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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

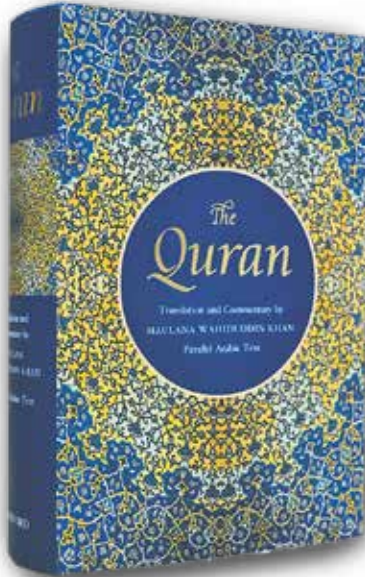


The power to solve problems is always more significant than the problems themselves.

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

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



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

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 41 MAY 2016

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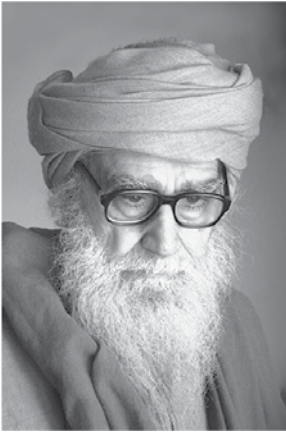
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

MY MOTHERLAND

ON March 17, 2016 my telephone rang and a Muslim greeted me and asked a question: Is it lawful according to Islam to call the homeland as *madar-e-watan* (motherland)? I replied that questions on whether it is lawful or unlawful is to make it an issue of the *Shariah* (Islamic law), while in fact this has nothing to do with the Islamic law. The Quran and the teachings of the Prophet do not deal with the question of how to address our nation. Hence, it must be regarded as an issue of culture and not of the law.

The Quran and *Hadith* have used a word, *ghulu*, that is, extremism, which means making something an issue of the *Shariah* when it is in reality, not related to it. According to a *Hadith*, a person once asked the Prophet a number of questions. The Prophet did not respond to any of the questions, instead he just said: '*Istafti qalbak*' (*Musnad Ahmad*). That is, 'Seek the *fatwa* from your heart.' A *fatwa* is an opinion of the *Shariah*. This saying of the Prophet tells us that matters not mentioned directly in the Quran and *Hadith* should be decided

***Love for one's nation,
or patriotism is a
natural fact.***

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

through the dictates of one's own nature or conscience. If the intention is pure and sincere, the decision would be acceptable to the *Shariah*.

Madar-e-watan literally means motherland. But this is a metaphor. It does not mean that one is born out of the land as one is born out of one's mother's womb. 'Motherland' means what is generally called 'homeland'. Homeland and motherland are interchangeable, different only in terms of words, not in terms of meaning.

Love for one's nation, or patriotism is a natural fact. A person naturally loves a place where he is born and brought up and where he develops relations with people. This love for one's nation is in accordance with the spirit of religion. There is no difference between the stand of patriotism and the stand of religion in this regard.

Referring to a piece of land as 'motherland' is an expression of one's sentiments and has nothing to do with religion.

According to a tradition, the Prophet said: All of the land is *tahir* (pure). (*Muslim*) Therefore considering any particular part of the land superior to another is not right. Every part of the earth is worthy of being regarded as God's gift for humanity. According to Islam, the whole of the planet earth is a divine gift to

mankind and without doubt a blessing from God.

The planet earth is a unique place in the universe. It has a life-support system for man. There is no other place known to have conditions where humans can settle. Given this, it is natural for a person to consider the planet earth as a divine gift. He must have gratitude and love for the planet earth where he resides.

A person loves his nation just as he loves his mother. Hence calling the nation as one's 'motherland' does not go against the spirit of religion. Referring to a piece of land as 'motherland' is an expression of one's sentiments and has nothing to do with religion.

In the present age, nationhood is based on one's homeland. This is the right concept. The opinion that nationhood is based on religion is an extremist concept. It is not an issue of the *Shariah* but is being made to appear as such. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION—PART II

Worship of God

The Demands of Worship

WHAT God desires of man, first and foremost, is that he display humility in His presence. This attitude is called worship. But man was not created in a vacuum; he has been placed in a world full of diverse circumstances. It is necessary that this spirit of worship should be present, no matter what the circumstances are.

The first aspect of worship relates to the person himself. In the course of normal living, when faced with two options—one path leading to God and the other leading to self—his spirit of worship compels him at that point to renounce the latter path and take the one indicated by God. This happens when he has totally surrendered his being, both physical and spiritual, before God to whom he has already bowed psychologically. This manifestation of worship, related to one's self, is called submission. Occasions for such submission can occur at home, office, market or other places where the faithful may be faced with a choice between godly and ungodly ways.

The second aspect of worship relates to the external world, that is, to others. The faithful are expected to obey the commandments of God as far as they themselves are concerned, and in relation to others they are responsible for being well-wishers in every way.

Individual obedience is to obey God in matters related to one's personal life.

Now let us take the first manifestation of worship—submission. It can be classified into individual and collective (or social) submission. Individual obedience is to obey God in matters related to one's personal life. It covers commandments pertaining to dealings with others, like speaking the truth, keeping one's promises, being honest and trustworthy, upholding justice and equality, being humble, giving full measure, paying everyone their due and being a well-wisher of all. In short, it covers virtues related to man's personal life and situations in which man must make decisions. Compliance with divine injunctions means surrendering to the will of God in one's personal affairs. A Muslim is not allowed to disobey God once he knows God's commandments and is in a position to obey them. The Quran states:

It is not fitting for a believing man or woman to exercise any choice in his or her own affairs once God and His Messenger have reached a decision upon them. Anyone who disobeys God and His Messenger is in manifest error. (33: 36)

Individual obedience is an obligation which every believer must fulfil. One cannot be regarded a worshipper in the eyes of God unless he obeys the commandments related to his life and his circumstances. Worship means submission of the inner self. Externally, man should mould his life entirely on the pattern indicated by God. It is the duty of all believers to reject other inducements and submit totally to God in all matters that they face in life:

O believers, submit all of you wholeheartedly, and do not walk in Satan's footsteps; he is your sworn enemy. (2: 208)

The social laws are addressed to Muslim society which is invested with authority, rather than to individual believers who have no political power.

The second category of commandments are termed social commandments. These are commandments, the obeying of which does not depend upon the will of an individual believer. These can be carried out only when the society is prepared to accept them. Therefore the social laws are addressed to any Muslim society which is invested with authority, rather than to individual believers who have no political power.

These laws are not required to be obeyed in the absolute sense, but only in relation to circumstances of the individual or group addressed. The truth is that social and political commandments are directed only at those groups of believers who are in a position to carry them out. Believers with a limited sphere of power are not required to enforce religious laws on a social or national level.

One clear principle of the Islamic laws is that, 'God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear' (2: 286). That is to say, no one is charged with a responsibility which is beyond his capacity to fulfil. To assign responsibility to anyone which is beyond his capacity is not God's way. Then how can believers be asked to obey laws, which they are not in a position to comply with?

Taking into account all the details of religious laws, if the claim is made that it is obligatory for believers to carry out and enforce these laws in all circumstances, will amount to saying, for example, that it is the

responsibility of each and every Muslim to try to acquire all those financial assets on which *Zakat* (obligatory charity almsgiving) has been fixed, so that he may carry out the duties in relation to *Zakat*.

All the commands of religion are of equal value in terms of form, but their applicability is determined by circumstances. For instance, one command of the Quran is to 'pray regularly,' another is to 'pay *Zakat*.' Both these commands are equal in importance as they are in the imperative tense. But their relevance to different individuals is not always the same. The command to pray regularly is an absolute command obligatory on each and every believer, while the command regarding *Zakat* is conditional, that is, it is obligatory only when one possesses enough wealth to come under the law of *Zakat*.

That is, if a person possesses the minimum prescribed wealth under *Zakat* law, this obligation to pay *Zakat* will be applicable to him in the absolute sense, just as the order to pray is obligatory for all. But a person who is not in possession of this minimum wealth, is neither required to pay *Zakat* nor is he ordered to acquire wealth so that he may be able to obey the law on *Zakat*. What is desirable is that the believer should be active in carrying out duties which are applicable in the present rather than engaging in such activities which may be applicable to him in the future under different circumstances.

All the commands of religion are of equal value in terms of form, but their applicability is determined by circumstances.

We learn, therefore, that there are a number of religious duties that are not to be enforced in the absolute sense, being applicable only in relation to circumstances. All Islamic commandments are the expression of some inner reality. When faith is rooted in the heart, it reflects on the human personality. Yet its external expression is in proportion to the scope offered by external circumstances.

Further inter-relationships between believers are also an aspect of the spirit of worship. The required attitude is alluded to in the Quran as 'Exhort one another to truth and patience' (103: 3). This exemplifies the spirit of worship which marks a Muslim's dealings with another. Thus God has highlighted the important aspect of the demand made by faith to induce believers in Islam to opt for the course of action which God finds desirable.

Even a society of Muslim minority, however religiously aware, is not required to launch its Islamic mission as a campaign for the enforcement

of Islamic laws. The correct way to reform a Muslim society is to spread the basic teachings and initial commandments of religion. In the present age the most urgent and crucial demand of worship amongst Muslim societies is to exhort its members to work for the common goal of world peace and convey the peaceful message of Islam.

The most urgent and crucial demand of spirit of worship amongst Muslim societies is to exhort its members to work for the common goal of world peace and convey the peaceful message of Islam.

This work has to be done at two levels. First, we have to condemn violence in unequivocal terms. We must tell the perpetrators of violent acts that their actions go against both Islam and reason. Secondly we must present the peaceful teachings of the Quran to those who are under the influence of violence. The Prophet has said, 'God grants to peace what He does not grant to violence'. (Sahih Muslim) □



No Haste

Sometimes, by being hasty a man invites trouble, but then he always has the possibility of turning the situation to good account by adopting the way of patience.

HAPPINESS

A Mirage

SOMEONE once said: "For the majority, happiness does not exist in the present but seems to be distantly encapsulated in an idealized future." This statement expresses only half of the truth as it pertains not to the majority but to every human being. Another aspect of this matter is that everyone feels that they have failed to find the happiness they desired, even after enjoying a long lifespan. This is a universal phenomenon. But why is it so unachievable? Why is happiness a matter of the distant future and unattainable in the present? Why is it a matter of tomorrow and not of today?

The fact is that human beings are ideal-seeking creatures, and learn by experience that this world is imperfect: everything is there for the taking but can be had only in a form which is less than ideal. Man by nature is a perfectionist, born in an imperfect world. It is this contradiction that creates problems.

Thinkers try to explain this contradiction. Some say man ought to find joy in small things. But this is an unnatural solution, because man seeks perfection. Imperfection will certainly fail to bring him happiness. Should anyone claim to have found happiness in small things, he is perhaps making a statement without any substance. Evidently he is uttering words that do not come from the heart. He is making a statement the veracity of which his own nature questions.

Man by nature is a perfectionist, born in an imperfect world. It is this contradiction that creates problems.

The only answer is that man must discover the creation plan of the Creator. He must discover the scheme of things as ordained by God. This will lead him to the discovery of Paradise. Acceptance of the concept of Paradise will give him the satisfaction and assurance that eternal and complete happiness awaits him in the world Hereafter. □



THE 'I AM RIGHT' SYNDROME

Unhealthy Mindset

IN a fascinating piece of research published in 2000, the political psychologist James H. Kuklinski and his colleagues conducted a survey to document the deficiencies in political knowledge among American citizens. From a random telephone survey of 1100 Illinois residents they found that few were well informed about the facts of the welfare system: only 3 percent got more than half the questions right. That wasn't very surprising, but what should be a warning to us all is that: those holding the least accurate beliefs were the ones expressing the highest confidence in those beliefs.

This mind-set can be termed the 'I know I'm right' syndrome, a common human tendency. People don't know but they are convinced that they know. This is the greatest hindrance to intellectual development.

When you believe that 'you know', while in fact you don't, you are depriving yourself of the greatest source of intellectual development, the spirit of enquiry. Almost all the sciences have been the product of this spirit. First the spirit of enquiry has to be fostered, only then will it lead to research and new discoveries.

People don't know but they are convinced that they know. This tendency is the greatest hindrance to intellectual development.

In the famous story alluded to Isaac Newton, an apple that fell on him led him to wonder and contemplate on the mysterious universe. Soon he understood that the very same force that made the apple fall toward the ground also keeps the moon from falling toward the earth and the earth from falling toward the sun: gravity.

There is an Arabic saying that translates as, 'to say 'I don't know' is one half of knowledge.'

This means that when you discover your ignorance about something, you will try to gain knowledge about it. However, if you believe that you know it all, the result will be a life of ignorance.

Acknowledge ignorance and then proceed to discover rather than live in perpetual ignorance with the false belief that 'I know I am right'. □



ZAKAT: THE PRESCRIBED CHARITY

Social Welfare

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

Zakat is an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God, and that nothing should, therefore, be withheld from Him. Man himself plays only a very small part in obtaining whatever he owns in this world. Were he not to have the benefit of God's endless bounty, he would neither be able to grow grain, raise cattle, set up industries nor accomplish any other work of a useful nature.

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

The observance of *Zakat* is a way of acknowledging this fact of life. Islam desires that private wealth should be considered as belonging to God, and therefore should be spent in the way as ordained by God. Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers.

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

In doing so, no one should consider that he is conferring a great favour upon those less endowed than himself, and should in no way be condescending to the recipients of his charity. When a man gives alms to others, he should do so with the knowledge that they have a rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained. He is doing no more than giving others their due.

Zakat brings the realization that all of one's possessions are gifts from God and makes one more keenly aware of the virtues of devotion to God. In the light of such awareness, one cannot remain insensitive to

the needs of the society in which one lives. *Zakat* is a perennial reminder that a selfish stance is a wrong stance, and that others must be given their rightful share of our earnings.

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

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

One unfortunate aspect of human relationships is that people tend to give to others only when they hope to gain something in return. Money, they feel, should be returned with interest. When such an understanding becomes a factor in our social organization, exploitation becomes rampant; everyone is ready to plunder everyone else. This results in society falling prey to oppression and disorder. No one—no matter whether they are rich or poor—can be at peace in a society stricken with this malaise.

Believers have the assurance of God that if they give to others, whatever they give will be returned to them many times over in the next world; their trust in God's promise is complete. In giving to others, he knows for certain that he will not be denied by God at the Last Reckoning.

In a society ordered in this way, feelings of antagonism and indifference are not allowed to develop; people are not bent on exploiting one another. There is never an atmosphere of mutual resentment and dissatisfaction, for everyone lives in peace with his neighbour. Such a society, in short, is a haven of contentment and well-being.

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

The Ramazan Charity

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

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

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

Zakat is a perennial reminder that a selfish stance is a wrong stance, and that others must be given their rightful share of our earnings.



Castles in the Air

Those who seek to achieve high ideals, but do not wish to go through the tedium of doing extensive groundwork first, are building sandcastles that will not be able to stand the test of time.

REMARKS OF DONALD TRUMP

A Trump Card For Muslims

DONALD TRUMP is the front-runner for the Republican nomination to US presidency. On March 23 he appeared on ITV's *Good Morning Britain* in which he said that Muslim communities were "absolutely not reporting" suspected terrorists and need to "open up to society". This interview was extensively cited in the media. According to *The Guardian*, Donald Trump implied that Muslim communities were the "enemy within". (*Donald Trump hits on a sore point with Brussels 'coddling' remarks. The Guardian, 23 March 2016*)

Donald Trump's remarks about American Muslims are applicable to all Muslims especially those living in the western world.

At this moment, Muslims around the world number about 1.6 billion and the above news has reached almost all of them through the media. In reality, however, this news should be an eye opener for Muslims.

They may not have discovered this fact at present, but they will soon come to realize it.

Muslims should now put into practice the fact which Islam states about all of mankind being one family of God.

Going by Muslims' current mood, it can be said that they would at first give a negative reaction, claiming that Trump's remarks are only a phenomenon of Islamophobia. However, Muslims will soon realize that this traditional response of theirs is not working. They must be guided to discover an alternative response that works. To be

sure, this alternative would be only one, that is, Muslims will have to openly disown "Muslim terrorists" or "Muslim radicals" and dedicate themselves completely to work towards peace in every possible way and affirm that Islam is a religion of peace. They should now put into practice the fact which Islam states about all of mankind being one family of God.

This change in the Muslim mind would come about sooner or later. It is a golden opportunity for those Muslims who have been working towards peace but have not gained much popularity among Muslims in general. Now their mission would receive full support from all Muslims and they would be able to spread their work globally. This change in western Muslims would surely appear and it would undoubtedly serve as a boon for the peace mission of Islam.

Islam is a religion of peace—this had till now been a fact which had no direct relation to Muslims, but now it has become the personal interest of western Muslims. Muslims would soon understand that to become acceptable in the modern world, they have no other alternative. To secure their interest in the present world, they have no option but to replace every kind of negativity with positivity and contribute towards the constructive projects for the progress of the world.

A person can be indifferent in a matter which is not his personal interest, but he can never afford to ignore that which does become his personal interest. This state of affairs is great news for peace-keeping Muslims. They will see that they can now carry on their mission with Muslims' popular support, something that was not possible earlier.

Muslims should realize that the first requirement for them and their future generations is that they understand the true Islamic teachings, live by those teachings of peace and well-wishing and communicate to the world that Islam is a religion of peace, through every action as well as diction. To achieve this purpose it is important to translate the Quran into all languages and convey its message to all peoples. Along with this, literature about the true face of Islam and peace should be disseminated informing the world that 'God calls to the Home of Peace.' (10: 25)

Donald Trump's above statement should be considered as the trump card for the Muslims to bring about an era of global peace and human brotherhood. □

To secure their interests Muslims must replace every kind of negativity with positivity and contribute towards the constructive projects for the progress of the world.



For the Courageous

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

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.



GENESIS OF MUSLIM MILITANCY

Result of the political interpretation of Islam

MILITANCY in Muslim countries is not a simple kind of militancy. It is an ideologically justified militancy. Therefore, it is not enough to condemn it in human rights terms or any other terms. A condemnation of this kind will not work in this case. Those who are engaged in militancy will brush aside such condemnation by saying that it is from the enemies of Islam who do not want to see Islam gain political power.

Muslim militancy can be killed only through an ideological weapon, and not physical weapon.

The genesis of this militancy goes back to those Muslim ideologues of the twentieth century who formulated the idea that Islam is a complete system and that political power is a necessary part of it, because without it Islam cannot be implemented as a complete system of life.

Those who were impressed by the political interpretation of Islam tried to implement it as a political system in society. But, they saw that the political seat was already occupied by certain other people. So, they realized that in order to establish an Islamic state it was necessary to overthrow the present rulers. Thus, unseating the current political occupants became a prerequisite for them to establish an Islamic political system in society. However, when the people who already possessed political power refused to step down, those who believed in political Islam engaged in violence and militancy to overthrow them. Therefore, it is the ideologues of political Islam who are truly responsible for Muslim militancy.

The present militants or non-state actors are only trying to materialize the ideology they have received from their leaders. The worst aspect of this militancy is that it is associated with Paradise by its ideologues. These ideologues made Muslims believe that if they succeed in their violent struggle and become *shaheed* or martyred, they would go to Paradise. Muslims thus became obsessed with this beautiful notion.

For them worldly success or failure does not matter. If they succeed in the struggle, they will receive the title of *ghazi*, or victorious. If they die in this struggle, even if it be through suicide bombing, then they would be regarded as martyrs, guaranteed Paradise in the world Hereafter. It is this kind of a political ideology that has motivated the Muslim youth of the present time to engage in militancy. They will remain active in this field, unless this ideology is dispelled as un-Islamic and against the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam.

This Muslim militancy has caused the loss of precious lives and also greatly damaged the true picture of Islam. It is the duty of every sincere Muslim to try to prove this political theory wrong through argument. Muslim militancy can be killed only through an ideological weapon, and not by any physical weapons.

The ideologues of political Islam are truly responsible for Muslim militancy.

There are parties and groups in the Muslim world who have accepted this political ideology as the right ideology and became associated with it. Now, when the violence resulting from this ideology is being condemned all over the world, they too have joined in condemning it. However, this kind of condemnation will yield no result. These people must first declare that their ideologues were wrong and they had wrongly accepted their ideology. Thus, their condemnation should begin from condemnation of the ideology and not from condemnation of the present militancy. These people will not receive the credit of condemning militancy by doing so in human rights terms. Rather, they will have to first disown the political ideology of their ideologues, which they still regard as respectable, and only then can they be given the credit of having condemned militancy.

CPS International is a mission that is performing this same task. We have published hundreds of books and articles for this purpose. The magazine 'Spirit of Islam', was in part initiated for this very purpose. Those who want Muslim militancy to come to an end should earnestly spread our literature and the 'Spirit of Islam' among Muslims and others. □

THE QURAN AND WAZU

A Misunderstood Concept

MANY people believe that to touch the Quran, you must first perform *wazu* or a particular form of ablutions. This belief is baseless. It is not mentioned in the Quran.

This concept is a product of Muslim jurisprudence that emerged after the Prophet's time. During this period, many people embraced Islam. They brought with them their mind-sets and previous beliefs. Many learnt the Arabic language and became religious scholars. Several of these converted Muslim scholars played a key role in compiling the corpus of *fiqh* or Muslim jurisprudence. With their earlier beliefs, they unconsciously introduced into the Islamic tradition many issues not present at the time of the Prophet's Companions. And to support these, they misinterpreted Quranic verses. One such claim that it is not permissible to touch the

In order to support self-created jurisprudential issues, people engaged in wrong interpretation of Quranic verses.

Quran without first performing ablutions is nowhere mentioned in the Quran. Those who insist on this, claim to deduce it from these Quranic verses, "*...this is indeed a noble Quran, in a well-guarded preserved Book, which none can touch except the purified.*" (56: 77-79)

This verse is not a command but simply states the fact that the Quran was conveyed from God to man through the medium of angels who are pure beings. □



World of Ideas

Make your target an intellectual or spiritual journey and you can certainly claim that your journey has no bounds.

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



SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

WHAT is spiritual development? It is creating divine awareness in one's inner personality. The spiritual personality of man becomes healthy through delicate experiences which the Quran calls as divine provision.

July 16, 2004, was a very hot day in Delhi. The electricity went off and the ceiling fan stopped functioning. I sat in my room in this heat. After a long time the power returned and the fan started functioning.

It was a moment of sudden experience. The body cooled with the rotation of the fan. It felt as if the period of suffering was suddenly over and replaced by another period of joy. I was reminded of a tradition of the Prophet of Islam in which it is said that the world is a place of suffering for a believer. When death comes, he will find himself all of a sudden in the garden of Paradise. The period of worldly suffering will instantly end and the joyous period of Paradise shall begin.

On experiencing this, the hidden divine feeling in my nature awakened. The material incident was converted into a spiritual one. My heart wished that God would deal with me in the same way. When the time of my departure from this world comes may it be the end of suffering and an entrance into the joyous world of Paradise.

Spirituality raises man above materialism to a higher plane of the world of meaning.

Spirituality is an intellectual journey—a journey which raises man above materialism to a higher plane. This journey takes place internally. Others apparently do not see the stages of that journey but the traveller feels it deeply. Spirituality makes man a human being in the true sense. One whose life is devoid of spirituality leads a life at an animal level. □



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GOD-GIVEN HOPE

Inspite of Our Mistakes

*If a misfortune befalls you, it is the fruit of your own labours.
He forgives much. (THE QURAN 42: 30)*

THIS verse of the Quran tells us that when a man is afflicted by misfortune, it is necessarily the result of one or more of his own actions. Blaming others for this is meaningless. Making protests and complaints is a waste of time and in no way solves the problem.

If our problems had been caused by others, then we should have been dependent upon others for their solution and wait for their kindness. God's system for this world is that He has made each one of us responsible for our own personal affairs. That is, an individual can construct his life by dint of his own efforts. Each one's future is in his own hands.

*Everyone can
construct his life
by dint of his own
efforts.*

Sometimes one incurs a loss due to one's own foolishness; much harm can be avoided by adopting wise ways. At times an initiative goes awry for lack of planning. But there will be other opportunities in future to plan better.

By being hasty a man invites trouble, but it is possible to remedy the situation through patience and fortitude. Being too emotional can also ruin people; such people too can taste success by remaining cool and rational in their approach on subsequent occasions.

Failure is never final or fatal. With God given hope and a change in strategy through wise planning our past failures can be converted into success. □



Scheme of Nature

*Nature tells us of its scheme through
the trees—that after every winter a new
spring will follow.*

FASTING AS A SPIRITUAL CULTURE

Simple Living—High Thinking

ACCORDING to Islamic teachings, *Ramazan*—the ninth month of the *Hijri* (Islamic) calendar—is the month of fasting. In this month believers refrain from food and drink for a limited period each day, that is, from dawn till sunset. They eat and drink during the night. This practice continues for one month.

What is fasting? Fasting does not simply amount to observing hunger for a temporary period of time. In fact, it symbolizes a lifelong culture, that is, a culture of dedication.

According to Islamic ideology, a believer is a man of mission. A man of mission is a different person. He has little time for anything other than his mission. He eschews all such activities as are irrelevant to his mission and fasting symbolizes this spirit.

The Arabic equivalent of fasting is *sawm*, which means abstinence. Abstinence is the gist of fasting. When one involves himself in a mission, he abstains from all diversions. He has no time, except for fulfilling his bare necessities. This is the mission culture.

Abstaining from food and water for a limited period is symbolic training. This practice prepares one to lead a life of dedication to one's mission.

Fasting during the month of *Ramazan* reminds a faithful person that if the acts of abstinence were to reach the extent of refraining from food and water for a temporary period, then he would be ready to do so for a higher purpose. Although this training is for a temporary period, it enables one to lead one's whole life in accordance with this spirit.

A person, who controls his material life and devotes himself for a higher cause, also inculcates spirituality in himself.

For a faithful person, living for the divine cause is his mission. All other things become secondary for him. This kind of focused life is also a great source of spirituality. A person, who controls his material life and devotes himself for a higher cause, also inculcates

in himself what is called spirituality. In terms of external form, he refrains himself from material things, but in terms of inner content, he inculcates spirituality in his personality. Fasting makes one a spiritual person.

Fasting is not a set of rituals. It is rather the adoption of the well-known principle—simple living, high thinking. Fasting helps one adopt this principle. Simple living refrains one from distraction, and high thinking is only another name for a distraction-free life. And, when one saves oneself from distraction, the result undoubtedly is high thinking. □

*Fasting symbolizes
a lifelong culture of
dedication.*



Precious Time

It is unwise to waste and idle away your time. It is a waste of your life to spend your time on useless things. You should use your time on things that will benefit you in the true sense.

Fasting

The greater significance of fasting lies in its symbolism of an inner spiritual eagerness to make all kinds of sacrifices.

WAITING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Patience Pays

THE German philosopher, Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and his associates propounded the theory comprising the triad, *Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis*.

Thesis marks the beginning. As a result of the internal process initiated by thesis, antithesis comes into being. The culmination of this process is marked by synthesis. In simple language, it means that history travels in the form of a periodical phase constituting *action, reaction and positive response*.

To wait for a better tomorrow is a higher form of worship.

This is not merely a philosophical theory; it is a law of nature, which provides hope for man. If man is in the middle process, he must consider it to be a temporary phase. He should hope that a better tomorrow shall certainly come; it is destined.

The Prophet of Islam described this law of nature in the following words,

Afzal al-ibada, intezaar al-farj (Al-Tirmidhi)

This *Hadith* (sayings and deeds of the Prophet of Islam) means that to wait for a better tomorrow is a higher form of worship. Human history is not a static phenomenon; it travels from bad to good. Life therefore has no room for pessimism. Man must always be an optimist and wait for a better tomorrow. □



Justness

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

INTERDEPENDENCE

A Law of Nature

ACCORDING to the law of nature, human life is based on the principle of interdependence. Disparities are inherent in our social structure. Society can only be cohesive and peaceful if each member accepts these disparities along with the obvious necessity for interdependence. This law of nature is referred to in the Quran in these words:



Is it they who apportion the blessing of your Lord? It is We who distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and raise some of them above others in rank, so that they may take one another into service; and the blessing of your Lord is better than [the wealth] which they amass. (43: 32)

This Quranic verse makes it clear that it has been divinely ordained that there shall be no uniformity among people, but rather disparity. This disparity is based on great wisdom which people should know, that according to the Creator's scheme of things, no individual is self-sufficient in this world; an individual completes himself only by associating with others. In other words, each member of society must accept that interdependence is an ineluctable state of viable societal existence. It is essential that people should accept disparities as a matter of fact. Acknowledgment of this reality will go a long way towards putting an end to social unrest.

By accepting that disparity is a positive feature of human life, one has to concede that, according to the creation plan of the Creator, the entire system of the world has to be based on interdependence. Acceptance of this fact will help to eliminate violence from society.

Unwillingness to acknowledge the disparity that is characteristic of human society will result in rivalry between people. In the name of removing disparity from the world, people will engage in confrontation and violence. A never ending cycle of violence will then come into existence. If however, people were to accept disparity as a reality, the culture of cooperation would be promoted in society. Every individual would seek to cooperate with his fellow

Each member of society must accept that interdependence is an ineluctable state of viable societal existence.

men, in this way, a collective culture would be given encouragement. This culture of collective cooperation will undoubtedly help to nurture peace in society.

Those who are engaged in violence are not fighting against any person or group, but rather against the very creation plan of the Creator. There are a number of commandments in the Islamic scriptures which forbid violence. The reason is that the culture of violence runs counter to the divine creation plan. According to this plan, if a person or group possesses political power, others should consider this situation as God-given and should not engage in a campaign to unseat those in power. In other words, the creation plan requires that the status quo be maintained. The principle of 'status quoism' is the only workable formula for achieving peace in this world.

*The culture
of collective
cooperation
undoubtedly helps
to establish peace
in society.*

Trying to bring about a change in the status quo leads to conflict, while making plans for one's activities by accepting the existing state of affairs leads to peace. If a person or group has any complaint or difference of opinion, they should strictly adhere to peaceful negotiation. Trying to bring about change through violence is not an option for anyone. No excuse whatsoever is acceptable in this regard.

Disparity among men and women is not an evil: it is rather a blessing. When people complement each other, it promotes the culture of cooperation, which further leads to the creation of an atmosphere of peace and friendship. The culture of interdependence promotes all kinds of human values and is therefore, the best social scheme. Those who have opted for violence are not only destroying social peace, but are also pursuing a target which is unachievable. Interdependence is a law of nature. Accepting the principle of interdependence brings peace to society and opens up all doors to development.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO THE MUSLIMS OF THE WORLD

The time has come for the Muslims to take the most important step without any further delay. Muslims must follow the commandment of God expressed in these words:

Believers turn to God, everyone of you so that you may prosper.

(THE QURAN 24: 31)

Towards this end Muslims all over the world must establish a large institution with the name *Universal Peace Centre*. All the Muslim countries, organizations and Muslims with resources should become members of this centre. The *Universal Peace Centre* should be set up with the common support of all Muslims. It should be structured in accordance with international standards and should be completely non-political, non-communal and non-commercial. The sole purpose of this centre should be to promote peace and replace the culture of violence with the culture of peace all over the world.

The Muslim community owes a debt to God and His creation. They have to be true well wishers to mankind. This *Universal Peace Centre* will be a means to fulfil this global responsibility of the Muslims. God will assist them in this task. At present, Muslims are more than one billion in number and are spread out all over the world. All kinds of rich natural resources are available in Muslim countries. They can make the best use of these resources for achieving the most positive results for mankind. □

The culture of interdependence promotes all kinds of human values and is therefore, the best social scheme.



An advertisement for 'Spirit of Islam Online'. On the left, a laptop is shown with its screen displaying the title 'THE GREATER QURAN' and some text. To the right of the laptop, the text reads: 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE'. Below this text is a hand cursor icon pointing upwards. At the bottom of the advertisement, the website 'www.spiritofislam.co.in' is listed, followed by the instruction 'Download ebook at: www.newshunt.com'.

BETWEEN TWO OPTIONS

Impractical Expectations

MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD (died 1958) wrote about himself: 'People did not give due appreciation to my abilities.' Maulana Azad recognized that he had certain abilities, but regretted that people failed to recognize them and hence were not utilised.

Maulana Azad was not alone in thinking so. History has many people who felt that their skills and abilities were not truly appreciated and utilised, and left this world with this feeling. Such people seemed, on the face of it, to have complaints against others; but in fact, they alone are responsible for how they felt.

In such matters people have just two options. One is to accept an establishment made by someone else. The other is to create one's own world and to live in it the way one wants to. There is no third option.

History has many people who felt that their skills and abilities were not truly appreciated and utilised, and left this world with this feeling.

This world is competitive. It is impractical to expect others to realize your value and relate to you the way you want them to. Nothing of this sort happens with anyone. The best you can hope is for others to acknowledge your deeds.

In this world, no one else can do your work. As the saying goes, "Do or die!" You cannot be in between. □



Collection of the Good

The society of Paradise will be a collection of the best individuals from the whole of human history.

EMOTIONS OF FAITH

Message of Ramazan

ACCORDING to a *Hadith*, the Prophet of Islam said, God suggested to me, 'We will change one of the valleys of Makkah into gold for you'. I said, 'Oh my Lord, No! Instead, I desire that one day I should eat well and be satisfied and the next day remain hungry. So that when I feel hungry, I can beseech You and remember You and when I am full and satiated, I can praise You and thank You.'

It is a fact that emotions and feelings of faith are directly related to the situation or circumstance. Every situation in life presents an occasion for emotions of faith. As there are many different situations that can arise, accordingly there are many different types of feelings and emotions of faith. Man has been placed in this world for the purpose of a 'test'. That is why for every man and woman in this world many different circumstances arise in their lives, so that it can be assessed which one of them will satisfy the requirements of the test.

In this world, situations and conditions of comfort or want are both extraneous. What is of importance is the reaction to the situation and not the situation itself. Given the situation, was the reaction desirable? If this fact is clear to any person then they will not look at the situation of comfort or want but at the reaction they present as testimony. Was it gratitude or pride; acknowledgement or thanklessness; one of patience or one of intolerance? Such people will evaluate and introspect at every situation and not complain about the circumstances. Without such conditions there can be no emotions at all.

God desires two qualities from His believers. First, that they acknowledge the all pervading power of God and express their utmost helplessness to Him. Secondly, that after receiving and perceiving of the blessings of God they express their gratitude for the same. Both these desirable qualities have been clearly and explicitly explained in the Quran and the *Hadith*. The most practical experience of these qualities is one that appears in the form of hunger and thirst on the one hand and satiation and contentment on the other.

Through fasting one experiences both hunger and satiation so that one can be humble as well as grateful to God.

The pangs of hunger and thirst are the ultimate experience of the realization of man's weakness, helplessness and dependence. In a

similar manner when he partakes of food and water after going through hunger and thirst, it is the utmost experience or realization of the value of the food and water that God has provided for him.

In this world man needs to experience both the feelings of hunger and satiation. He should experience the feeling of a parched throat and the pleasure of drinking cool water to quench his thirst; a feeling of contentment described in a *Hadith* as 'My thirst was quenched and my nerves were cooled'. Feelings will not arise without the associated conditions.

Fasting in the month of *Ramazan* is an annual program for creating such conditions. Through fasting one experiences both hunger and satiation so that one can be humble as well as grateful to God. While giving the command for fasting the Quran says: Believers', fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil (2: 183). He desires you to fast the whole month, so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him. (2: 185)

***Acknowledgement
of God's power
and acceptance of
our helplessness
creates the feelings
of piety and humble
supplication.***

The month of *Ramazan* is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. Two essential benefits of fasting are mentioned in the above verses. One, that fasting creates piety in an individual. Secondly, fasting makes it possible for man to express genuine gratitude to God. The same feelings that the Quran mentions as piety and gratitude are mentioned in the

Hadith as humility and thankfulness. These two feelings are essential to worship. Acknowledgement of God's power and acceptance of our helplessness creates the feelings of piety and humble supplication. And, the acknowledgement of God's blessings creates the feelings of praise and gratitude towards God.

If man is conscious of these facts he will experience both these types of feelings every day and in every situation. From every incident he will derive this divine nourishment for his soul. Fasting has been ordained so that these feelings can generally be further developed with more intensity. In other words, fasting in the month of *Ramazan* is a general training to be accomplished through a specific course. □

PATIENCE, A MATTER OF WISDOM

Hopeful Not Hopeless

THE Prophet Ayyub (Job) described in the Quran in brief, and in the Bible in detail, was born several hundred years before Jesus Christ. In the Bible, his place of birth is called Uz, the plains stretching from Syria to Palestine.

According to the Bible he possessed seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; he was the greatest of all the men of the East.

Misfortune later befell him leaving him impoverished, yet Job was the epitome of patience. In the words of the Bible, "...Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped. And said, 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return to thither: the Lord gave, and Lord hath taken; blessed be the name of the Lord.'" (JOB 1: 20-21)

Then again circumstances changed and Job regained wealth and resources, more than he had before. According to the Bible, "The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand she-asses." (JOB 42: 12)

The Quran ended the tale with "We restored to him his people and as many more with them: a blessing from Us and as a reminder to all those who are endowed with insight." (38: 43)

Although given very brief mention in the Qur'an, this incident is important and enlightening. Never despair when afflicted by misfortune or loss in life. God, the All-merciful, has devised a system where no loss or deprivation is final. One can always overcome misfortunes and regain losses provided one remains patient and perseveres in one's struggles, without losing hope of God's succour. □

God, being All-merciful, has devised the system of this world in such a way that here no loss or deprivation is final.



MAN'S TRUE PURPOSE IN LIFE

To Elevate Himself

MAN attains his highest distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. This characterizes the most advanced stage of human development where man's personality manifests its unique quality. An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better country when seasons change; a wasp busies itself building its home using tiny particles of earth; a herd of deer takes measures to protect itself from wild beasts of prey. These appear to be purposeful actions. Without doubt arranging for one's food, clothing and habitation have to be performed; this is bare survival, a level where man and animals are equal.

On the other hand, "a purposeful life", refers to aspects of life beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism. God's creations fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animates enjoy a certain superiority over inanimates. Animates include the human, animal and vegetable kingdom. Plants possess life, nourish themselves and grow. But animals and men surely represent a higher form of life. What makes man superior to animals? Modern biologists have concluded that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought that distinguishes him from other life-forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms a mental plan of action and his everyday actions are self-determined.

Man's life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism.

Many actions of animals may appear similar to those of men, but they all stem from pure instinct. Animals are led intuitively by their desires and their needs in a certain direction. Their actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

Using his unique conceptual quality, man can conceive of a higher purpose to his life. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God. Man's true purpose in life should reflect the higher side of his personality, the superior being that he is.

The Quran gives us clear guidance in this matter. Man's purpose in life is explained in the following words:

I created mankind and the *Jinn* that they might worship Me. I demand no livelihood of them, nor do I ask that they should feed Me. God alone is the Munificent Giver, the Mighty One, the Invincible. (51: 56-58)

These verses specify that man's purpose in life is worship. This elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse states; rather He is responsible for your livelihood. This means that worship of God is motivated neither by inner desires nor outer influences, but comes into being through thought alone. When a person goes beyond his self and his environment he understands that there is a higher purpose to his life.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. This cannot be called a purposeful life; it is only a life of survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs, and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations which guide a person in his search for livelihood.

A really purposeful life is a life in which his personality makes manifest its unique distinctive quality.

Growing up, he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status. These activities are not directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal.

His true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When he seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is what distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely be in accordance with man's unique status; one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature. □

UNDISCOVERED REALITY

Known Certainty

DEATH is the most known event of human life, yet it is an undiscovered reality. People see or hear of this regularly, but everyone takes it as external news. No one applies it personally. What is the reason? The reason is the 'now-based' culture. This culture is so common that everyone, religious or secular, is living in their 'now' or present moment. It is rare to find a person who lives for tomorrow.

Animals do not possess a mind like humans. Animals are born in 'today' and live in 'today'. But a human being has a special mind. The concept of tomorrow is a human mind's unique feature. All the planning of a human being is based on tomorrow. Without tomorrow, there is no planning, civilization or activity.

With poor awareness of the world Hereafter, all planning is for today. Seldom can you find a person who plans keeping the world Hereafter in mind. People talk of the world Hereafter, but it is mere lip service, not the result of a deeper realization.

It needs an intellectual campaign to make people aware of the reality of death and the Hereafter. Death is the gate through which we enter the next world. But man is oblivious of this significant reality which he should know more than anything else.

The concept of tomorrow is a human mind's unique feature. Without tomorrow, there is no planning, civilization or activity.

The American evangelist Billy Graham, reported a very thoughtful incident. Once he received a message from a very important person, who had requested him to come and meet him urgently. Billy Graham cancelled all engagements and went to meet him. Face to face in his office, the person said without any

introduction: 'You see I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am going to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope.'

This question concerns everyone, consciously in some cases and unconsciously in most cases. Answering this question is the greatest human service. Those who engage in this work will be held as the greatest benefactors of modern human history. Are there any takers for this task? □

WRONG APPLICATION OF A CRITERION

A Common Mistake

WRONG application of a criterion is a common mistake. In physical sciences it is an accepted principle that a formula should be demonstrable, else it will fail to find acceptance among the scientific community. In humanities however, this is not possible. You can use certain technical methods in the process of analysis, but in the end you have to make your own inference.

For example, water changes its state from liquid to the gaseous and starts to boils at 100 degrees Celsius. This natural law was used to develop steam power. Anyone can prove this by heating water and demonstrating that it begins to boil at 100 degrees Celsius.

Consciously or unconsciously, people make the mistake of applying this principle of physical sciences to humanities. Many ideas were accepted as true because they were apparently demonstrable. Those who inappropriately apply the principle of demonstrability to the field of humanities have made 'road activism' equivalent to being a demonstration for the truth of an idea.

Those who apply the principle of demonstrability to the field of humanities have made 'road activism' equivalent to being a demonstration for the truth of an idea.

The Arab Spring is a good example. These were democratic uprisings that arose independently and spread across the Arab world. Originating in Tunisia in December 2010, they quickly took hold in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. It caught people's imagination because they were doing a 'road show'. People wrongly considered this road show as demonstration that the Arab Spring was a successful movement. But in practice, the Arab Spring only led to anarchy.

In the humanities, the criterion to evaluate the truth of the matter is the result, not the 'road shows'. □



THE RETURN TO RELIGION

Role of Science

THE nineteenth century was the century of atheism. But with the arrival of the twentieth century, the whole course of history changed and religion again became a major force in human life. The obvious causes of this fact were discontentment with science and the continuing existence of religion as an inherent part of human nature.

A hundred years ago even thinking against science was considered a sign of ignorance. At the end of the 19th century a well-known scientist said that he was not able to understand anything unless he could make a scientific model of it. But now, at least at the academic level, man's conviction of the usefulness of science has been shaken. The spate of books on this subject, published after the second world war, was an indication of the extent of the human dilemma. The article on the History of Science in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) begins with these words:

Until recently, the history of science was a story of success. The triumphs of science represented a cumulative process of increasing knowledge and a sequence of victories over ignorance and superstition; and from science flowed a stream of inventions for the improvement of human life. The recent realization of deep moral problems within science of external forces and constraints on its development, and of dangers in uncontrolled technological change has challenged historians to a critical reassessment of this earlier simple faith.

Modern science has offered man innumerable facilities, but along with this it has brought in its wake, such problems as have rendered many of its gifts meaningless. The greatest menace is that of a third world war. In the event of this happening, it will be a nuclear war, which will reduce most of the big cities to ruins in a matter of hours. Moreover, the whole atmosphere will be engulfed in a thick nuclear smog preventing sunlight from reaching the earth. This will in turn produce a terrible nuclear winter, which will bring all human, animal and vegetable existence to the verge of the most tragic annihilation. The progress of science has not only produced material problems, but has also created intellectual and spiritual problems of a very grave nature.

Science and scientific resources have vastly expanded human knowledge. It has not only given man microscopes and telescopes

to observe things which had till then remained unseen, but has also opened up innumerable new ways and means of making it possible to add greatly to information in every field.

All this gave man the self-confidence to feel certain that he could arrive at the final reality through science alone. But the only thing that the increase in knowledge has given man is that he has now entered into a new phase of ignorance. In the words of a scientist: "We know more and more about less and less."

By the end of the 19th century scientists believed that with the increase in knowledge they had been heading towards the final reality. But new research proved that man cannot reach the ultimate reality unaided. His limitations are decisive obstacles in his path. It is now an accepted fact among the scientific community that science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality.

With the emergence of modern science it had become fashionable among intellectuals to hold that the universe could be explained without God. Therefore, every fact that came to light was explained in a way that would prove that there was no mind or consciousness behind the universe. But this bid to explain the universe atheistically failed.

The Indian scientist, Dr. Subramaniam Chandra Shekhar, who won the Nobel prize in Physics (jointly) in 1983, is a self-avowed atheist. He has briefly stated the present position of science on this subject:

The expansion of human knowledge gave man the confidence to feel certain that he could arrive at the final reality through science alone.

There are aspects, which are extremely difficult to understand. A famous remark of Einstein—and other people have said similar things, Schrodinger in particular—that the most incomprehensible thing about nature is that it is comprehensible. How is it that the human mind, extremely small compared to the universe and living over a time span microscopic in terms of astronomical time, comprehends reality in ideas, which spring from the human mind? This question has puzzled many people from Kepler on. Why should mathematical description be accurate? Mathematical description is something the human mind has evolved. Why should it fit external nature? We don't have answers to these questions. One is not saying the world is orderly and therefore must be ordered. But why should

we understand the world in terms of the concepts we have developed?

The British poet, T.S. Eliot has said: Where is the wisdom that we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge that we have lost in information?

A book called *Wisdom, Information and Wonder*, (published in 1989) by Dr. Mary Midgley, elaborates—as its title suggests—on the above rhetorical questions, and makes a significant contribution to the new thinking of the latter half of the 20th century.

In his book, *The Secular City*, (published in 1965) Professor Harvey R. Cox (published in 1965 in the U.S.A.) showed that people had lost interest in religion. But the same writer in another book titled, *Religion in the Secular City*, published in 1984, has shown that religion in the U.S.A. has seen a revival. The same has been found to be true in the other western countries.

In this search for truth, Islam a preserved and historical religion deserves to be considered for understanding it through its original sources. However, an important principle to follow while considering it for serious study should be that the seeker should separate Islam from Muslims. □



Ungratefulness

A great disadvantage of an ungrateful attitude is that it produces a mentality of non-acknowledgement. Failing at first to acknowledge the favours of one's fellow men, leads one to failure to give wholehearted credence to the Lord of the Universe.

MODERN CIVILIZATION

A Supporter

ACCORDING to *Hadith*: 'God will strengthen Islam through the secular people also.' This *Hadith* is of great significance so far as the art of thinking is concerned. It points to the error of dichotomous thinking; the tendency to see everything in terms of black and white. It implies that while people may fall into one of two categories—irreligious or religious; they may also fall into a third category, that of potential supporters of Islam. That is, an individual may fall into the category of the irreligious, yet still possess a third quality, that of a position to support the religion in one way or another.

The outcome of the treaty of Hudaibiya provides a practical example of the success of broader thinking in the early history of Islam. The Prophet's opponents were not pro-Islam. Therefore, the Muslims in general, because of the limitations in their thinking, mistakenly categorised them as enemies of Islam. But thanks to his divine wisdom, the Prophet did not fall into the error of regarding them as such. For he knew that a third possibility also existed. It was the latent potential of conveying the message. Therefore, the Prophet decided to open a door which had been closed by entering into a peace treaty with his opponents. Consequently, the possibilities of conveying the message began taking shape and within a short period of two years the entire history of Islam was transformed.

Viewed from the above angle the case of modern civilization and Islam parallels that of the Hudaibiya situation in modern times. Muslims have once again fallen prey to limitations of dichotomous thinking in these matters. Since modern civilization does not appear to them to be friendly to Islam, they tend to regard it as an enemy of Islam.

If we could extricate ourselves from this rigid pattern of thought we would find that modern civilization, is neither friendly nor hostile to Islam, but rather—in the words of the *Hadith*—a potential supporter of Islam.

Today, we are once again in need of divine wisdom adopted on the eve of Hudaibiya. If we could but think in the same way as the Prophet did on that occasion, history would certainly repeat itself. Out of

***Modern civilization, is
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unfavourable circumstances, favourable possibilities would emerge, and by being able to use these possibilities, we would be able to build a new history of Islam.

Led by their political and economic interests, the upholders of modern civilization follow many policies which might be detrimental to the collective good of Muslims. In reality this has nothing to do with any enmity towards Islam. It is simply due to the imperatives of economic competition. The affairs of this world being based on the principle of competition, such events have always taken place and will continue to do so in the near and distant future. So, Muslims must accept these things as a part of nature and turn their full attention to seeking out alternative possibilities in order to exploit them fully.

Such possibilities do exist for us in spite of all the apparently adverse circumstances in which we strive to perpetuate our Islamic heritage.

Out of unfavourable circumstances, favourable possibilities would emerge, and by being able to use these possibilities, we would be able to build a new history of Islam.

For this work to be accomplished many contributory factors were required—factors which had never hitherto existed. It is the modern civilization alone which has provided for the first time in human history all those means and resources which were necessary for the realization of the process of *Idkhal-e-kalimah* (global dissemination of the message of God).

In this way, according to the words of *Hadith*, the case of modern civilization is one neither of friendliness nor of hostility. It falls rather into a third category—that of supportiveness.

A few examples of this supportive nature are given below to serve as a practical explanation of this matter.

The first and foremost requirement for the performance of the mission of conveying the message is the provision of a system of global communication. It is an acknowledged fact that the scientific revolution of the modern world is the first event in human history to have placed at our disposal such a worldwide system of communication—a prerequisite for the realization of Islamic goals.

The second requirement essential to facilitating this task was complete religious freedom. In the absence of religious freedom, successful communication of the desired nature had never been possible. Now this civilization has brought into being an era in which for the first time

in human history, freedom of religion has come to be accepted as a sacred human right. This is one of its greatest gifts to humanity.

In order to spread the word of God on a universal scale, an unlimited amount of wealth was required. It is through modern industrial development that the Muslim nations have been able, albeit indirectly, to secure this wealth. For it was the secular and the scientific people of different parts of the world who first discovered the wealth of oil abounding in Muslim countries. It was again these very people who, by ushering in the modern machine age, gave oil the status of a precious commodity. This wealth thus acquired has enabled the Muslims of today to spread their campaign throughout the world, regardless of the cost.

Another important supporting factor is the principle of free enquiry developed in the world. This principle of free enquiry was extended even to religion. Sacred texts for the first time in human history were scrutinized in the light of the 'higher criticism'. This resulted in the establishment two facts about the Quran; one, of it being a preserved book and the other, its historical authenticity.

Muslims must strive to find a third option by keeping before them the principle of Hdaybiya which should be adopted in their relations vis-a-vis the modern civilization.

Thus the modern civilization has produced all the means and resources essential to the successful carrying out of mission of spreading the message of Islam all over the world. This mission can be properly performed only by making use of all the opportunities offered by modern times.

After the peace settlement at Hdaybiya the chapter Al-Fath was revealed in which it was said: "that it may be a sign for the believers, and that He may guide you to a straight path." (48: 20)

That is to say, the symbolism of this event should prevent believers from falling prey to the narrowness of dichotomous thinking in such matters. Rather they must strive to find a third option. This is the Hdaybiya principle which should be adopted in our relations vis-a-vis modern civilization. □



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**

Devote yourself single-mindedly to the Religion. And follow the nature [constitution] as made by God, that nature in which He has created mankind. There is no altering the creation of God. That is the right religion. But most people do not realize it. Turn to Him and fear Him, and be steadfast in prayer, and do not be one of those who associate partners with God, those who split up their religion and became divided into sects; each one exulting in what they have. (30: 30-32)

The true religion is one, and it has been revealed in its perfect form to every prophet. That religion is turning towards God, fear of God, worship of God and giving one's attention to God with all one's heart and soul. This is the religion of nature and it eternally pervades the inner soul of man. All prophets preached this one religion, but their followers in latter generations split it into many religions.

This results from the additions made by later generations to the original teachings of Prophets. Hair-splitting innovations in beliefs, new interpretations of religion with the changing times—all these things have created many religions out of one. When these additions are made people start laying more stress on them than on the original religion, due to which different groups set themselves up in opposition to each other. One group emphasizes one set of additions, while another group emphasizes another set. At last a stage is reached when the followers of a single religion become divided up into many religious factions.

When an affliction befalls men, they cry out to their Lord, turning to Him in repentance; but then, when He has made them taste His mercy, a section of them associate partners with their Lord, and are ungrateful for what We have given them. So enjoy yourselves for a

while, but soon you will come to know. Have we sent down to them any authority which speaks in favour of what they associate with Him? (30: 33-35)

Under ordinary circumstances man finds himself possessed of certain powers. Therefore, he assumes an air of arrogance. But, when critical conditions make him feel his helplessness, the veils are removed from his mind. At that time he is cut down to size, and realizing his helplessness, he starts calling upon God for help.

This is the psychological proof of the Oneness of God. In this way, the reality is mirrored in the personal experience of the individual. But man is so foolish that, as soon as the circumstances become favourable, he reverts to his neglectfulness and arrogance.

When we give mankind a taste of our blessing, they rejoice therein: but if they encounter tribulation because of their own actions—they fall into despair. Do they not see that God gives abundantly to whoever He pleases, and sparingly to whoever He pleases? In that truly there are signs for those who believe.

So give the near relative, the needy, and the wayfarer their due—that is best for those who seek God's pleasure: such men are the ones who will surely prosper. Whatever you lend out in usury to gain in value through other people's wealth will not increase in God's eyes, but whatever you give in alms in your desire for God's pleasure will be multiplied. (30: 36-39)

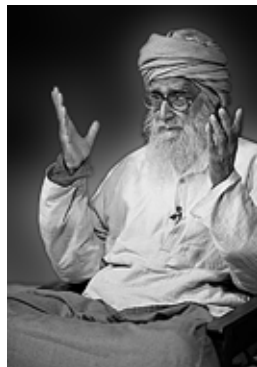
A believer considers that both difficulties and ease come from God. Therefore, he turns towards God in good times and in bad. When in comfortable circumstances, he thanks God, and in adverse circumstances, he exercises patience. As opposed to this, one who denies the truth solely relies upon himself. So, when in easy circumstances, he is boastful. When his energies fail him, he is desperate, because he feels that he has reached the final limit. This is nature's indication that the former type of mentality is the truly virtuous one, while the latter is improper and unworthy.

One sign of a believer is that he spends his wealth for the pleasure of God. So, he shares his wealth with other needy persons who may or may not be his relatives. He spends his wealth to reap the benefits of the Hereafter and not to earn profits in this world like a usurer. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered



You have written so many books before on Islam and peace. Why did you feel the need for yet another book on the subject—*The Age of Peace*?

It is right that I have already written many articles and books on the subject of peace, but these writings are mostly in reference to Islam. Since quite some time, the idea that Islam is a religion of violence has become widespread. I therefore wrote extensively on Islam and peace to dispel the prevalent notion about the religion of Islam. For example, the term '*jihad*' was taken to mean military action. Through my writings, I have explained that *jihad* truly means a peaceful ideological struggle.

The focus of the present book is not on Islam, but on the present age. The fighting that had happened during the time of the Prophet of Islam was due to the age factor. That is, the advent of Islam was in the tribal age. And, the culture of the tribal age is that of war and violence. Through my study, I realized that several changes have come about in the modern age. Whatever was earlier attainable through military power can now be attained with greater success through peaceful means. Therefore, no reason remains to indulge in fighting and war. This was the incentive behind the title of the book as *The Age of Peace*.

What new points have you highlighted in this book that you had not addressed in your previous books on Islam and peace?

In this book, I have written in detail on the concept of de-monopolization, expounded in the second chapter, which I had not dealt with in my earlier writings.

Although the word 'de-monopolization' exists in the dictionary, it has been given a reduced definition. I have defined de-monopolization in a new way in my book. I have shown that in the modern age, the word 'de-monopolization' has acquired a comprehensive connotation and we can say that the present age is an age of de-monopolization. In previous ages, might was considered to be most important—it was said 'might is right'. A landlord, a political ruler or a person possessing any kind of power was believed to be in a position in which he could do anything. Such people had monopoly over things. But in today's age,

this concept of monopoly has become obsolete and another concept has taken its place—that is, 'everything for everyone'.

In today's age the most important thing is planning, and not political power. If a person knows how to do wise planning, he can, through peaceful planning, attain everything which in the earlier age was regarded as possible only through military power and force. For example, in previous ages, colonialism had held sway. The aim of colonialism was commercial exploitation, for which the colonial powers considered controlling other territories as necessary. The colonial nations were basically commercial exploiters.

But today this commercial gain can be achieved through other means, for example, outsourcing, investment, and so on. Today there are many big companies which gain their commercial interests at a global level, but do not own an army. The means that they have employed for carrying out their activities are outsourcing and investment. This is an example of the phenomenon of de-monopolization that has come to characterize the present age. In earlier times, powerful people could enjoy monopolies, but today the same advantage can be achieved by all through planning and organization.

Can you please summarize the basic arguments of this book?

People generally live in anachronism. Although the age of war is over, people still continue to advocate for and engage in war. In this book, I have proved that such changes have been brought about in the present age that war has become totally futile. Today, we can achieve more successfully through peace what we could not have attained by taking to war in the previous age.

In this book I have, directly or indirectly, tried to show that a process has been going on since past thousands of years in human history. This process, according to me, was to replace violence with peace or to make peaceful struggle the alternative for violent struggle. This process reached its culmination in the second half of the twentieth century. Those who now opt for the violent struggle to attain their goals are victims of the anachronistic way of thinking. The gist of the book is to make people aware of the spirit of the age and to re-engineer people's minds along the lines of peace.

The benefit of this replacement of violence by peace is not only that violence would come to an end in society and peace would prevail, rather the greater benefit would be that after this re-engineering, people would no more have negative thinking and would develop

positive thinking in the complete sense of the word. And, positive thinking is most important for one's personality development.

The book is called *The Age of Peace*, but the reality might seem quite the opposite. Violence is so widespread today—not just in the form of war and terrorism, but also violence in society, in homes, in families, in people's minds, maybe on a scale that did not exist before. So, on what basis do you call this the Age of Peace?

When I say that the present age is an age of peace, I mean it in terms of potential. If people are fighting, they are doing so on account of unawareness of the present age. I want to dispel this unawareness and make people aware of the potentials available to us to work peacefully in every field in the present age. When I say that today we are living in the age of peace, I do not mean it in the sense that someone says that we are in the age of machines. What I mean is that now by following the peaceful course of action all things are achievable for us, and in a much better way than by taking recourse to violence. I therefore, want to explain to people who are engaged in violence that their case is one of anachronism—of living with the mindset of war and violence in an age in which one can attain all of one's goals through peaceful methods.

The modern age, in terms of the possibilities that exist today, is an age of peace. But due to people's unawareness, they are unable to adopt the peaceful method. The opinion makers of society are unaware of the spirit of the age. They still speak as if even today violent struggle is as important for the attainment of a goal as it was earlier. Therefore, it is my experience that those who are explained the importance of peace and have realized it, have changed their thinking and methodology. Earlier people took to the way of war due to circumstantial compulsion, but if they do so now, it is out of unawareness. If this unawareness is removed, they will come to the path of peace.

Today, one of the greatest challenges to world peace are terrorist groups misusing the name of Islam and falsely claiming to be engaged in jihad. If this is truly to be the Age of Peace, how do you feel these groups and their ideology can be countered and defeated?

The violence in the name of *jihad* that we see today among Muslims is a result of the political interpretation of Islam. This interpretation was given in the twentieth century by certain Arab and non-Arab Muslims. Under the influence of this interpretation, Muslims came to think that they needed to change the political system to bring about reform in society. When they realized that they could not unseat those who

possessed political power, they began to fight against their rulers to bring about reform in the system. The solution to this problem is not counter-violence, but to prove through arguments that the political interpretation of Islam is a wrong interpretation. Islam, in reality, is a completely peaceful religion. The goal of Islam is not to bring about a change in system, but to bring about change in an individual. □



Irrelevancies

If a person allows himself to become upset by opposition, taunts or other kinds of unpleasantness, he will never reach his goals. He will simply become enmeshed in irrelevancies.

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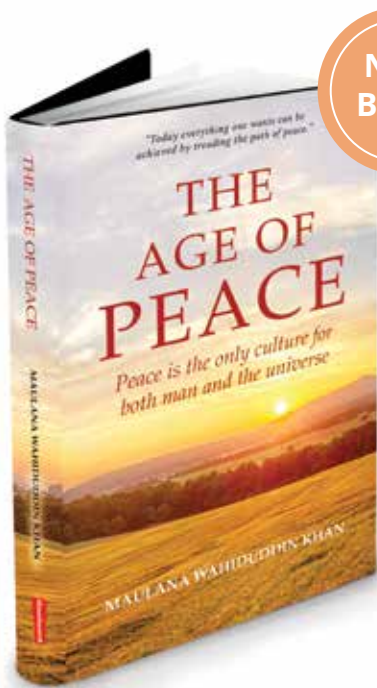
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