggests that as long as food is on the table it has an identity as an edible item. But once Miss T eats them, they become a part of her. This is a form of conversion, through which a material substance is changed to become a part of the human body. But there is another aspect of this change. This aspect relates to the human consciousness.

When we see various material things around us, they are just objects. But when they enter our minds, they can be transformed into a source for the development of our consciousness.

***Pondering
over material
experiences can
transform them
into a means for the
development of our
consciousness.***

A conscious person might wonder on the creation and existence of various materials on this earth. Their compatibility with humans go to form a fascinating life support system. Exploring further, one begins to discover the meaningfulness of God's creation and can see the Creator through His creation. This experience is a means to develop intellectually and spiritually. □



Ignore the Problem

*People's actions may present problems,
but no one has the power to uproot all the
opportunities from a person's life.*

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**

Put your trust in the One who is the Ever-Living [God], who never dies, and glorify Him with His praise. He is fully aware of the sins of His servants; it is He who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six Days [periods],^a then settled Himself on the throne—the Gracious One. Ask any informed person about Him.^b When they are told, 'Prostrate yourselves before the Gracious One,' they ask, 'Who is this Gracious One? Shall we prostrate ourselves before whatever you will?' This increases their aversion. (25: 58-60)

^a The 'six Days' refer to six Days of God, or it may be called six stages, indicating that the Creation was done in a systematically planned manner. All that was brought into existence as part of a deliberate plan cannot be futile.

^b In the question the stress is on the subject matter and not on the person to whom the question is put. The idea is that a man who is acquainted with God's wonderful marvels will be able to tell you how High and Mighty is the Merciful God. Research undertaken by modern scientists partially fits the meaning of this verse. Should a person learn the secrets of the universe as a result of scientific research, he would grow extremely excited, his hair will stand on end and his heart will spontaneously bow down before the Might of the Creator.

Exalted is He who put constellations^a in the heavens, a radiant lamp and an illuminating moon—it is He who has made night and day succeed each other, a sign for those who would take heed and would be grateful.^b (25: 61-62)

^a This passage possibly refers to the solar system. The original Arabic word '*buruj*' literally means a castle or fort, but scholars differ in their interpretation.

^b A phenomena of our solar system is the constant revolution of the earth around the sun. Its revolution has a fixed orbit and is completed in one year. The seasons occur due to the elliptical shape of its orbit and the sun not being located at its exact centre. Besides its revolution, the earth rotates on its axis and this is completed in twenty-four hours causing of day and night.

The revolution and rotation of the earth with extreme precision in vast space is marvellous. Such a system being greatly subservient to human beings' interests, is indeed beyond our understanding and leaves one feeling truly humbled. Reflecting on these blessings should indeed overwhelm one with gratitude to God. □



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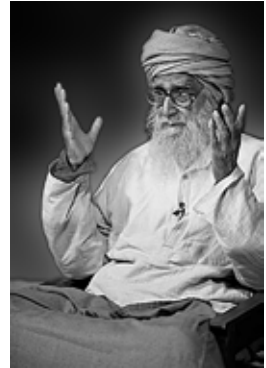
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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered



SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In this interview with Jamuna Rangachari of Lifepositive.com he demolishes many of the interpretations that have tarnished the name of Islam in present times.

<http://lifepositive.com/setting-the-record-straight/>

What is the role of religion and faith in today's world?

Religion is a spiritual discipline. The sole objective of religion is to develop a person spiritually who is able to live with a positive mind that is duty-conscious rather than rights-conscious. Such a person is free of greed and hate, and is capable of assessing things objectively. He possesses a predictable character. This kind of personality is the greatest need of present times.

Many people are wary of Muslims and Islam because of their perceived intolerance toward people of other faiths, whom they call kafirs. Who, according to you, are kafirs and how should they be dealt with?

It is totally wrong to divide people in terms of Muslim and *kafirs*. According to the Quran, every person is *insaan*, or a human being, have common ancestors, Adam and Eve. This means that all people are blood sisters and blood brothers. A saying of the Prophet of Islam: "*Al-khalq ayal Allah.*" suggests the entire humanity is the family of God. Given this, Muslims must live amidst others as though they were their family members, and deal with them accordingly.

The word *kafir* literally means denier of truth. But that can be determined only by one's intention. Therefore, only God knows who is truly a believer and who is a non-believer. Muslims have no right to take the seat of God. Muslims must fulfil their own duties and should leave all other matters to God. In Islam there is no concept of being a born Muslim. Therefore, even a Muslim's being Muslim will be established only when God confirms his or her being a Muslim.

Islamic teachings state that Muslims have no right to declare a person or a community as *kafir*. This matter is God's domain. The duty of Muslims is only to treat others as human beings.

Everyone wants freedom to make their own choices. Does Islam permit its followers to do so?

The first clause of Islam is that every person has been bestowed freedom of choice by the Creator. Whether a person is making the right or wrong use of freedom shall be decided by God. No person has the right to make this decision for another.

What kind of education does Islam recommend?

According to Islam, education is of two types: religious and secular. Religious education is the need of every believer. Secular education has a universal domain and is thus the need of the entire human society. Islam accepts the importance of both these forms of education and leaves it to people to organise these two aspects of their education.

In the area of attire, especially women, it is said Islam has a strict code. This is not practical today. For instance, how can one expect a tennis player like Sania Mirza to be clad in a burqah while playing? What are your views on this?

Freedom is the right of both men and women. The *burqah* is not part of Islamic teaching. It was innovated in the later period of Muslim history. It is ridiculous to demand that Sania Mirza should play in a *burqah*.

Many great singers, accomplished musicians and lyricists, are Muslims. Still, it is often said that Islam prohibits music. Could you clarify this?

Music is not prohibited in Islam and is a matter of personal choice. It is a hobby and everyone can choose his or her hobby. Sharia law does not ban music.

What is the Sharia law? Can it be revised as per the times and circumstances?

There is a Sharia (law) in Islam. Muslims are not required to implement the Sharia by force. It is a matter of option and not a matter of implementation. In this context, the word "revision" is inappropriate.

The better word is *ijtihad*, meaning to re-apply the spirit of the Sharia according to the circumstances.

In your view, should the citizen of a country give more importance to the Islamic law, or the law of the country he/she lives in?

Law of the land is to be followed by Muslims as by others. Muslims must follow Sharia in their personal issues, but as far as national issues are concerned, every Muslim must follow the law of the land as established by the Parliament.

How do you view disorder and violence in different parts of the world in the name of religion? Who, in your opinion, is responsible for such inhuman acts?

The violence in the Muslim world in the name of Islam has no relation to Islam. It is entirely a form of tribal culture, rather than being derived from Islam. Some people started it for their personal interest and gave it the name of Islam. In this matter the *ulema* have made an unforgivable mistake by not openly condemning the violence, as a result of which it has continued to this day.

What is your vision for the future?

According to me, the future of both the Muslim and non-Muslim world is only one, that is peace. We have to adopt peace as a universal norm, and not the way of violence under any circumstance. After the invention of weapons of mass destruction, the option for violence does not remain. In present times, the entire world has peace as the only option. □



No Silver Spoon

One who was born without a silver or a golden spoon in his mouth was born with a better spoon, that is, a strong incentive to work and change his fate.

Towards Spiritual Living

Al-Risala and Spirit of Islam are two monthly spiritual magazines. They aim at helping individuals discover for themselves answers to their questions on spirituality, religion, this life and the life beyond, and also instill in them the spirit of dawah work.



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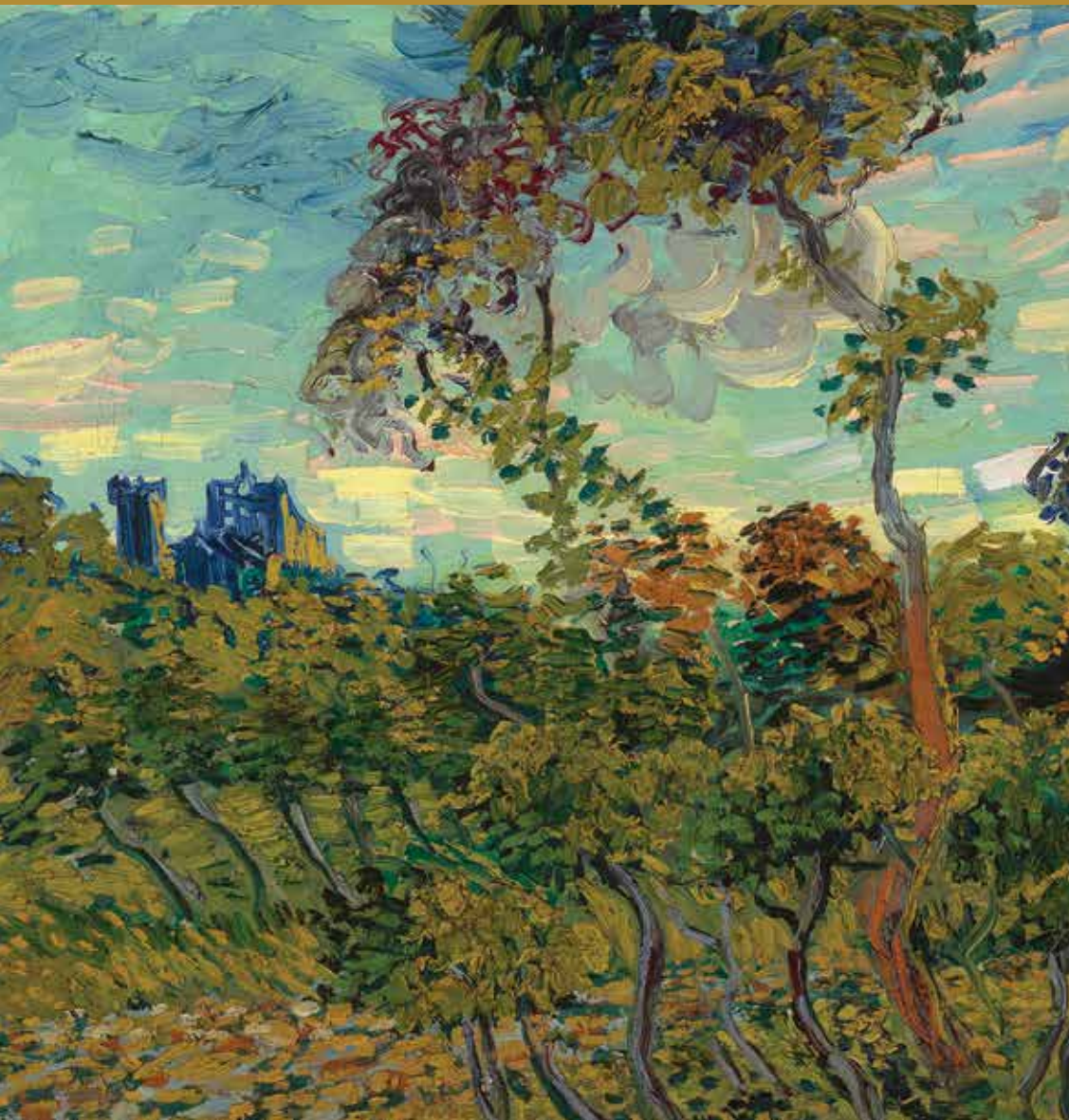
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