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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

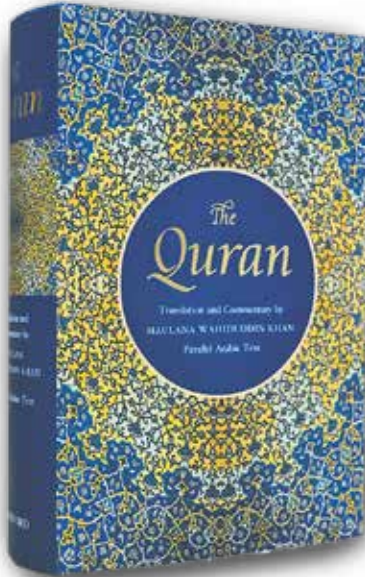


**Wisdom is the ability to discover the relevant
by sorting out the irrelevant.**

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

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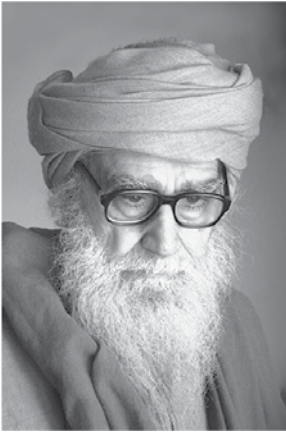
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CONTENTS

■ FROM MAULANA'S DESK	3
■ THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FASTING AND LIFE	5
■ TAKE IT AS A CHALLENGE	6
■ TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE	8
■ GREED TILL THE GRAVE	11
■ PRESENCE OF MIND	12
■ THE SIGNIFICANCE OF <i>IFTAR</i>	13
■ INTROSPECTION	15
■ FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE	17
■ GOD-ORIENTED LIFE	19
■ PATIENCE	21
■ <i>LAILATUL QADR</i> (THE NIGHT OF DESTINY)	22
■ WRONG CRITERION	24
■ <i>RAMAZAN AND EID-UL-FITR</i>	25
■ SPIRITUAL POWER NOT POLITICAL POWER	27
■ MAN	31
■ FASTING AND FEASTING	41
■ THE WORD OF GOD	43
■ ASK MAULANA	45

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 recognized 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.

LESSON FROM LONDON

ON May 7, I switched on the radio and heard the speech of a British Muslim. One of his statements was: "I want to thank every single Londoner for making the impossible possible today."

This voice from London prompted me to search for details about this event. It was the voice of Mr. Sadiq Khan, a practising Muslim and former labour cabinet minister, who was elected mayor of London, by defeating Conservative candidate Zac Goldsmith in a landslide victory. He gained more than 1.1 million votes, the single largest mandate for any individual politician in British history.

The new mayor of the UK's capital is the son of immigrants from Pakistan who settled in London in the 1960s, where his father worked as a bus driver. Khan studied law and became a human rights lawyer before being elected as the Labor MP for the London constituency of Tooting in 2005.

In his victory speech, Mr. Khan referred to his humble origins on a council estate and said he had never imagined that someone like him

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

could be elected mayor of London, and he promised to be a mayor for all Londoners.

I discovered that this incident had a revolutionary message for all Muslims—Abandon thinking along the lines of complaint and make plans for actions on a positive basis.

Mr. Sadiq Khan's victory clearly disproves the common Muslim perception that the West is anti-Muslim, a phenomenon termed as 'Islamophobia'.

'Making the impossible possible' is not a simple matter. It is the phenomenon of a new age. The spirit of the age has ended the monopolization of social and political positions by the privileged class. Opportunities are open for everyone, be it political or non-political. The case of Mr. Sadiq Khan is an illustration of the spirit of the age.

However, this opportunity is strictly for those who adopt the peaceful course of action and do not take to violence under any circumstance. Mr. Khan's victory clearly disproves the common Muslim perception that the West is anti-Muslim, a phenomenon termed as 'Islamophobia'. It is high time for Muslims to abandon this kind of thinking and re-orient themselves to peaceful and constructive action. Their goal should be to achieve competence and be meritorious, which will open all doors of opportunity for them. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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Unrealistic Thinking

Unrealistic thinking is that which does not take the actual state of affairs into account, which is based on suppositions and conjecture, on mere opinion, rather than on fact.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FASTING AND LIFE

Brakes on Desires

FASTING in the month of *Ramazán* is not just a kind of annual custom. It is a living creative process. Fasting is related to the entire life of a human being, the aim of which is to make man's life a fasting-oriented life.

The reality of fasting is to put a curb on desires. In one *Hadith*, this is referred to as 'renouncing one's desires'. Food and water are essential needs of man. Sleep and rest are also needs of man. During the month of fasting there are restrictions to these essential needs by compulsion. This training inculcates in man the capability to restrain his desires willingly so that he consciously leads a disciplined life.

There is a 50:50 ratio in all the actions man has to perform in life i.e. 50% of the actions require abstaining from something and the other 50% acting on something. In the Islamic creed, 'There is no other God' comes before, 'there is one God'.

The aim of fasting for man is to apply a brake on his desires so that he may carry out the desirable deeds in this world.

The same ratio of negative and positive aspect is found in all the religious acts. In this respect, the aim of fasting for man is to apply a brake on his desires so that he may carry out the desirable deeds in this world.

Symbolically speaking, the position of fasting in human life is akin to the brakes in an engine. Brakes keep the engine of a vehicle in control so that the journey can be completed successfully. If there is no brake in the engine, the vehicle will not be able to function effectively.

The same is the case of fasting in the life of a believer. Man should accord the place of brakes to fasting in his life so that he may travel successfully on the path of God. The fasting of that person is true for whom fasting is like applying brakes on the things forbidden by God. □



TAKE IT AS A CHALLENGE

Not as a Problem

PEOPLE often point out that the world is beset by numerous problems such as economic debt, oppression, genocide, inequality, lack of opportunities, and poverty and that these problems cannot and should not be passively accepted. The questions thus frequently raised are: "If God is all-powerful, why is the world afflicted by such problems at all? Why doesn't God put a stop to evil?"

There is no doubt about the prevalence of these problems in this world, but they cannot be regarded as an issue of the existence of evil. Nor does the existence of adversity cast doubt on the Creator's omnipotence. A state of affairs marred by problems must be attributed rather to the nature of the creation plan of the Creator.

The creation plan of the Creator is based not on idealism, but on challenge. According to this, challenges are part of the scheme of things. In truth, these phenomena are the plus points and not the negative aspects of this world.

The fact is that the Creator has created man with great potential. It is everyone's personal duty to unfold one's potential and turn it into actuality. In other words, challenge fosters creativity. This guarantees that creativity will always be a part of human life and, consequently, life will never become stagnant. Had everything been perfect in this world, man would have had nothing to strive for and the result would have been a life lived meaninglessly in the doldrums.

The creation plan of the Creator is based not on idealism, but on challenge.

Advocates of human rights, generally categorize people as 'haves' and 'have-nots'. This division is not based on reality, but rather on a general unawareness of the law of nature. The right way to describe these two groups is to call them 'haves' and 'potential haves'. If in

terms of the present, an individual appears to be in the category of the 'potential haves', in the future there are distinct possibilities that he will emerge as one of the 'haves'.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, for instance, was born into a Dalit family which lived below the poverty line. During his schooldays he had to study by the light of street lamps. But this same boy later did wonders by becoming a leading scholar and being instrumental in drafting the Constitution

of India. Similarly, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam was born into a family which could not afford to pay his school fees. However, Dr.Kalam went on to become a leading scientist and ultimately the President of India, the highest office of the country.

It is poverty and difficulties which create motivation in people and as such, they are not evils. Without them, there would be little chance of progress or development. According to the creation plan, the principle of life is: suffering plus motivation leads to development.

The same holds true for nations. For example, Japan and Germany were engaged in the hostilities of the Second World War. Both were defeated and suffered great losses. But this loss motivated them to do better national planning, and their efforts in this field bore fruit. It is common knowledge that Germany and Japan, which had once been devastated by war, ultimately rose to become successful nations in the post-war period.

It is not in the Creator's scheme of things for anyone to be born 'ready-made' by nature. Human beings are required to struggle to become self-made individuals. This is so that every mind may become a creative mind, and so that everyone may have the self-confidence to carve out independently a career for oneself. Had the world not been fraught with challenges, it would have been a moribund rather than an alive world.

Modern civilization is considered to be the greatest marvel of the present age. But this marvel could only have come into existence as a result of the challenge-response mechanism. A phenomenon such as civilization could never have arisen in a world without challenges being met.

Human beings are required to struggle to become self-made individuals.

Moreover, had there been no challenges in the world, human beings would have been deprived of real joy. It is human nature for a person to face a challenge, overcome it through struggle, discover or achieve something new in the process, and then experience great joy. Had everyone been in possession of all they needed from the outset, and no one had been required to struggle to achieve anything, human life would have become like the world of the trees; living, but joyless. On the contrary, man, besides just being alive, can experience joy. The reason for this is the presence of challenge, which is often erroneously considered as a source of suffering. □

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.



THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN PEACE BUILDING

SINCE most people believe in one religion or the other, the role of religion can never be overstressed when it comes to peace building. But it is crucial that religious people should refrain from extremism and tread the path of tolerance. This is the teaching of all religions. No religion approves of extremism. If people follow the teaching of their religion, it will reinforce the culture of tolerance. And the culture of tolerance is indispensable for the establishment of peace.

Since the majority believes in one religious system or the other, religion provides a ready-made instrument for establishing peace in society. If we speak of peace and tolerance with reference to religion, it will have a vast appeal. People will attach great importance to it and will try to practise it. But one has to sedulously refrain from extremism while communicating the teaching of the respective religions. If this can be done, religion will, without doubt, prove to be the greatest means of bringing about peace in society.

It is also a fact that religion in its real authentic form teaches well-wishing for one another. Jesus Christ once said, 'Love your enemy', which means to establish friendly relations with everyone including one's opponents, and win over one's enemy by using the power of peace. In business, a customer-friendly culture is adopted. Similarly the essence of the social teachings of every religion is a human-friendly culture.

History tells us that in every age, religion has been the means of uniting or joining people—far from splitting them asunder. But in the age of democracy in modern times, a new culture has come to be promoted—that of the vote bank. This has divided people into different groups. Now human relationships have become that of rivalry rather than the brotherhood of man.

This phenomenon has emerged in the wake of democratic politics. Democratic politics is undeniably important. But there is a great need for religion not to be politicized.

The need of the hour is, thus, to awaken the spirit of religion. It is, therefore the duty of religious scholars to engage themselves in this most important task.

The study of religion tells us that one thing is common to every religion and that is spirituality, or a non-material outlook. A non-material outlook is essential to peace. In this respect, peace is deeply related to religion. A material outlook disturbs peace, while a non-material outlook fosters the environment of peace. This is why, the most important way of establishing peace is to revive the spirit of religion.

The ideology of Islam is a peaceful one in the full sense. Islam embraces the whole of humanity. It does not believe in the 'We' and 'They' concept, but rather it believes in the 'We and We' concept.

The Prophet of Islam said that all human beings are God's family. All human beings are blood brothers and blood sisters. Therefore, they have to live in this world as a universal family.

There are many religions in this world, and they have many things in common. While there are also many differences, Islam teaches us to manage the differences, rather than try to eliminate them. The formula of Islam in this regard is to follow one and respect all.

Islam teaches us to manage the differences, rather than trying to eliminate them. The principle of Islam in this regard is to follow one and respect all.

Peace is, without doubt, extremely important. It would be right to say that peace is the greatest good, the summum bonum—without it no progress is possible, neither religious nor secular.

The principle for peace in Islam is the same as has already been adopted in the secular world and that is, peaceful co-existence. This is the only method in this matter which is practicable.

There are two parts to every religion: belief and the value system. The value system relates to the social system which is based on ethical norms. And ethical norms are common to almost all religions. There are some differences in beliefs, but beliefs are of a theoretical nature. They are in the mind of the believer, so differences in belief do not create any problem so far as the establishment of peace is concerned.

One part of every religion is its spirit and another is its form. Spirit is the essence or the real part of every religion. For instance, speaking the truth, honesty, well-wishing, etc. —the spiritual content of religion does not create any problem. The problem is always created by the form of the religion. When the form is emphasized, differences, clash and confrontation ensue.

According to Islam, the spirit of religion is its real part and the form of religion is a relative part. Islam forbids stressing the relative part, which is called extremism in Islam. Islam's emphasis is on spirit. So far as form is concerned, the way of tolerance will be adopted.

Differences in belief do not create any problem so far as the establishment of peace is concerned.

Islam attaches great importance to the life 'Hereafter'. According to the teachings of Islam, man should make the success of the Hereafter his greatest concern. If a living awareness of this concept is produced in man, material differences, and controversies will

be minimized and replaced by a non-material or other-worldly outlook. This verse of the Quran is significant:

And God calls to the Home of Peace (Paradise). (10: 25)

This means that according to the creation plan, peace and harmony should prevail in human society. God Himself is peace. He intended this world to be peaceful, and only a peaceful world will be able to receive His blessings. A peaceful world is like a Paradise on earth. It is only in such a world that we can meet and establish contact with God Almighty, the Creator of man and the universe. □

The above article by Professor Farida Khanam, Department of Islamic Studies Jamia Millia Islamia Delhi appeared in an online magazine Diplomatic Square on March 7, 2016.



GREED TILL THE GRAVE

Until the End

The Quran refers to a condition of many people in the following words:

*Greed for more and more distracted you [from God]
till you reached the grave. (102: 1-2)*

MANY people make accumulating as much wealth as they can, the aim of their lives. That is what they keep themselves busy with, till at last, one day, death arrives and carries them away. They leave the world lamenting that they failed to acquire what they had spent their lives chasing.

The fact is that there is a definite limit to the wealth that we really need. But for those who make accumulating wealth for its own sake the aim of their lives, there is no such limit. If it is to meet your needs that you seek wealth, when you have earned enough to meet your needs you will be content. But if you have made acquiring wealth for its own sake your life's purpose, you will never be content. You will constantly hanker for more. You will always be discontent, and you will die in that condition.

***The fact is that there
is a definite limit to
the wealth that we
really need.***

The well-known American businessman Bill Gates made making as much money as he could the aim of his life. That's what he did for many years, till he became, in economic terms, the richest man in the world. Finally, however, he realized that his needs were, after all, limited and that the extra wealth that he had accumulated was, in terms of meeting his needs, pointless. He very rightly commented:

*Once you get beyond a million dollars,
it is the same hamburger.*



Masterstroke

*The quality of adjustment makes a person
capable of surviving with all kinds of people.*

PRESENCE OF MIND

A Gift of God

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI (1869 – 1948) was a great leader of India. There are a number of interesting stories from his life. According to one of the stories, one day, as Gandhiji started to board a train, one of his shoes slipped off and got caught on the track. He was unable to free the shoe from the track; so he took off the other shoe and threw it also on the track right at the spot where the first one was stuck. The astonished passengers asked, 'Why are you throwing the other shoe onto the track?' He replied, 'The poor man who finds the shoe lying on the track will now have a pair he can use.'

This was a moment of crisis for Gandhiji. A crisis always comes suddenly. Few people can manage it successfully. Crisis management requires presence of mind. It is presence of mind that helps one to successfully manage crises. Gandhiji was wise enough to manage the crisis he faced and turned his loss into gain, if not for himself, then certainly for some other person.

Crisis management requires presence of mind. It is presence of mind that helps one to successfully manage crises.

The greatest quality needed for successful crisis management is only one, that is, to forget the first chance that you have lost, and to discover the second chance and avail of it. In every crisis, a person loses the first chance. One who is obsessed with the losing of the first chance, cannot manage the crisis. The moment you get rid of the first loss, you can easily manage the problem in your favour.

This principle applies not only to individuals, but also to nations. A nation, too, often loses the first chance. At that time, national leaders should remove people's focus from the first chance and draw their attention to the second chance. This is the only art of management of crisis. □



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *IFTAR*

True Perspective

I*FTAR* is an Arabic word, which literally means 'to break'. In the Islamic context, it means to break the fast, to eat and drink in the evening after the daylong fast. *Iftar* is not simply a matter of having dinner. It has great significance. It is the partaking of a combination of spiritual and physical food.

According to Islamic teachings, there are five pillars of Islam. One of these pillars is fasting during *Ramazan*, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Fasting begins from dawn and ends at sunset. One can take food before dawn, after which one is required to maintain a total fast until sunset. After sunset, one is allowed to eat and drink according to one's choice. Taking food before dawn is called *sehri*. Taking food after sunset is called *iftar*.

Iftar is like dinner, but it is a dinner combined with a spiritual experience. It is like a compulsory form of training. When one experiences hunger in the daytime, one discovers the importance of food and water which give us energy. Indeed, one discovers the fact that one cannot live without food and water. And, after this experience, when a person takes food and water in the evening, he is filled with gratitude to God Almighty, who not only created him, but also provided him with all the basic needs, essential for his continuing existence.

Iftar, thus not only gives physical energy, but also becomes a source of spiritual development.

This spiritual experience also inculcates in his mind the importance of philanthropy. He becomes more sensitive towards those people who are unable to meet their needs. This feeling gives him an incentive to give assistance to such people.

***Iftar is like dinner,
but it is a dinner
combined with a
spiritual experience.***

In this sense, *iftar* is a source of spiritual learning. The *iftar* time becomes a time of inspiration. It is the moment when physical food is converted into spiritual food.

According to Islamic teachings, *iftar* should be a simple meal and not a lavish affair. Simplicity saves us from distraction and will make us concentrate on the spiritual aspect of fasting. On the other hand, if the *iftar* takes the form of a lavish affair, all attention will focus on the taste

and the physical aspects, and the spiritual benefits will be lost. In fact, a lavish *iftar* kills the true spirit of fasting. The Prophet of Islam and his Companions always used to take simple food at the time of *iftar*.

Iftar ostensibly ends the time of fasting, but treating it as an end would be an underestimation. For the spiritually awakened mind, it is like a new beginning towards spiritual upliftment. Such a person will analyze the experiences of the day and try to learn lessons from them. *Iftar* gives a glimpse of the boundless rewards that await man in the world Hereafter.

According to Islamic teachings, *iftar* should be a simple meal and not a lavish affair.

These days, organizing *iftar* parties has become a tradition. But this party should not be like any other party. Such a party should give us an opportunity for spiritual exchange, turning our individual experience into a social experience.

It is reported that the Prophet of Islam used to say at the time of *iftar*, 'Thirst has been quenched, and hunger is no more, and, God willing, God will bless us with His reward.' This shows that *iftar* invokes the spirit of prayer. It gives us an opportunity to say,

'O God, I have fulfilled my duty and now I hope You will not deprive me of Your higher blessings.'

During the fast, the pangs of hunger and thirst make a man feel vulnerable and he turns towards God with renewed zeal. He cries out, 'God, I have obeyed Your one command, there are many I could not. I kept one day's fast, but I failed on several other occasions. I seek Your forgiveness and your special blessings.'

When a sincere prayer like this is uttered, God turns His special attention to it and the rewards are boundless. Man prays in this world and the reward is given in the world Hereafter. But fasting is an exception for which a taste of the reward is given in this world itself. *Iftar* gives a glimpse of the boundless rewards that await man in the world Hereafter. □



INTROSPECTION

After Making a Mistake

INTROSPECTION is a major source of purification known as *Tazkiya*. Introspection awakens the human mind, it jolts the human personality, and gives the individual the incentive to reform. Introspection in this way leads one to intellectual and spiritual development.

Let us assume that you were provoked and reacted negatively to a hurting remark from someone. Later you became repentant and engaged in introspection about your reaction. Introspection led you to realize that your behaviour would result in making you a negative personality. Such a result would have a deleterious effect in the life after death. In fact it would render one incapable of entering Paradise.

You came to realize that the culture of the people of Paradise would be that of peace and positivity; only those would be accommodated there who had the capacity to live together in love and peace. This being so, one who develops a personality which is intolerant, easily provoked and downright unfriendly will be held ineligible to enter Paradise and will be deprived of happiness and success for all eternity. You will become extremely keen to reform yourself such thinking will prove to be revolutionary and you will become your own watchdog.

Thinking born of introspection is the greatest source of purification which can always be achieved by inner self-appraisal, rather than by some external activity.

Introspection leads one to intellectual and spiritual development.

What are the Means of Attaining Purification?

Traditionally, some things are considered to be the means of attaining *tazkiya*, such as, supererogatory prayers, recitation of the Quran, prophetic prayers, meditation, companionship, taking lessons from the lives of the 'saints', etc. According to this thinking, it is like a fixed course, or something to be learned from a manual. However, the truth is that there is no fixed course for attaining such purification. It can be attained only through a living act.

The real means of attaining the ends of *tazkiya* is for man to reflect on the signs of God, activate his thinking, and through continuous reflection or pondering, discover the deeper realities of things. This discovery is spiritual food for a person who is a seeker of it.

The culture of the people of Paradise would be that of peace and positivity; only those would be accommodated there who had the capacity to live together in love and peace.

For instance, suppose you see a bird. This reminds you of the saying of the Prophet that the hearts of the people of Paradise will be like the hearts of birds. You later begin to think about yourself—whether your heart is like that of the bird; whether your heart is free of all negative thinking like that of the bird; whether you are free from greed like the bird; whether you are as harmless as a bird; whether you follow the law of nature, just as the bird does. Such thinking is the essence of *tazkiya*. Without such introspection, no one can attain it.

In its reality, it is an act of spiritually developing one's own self. In engaging in self-purification, one has to become one's own teacher to purify oneself. Sitting in the company of another or listening to someone else's preaching cannot in itself be effective for one who aspires to purification. Initial guidance can be provided by another person, but taking it to completion is a task one must achieve oneself. In the process of attaining purification, if the share of the other person is 1% then one's own share is 99%. □



Material Distractions

Our minds are continuously attracted towards material needs. This leaves no room for thoughts about higher realities. We remain devoid of spiritual realization.

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



THE LIFE AFTER DEATH

THE Prophet of Islam likened death to sleep and life to the state of wakefulness after sleep. When he awakened in the morning, he would say: "All praise and thanks are due to God who gave us life after death."

For mankind, waking and sleeping are likewise symbolic of life and death. Going to sleep is like dying and waking up in the morning is like rising from the grave. Our inevitable awakening after sleeping foreshadows with certainty how we shall arise after death to give an account of our deeds on the Day of Judgement.

Man has to pass his life in this world in such a way that every happening becomes for him a reminder of the Day of Judgement. His sleeping and rising should also serve as reminders of life after death.

The most delicate aspect of man's life is that his existence does not come to an end after death. He has to be reborn in another world. The present world is the world of action, while the world to come will be one in which he

True faith leads man away from artificial things to nature, where simplicity is the rule.

reaps his reward. That will be the beginning of a new and eternal life—either eternal heaven or eternal hell.

Man is reminded daily of this most important reality when he goes to sleep and when he rises from sleep. In this way, actions of this world come to remind man of the Hereafter.

If we are conscious of the above fact on a daily basis it will certainly show in our behaviour in the day-to-day life. It is not possible that we can at the same time be aware of this fact and also keep living our life without any consideration for striving towards achieving the higher goals we are meant to achieve in this world. We are here for a purpose and for this, one needs to adopt the concept of high thinking and simple living.

The Prophet of Islam used to lead a very simple life and laid great stress on believers doing likewise. Once he said, "O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me. Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith. Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith."

Our inevitable awakening after sleeping foreshadows with certainty how we shall arise after death to give an account of our deeds on the Day of Judgement.

When man has discovered the greatness of God, his own existence in comparison appears quite insignificant. This feeling makes him a truly modest person. His whole being is coloured in the hue of servitude. His manner ceases to be aggressive and his voice becomes gentle. Even his gait expresses his modesty. His whole attitude comes to reflect a new seriousness.

All this inevitably results in his preferring simplicity in everything; in food, drink and living arrangements. He avoids luxuries, pomp and show. His soul finds pleasure and contentment in leading a life of simplicity instead of indulgence.

True faith leads man away from artificial things to nature, where simplicity is the rule. He develops a liking for a simple way of life, which is more natural. This naturalness behoves the believer. Naturalness is in accordance with his modesty and humility, which are great virtues in the eyes of God.

The daily actions of sleeping and waking up which might just appear as two ordinary actions amongst many in our life can actually be the greatest reminders to keep us away from frivolities and to be serious about achieving the high goals befitting a human being. □

GOD-ORIENTED LIFE

Leading Towards Success

IF the earth did not revolve around the sun, its existence would have no meaning, and life would come to an end. Just as the earth revolves around the sun, in man's life, all his activities must revolve around God.

The God-oriented life begins with the discovery of God. When an individual discovers God, it means that he has found the truth. And this truth pervades his whole being filling him with everlasting conviction. Conviction removes all frustrations from a person's life. Therefore, losses no longer matter; he never loses the feeling that his greatest asset, God, is still with him.

God is a spiritual focus for man. One whose heart is attached to God undergoes spiritual experiences at every moment. Belief in God becomes a source of spiritual development. Filled with the love of God, he does not need anything further. In the form of spiritual awakening, he receives such great wealth that he does not feel the need for anything else.

The God-oriented life for man starts by his remembering God. He begins to feel the presence of God. Everything serves to remind him of God. God's remembrance is never absent from his heart and mind.

Man experiences this realization by pondering upon God's creations. The truth is that the universe is an expression of God's attributes. It is a complete introduction to God. God is visible in His creations. For one who discovers God, the entire universe becomes an open book of God for him. Every leaf of a tree becomes a page of the divine book.

Finding God is to find his centre of love. Man by birth is a seeker of a Supreme Being who is far above him; who is free from all limitations and who may form the centre of his feelings. The discovery of God is to fulfill one's real urge to find this Supreme Being.

***God is a spiritual
focus for man.
One whose heart
is attached to God
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experiences at every
moment.***

Man, of his own free will, should surrender to God. He should build a life based on the concept of God. This consciousness is the real ascension of man. In this consciousness lies the secret of all success.

The concept of God provides man with an ideology in which loss is turned to gain and adversity brings with it good tidings. Therefore submission to God is the only way of life for both man and the universe.□

Human Society

If people do not show reliability and predictability in their character, human society will crumble.



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PATIENCE

Great Wisdom

THE dictionary defines patience as exhibiting calm endurance in the face of pain, difficulty, provocation, or annoyance. This however, is a technical definition of patience. There is high wisdom in patience, but it is absent from this dictionary definition.

Being impatient means giving an emotional reaction to the situation. Such a response, in terms of the result, is a waste of time. If on the other hand, you save yourself from giving a hasty response, then that is patience. Such kind of patience gives you the opportunity to do ample planning before taking a step. In truth, patience is buying time to enable yourself to give a well-considered response to the situation.

An impatient person can never give the right response to a situation. On the contrary, a patient person has the ability to give a proper response to the situation he finds himself in. Therefore, keeping patience is a way of buying time.

For example, suppose someone crashes his car into yours and out of impatience, you may engage him in a fight. In this case, you are doubling the problem. This is because your fight would invite the police who would take you to the police station. On the other hand, if you do not get angry and speak softly with the person who collided with your car, the issue would be resolved without further aggravation.

Anyone can give an impatient response to the situation, but only a wise person can give a patient response. □

Patience is buying time to enable yourself to give a well-considered response to the situation.



Negative Thinking

Negativity is to follow impulse rather than truth.

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 significant because by doing so, a believer realizes 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.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word.

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.

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.

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 a *Hadith* report, once the Prophet was in *etkaaf* (seclusion practised 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 violence and suicide bombing can never become the recipients of divine 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*). □



Run towards success

To be successful, a man has to exert himself, while for failure, he has to do nothing; it is itself running towards him.

WRONG CRITERION

Leading Man Astray

The Prophet of Islam is said to have remarked that in this world there are only few rights of a person—a house to live in, a piece of cloth to cover his body, a loaf of bread and water. (Tirmidhi)

FROM this *Hadith* of the Prophet we learn what the criterion for determining the necessities of life. It tells us what things we need, to live adequately. If we do not abide by this standard, and instead, think that in order to live, we need, for instance, a palace, we won't ever be satisfied with a small but adequate house. We will be obsessed with acquiring a palace, driven by the belief that as long as we don't have a palace we are homeless.

The same applies to entire communities, in just the same way as it does to individuals. If on its own a community starts imagining that for its communal life it is absolutely essential for it to wield political power, it will never be satisfied with anything but a status of political dominance. Even if by remaining without political dominance the community can access and enjoy many facilities, members of the community will continue to be resentful because of the lack of the dominance that they hanker after, and which they feel they are deprived of. For the sake of achieving this self-created criterion of theirs they may take to violence, even if the result of this would be nothing but a further exacerbation of their own destruction.

Muslims today are, generally speaking, victims of precisely this wrong sense of deprivation. This is despite the fact that today they can easily access and enjoy many facilities and opportunities, for which they should have been grateful to God. The only cause of the condition in which they find themselves is that they have formed, on their own, a wrong standard of Islam. According to this self-styled criterion, they imagine that Islam will live if Muslims acquire political dominance, but that otherwise it will not live. In this mistaken zeal of theirs they have gone to such an extent that today there are more than 50 countries where Muslims enjoy political dominance but still they do not perceive this obvious reality and continue with their negative activities. □

Justness

*Objectivity requires a person
'not to deviate' from the path of justice,
even when it concerns one's opponent.*

RAMAZAN AND EID-UL-FITR

Deeds and Reward

A portion of an authentic *Hadith* reported by Abu Hurairah and recorded in Musnad Ahmed is as follows:

During the last night of Ramazan, the sins of all the believers who have been fasting are forgiven. It was asked, 'O Prophet of God, Is this night the one known as the 'night of power'?' The Prophet replied, 'No, but as soon as the deed is done, the reward for the deed is immediately bestowed'.

ACCORDING to this *Hadith*, on the last night of *Ramazan*, those amongst the followers of the Prophet who have fasted in the true spirit will be rewarded for their deeds, and this will be noted in their records. This night of *Ramazan* is referred to in other *Hadith* literature as the 'night of reward' (*Al Bayhaqi*). God rewards His believers for every good deed. Due to the special significance of worship during *Ramazan*, this reward has been specifically mentioned by the Prophet.

In reality, those who have spent the month of *Ramazan* in its true spirit can never even contemplate that they can spend the last night of *Ramazan* in frivolous activity.

It has been generally noted that when the month of *Ramazan* is completed, the night before *Eid* is spent by most people in careless indulgence and entertainment. They throng shopping centres and market places. The above *Hadith* is a warning against all such frivolities.

The 'night of reward' is best utilised in more prayer and supplication, in introspection of the whole month of *Ramazan* that has just passed and in making fresh resolutions for the new year to come. To spend this night in frivolous shopping and entertainment is to ignore its importance and lose this great opportunity to earn rewards.

Another authentic *Hadith* regarding *Ramazan* has been reported by Anas ibn Malik. One part of this *Hadith* is: When the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr* dawns on them, then God is pleased and proclaims to the angels, 'O

The 'night of reward' is best utilised in more prayer and supplication, in introspection of the whole month of Ramazan that has just passed and in making fresh resolutions for the new year to come.

my angels, what is the reward for the doer who has completed his deed? The angels reply, 'Our Lord, such a person should be given the complete reward for the deed done.'

After the end of *Ramazan*, the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr* appears with glad tidings, with tidings of everlasting happiness as reward. This reward is for those believers of God who have proved themselves deserving of it by reviving the true spirit of all kinds of good deeds during the month of *Ramazan*. □



Spirit of Eid

The true spirit of Eid is to promote spiritual values among people and create a peaceful environment in society.

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SPIRITUAL POWER NOT POLITICAL POWER

Goal of Islam

*Say: "O God! Lord of power, You give power to whom
You please, and You take away power from whom
You please." (THE QURAN 3: 26)*



THE concept of the state in Islam can be understood from the above verse of the Quran. Some points are made here very clearly: one being that the actual possessor of power is God and that it is He who grants power on earth to whom He wants, and it is God who takes away power from whoever He wants. So the whole matter in this regard rests with God. If someone receives power, it is not due to his own effort: it is given to him by God alone. Similarly, when power is taken away from him, it is done by God alone.

Thus the dominance or subjugation of any group is ultimately for God to decide. According to this verse, no human being has any power whatsoever. The theory that comes to light is that political power is totally governed by God, just as the entire universe is running in accordance with the divine plan. It is like saying that God alone is the controller of the universe and that He alone has the final word as to who is going to be given political power. Just as God exercises full power over the setting and rising of the sun, so also has He full power over the granting of political ascendancy.

This is an incontrovertible fact. There is another verse in this connection which throws further light on the issue:

And He will bestow upon you other blessings which you desire;
help from God and a speedy victory. (61: 13)

In this verse "other blessings" means political power. This has been characterized as something secondary. When we take this verse in its literal sense, it transpires that the status of political power has a secondary rather than a primary position in Islam. Primary position is given to the purification of the self through intellectual and spiritual development.

Another point made clear in this verse is that the receiving of political power depends solely upon divine succour. Victory and defeat

apparently belong to the human world, but both are totally governed by God.

As we learn from the Quran:

Say, 'Lord, sovereign of all sovereignty. You bestow sovereignty on whom you will and take it away from whom you please; You exalt whoever You will and abase whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hands. You have the power to will anything.'

(3: 26)

The above verse from the Quran explains this matter further. If we take this verse literally, it emerges that political power is a promise from God, and not a target. That is, it is not something that Muslims should aim at, for they can receive it only by divine edict.

Then there is another verse in this connection which throws further light on the subject.

....When Solomon saw it placed before him, he exclaimed, 'This is by the grace of my Lord, to test whether I am grateful or ungrateful.... (27: 40)

This is in the context of the granting of political power to the Prophet Solomon. The words uttered by the Prophet Solomon after receiving power was '*Leabluani*' (This is meant as a test). These words tell us that political power is given in order to try us. The test contrives to separate the grateful from the insolent servants of God.

The actual possessor of power is God and that it is He who grants power on earth to whom He wants and it is God who takes away power from whoever He wants.

Thus, according to the Quran, the nature of political power in this world is exactly the same as that of other things. That is, when an individual is given wealth, children or anything of a material, worldly nature like success, all that is designed to test him. All these blessings serve as test papers. And political power is also a test paper.

Whoever receives power should realize that power is given to him in order to test him. It is not something to take pride in, nor is it a gift from God.

The concept of the state that emerges from these verses of the Quran makes it clear that political power is not the target or goal of our activities or actions.

If political power is not our goal then what is the target which Islam sets before man?

The answer in the words of the Quran is: 'A peaceful soul' (89: 27). Thus the spiritual goal of Islam is to attain this state of peace in the soul.

According to the Quran this is the ultimate stage in a man's spiritual development. When he reaches this stage of progress, he qualifies to be ushered into Paradise, the perfect and eternal world of the Hereafter. The Quran addresses such souls in these words:

'O serene soul! Return to your Lord joyful, and pleasing in His sight. Join my servants and enter My Paradise.' (89: 27-30)

In this world man has to lead his life in circumstances in which he experiences various kinds of situations; there are times of gain, times of loss; times of happiness and times of grief. Sometimes he receives good treatment at the hands of others, at other times his fate is quite otherwise.

The status of political power has a secondary rather than a primary position in Islam.

The ideal human being of the Quran is one who undergoes all these experiences without losing his integrity. Under no circumstances is his inner peace disturbed. However untoward the occasion, he maintains his natural balance. Success does not make him proud. Power does not make him haughty. No bad treatment by others drives him to seek vengeance in anger. At all events, he remains serene. It is such a man who is called 'a peaceful soul' in the Quran. And it is this man who, according to the Quran, has achieved the highest spiritual state.

The realization of God joins man to his Maker. Such communion with the divine brings about a state of spiritual elevation. Having been thus raised to a higher plane of existence, man becomes of a 'sublime character'(68: 4), as expressed in the Quran.

This can be illustrated by an example from the natural world: The process of conversion of a substance from the solid to the gaseous state is called boiling. The boiling point of a liquid varies according to atmospheric pressure. At sea level water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. At a higher altitude, as on a mountain, the atmospheric pressure is less, so the boiling point is lower. This shows that it is the altitude that makes the difference.

The law of nature governing this world accounts for the difference made by altitude. Islam's aim is to foster human beings whose altitude has changed. The superior qualities desired in him will come later, on their own.

According to the Quran whoever receives power should realize that power is given to him in order to test him.

The Prophet of Islam was a perfect example of the peaceful soul. By studying his life, one can learn the nature of God's ideal man, the peaceful soul. In the Quran the Prophet is described as an example of a 'sublime character'.

Who is the one who possesses this sublime character? In the words of the Quran it is a man who can show respect for every human being. It is he whose spiritual progress has elevated his mental level, who can do honour to one of another creed. He is the one who can rise above all negative feelings. The peaceful soul is one who being on a higher spiritual plane, can live in tranquility, regardless of the circumstances. No external event can disturb his inner peace.

To sum up, according to Islam, the highest spiritual goal for man is his spiritual upliftment when he has attained the high state called "peaceful soul" in the Quran. This may also be termed as complex-free soul which can withstand all kinds of negativity.

The importance of the peaceful soul is its being deserving of salvation and thus eligible to enter the purest and finest realm of Paradise. The way to reach this stage depends upon man's relation to God. The more man turns his attention to God, the more he will receive inspiration from Him. With the help of divine inspiration, he will be able to pass through the various stages of spiritual upliftment until he ultimately reaches that pinnacle of sublimity so desired by the Almighty. □



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MAN

An Islamic Perspective

IF a group of people were asked, "What was the most important issue for mankind today?" Different people would have different answers. Some would say that the spread of nuclear weapons was the most important issue. Some would say the population explosion, while others might say that the production and distribution of wealth were of paramount importance.

Such diversity of opinions shows that people in general do not properly recognize themselves. If they did, they would all agree that the most critical issue facing mankind was man's total disregard of the reality of his existence.

Man persists in ignoring the inescapable fact that one day he must die and be called to account before his Maker. If he were to become aware of the reality of his existence, it would be to the afterlife rather than to this world that he would direct his attention. If you stand in a busy shopping centre during the evening rush-hour and observe what people are hurrying towards, you will realize what today's human-being has chosen as his fundamental issue. Why do you think there is an endless stream of traffic in the streets? Why has the merchant decorated his shop? Where are the crowds of people coming from and going to? What is the main topic of people's conversation and the true purpose of their meeting one another? What interests them the most? To what use are their finest talents and resources put? What have people taken with them; from their homes, and what do they intend to return with? If you can answer these questions, you will also be able to deduce exactly what it is that mankind has chosen to base his life on and what he is endeavouring to achieve.

In the series of topics given below the Islamic perspective about 'man' is presented to the discerning reader to think, ponder and compare it with his natural feelings and to observe nature outside of him taking new ideas for progress and success in life.

The Concept of Man

Man is God's servant. Man has been created by God with a plan, that is, to place him temporarily on earth in order to give him the opportunities in the form of different situations to help him mould into a heavenly personality.

*Man persists
in ignoring the
inescapable fact that
one day he must
die and be called to
account before his
Maker.*

Those who make use of this opportunity, which is referred to as 'passing the test' in the Quran will be rewarded, while those who fail will be rejected.

For the purposes of this test, man has been granted freedom in this world. Whatever man receives in this world is not a matter of right but only a matter of trial. Every situation here is a test, and in all situations man must give a proper response, as is required of him by God.

The proper attitude for man is not to take to the path of his desires, but to understand the divine plan of creation and then after being convinced of its ineluctability; he should build his life accordingly.

Man may deviate from the divine plan by misusing the freedom given to him by God, but he cannot save himself from the consequences of this deviation.

In such a state of affairs, it is in the interest of man himself that he remain extremely cautious in determining the course of his life. Instead of being guided by his own will and desires, he should make God's will his guide. Instead of pursuing his own desires, he should lead a life in conformance with the commands of God.

Whatever man receives in this world is not a matter of right but only a matter of trial.

Man may be a masterpiece of divine creation, but he must nevertheless remain subservient to the plan of God. Making a full acknowledgement of these two aspects of the existence of mankind is the key to human progress.

Man succeeded in building a modern industrial civilization by discovering and exploiting the laws of nature. Similarly in the next world man will achieve lasting success on a much greater scale, but only after striving earnestly to comprehend the creation plan of God for humanity and adhering unflinchingly to its edicts.

The Relationship Between Man and God

The Quran says, "And when My servants question you concerning Me, tell them that I am close at hand. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he cries to Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me, in order they may be rightly guided." (2: 186). This shows that the relationship between man and God is reciprocal: man offers God what he has, then God bestows His favours in return. Man offers his Lord a gift of realization, piety and thankfulness. In return, God provides him with eternal guidance and prosperity.

Man can deal with any problem in either of two ways: the pious and morally proper way, or the way in which such values are abandoned. The correct answer to the call of God is for one to use one's intellect to ascertain the right course of action and then follow it, difficult as it may seem. One then automatically avoids the easy, though misguided way.

Sometimes one is faced with the choice between callous and unjust action on the one hand and righteous, fair treatment on the other. If one answers God's call as it should be answered, one will not flinch from the righteous path and will refrain from oppression and cruelty.

Man is free to consider what he has, within him and outside, to be the result of chance; alternatively he may look at it all as the fruits of his efforts; or he can acknowledge reality and consider it all as having come from God. A person who adopts this latter course will answer the call of God implicit in every blessing by exclaiming, "Lord, You are the bestower and You have given us everything!" When one has offered one's mind and heart to God in this way, then God will provide one with guidance, which means a righteous life in this world and eternal Paradise in the next.

Man and His Mind

Man has been created by God with two opposing yet complementary qualities: the spiritual and the physical. On the one hand is his mind, in respect of which he finds himself limitless. He can think anything he wishes; there are simply no boundaries to his thinking. Yet, in his physical existence, man is extremely limited. He is bound by innumerable kinds of constraints. The greatest limiting factor which man faces is death. Death nullifies all greatness in man.

Man offers his Lord a gift of realization, piety and thankfulness. In return, God provides him with eternal guidance and prosperity.

This is man's severest test. In all his apparent greatness, he must acknowledge how humble his condition is. Passing from a limitless to a limited environment he must acknowledge the confines within which he lives. He must accept restrictions in an atmosphere of freedom. Man is constantly under trial in this world. To pass all tests, he must learn his practical limitations vis à vis his intellectual limitlessness. By so doing, he can save himself from all misapprehensions, and can exercise his free will in the sphere of reality.

So far as animals are concerned, their thinking capacity barely goes beyond the immediate needs of survival. They are, in this sense, like

living machines. By contrast, the area of man's thinking is vast. The greatest test of humanity is to discover a balance between thought and action.

Man's Quest

Man longs for a perfect world, however he is compelled to live in an imperfect one. His happiness is always short-lived and every success is, in some way, imperfect. The aspirations that he cherishes in the early days of his life are shattered as he begins to age. Just as he begins to take root on earth, disaster, old age, disease and death overtake him.

How enchanting the flowers are, but they blossom only to wither. How brilliant is the sun's radiance, but it shines for only a short while before being covered in darkness. Miraculous though man's existence is, no miracle can save him from death. Everything in this world shall perish. Although this world is inexpressibly beautiful and meaningful, all its virtues are bound to fade. All mundane things have a dark side to them. How, one may ask, could a God who is Himself perfect, be satisfied with the creation of an intrinsically imperfect world? The absolute cannot abide in the non-absolute. This world must be inconclusive. Another world must follow to compensate for the inadequacies of the present one.

The greatest limiting factor which man faces is death. Death nullifies all greatness in man.

Everyone is seeking some unseen fulfillment. Everyone seeks a perfect world, but this has always eluded man. Yet it is quite natural that he should continue to strive, for the universe in which he lives testifies to the existence of one, infinite God. The emergence of a world of infinite blessings is just as likely as the existence of the present transitional world. How can an inherently infinite Creator be satisfied with a finite manifestation of His attributes? God, Who created all things from nought, can surely endow creation with perpetuity.

Man is always searching for a world of everlasting content. This quest is quite correct and in accordance with human nature; but our dreams cannot come true in this world, for here, there cannot be an eternally perfect order. The resources needed for such a world are lacking. The Prophet taught that God has made this world one of trial and tribulation, not one of reward and retribution. The world is full of things which put man to the test, whereas the factors required for a life of everlasting delight and repose will be forthcoming only in the next world. Death divides these two worlds. Death marks the completion of the trial of man and his entrance into the world of eternity.

If one wishes one's dreams to come true, one should not try to construct a heaven on earth. One should rather try to succeed in the trial of life, accepting the role of God's true servant, adopting the life pattern of the Prophet and restricting one's freedom to the limits which God has laid down. The dreams of those who succeed in the trial of life will be fulfilled in the next world. Those who fail will find nothing but woe awaiting them.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us. Paradise is evidence of God's absolute power to make beauty perpetual and joy boundless in a world of everlasting peace and contentment.

The emergence of a world of infinite blessings is just as likely as the existence of the present transitional world.

Man and Opportunity

It is a matter of common circumstance that chances to make progress in this world do not conveniently present themselves at every juncture. They are few and far between. But most people, unconvinced of how imperative it is to realize their special importance, fail to grasp them in time. Thus golden opportunities are lost forever, and all that remains is regret at having so foolishly missed them.

The same is true of the Hereafter, but on a scale barely appreciable by human beings. There are the wholly different dimensions of eternal bliss or eternal damnation to be taken into consideration. Everyone, of course, has been given opportunities in the present world to act in the interests of his own salvation in the life after death. And then death—the great cut-off point—comes and puts an end to opportunities for all time.

After death, when man's eyes are opened he receives a severe shock. Now he finds himself doomed to eternal regret at having squandered unparalleled opportunities, thanks to his own ignorance, foolishness and lack of a sense of timeliness.

Everyone in this world should behave as a morally responsible servant of God and everyone is given equal opportunities to do so. Yet, in the Hereafter, there will be some who will flounder on the question of missed opportunities, while there will be others who will pass the divine test because of opportunities seized and turned to good advantage. It will be quite obvious on that Day which of God's servants availed the opportunities to serve Him, and which of them did not.

This ultimate reckoning should make us examine our lives with greater earnestness. Are we sufficiently aware of the fact—considering that none of us are immortal—that we cannot go through life allowing one opportunity after another to slip through our fingers? We cannot surely expect to be offered unlimited chances for our own salvation. And once death intervenes, looking for alternative possibilities beyond the grave becomes meaningless. There we are ineluctably faced with an eternity of success or an eternity of failure.

Likeness of God

A likeness of God is to be found in man, for is not the existence of man a proof of the existence of God? What is the nature of God? He is a live, self-sufficient Being, with a mind that is all-knowing, eyes that are all-seeing and ears that are all-hearing. His power is of such infinitude that it reaches the furthestmost corners of the universe, and no object of His will is too great or too small to escape its force. And quite independent of all objects of creation, God has His ego.

Man may not, like God, be omniscient and omnipotent, but he certainly thinks, sees, hears, has a will, acts of his own volition and understands quite precisely what is meant by the ego—the 'I'. To believe in God is to have faith in a higher form of the 'I'. Man's experience of himself, his attributes, his characteristics, make it possible for him to apprehend the eternal Being who possesses these very attributes and characteristics, but to a superlative degree. This is the Being whom we call God, or Allah.

Everyone in this world should behave as a morally responsible servant of God and everyone is given equal opportunities to do so.

If one is sure of one's own existence, why should one not be sure of the existence of God? Here am 'I', sitting in one place, observing the universe. Why, then, should there not be a Being greater than I am, situated elsewhere in the universe, watching over it? We ourselves direct the movements of machines in outer

space by means of remote control, so why should we have any difficulty in accepting that there is a God who controls the universe by His own invisible system? Man metes out punishments and gives rewards according to his own concept of justice, so why should there not be an all-powerful God who administers reward and retribution according to his own, unique concept of justice?

Indeed, believing in God is no different from believing in one's own self. It is no more difficult for man to accept the existence of God than

it is for him to accept his own existence. Belief in God is doubtless an extraordinary feat of the imagination, but it is no more extraordinary than believing in man. Once one has accepted one such extraordinary phenomenon, what is there to prevent one from accepting another?

Tragedy of Man

According to the law of nature, human beings are created in such situations where they have to spend all their lives in struggle and hardship. Difficulty and sadness are an essential part of the creation plan of the Creator. No man has the power to prevent himself from the life of trials and tribulations. This system is to remind man of the fact that the present world is not made as a place of luxury and comfort, rather it is made as a testing ground. The present world is created so that man may pass through different situations where it is being decided whether that person is eligible for the eternal life of Paradise or not. One who does not respond positively and rightly in these situations, will be separated from the rest and suffer eternal punishment.

In the present developed world, the conditions of difficulty are still present. But the people, owing to unawareness of God's creation plan, do not understand its nature. By giving the wrong response they prove themselves in the eyes of God like the ones who underwent the examination course but could not make themselves successful.

*Believing in God is
no different from
believing in one's
own self.*

In the present times, big institutions have been established, claiming to provide services for de-stressing like meditation; that is to relax people by stopping the function of thinking. But this is not a real solution to the problem. There is only one true solution to this problem and that is stress management.

This is a matter of general observation that those people, who have suffered in their lives, develop the psychology of, "Let no other suffer what I have suffered."

This psychology shows that man thinks of every matter as simply worldly matter. According to him, sufferings are only worldly suffering and the biggest task is to make this world a non-suffering place. Whereas this thinking is against the creation scheme of nature, therefore it is just not possible to make this world a suffering-free zone.

Whenever a person experiences unpleasantness in the world, it happens so that a person may take right lessons from it so that he is reminded of the reality, that the present world is the world of trial. Nobody can find a comfortable life here. Man ought to take lessons from negative experiences of the world.

He must awaken the consciousness in himself that in this limited world he cannot achieve his desired life. That he has to seek his desired life in the next life span of the unlimited world.

In such a situation, the right lesson of unpleasant experiences is that man remembers the next world of Paradise. He awakens the thinking in himself that "let me not suffer in the Hereafter that which I have suffered in this world."

Successful is he, who has realized the eternal world in this temporary world; one who has discovered the secret of eternal success of the next life span in the failures of the present world.

God has made this present world in accordance with such a plan that here every man lives in 'toil'. On the other hand, the world after death will be free from all grief and only those who made themselves eligible for it will receive it.

The right lesson of unpleasant experiences is that man remembers the next world of Paradise.

If observed in the light of this creation plan, the root of the entire human problem is that people want to make their Paradise in the world before death, whereas under the system of nature, such situations do not prevail here at all as may enable one to make his Paradise on earth. Just as no building can be erected either on sand dunes or marshy

lands, similarly, in this present world, it is not possible for anyone to construct his luxury castle. And when man meets with failure under the law of nature, he falls prey to different types of negative reactions which wreak further havoc to his personality.

The right way is that, man acknowledges this law of creation, and plans his life in accordance with it. This plan is just one—in this present world to strive to make oneself the desirable person; so that one may be held eligible for admission to Paradise, in the world after death. According to this creation scheme of nature, man has to be content in the world before death and in the world after death he will have Paradise in store for him.

Man and Animal

In the universe known to us, man is the only creature who possesses superior intelligence. No other creature, so far as we know, is so abundantly endowed with this faculty. Animals, apparently very much like us in certain ways, exist nevertheless on a lower plane, because all their actions are governed by instinct. Instinct, in the broad sense, may be defined as unconscious intelligence. Conscious intelligence, the wellspring of moral choice, is the hallmark of homo-sapiens: no other species can lay claim to it.

Modern research has shown that the human brain has infinite potential: it contains about hundred billion neurons or nerve cells and an equal number of non-neuronal cells. This means that man, is born with unlimited capacities. But experience shows that everyone departs from this world with an acute sense of having failed to achieve what he most desired.

Fulfillment is the deepest aspiration of the human being. But seldom does anyone attain this objective before death overcomes him. This is a tragedy which falls to the lot of the majority of men and women in this life.

Fulfillment is the deepest aspiration of the human being. But seldom does anyone attain this objective before death overcomes him.

In this world, there are innumerable creatures other than man. They are born and they die like human beings. But unlike man, they are never faced with the problem of discontentment. The word 'tragedy' exists only in the human lexicon. Nowhere does it figure in that of animals.

An explanation to this contradiction lies in a comparative study of man and animals. The study shows that the concept of tomorrow—an exceptional one—is entertained exclusively by man. If it is man's nature to want to extend his today into tomorrow, it is because he hopes that what he failed to find today, he will find tomorrow.

The case of animals is quite different. The study of animals shows that they have no concept of tomorrow. They live only in their today and also die in their today. A number of animal activities which seem to be based on a certain consciousness of tomorrow, for instance, the gathering of food by ants for the future, are governed by an innately perceived threat of extinction rather than by any consciousness of tomorrow or the future.

When we ponder upon this unique quality of foresight in man, we find

that his urge to find fulfillment is relative to tomorrow, that is, he sees his fulfillment as achievable in the future. The biological span of today is very brief, that is why nature has provided for human fulfillment in the lifespan of tomorrow.

There are two stages of human life, one pre-death and the other post-death. The pre-death stage is temporary, while the post-death stage is eternal. This division has been purposefully made. Its objective is to enable man to find in the next stage of life—tomorrow—whatever he has not been able to find today.

As mentioned above, the human brain has such an immense potential that man's physical age, about 100 years, is totally inadequate for its realization. Even if our age could be greatly extended, the conditions on earth are so full of constraints that man's unlimited mind could never utilize its full potential.

Keeping these realities in view, when we explain human life, we have to portray the present world as a temporary abode, rather than as man's eternal destination.

The life span before death is like a training period, and the present world is, as it were, man's training ground. Here, ideally, he should receive very thorough moral conditioning during what is only a temporary stay, and then move on to the next eternal world. Every man is necessarily faced with death. What is death? Death is, in fact, a bridge. It acts as a mode of transference from temporal life to an eternal one. And it is in the Hereafter that he shall find the opportunity to utilize the full potential of his mind and achieve the happiness induced by total fulfillment.

However, in the second stage of life, the true achievers will only be those who have been receptive to the necessary training in the first stage. Those who arrive there without such training will be deprived of any further opportunity to exploit their own potential. Their case, in the world of the Hereafter, will be identical to that of one who remained deprived of fulfillment in the world he left behind, because of his own unwillingness to subject himself to moral conditioning. This deprivation will be, without doubt, a punishment; a harder punishment is difficult to imagine.

If man lives only in his today and dies in his today, it is as if he has lived and died the life of an animal. The real man is one who reaches his 'tomorrow' by living out his 'today' in a state of moral rectitude. He is the one who, after having reached the limit of this worldly lifespan, dies having made full preparation for his tomorrow. Indeed, it is only one such as he, who is worthy of being called a successful person. □

FASTING AND FEASTING

Semblance of The World and The Hereafter

THE Prophet is reported to have said: 'The fasting person has two delights: one at the time of breaking the fast and the other at the time of meeting with his Lord God most High.' (*Sahih Muslim*).

Fasting, and the breaking of the fast; both are different experiences in their own right.

The reality of this life can be realized through the experience of fasting. Eating, drinking and certain other specific activities are prohibited during the fast for a temporary period throughout the day. Similar prohibitions are imposed upon the true believer throughout his life. He has to abstain from all that has been forbidden by God and live life as a 'fasting' person.

The very purpose of life is the 'testing' of man. Fasting is a semblance of this test. This worldly life is only to do good deeds as enjoined by God, to follow the path He has shown and refrain from all that He has prohibited. For this conscientious life the promise of God is boundless rewards in the Hereafter; rewards which are not manifest in this worldly life. Fasting thus gives an awareness of the patience and struggle of this life.

In contrast to fasting, *Iftar* (breaking the fast), presents a semblance of life Hereafter. In the same spirit, the whole month of *Ramazan* resembles the conditioned life of this world. Likewise, *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the day of feasting, also gives us a faint taste and semblance of the life Hereafter.

Fasting gives us an awareness of the patience and struggle of this life.

The day of the festival brings an end to the prohibitions and restrictions placed during the period of fasting. *Eid* reminds us of the joys and pleasures of the Hereafter for a believer who has successfully passed this worldly test.

A true believer, having undergone the period of fasting in a most sincere manner, gets the feeling of the Hereafter as soon as the month of *Ramazan* is over and the celebrations for *Eid* are under way. He feels as if he is being entertained as a guest by God Himself. From the depths of his being, his heart cries out:

'Oh God, as You have helped me carry out the injunctions of fasting and at the culmination of the month have bestowed

on me the joys of *Eid*, accept this life of mine as one spent in fasting and bestow on me the delights of Paradise. Write me down amongst the list of persons who have been bestowed the life of Paradise by opening Thy gates of mercy'.

As fasting does not imply mere hunger and thirst, the day of the festival does not imply mere feasting and celebration. It should, rather, strengthen in us the right perspective of the ephemeral nature of this worldly life and the imminent delights of the life Hereafter that are sure to follow.

The day of Eid should inculcate in the believer a new spirit and a renewed sense of zeal and determination towards the journey to the life Hereafter.

The reality of this life can be known through the experience of fasting. In contrast, *Iftar* or *Eid* reminds us of the joys and pleasures of the Hereafter.

This should be truly manifested in the thankfulness we present to the Creator by offering prayers and also by giving more in charity to the needy. As the period of fasting was spent in self-preparation and spiritual development, the day of *Eid* should inculcate in the believer a new spirit and a renewed

sense of zeal and determination towards the journey to the life Hereafter.

The message of *Eid* fosters the rekindling of our faith and the opening of new vistas and an entirely fresh and innovative approach to the struggles of life which would culminate by the grace of God with the rewards of everlasting Paradise. □



Divine Connection

Just as the electric connection illuminates your room, so does the divine connection illuminate your whole personality.

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**

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

Ha Mim

By the Book that makes things clear, surely We sent it down on a blessed night—We have always sent warnings—on that night every wise decree is specified by Our own command—We have been sending messages, as a mercy from your Lord, He hears all and knows all. He is the Lord of heaven and earth and all that is between them—if only you would really believe—there is no deity save Him: It is He who gives both life and death—He is your Lord, and the Lord of your forefathers.

(44: 1-8)

The total clarity of the Quran is in itself proof of its being the Book of God, and this being so, its tidings and forecasts are also definitive. There is no scope for any doubt about them.

The beginning of the revelation of the Quran took place on a particular night—a night fixed for important godly decisions. The revelation of the Quran was not a simple event. It resulted from a decision regarding the dawn of a new era of history. That is why it was revealed on this specially blessed night. Primarily, the Quran was and still is a declaration of Truth. It came into existence in order to show the falsity of polytheism and the truth of the Unity of God. Most importantly, it provides man with a standard by which to distinguish between truth and falsehood. The Quran was the distinguisher among nations solely on this basis.

Yet, they toy with their doubts. Wait, then, for the Day when the sky brings forth plainly visible clouds of smoke. That will envelop the people. This will be a painful punishment. Then they will say, Lord, relieve us from this torment, for truly we are now believers in You.'

How can they benefit from admonition, seeing that a messenger had already come to them explaining things clearly? Then they turned away from him and said, 'He is a madman, taught by others!' Were We to ease the torment for a while, you would still revert to denial of the truth. On the Day We inflict the direst scourge upon all sinners, We will certainly exact retribution. (44: 9-16)

The subject about which these addressees of the Quran were in doubt was not the existence of God but the oneness of God. While accepting the existence of God in a traditional manner, they continued to practise the religion of their forefathers and their leaders.

The Quran proved the beliefs of their forefathers to be baseless, but they were not ready to accept this position. On the one hand, they found themselves without supporting arguments while, on the other, they found it impossible to banish from their minds the image of the greatness of their forefathers and leaders. This dual dilemma had pushed them into the realm of doubt. The preacher of God appeared to them too small a person for them to accept, or to act on his advice to abandon their so-called great men.

Those who do not accept the Truth through persuasion expose themselves to the danger of having to accept it under threat of punishment. They may accept it in the latter instance, but at that time their acceptance will be of no avail.

We tried the people of Pharaoh before them: a noble messenger was sent to them, saying, 'Hand over God's servants to me. I am a trustworthy messenger for you. Do not set yourselves above God: I bring you clear authority. I have sought refuge with my Lord and your Lord lest you stone me [to death]. If you do not believe in me, at least keep away from me.' (44: 17-21)

The call for Truth is, in fact, a manifestation of God's power in the shape of reasoning. In this way, God announces Himself through human beings, while He Himself remains unseen. The divine call, therefore, becomes a trial for its addressees. The truth seekers acknowledge it and bow down before it, while those who are enamoured of appearances consider it unimportant and ignore it.

But after rejecting the call to accept the Truth, man cannot avoid facing the consequences. During the lifetime of the Prophet, these ruinous consequences became apparent in this world itself, just as had happened in the case of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Where there was no immediate evidence of such divine retribution, the deniers had to face the consequences of their actions after death. □

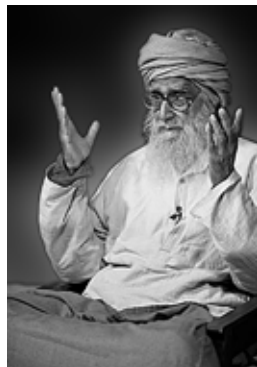
ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in a Discussion with an Academic from Sweden

If you were asked to define the essence of Islam, what would you say?

The very word 'Islam' tells us the essence of Islam. The root of the word 'Islam' is *silim*, which means peace. And so, the essence of Islam is peace. Many Westerners believe freedom to be the summum bonum, but according to Islam, the summum bonum is peace.



There are many verses in the Quran that stress the importance of peace. For instance, the Quran says *as-sulh khair* or 'reconciliation is best' (4: 128). In another verse, God calls people to the 'home of peace', that is, Paradise (10: 25). This is the ideal world that the Quran calls *dar-us-salam*, the home of peace (10:25). So, we are required to live in peace and to give peace to others.

Why is this so?

It is because without peace there cannot be any positive activities. Peace is the basis of all kinds of goodness. Without peace, you can't have positivity, you can't have positive thinking, you can't have good relations with others. Nothing that we want in life—in our personal life, in our family life, in our social life—can be achieved without peace. And so, Islam stresses peace.

That said, I should make it clear that in Islam peace is not a matter of belief. Its importance lies in its practical value, the practical purpose it serves. *Tawheed* and prophethood are matters of belief, but the matter of peace pertains to living in society, so it is a worldly matter. Its importance lies in it being a practical need or method to be followed for leading life in this world.

Islam is based on monotheism, the oneness of God, or *tawheed* in Arabic. As far as belief is concerned, *tawheed* is the greatest thing. All Islamic teachings revolve around this belief—that God is one. The oneness of God is the most important thing in Islam. As far as practical life is concerned, you cannot achieve anything without peace. So, for practical purposes, Islam stresses peace, and as far as belief is concerned, Islam is centred on *tawheed* or the oneness of God.

As per my study, the essence of Islam is God-realization. Man is born as a unique creature. The only thing that is required of him is to discover the reality on his own. Realize truth and live on self-discovered truth: this is *ma'rifat*. Self-discovered truth is the greatest quality of a believer. Faith is discovery. A discovery has the greatest role to play in the life of a person. It can lead one to become a superman. Without it, one is like an animal. According to the law of nature, discovery is the greatest. According to Islam, it is the discovery of God that is the greatest. This is *ma'rifat*.

You head the Centre for Peace and Spirituality. What is spirituality, according to you?

I think that peace and spirituality are two faces of the same coin. Peace means external spirituality. Spirituality means inner peace. Peace and spirituality go together. They coexist. Where there is peace, there is spirituality. And where there is spirituality, there is peace.

Peace and spirituality are very important for all beings. You are free to choose your beliefs. It's a personal choice. But in this world, you can't establish an environment conducive for a better life without peace and spirituality. Religion, in terms of belief, is a personal choice, but when it comes to collective or social life, peace is very important.

Can you list what you regard as the core principles for peacemaking?

In the light of my experience, people are generally obsessed with the notion of justice. But if you insist on justice, you can't have peace. You must know what the Creation Plan of God is, the reason why you are here in this world. According to this Plan, it is impossible to establish ideal justice in this world. So, you have to be ready to accept something that's less than ideal. This is the first condition or principle of peace making. People who are obsessed with justice can't establish peace. It is against the law of nature.

Secondly, one must know that peace is required for the sake of peace. Nothing, including justice and human rights, can be bracketed with peace if you really want peace. In other words, peace must be sought at any cost. Unconditional peace. If you bracket human rights and justice with peace, there won't be peace.

A third principle is that one must know that peace can only give you opportunities. It can't give you anything but normalcy and the possibilities to avail existing opportunities in a situation of normalcy. By availing these opportunities that peace opens up you can get all the other things that you want—education, economic advancement,

justice, opportunities to engage in *dawah* work and so on. These things can't be had directly. They can be had only when there is peace and one makes proper use of available opportunities that peace opens up. Peace opens the doors of such opportunities, and by availing these opportunities, you can secure what you want.

A fourth principle is that you must remember that as an individual you can be idealistic, but when it comes to society, it is impossible to establish idealism. So, in your own life, you can try to adopt idealism, but in terms of society, you have to be pragmatic. You have to adopt pragmatism when it comes to society.

A fifth principle is to be aware that in this world it is impossible to achieve or get all that you want. You simply cannot fulfill all your dreams. It is very important to know that in this world, only less than ideal is possible. Achieving the ideal is impossible. So, you have to be ready to accept what is less than ideal, otherwise there is no peace. The greatest mistake that almost all social reformers have made is that they adopted ideal justice, instead of peace, as their goal. But ideal justice isn't the right goal really. Why? Because, according to the Creation Plan of God, ideal justice can't be achieved in this world. It's simply impossible. Everyone has been given freedom or free-will by God, and you are free to use or misuse this freedom as you like. And since people misuse this freedom, you can't expect ideal justice in this world. If you try to achieve ideal justice here, you'll achieve nothing but frustration and tension.

What plans do you have for the future?

My plan is based on the saying of the Prophet "a day will come when the word of God will enter into every home, big and small."

So, this is my goal. I find my goal in the above *Hadith*—that I have to spread the word of God, calling people towards the home of peace. This is the goal, the Centre for Peace and Spirituality is working for. We've translated the Quran into many languages, and with God's grace, we have many helpers in this mission of conveying God's message of peace and salvation in different parts of the world. □



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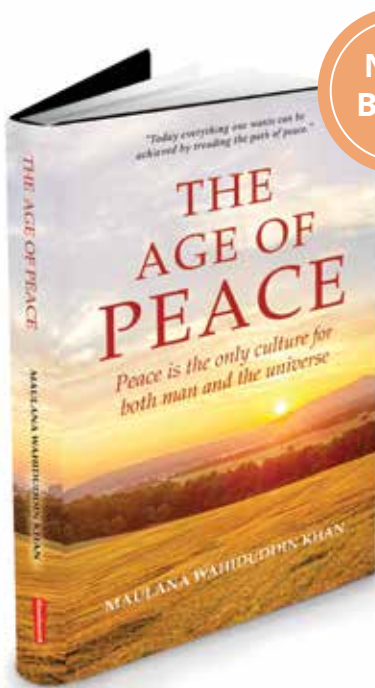
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