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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



A learned person is one who understands that what he knows is but little in comparison with what he does not know.

A MAGAZINE FOR THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

Spirit of Islam monthly...

- ▶ Presents Islam, the religion of nature, in the contemporary idiom to help Muslims rediscover Islam from the original sources
- ▶ Explains Creation plan of God for humankind
- ▶ Enlightens people on the subject of global peace
- ▶ Addresses contemporary issues
- ▶ Assists the readers to deal with life's challenges
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- ▶ Fosters greater communal harmony through religious understanding

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 95 NOVEMBER 2020

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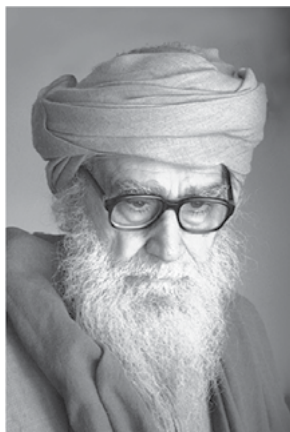
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CONTENTS

■ FROM MAULANA'S DESK	5
■ FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR	7
■ IN SEARCH OF HEAVEN	10
■ PREDICTING THE AFTERLIFE	11
■ LOVE FOR HUMANITY	14
■ QUEST FOR ANOTHER HABITABLE PLANET	15
■ THE ETERNAL JOURNEY	17
■ THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING	18
■ ARGUMENT FOR THE LIFE HEREAFTER	21
■ FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE	26
■ TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE	28
■ TOWARDS A LIFE OF COMFORT AND PEACE	31
■ SECRET OF MENTAL PEACE	32
■ LEADING A GODLESS LIFE	34
■ PARADISE: A UNIVERSAL CONCEPT	35
■ WRATH, MERCY	40
■ TRYING TO DECEIVE GOD	41
■ ACCOMODATING ONE'S SHORTCOMINGS	42
■ THE TWO COURSES	44
■ THE WORD OF GOD	47
■ ASK MAULANA	49

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.

THE QUESTION OF INTELLECT

WHAT is intellect? Intellect is the ability of the mind to reach correct conclusions about what is true and what is false. The intellect is a precious gift from the Creator. It has been narrated in a *Hadith* that the best thing God has created is the intellect. The fact is that all human progress and accomplishments depend on the use of the intellect.

Without intellect, man will be like a lifeless statue. He will not be able to understand and differentiate between truth and falsehood. The intellect by itself is not a criterion. It is the ability to understand and comprehend. The status of intellect is as an instrument or faculty and not that of a judge by itself.

Reason is the intellectual faculty by which conclusions are drawn from premises. Revelation is guidance or communication directly from God. It is incorrect to hold reason and revelation as rivals. The fact is that revelation is a permanent source of knowledge, while the intellect itself is not a source of knowledge. When a person believes in revelation, he does so by using his God-given intellect to contemplate on it, and

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2020, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

after reaching the level of conviction, he discovers the authenticity of the revelation. From this point of view, it would be correct to say that intellect, or reason, reinforces revelation and does not contradict it.

The intellect is a natural gift bestowed upon man by the Creator. It is not a personal invention or commodity. The conflict between religion and reason began with a misunderstanding when an extreme version of reason was proposed. Some proclaimed that the intellect itself is the standard of acquiring knowledge. The religious class accepted this concept and unnecessarily considered reason or rational thinking as anti-religionist. To counter their differences, they held that the realm of reason was different from the realm of revelation, and that the realm of intellect ends where revelation begins.

The root of the word 'intellect' (*aqil* in Arabic) is used about fifty times in the Quran. The Quran repeatedly refers to the intellect and asks man to seek the truth of revelation through intellect. For example, this verse is mentioned in chapter *Joseph* of the Quran, "We have sent down the Quran in Arabic, so that you may understand (by applying reason)". (12:2) Similarly, the Quran advises people to use their intellect to discover the truth of prophethood (10:16), etc.

Man is naturally endowed with various abilities. For example, the ability of the feet to walk, of the hand to hold, of the eyes to see, of the ears to hear, and so on. In the same way, man has been endowed with intellect which is capability of thinking and analyzing. Together with the intellect, man has been given complete freedom. Man has the right to properly use or misuse this freedom. It is a known fact that the ear and the eye can be put to proper as well as improper use. Likewise is the case with the intellectual faculty of man.

The function of human intellect is to collect information and observation, and then through analysis of the information attain correct knowledge and truth. The intellect by itself is not a source of knowledge. So, it is possible for the intellect to reach the right and even the wrong conclusions. Those who see the intellect as a source of knowledge in itself, are in fact extremists in the rational school of thought. Such extremists are found everywhere, even in the realm of religion and faith. □

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

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SUICIDE—AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

MAN'S physical existence and his life are not, in reality, his personal property. These are a trust bestowed by God Almighty. Life is a great boon that acts as foundation for all of the other blessings and boons that accompany life. Therefore, Islam has commanded human beings to protect life and promote the welfare of human body. Islam binds every member of the society to protect life at all costs, and to make it beneficial to oneself as well as to society at large.

God is the Lord of life and death. Islam states that murdering an individual is akin to murdering the entire humanity.

(...) Whoever killed a human being—except as a punishment for murder or for spreading corruption in the land—shall be regarded as having killed all humankind. (5: 32)

Similarly, taking one's own life and putting it in jeopardy is likewise an act disliked by God.

Do not cast yourselves into destruction by your own hands. (2: 195)

Commentators say that this verse also includes those who commit suicide.

In another verse, the Quran says:

Do not kill one another, for God is most merciful to you. If anyone does these things through transgression and injustice, We shall cast him into the Fire; and that is easy for God. (4: 29-30)

Noted Islamic scholar and acclaimed commentator of the Quran, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. AD 1210) writes under these verses:

The verse addresses those who kill someone wrongfully and those who commit suicide. This verse is proof that people are commanded to refrain from committing suicide.

The corpus of *Hadith* (record of sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) contains many examples where the Prophet of God unambiguously instructed the people to refrain from committing suicide:

Islam has commanded human beings to protect life and promote the welfare of human body. Islam binds every member of the society to protect life at all costs, and to make it beneficial to oneself as well as to society at large.

'Your body has a right over you and your eyes too have a right over you'.

This saying quite clearly directs people to protect their body, life and all organs of the body, and it also exhorts one to fulfill their rights, namely to take care of them. Reading such directives, how could it be possible that Islam would make allowance for committing violent acts such as bomb blasts and suicide attacks? How could Islam, the religion of peace and universal brotherhood, sanction taking the precious lives of citizens through heinous acts of violence?

Quite the contrary, the Prophet of Islam says about those who commit suicide that they will enter the raging fire of Hell and abide there forever. Thus, they would incur unrelenting and unending painful punishment. Many *Hadith* narrations are cited here to bring home this point:

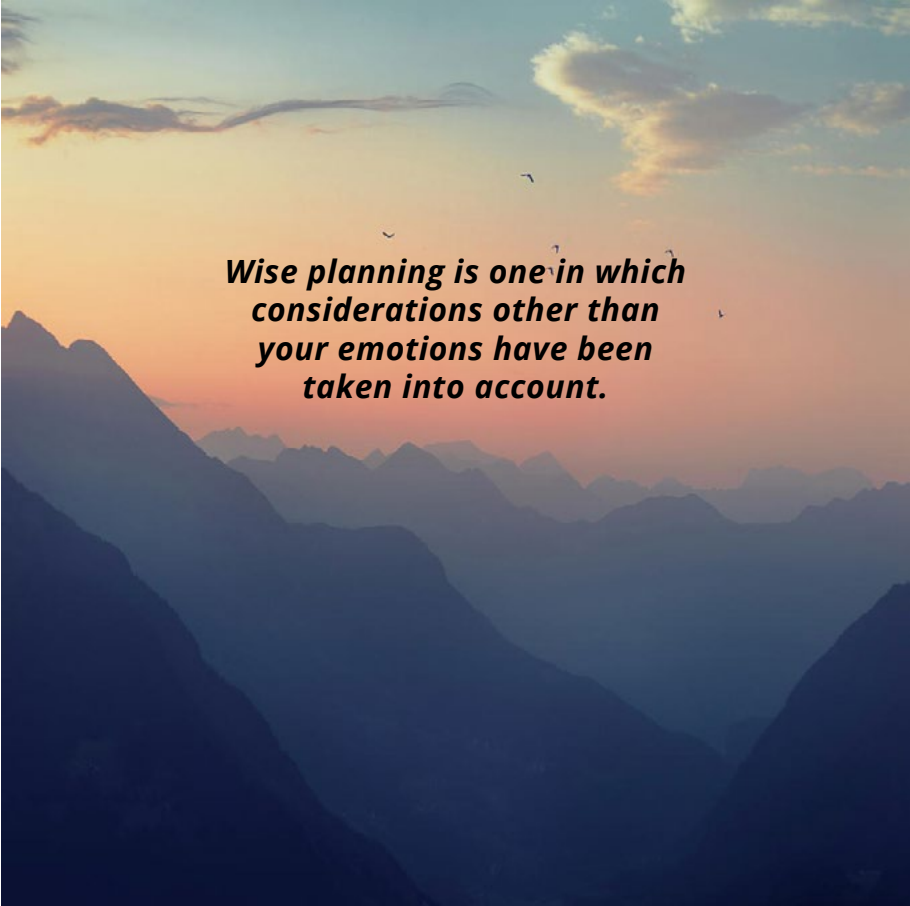
"If a person jumps from a mountain so as to kill himself, he will enter Hell and abide there forever, and he will keep tumbling down in it. If a person consumes poison to kill himself, Hell will be his eternal abode, and the poison he consumed will be constantly with him which he will consume. If a person kills himself with a metal weapon, he will be given the same weapon in Hell with which he will keep stabbing himself in the stomach, and he will abide there forever."

A Companion of the Prophet, Abu Hurairah, reports that the Prophet of Islam said, "If a person chews something in order to kill himself, he shall be forced in Hell to keep chewing the same substance. Similarly,

if a person kills himself by falling into a pit, he shall be compelled to plunge into the pit forever. And if a person kills himself by hanging, he shall be punished to continuously hang himself in Hell.”

Another Companion of the Prophet, Thabit bin Dhahak, reports that the Prophet of Islam said, “Whoever commits suicide through something, he will be punished by the same thing in the blazing fire of Hell, and there will be no end to it. □

Prof. Farida Khanam
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***Wise planning is one in which
considerations other than
your emotions have been
taken into account.***

IN SEARCH OF HEAVEN

A Scientific Stand

RENOWNED English theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking, in an interview with *The Guardian* in 2011 said, “There is no heaven or afterlife...; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.” It is unfortunate that Mr Hawking, a scientist, chose to make such an unscientific statement.

A person who does not believe in Heaven can only say that according to known physical laws, Heaven does not exist. But the matter cannot be said to end here. The currently accepted theory of the composition of the universe states that only 4% of the universe consists of matter as we know it. The remaining 96% of the universe is thought to consist of dark matter and dark energy, which are poorly understood, if at all. Only the 4% of the universe that we do understand—the observable universe—is subject to scientific study. Science is defined as the systematic study of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.

A statement is considered valid only if it has been made via the established scientific method. This method has to be adopted by scientists and non-scientists alike.

Matter, either microscopic or macroscopic, which can be observed directly or indirectly and then put through scientific study is the object of investigation. Since the greater part of the universe cannot be observed, it clearly cannot be studied.

In earlier times, there was no scientific method. In the present day, a statement is considered valid only if it has been made via the established scientific method. This method has to be adopted by scientists and non-scientists alike. The only scientifically valid statement on this subject that Mr Hawking could have made was that—according to known physical laws, in the 4% of the universe subject to scientific study, there is probably no Heaven. □



PREDICTING THE AFTERLIFE

A Natural Corollary of the Present Life

THE physicist Paul Dirac predicted the existence of “antimatter” before it was observed. What Dirac did on a scientific level, the preacher of God’s word does on a spiritual level: he predicts the afterlife.

Perhaps one of the main reasons why people fail to attach themselves to true religion in the modern age is that the teachings of religion cannot be observed or experienced in the normal scientific sense. Belief in the afterlife, which is the very crux of true religion, appears to most people as particularly hypothetical and far-fetched: if something cannot be seen, how can it be believed?

Scientific discoveries made in the 20th century, however, should have made it much easier for people to believe in the afterlife. In their initial stages most scientific discoveries have been no more than conclusions reached from theoretical, abstract data; they have constituted an inference of scientific “truths” from scientific “facts”. Will Durant wrote in his *The Story of Philosophy*: Every science begins as philosophy...; (science) arises in hypothesis.

In several cases it has been many years before discoveries were made in the laboratory. Yet even before these discoveries had reached the experimental stage, they were accepted as facts: they were not denied on the basis of the theoretical and abstract method of their presentation.

The prediction by the Cambridge physicist Paul Dirac (1902-1984) of the existence of antimatter was one such discovery. The first antiparticle to be discovered was the positron—the antiparticle of the electron. Its existence was first effectively predicted by Dirac in 1928. It was not until 1932, however, that the particle was detected in cosmic rays by C.D. Anderson. By that time Dirac was making new and far-reaching predictions on the basis of facts already at his disposal. As J.G. Crowther wrote in his obituary of the famed physicist, “Dirac was quick to perceive the general implications of his discovery.” In 1933 Dirac shared the Nobel Prize for physics with Erwin Schrodinger.

In his address on receiving the reward he gave a virtually complete outline of antiparticles, antimatter and even hinted at the anti-universe. He specially forecast the existence of a negative proton, which was not observed until 1955.

Clearly, Dirac's prediction of everything from antiparticles to an anti-universe was based entirely on abstract theories. He had not observed antiparticles, nor had he experienced an anti-world; but he knew that the theoretical data at his disposal implied their existence. He started off with the laws of quantum theory and relativity, and conceived an equation to describe the motion of electrons in accordance with these laws. His equation made the spin of the electron a logical consequence of the union of relativity and quantum theory. The inference he then made was that the equation for the electron implied the existence of

***This world is finite:
there must be an
infinite world as
well, for otherwise
this world will be
incomplete. Injustice
prevails in this world:
there must be a
world of absolute
justice, for otherwise,
in a world founded
on principles of
justice, injustice will
persist.***

another particle having the same mass and spin as an electron, but with a positive instead of a negative electric charge. This is electron's antiparticle, now known as a positron.

What Dirac did on a scientific level, the preacher of God's word, one who calls humankind to belief in the afterlife, does on a spiritual level. He takes the "equation" of this world and sees that it implies, with absolute certainty, the existence of an anti-world—the Hereafter—to balance it out. This world is finite: there must be an infinite world as well, for otherwise this world will be incomplete. Injustice prevails in this world: there must be a world of absolute justice, for otherwise, in a world founded on principles of justice, injustice will persist, and that is inconceivable. Certain limitations are inherent to this world; opportunities and

potentialities, on the other hand, are unlimited. There must be another world where our unlimited potentialities can find unlimited fulfillment. Without an "anti-world", this world is incomplete. The very existence of a finite, imperfect world implies the existence of another infinite, perfect one.

Dirac's "discoveries" had not been observed when, in 1933, he expounded on them at length in his address on receiving the Nobel Prize. He was, however, so certain of the accuracy of his predictions that he was compelled to communicate them to others. So it is with the one who calls humankind to faith in the afterlife. He is so certain of his "discovery" of the life after death that he feels an obligation to convey the news to others.

And the latter, spiritual discovery, is no less certain than the former, scientific one. Indeed, it is one of the puzzles of the modern age that a world that has accepted Dirac's "antimatter" and "anti-universe" as 'the leading physical ideas for explaining the character and contents of the contemporary universe, its origin, and history', has yet to accept the concept of an anti-world in the spiritual sense of the word. Perhaps the reason for this is that no one has, in recent times, conveyed the concept of an anti-world—or Hereafter—with the conviction that Dirac had when he put forward his idea of antimatter. □

A landscape photograph showing a bright sun setting behind a range of mountains. The sky is a deep orange and yellow, and the mountains are silhouetted against the light. The foreground shows dark, silhouetted trees and hills.

***Patience gives the strength
to restrain one's emotions in
delicate situations and use one's
mind to find a course of action
along result-oriented lines.***

LOVE FOR HUMANITY

Bigger Picture

IN general people give credit to their parents in the building of their lives. In this respect they praise their parents. But such men and women are hard to find who realize and acknowledge that the whole of humanity has played a part in the building of their lives. In this matter if parents play just one percent part, the general humanity plays 99% part. But no one realizes this reality, no one acknowledges it.

For instance, when you eat bread, your parent's role in this is less than 1%, while the role of the humanity in general is more than 99%. For, over a long civilizational process spanning thousands of years, it has become possible that a person may discover bread, as we know it today, and use it as his food. The same is the case of other things, for instance, clothes, houses, transport, machines, industries, etc.

The greatest form of worship for a person is to offer abundant gratefulness and abundant acknowledgement.

The truth is that the things one possesses, one part of it is the direct gift, while the other part is the indirect gift. If the direct gift is akin to the tip of the iceberg, then the indirect gift is akin to the iceberg. The indirect gift, apparently, is not visible but in its quantity, it is much more than the direct gift. People know only the direct gift, that is why they are able to give very little thanks, they are not able

to acknowledge as is due. Had they known the benefit of the indirect gift, their gratitude and acknowledgement will increase. They will start loving the whole humanity just like they love their parents.

The greatest form of worship for a person is to offer abundant gratefulness and abundant acknowledgement, but the person who is unaware of this reality will remain deprived of the worship of abundant thanksgiving and abundant acknowledgement. □



QUEST FOR ANOTHER HABITABLE PLANET

Mars, or Paradise?

DEFENCE scientists from the US are planning to use genetically engineered algae, bacteria and plants to radically transform the climate of Mars and terraform it into an Earth-like planet. Scientists from Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) aim to warm up and potentially thicken Mars' atmosphere by growing green, photosynthesising plants, bacteria, and algae on the barren surface of the red planet. "For the first time, we have the technological toolkit to transform not just hostile places here on Earth, but to go into space not just to visit, but to stay," Alicia Jackson, deputy director of DARPA's new Biological Technologies Office said recently at a DARPA-hosted biotech conference.

The above is from a PTI news report released on June 29, 2015 and published in *The Times of India* under the title 'Will tweaked microbes make Mars Earth-like?'

This plan is undoubtedly utopian with little scientific data for support. Both man and the universe have some limitations that make it impossible to bring this plan into effect. It lies more in the realm of dreams than in reality.

The Quran is a book that speaks about the Creator's plan for this world. This world was created only for a temporary period. At the culmination of this period, the whole world will undergo a great change and then a new world will be formed. This new world will be man's future abode.

This has been spoken about in the Quran in these words: 'On the Day when the Earth shall be changed into another Earth, as shall be the heavens.' (14: 48)

In such a situation, man should devote himself to the task mentioned in another verse as: 'And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and for a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the Earth, which has been prepared for the God-fearing.' (3: 133)

If it were possible for science to make a planet in space habitable for man through new technology, then the first application of this technology should be to reshape the Earth and make it once again habitable.

It is a fact that this world is gradually becoming uninhabitable for humans. This is why scientists are searching for an alternative for planet Earth. Some people are in pursuit of a 'space colony', while others are planning to develop Mars into another Earth. All these are only romantic ideas and not scientific schemes. If it were possible for science to make a planet in space habitable for man through new technology, then the first application of this technology should be to reshape the Earth and make it once again habitable as it was created.

The truth is that the time has come for man to transform his thinking and work towards attaining Paradise, which according to the creation plan of God will be man's future abode. □

*Remembering death is
the greatest source of
wisdom. It guarantees
that one's planning
will be realistic.*



THE ETERNAL JOURNEY

Take Provision for the Next World

EVERY affair should be looked at in its eternal context. A “guard” may give one temporary support in this world, but when one reaches the next world, there will be no one to lend a helping hand.

If one keeps in mind that one is on the way to the Hereafter, then one will consider everything which will become worthless there as worthless now, no matter how great a worldly price it may seem to command. One will give weight only to those things which will be of consequence in the next world, no matter how inconsequential they may seem in the world.

In this world, one may have command of impressive words which one uses to defy truth; but in the next world one will find oneself lost for words.

One may wield one’s power unjustly, content that one’s victims will never be able to avenge one’s wrongs; but in the next world one will be divested of all power.

Beguiled by wealth, one may become proud in this world, but in the next world one will have nothing to be proud of; one will have left one’s wealth behind in the world.

This is the basic difference between a man of true faith and one without faith. One without faith lives on Earth as if he is going to stay here forever, while the hallmark of true faith is the belief that one is on the way to the next world.

The distinction between belief and disbelief results into two entirely different manifestations in the psychological and practical lives of the concerned persons. One should constantly live with a sense of responsibility of one’s thoughts and deeds. Whatever a person does in this world will not be lost at his death, rather he will have to be accountable to it in full in the world Hereafter. □

One should constantly live with a sense of responsibility and accountability of one’s thoughts and deeds. One will be held accountable for one’s actions in full in the world Hereafter.



THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Finding the True Cause

ONE of the arguments put forth to cast doubt on the existence of God is what can be called *the Problem of Evil or Suffering*. This objection is the result of a misunderstanding that evil and suffering are created by God, while the truth is that they result from the actions of man. The perception of evil and suffering in human life is the result of such wrong attribution.

When people see an instance of evil or suffering in a person's life, they wish to explain it with reference to the person suffering. In most of the examples there is no justification for this in the afflicted person. This leads to the assumption that either there is no God in this world, or that God is cruel and unjust. However, this is an incorrect conclusion.

The suffering that takes place in a person's life is sometimes due to the person's own actions and sometimes due to the actions of the parents, relatives, or society in general. Quite often the collective system, in its broadest sense, is responsible. Suffering may be caused due to an immediate reason and sometimes its causes go back many generations. Whatever may be the cause, there is no basis in attributing it to God.

Analysis Using a Wrong Reference

The reason for this doubt is the analysis of the situation using a wrong reference, that is, studying the state of affairs with respect to God, whereas it should be seen in relation to man. For example, AIDS is considered a serious problem. Medical research has established that the risk of AIDS is a result of the misuse of human freedom. In medical science, genetics has shown that many diseases are inherited from the parents and passed down to future generations. These are referred to as hereditary diseases. In the same way, thousands of people die, or fall ill from various kinds of epidemics. These are also the result of the actions of man.

The son of Indian economist and journalist Arun Shourie is confined to a wheelchair. The cause of this 'suffering' is that he was given a wrong injection in a hospital in the United States, the result of which made him physically paralyzed. Countless people die or become disabled as a result of violence and wars. All these are a result of human actions and interactions.

Attributing human suffering to God or to nature is utterly unscientific. A study of all the branches of science shows that nature is completely free from defects. Nature is so well-established and well-regulated that its functioning and performance are the reliable basis for the progress of civilization. If there was no predictable character in nature, then all the activities of science would come to an abrupt end.

A Comparative Study

The first principle towards an academic analysis of the problem of evil is a comparative study. It is said that: it is in comparison that we understand. Comparative study shows that the problem of evil and suffering is limited to the human world. While man constitutes a very small part of the universe, the rest of the universe, with all its gigantic dimensions, is a completely flawless, zero-defect universe. There are countless activities going on in the universe, but evil does not exist anywhere else.

The human world is plagued by diseases, accidents, violence, and oppression. There is injustice, exploitation, wars, hatred and enmity, rebellion, riots, and crime. There are many such evils in the human world, however, the rest of the universe is completely free of evil. This difference proves that the problem of evil is created by man himself and not by nature. If evil was generated by nature, it would undoubtedly be found in the rest of the universe as well.

The suffering that takes place in a person's life is sometimes due to the person's own actions and sometimes due to the actions of the parents, relatives, or society in general.

A Scientific Study

A scientific study of this matter shows that there is a clear difference between the human world and the rest of the universe. The rest of the universe is governed by the fixed laws of nature. On the contrary, man is free. He maps out his life according to his own free will. This difference is the root cause of *the problem of evil*.

An in-depth study of the issue reveals that all the evils of the human world are the result of the misuse of human freedom. Medical science shows that the cause of many diseases is not in nature, but is to be found in the blunders committed by man. These errors are sometimes committed by the sufferer and can also be inherited from the parents. Often, corruption in the societal system leads to diseases. It must be noted that linking disease to nature is the ideology of atheistic thinkers.

It is not based on any scientific principles. Similarly, terrorism, battles, global warming, pollution, ecological problems, etc. are all the result of the misuse of human freedom.

Attributing human suffering to God or to nature is utterly unscientific. Nature is completely free from defects. Nature is so well-established and well-regulated that its functioning and performance is the reliable basis for the progress of civilization.

The Correct Reference

Why did the Creator give man this freedom? The Creator desires to give man an exceptional reward. This great reward is Heaven, a place of eternal bliss. Only those who use their freedom responsibly will be entitled to an abode in Heaven; those who—despite being free—keep themselves in check and control their desires. Where there is freedom, there will also be the misuse of freedom, but freedom entailing a great reward is so precious that it cannot be taken away due to apprehensions about its misuse.

The correct reference is to know the creation plan of God. According to this plan, man has been granted freedom in this world. God has

made this elaborate plan so as to create an environment of test. The events of suffering that happen in human life arise directly or indirectly out of the misuse of this God-granted freedom. □



Being patient does not mean inaction. It means planning your strategy, assessing your resources and taking into consideration the relevant natural factors.

ARGUMENT FOR THE LIFE HEREAFTER

From Probability Theory

ONE of the most important tenets of religion is the existence of the life Hereafter. After death, human beings will leave this present ephemeral world, and, on the Day of Judgement, will enter another world, which will be eternal. The present world is but a place of trial where man, throughout his entire lifespan, is on probation. When the time has come for the Last Reckoning, God will destroy this world and replace it by another world created on an entirely different pattern. All human beings will then be resurrected and will be brought before the Almighty to be judged. It is then that they shall be rewarded, or punished, according to the merits and demerits of their deeds on this Earth.

We shall now examine this concept from different standpoints and determine whether it is right or wrong to believe in this concept.

Probability Theory

The question that first arises concerns the possible advent of an afterlife in the present system of the universe. Do any events or indications substantiate our view?

This concept of the other world presupposes that man and the universe, in their present form, are not eternal. From the entire array of human knowledge up to the present, this fact stands out as indisputable. We all know, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that for both man and the universe, death is an inescapable fate.

The greatest desire of those who do not believe in the other world is to convert this world into a heaven of eternal bliss. Research into the cause, or causes of death have even been carried out so that it could be forestalled and prevented, thus rendering human beings immortal. But the failure of such research has been abysmal, and with each unsuccessful attempt, it has been borne in more and more upon researchers just how ineluctable death is.

Why does death occur? About two hundred explanations have been put forward as to its causes. Organic decay in the body; the exhaustion of constituents; the atrophying of veins; the replacement of dynamic albumens by less dynamic ones; the wearing out of the tissues; the secretion of poison by intestinal bacteria, which spreads throughout the body, and so on.

The concept of bodily decay would appear to be correct. Machines, shoes, garments and all such material things do wear out with the passage of time. There is, ostensibly, the possibility of our body wearing out too, sooner or later, just as a garment does. But science only partially supports this view of bodily decay, for the human body is very different from a garment, a machine or a piece of rock. It should be likened, rather to, a river which has been flowing for thousands and thousands of years and continues to flow in the same fashion even today. Can we really say that a river becomes old or stagnates?

An American chemist, Dr Carl Linus Pauling (d. 1994), recipient of two Nobel Prizes, one of Chemistry in 1954 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1962, has pointed out that, theoretically man is cast to a great extent in an eternal mould, cells in the human body being just like machines which automatically remove their own defects. In spite of this, man does grow old, and does die.

The concept of the other world presupposes that man and the universe, in their present form, are not eternal. From the entire array of human knowledge up to the present, this fact stands out as indisputable.

But let us leave death for a moment and look at life. Our bodies are constantly undergoing a process of renewal. Molecules of albumen present within our cells are continually being produced, destroyed and reproduced. Cells too (except the nerve cells) regularly degenerate and are replaced by newly formed cells. It has been estimated that the blood in a human body is fully renewed within the short span of about four months. And, within a few years, all of the atoms in a human body are replaced with new ones. This shows that man is more like a river than a mere structure of flesh and bones.

In short, the human body is constantly undergoing a process of change. This being so, all concepts of the body becoming old and worn-out are seen to have no basis in fact. Consider that in the normal course of events, the indirect causes of death, such as injury, various types of deficiencies, the clogging of arteries and the wasting away of muscle, tissue, etc., are generally dealt with, bit by bit by the body's own processes (sometimes with the help of medical treatment) but, in any case are eliminated in the course of time, without either singly or jointly having caused the onset of death. It is normally much later in life that death occurs. How then can these injuries, deficiencies, etc., be held responsible for the death of the

body? This would appear to imply that the cause of death does not lie in the intestines, veins or heart, but somewhere else.

Another explanation has it that nerve cells are the cause of death because they remain unchanged throughout life and are never replaced. The number of nerve cells in a human body thus decline year after year, thereby weakening the nervous system as a whole. If it is correct to say that the nervous system is the Achilles' heel of the human body, it should conversely be correct to say that a body having no nervous system at all should be able to survive for the longest period of time.

But observation does not support this view. A tree, which is devoid of a nervous system does survive much longer than a man, and in fact, survives the longest of all forms of plant-life. But wheat, which likewise, has no nervous system, survives for only one year. And the amoeba, with a minute nervous system, survives for only half an hour.

These examples would appear to imply the reverse, i.e. animals belonging to the higher species, with perfect nervous systems, should live longer. But that is not the case either. Creatures relatively lower down the evolutionary scale, like crocodiles, turtles and fish are the ones who survive the longest.

All the investigations so far carried out with the objective of showing that death need not be a certainty have met with total failure. The fact still remains that, one day, all human beings will have to die. There is no avoiding death.

Dr Alexis Carrel, a French Nobel prize-winner, who has done advanced research in tissue culture, has discussed this problem at length under the heading of *Inward Time*.

Man will never tire of seeking immortality. He will not attain it, because he is bound by certain laws of his organic constitution.

He may succeed in retarding, perhaps even in reversing in some measure, the inexorable advance of physiological time.

Never will he vanquish death.

Anomalies in the organization of the present set-up of the universe, which periodically result in minor calamities, are indicative of what is going to happen on a large scale, at some time in the future.

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The earthquake is the terrestrial phenomenon which most obviously forewarns us of the possible advent of Doomsday. The interior of the Earth is, in fact, composed of red-hot semi-molten magma, which is ejected periodically through volcanic activity in the form of lava. Sometimes strong vibrations of the Earth's crust can also be felt. These are produced by the shrinking of the globe due to the cooling process which has been going on for aeons. From time to time, the wrinkling of the Earth's surface assumes gigantic proportions and the resulting earthquakes are like nature's unilateral onslaught on man, in

The Day of the Resurrection will come upon us all of a sudden, just like an earthquake. Such natural catastrophes demonstrate, most awesomely, God's capacity to destroy the Earth at any moment.

which nature definitely has the upper hand. When we remember that only a thin, rocky crust, comparable to the skin of an apple, separates us from the red-hot, semi-molten interior of our planet, we do not wonder that the inhabitants of its surface are so often reminded of the "physical Hell" lying below the peaceful woodlands and blue seas.

Such earthquakes occur almost every day in varying degrees of intensity, some regions being more prone to earthquakes than others. The earthquakes which struck Shensi, a district in China, is the oldest of the highly destructive earthquakes recorded in history. It occurred in AD 1556 and took a heavy toll

of more than 800,000 lives. Similarly, on November 1, 1755, a volcano erupted cataclysmically in Portugal, totally destroying the city of Lisbon. In the course of this earthquake, within hardly six minutes, 30,000 people were killed and all the buildings were destroyed. It has been calculated that this earthquake caused an area four times the size of Europe to tremble.

Another earthquake of the same intensity rocked Assam in 1950. It is reckoned to be one of the ten most violent and devastating earthquakes on record. The whole of the northern part of Assam was catastrophically shaken and the course of the river Brahmaputra was diverted.

An earthquake is, in fact, but a small reminder of the Day of Resurrection. When the Earth is split asunder with a terrible rumbling; when buildings come tumbling down like playing cards; when the upper layers of the Earth are cracked open and the interior of the Earth is spewed out, when cities bustling with life are reduced to ashes in a matter of minutes; when the Earth is strewn with dead bodies, like shoals of fish washed up on the sea coast, man realizes his utter helplessness in the

face of nature. What is most tragic about earthquakes and volcanic eruptions is the fact that no one can predict when or where they will take place. And, when they do, everything happens in a flash leaving little or no time for escape. The Day of Resurrection will come upon us all of a sudden, just like an earthquake. Such natural catastrophes demonstrate, most awesomely, God's capacity to destroy the Earth at any moment.

Even more terrifying events take place in the outer reaches of the universe. In the infinitude of its space, innumerable, enormous celestial bodies are in rapid and continuous motion colliding and annihilating one another. Asteroids and comets slam into planets, stars explode and other stars and galaxies are ripped apart by black holes. In terms of scale, perhaps nothing is as violent as collisions between huge clusters of galaxies. Studies in astronomy having confirmed that this is an actual possibility, it would not be surprising if they did collide. Our Solar System may well be the result of a smaller collision of this type.

If we can visualize such a collision taking place on a greatly enlarged scale, the Day of Resurrection will no longer seem impossible, nor even such a remote possibility as we had perhaps at first imagined.

Believers in the concept of the life Hereafter contend that a time is bound to come when the forces of destruction, which are present in the universe in embryonic forms, will one day assume gigantic proportions. What is latent today will certainly manifest itself tomorrow, and the coming of the Day of Resurrection will be a reality. Today we apprehend it as a probability; tomorrow we shall witness it as a fact. □

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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



MARIFAH, OR GOD REALIZATION

MOST people talk frequently of *marifah* (God-realization) without having attained it. The reason is that they want *marifah*, but they are not willing to pay the price for it, and in this world, nothing can be achieved without paying the price. What man ought to do is that when he is not ready to pay the price for something, he should not talk about it. For talking about something for which he is not willing to pay the price will mean that he is only mouthing words about *marifah* without understanding its significance.

There is an Arabic saying translated as: "Knowledge gives you a part of it only when you give yourself to it completely." This is true of *marifah*. The price of *marifah* is that a person should give his all to it, that he should make it the sole concern of his soul, that while going to bed he should think of *marifah*, while getting out of bed he should think of *marifah*. He should engross himself in it to the point of starting to dream of it. The price of *marifah* is total surrender. One who does not totally surrender to *marifah*, will find that the doors of *marifah* will never be opened to him.

How does one achieve this *marifah*? This journey begins with the acceptance that there is a God and finishes with one discovering the true Creator. The individual must first of all become a seeker and later become a finder. It is this order of the journey of *marifah* which applies to common man as well as to a prophet. Another Arabic saying brings out the above understanding with clarity, "I don't know, is half of knowledge". First of all, an individual has to discover his own ignorance, and then a spirit of enquiry is born within him. The greater his acknowledgement of his own ignorance, the greater is his spiritual and intellectual learning. It is a natural reality to which there is no exception.

Marifah or the discovery of God is not something to be inherited that a father may give to a son and the grandson may receive from his forefathers. It is of a personal nature. Whenever anyone attains to God-realization, it will happen only as a result of personal effort. Without personal effort, no one can ever achieve *marifah*. Whatever one receives without personal struggle will be just a kind of traditional belief rather than a living *marifah*.

Marifah relates to the entire personality of the human being. It is initially achieved at an intellectual level. Subsequently through a natural process, it pervades his whole personality. The attainment of *marifah* for anyone colours his whole personality in its hue. No aspect of his life will remain unaffected by its influence.

The journey of *marifah* is indeed one of discovery. This discovery continues during the whole of one's life. One who thinks that he has achieved complete *marifah* would in effect never have discovered *marifah* at all. □

The discovery of God is not something to be inherited that a father may give to a son. It is of a personal nature. Whenever anyone attains to God-realization, it will happen only as a result of personal effort.



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.



DESIST FROM INTOLERANCE

CONSIDER a new tree. Based on the law of nature, this tree will start bearing fruit after a few years. But if some impatient people start demanding that the tree start yielding fruit after just a few months, they will destroy the tree with their impatience. Because of their behaviour, the tree will not be able to manifest its natural potential.

Similar is the case with developments that manifest themselves in the social sphere. Those on the path of truth will be repeatedly faced by provocations from people who are opposed to them. They will have to encounter numerous challenges, both mental and physical, that threaten to provoke them. This is a very delicate period for them. In such a situation, if they lose their patience and peace of mind and get entangled in the controversies that their opponents are bent on raking up, their real task will remain unfinished and they will start quarrelling with their opponents about unnecessary issues. By turning intolerant, they disobey God; and people who disobey God can never receive God's help. The Quran (30: 60) states: So have patience [O Muhammad]! God's promise is true; let not those who will not be convinced make you discouraged.

There are many different ways in which one can lose one's patience and become intolerant. For instance, by not being willing to tolerate even a minor damage or inconvenience for the sake of a higher purpose or goal and to start fighting about this. Or, for instance, by not ignoring issues that might hurt one's sentiments and by getting worked up

because of them. Another way in which people might express this lack of tolerance is if, instead of working for their own social and economic development, they start making demands on others and take to protesting, demonstrating and engaging in other such forms of negative political action. Or, they may zealously rush ahead and take seemingly very daring steps without having developed their own character. Or, they may give inordinate importance to the challenges that they will necessarily have to face in society and then get provoked and start fighting with others. They may develop unrealistic expectations of others, and when these expectations are not met, they may get angry and start quarrelling with them. They may not take into account human weaknesses, and so when they see a weakness in someone, they may create a big hue and cry about it. They may refuse to negotiate with the political authorities, and, instead, start fighting with them.

The principle of not allowing yourself to lose your patience and tolerance is based on great wisdom. If you violate this principle in the desire for obtaining the opportunities that you do not possess, you will only lose the opportunities that you presently enjoy. If you launch an agitation to topple the political authorities who allow you to work in the non-political field, the latter will perceive you as their enemy, and, using the power at their disposal, can easily suppress you. If your opponent is strong and commits some excesses against you and you fail to tolerate this, deadly violence will break out, which will play havoc with your entire life.

Such are the perils of allowing yourself to lose your patience and tolerance. Whenever you want to start some work, you will almost inevitably have to face complaints from others. You will have to contend with stiff opposition. Now, if you give importance to every complaint and every sort of hurt or damage caused to you by your opponents, you will inevitably start fighting with them. You will leave aside your real task, being so engrossed in opposing them.

Suppose those who claim to be on the path of truth do not abide by patience and tolerance and somehow still manage to acquire dominance in society. In such a situation, because of their lack of preparation, they will not be able to maintain this position for long. They will start

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fighting among themselves. If they had not focused on the task of purifying and developing their character, after grabbing political power they will promote strife and conflict, not peace and progress. If people who claim to be on the path of truth have not developed the firm conviction that the only thing of importance for them is truth and that all other matters are secondary, they will become engrossed in other issues if they acquire dominance in society. In this way, they will give birth to new social problems. If they have not risen above the psyche of revenge, after acquiring political power they will start killing off their former enemies, causing their societies and countries to become so weak that it will become impossible to manage them. If they have not developed the power of tolerance, they will unleash war against every person or group who might hurt their egos. If, stirred by their emotions, they lose control of themselves, in the name of ending one evil they will only succeed in producing many more.

Whenever you face an unpleasant situation at the hands of someone, you generally think just one thing: "This man is my enemy! I must

The best way to respond to provocation is to clear your own way ahead by exercising patience and wisdom, instead of becoming agitated by others and reacting angrily.

suppress or fight him!" But this is a very wrong way to estimate a person. God has placed great flexibility in the human psyche. It is a proven fact that human beings do not remain in one state all the time. Rather, they keep on changing. To exercise tolerance means to wait for the manifestations of human possibilities that emerge from this ever-changing nature of human beings. Islam stresses the importance of patience precisely because one should wait for a future period to come to pass when the latent potentials hidden inside people can manifest themselves.

Some people go to extremes in their opposition to others by turning aggressive. But in this world that God has made to test human beings, your opponents too, have the freedom to act, just like you do. The best way to respond to them is to clear your own way ahead by exercising patience and wisdom, instead of becoming agitated by others and reacting angrily. A person's lack of both patience and wisdom is his enemy's deadliest weapon. The most foolish person is one who hands over this weapon to his adversary himself. The same holds true for entire communities. □

TOWARDS A LIFE OF COMFORT AND PEACE

Be a Realist

THE secret of a healthy, comfortable and easy life is only one— one should become a realist. To attain peace and comfort, this is the only workable formula. There is no other workable formula at all. What man does is this: he sets up some hopes and expectations in life, sometimes from the world, sometimes from his relatives, and sometimes from society. These expectations are not fulfilled. When these expectations are not met, he develops a mentality of complaining. All problems arise as a result of ignorance of this fact.

An old man from my village used to say that your own power is the true power. I think this is the realistic formula of life of contentment. It means man should rely on his own capacity and power to achieve something. He should sedulously refrain from building a wall of hope on something that is beyond his personal power. Man's discovery of this fact is the secret of a life of contentment and comfort.

This principle applies to family life, social life, and to national life as well. Although it is very difficult to be realistic in the full sense, it is possible that when a person's expectations are not met, he should adopt the method of patience and tolerance. He should not adopt the method of complaint. When a man deals kindly with someone, he does so with certain expectations. Man should follow the famous proverb in this matter: do good and cast it into the river, i.e. be discreet in your kindness. If you treat someone well, he will not live up to your expectations in about 99% of cases. Therefore, the way to contentment and peace is that in such a case, the person should adopt the principle that he should either not do any kindness to anyone, or he should do so in such a way that he forgets it as soon as he does it. □

The way to contentment and peace is that a person should adopt the principle that he should either not do any kindness to anyone, or he should do so in such a way that he forgets it as soon as he does it.



SECRET OF MENTAL PEACE

Pinning Your Hopes on the Eternal

CHARLES Moss Duke Jr. is an American astronaut. He was born in 1935 in North Carolina, USA. He did his studies and research in the space sciences. In 1966, he was selected by NASA for the fifth manned mission to space. Journeying many times in space, he has several missions to his credit. He travelled on the Apollo-16 mission to the moon and stepped on the surface of the moon on 16th April 1972.

On 21st February 2008, two members of CPS International, Dr Rajat Malhotra and Dr Sadia Khan met Dr Charles Duke at the Ashoka Hotel in New Delhi for an interview that has been recorded. As a token of the meeting, he presented the team with a signed photograph of himself in a spacesuit standing on the surface of the moon. The subject matter of the interview was 'spirituality'. During the interview, Dr Duke was asked if he was content and happy with his life.

Talking about his life, Dr Charles Duke said:

From the beginning, there was no peace in my life. I thought going to the moon would give me peace. I thought this great career as an astronaut, all these goals and these accomplishments would give me peace, but they didn't. So, I thought I'll change my career. I left my career with NASA as an astronaut and went into business. I made a lot of money, but I still could not find any peace. There was still something missing in my life.

This matter is not peculiar to Dr Charles Duke alone. It is the case with almost everybody today. It is said that the present age is an age for 'making it big' or attaining great success. Today, there are multiple opportunities to obtain wealth, fame and power. People are racing against each other to acquire these things and many of them do manage to obtain them. Such people are hailed as 'super-achievers'. But experience tells us that every such 'big achievement' has only turned into a 'super-failure' in the end, when these 'super-achievers' get afflicted with some new illness or malaise. Despite acquiring every material thing, these people failed to achieve inner joy. And, finally, they died in a state of despair and frustration.

One such new malaise is tension or stress. People may have wealth and fame and power and all other such things, but despite these apparent successes, they are mired in tension and stress. Excessive wealth has become a cause for more illness and disease. Major share

of the scientific research today is in the medical sciences, seeking cures for new types of diseases.

As a result of this state of affairs, a new business called 'de-stressing' is in demand. In 'de-stressing' centres, experts work on methods to relieve people from stress. But facts show that tension and stress are continuously on the rise. It is said that the biggest danger of the present day is not the threat of World War III, rather it is the threat of tension and stress.

The situation reminds us of this verse from the Quran: 'Surely in the remembrance of God, hearts can find comfort.' (13: 28)

This same idea was expressed by the Prophet in these words: "There is no comfort, but the comfort of the Hereafter". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

This means it is only by making God one's supreme concern, man can obtain peace. And that the life that man desires is only possible in the period of his life after death. In the life of this world before death, no one will be able to get the life they desire.

Only by making God one's supreme concern, man can obtain peace. The life that man desires is only possible in the period of his life after death. Before death, no one will be able to get the life they desire.

This issue is directly related to the creation plan of God. The Creator made the present world as a testing ground. The present world thus cannot become a place of fulfillment of desires for anybody. For every person, the present world is only a temporary stage in the journey of life; it is the world of the Hereafter that is man's eternal destination.

While travelling in a bus or a train or a plane, if you want to enjoy the facilities of home, you will not be able to do so. This is because the vehicle is only a means of your journey, not a substitute for your home. In the same way, the fulfillment of one's desires is simply not possible for anyone in this world. The person who seeks the fulfillment of his desires must work for the world of the Hereafter. This fact is explained in the Quran in these words:

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



LEADING A GODLESS LIFE

Living for an Immediate Gain

A GOD-ORIENTED life is one in which a person discovers God, the Lord of the universe, in such a way that God becomes a part of his life. He starts sleeping with the remembrance of God, and wakes up with the remembrance of God. In a world created by God, he becomes a godly person. Everything in the world reminds him of God. In contrast, a godless life is one in which a person is born into this world, but he never used his intellect to discover his Creator. He is busy with his today, but he does not discover the purpose of his life.

It is my experience that if we talk about Muslim empowerment, everyone will listen with interest. This topic will soon garner public support. Everyone would want to play their part in the cause of Muslim empowerment. On the contrary, if we talk about God and the Hereafter, we will suddenly feel that people's interest has waned. People would start behaving in such a manner as if it were an irrelevant subject. People will listen to the speeches of Muslim empowerment as if it were their own case. On the other hand, people will listen to the speeches centred on God and the Hereafter as if they have nothing to do with it.

People live in the psychology of multiplicity and abundance, not in the psychology of contentment. This is the real problem of the present age.

The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that people in the present age are running towards worldly attainments. In the case of the world, they live in the psychology of multiplicity and abundance, not in the psychology of contentment. This is the real problem of the present age. This is the reason why there are a lot of gatherings and processions in the name of Islam in the present times, but from the point of view of real Islam, there is nothing really worthwhile. There is a flurry of external forms among the people, but in terms of spirit, it is missing everywhere. This is stated in a *Hadith* thus: Their mosques are full of people, but devoid of guidance. (*Shuab ul-Iman lil-Bayhaqi*) □



PARADISE: A UNIVERSAL CONCEPT

In Search of the Ideal World

THE concept of Paradise can be found in all human societies. Paradise is a universal dream of every human being. Every human is born in this world with a concept of a beautiful world that is named Paradise. It would be true to say that man is a Paradise-seeking being.

Studies show that a concept of Paradise has always been found in every society and in every culture. In this respect, Paradise is a universal word used in every language with minor differences. The word *firdaus* in the Quran (18: 107) is also an Arabicized form of the word Paradise. Below are examples of the use of the word in a few languages to show the universal nature of the word.

Avesta	Paradaeza	Persian	Firdaus	Indonesian	Firdaus
Greek	Paradeisas	Latin	Paradisus	Italian	Paradiso
French	Paradis	English	Paradise	Japanese	Paradaisu
Hebrew	Pardes	Akkadian	Pardesu	Korean	Paladaiseu
Aramaic	Pardaysa	Sanskrit	Paradesha	Spanish	Paraiso
Arabic	Firdaus	Afrikaans	Paradys	Zulu	Ipharadesi
Burmese	Prdisu	Albanian	Parajse	Welsh	Paradwys

The concept of Paradise is so ingrained in human nature that one cannot be separated from the other. Finding Paradise is a common dream of all humankind, either consciously or unconsciously. It appears that every man and woman has already seen this beautiful world in the world of their imagination, and that now they want to practically realize this dream. Because of this human desire there are now several different models of Paradise, and everyone is busy in seeking the model of Paradise they have visualized.

Among these models, the criterion that is used to ascertain the natural and understandable model of Paradise is the same that is applied to such matters in science, that is, the principle of corroboration. This means in order to validate a theory it must be analyzed with respect to all related observations and events. If the theory corroborates with all the related aspects, then it can be held as valid. On the other hand, if even a single aspect or event is not in accordance, it must stand rejected.

One such model can be termed as civilizational model of Paradise. Thanks to the progress of civilization, many new kinds of industrial and technological developments are now at man's disposal. It soon came to be regarded that there was no need to wait for another world; Paradise could be created by man in this world itself.

Man believed that he was now in a position to build a Paradise for himself. But soon this dream was shattered. The end of the 20th century showed that while the industry for building a Paradise on Earth had reached its final stage, it brought a new kind of Hell into existence. This Hell was in the form of pollution caused by green-house gases. The Earth's atmosphere was polluted from the industrial emissions of harmful gases leading to global-warming and making the survival of human race impossible.

This experience showed that to bring a Paradise into existence, pollution-free industry was required which is not humanly possible on Earth. The Paradise envisioned could not be brought into existence and the concept of civilizational Paradise met with total failure.

The end of the 20th century showed that while the industry for building a Paradise on Earth had reached its final stage, it brought a new kind of Hell into existence. This Hell was in the form of pollution caused by green-house gases.

Wishful Thinking or Ostrich Paradise

There is another popular concept of Paradise which can be called Ostrich Paradise in a metaphorical language. Those who believe in this concept will declare that Paradise is 'right here, right now' whenever they hear of it. Their life is based on the concept—work hard, party harder. Since nobody knows what is going to happen in the future, grab whatever you can right now.

To examine the veracity of this concept we will have to study it based on the results. Looking at it from this point of view, we find that it is just not feasible. Even those who speak such fancy words have failed to find any positive

results from this idea. It appears that this concept has only caused negative consequences for those who believe in it.

Such people quickly acquire wealth, but they waste it in pursuing a lavish lifestyle and rich food habits resulting in poor health and disease such as diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer. To make more money they work harder and to manage their stress from overwork

they go on holidays. But when they return from the holiday, they find they have another problem—holiday stress.

They squander their wealth acquiring commodities, but indulgence in their possessions only deprives them of higher thinking. They spend their money on love-affairs which only has the opposite effect of creating hatred. Eventually, such people remain disillusioned and deprived of the joys of family life.

Even if we suppose that one such person saves himself from all the negative consequences of this concept, it is inevitable that before reaching the age of a hundred, he grows old and weak, and is confined to his bed. Then with no option left, he must get admission to a hospital and leaving everything behind, depart from this world one day.

One such example appeared in the news reports of January 12, 2008. Sir Edmund Hillary, a New Zealand mountaineer, was a very strong person. He was the first climber to reach the peak of Mount Everest. When he set foot on the summit of the highest mountain of the world, news of his achievement broke in headlines in the newspapers. He was called the 'conqueror of Everest'. Setting foot on top of Everest he exclaimed with pride, "To my great delight, I realized we were on top of Mount Everest and the whole world spread out below us." (*Times of India, January 12, 2008*)

The present world is like a selection ground. Here man is placed under various circumstances to be judged according to his deeds to determine if he would qualify for the ideal world of Paradise.

But when he died at the age of eighty-eight on January 11, 2008, he was lying on a hospital bed, weak and infirm. He was left with no option but to accept the verdict of death and leave all his possessions and all his desires to enter a world for which it appeared he had nothing with him.

Quranic Model

Now, let us take the Quranic model of Paradise. The Quranic model is based on the creation plan of God. According to the Quran, the creation plan of God and Paradise are associated with one another. Hence, to understand Paradise as explained in the Quran, it is necessary to do so in the light of the creation plan of the Creator of the universe.

The Quran is the book of God. It has been fully preserved in its original form. According to the Quran, God created human beings and settled

them on Earth. This settlement was for the purpose of a test, not as a reward. That is, the settlement was meant to be a temporary abode in this world so that man may prove himself worthy of Paradise. After death, judged by his deeds on Earth, he would be granted an abode in Paradise.

In this respect, the present world is like a selection ground. Here man is placed under various circumstances to be judged according to his deeds to determine if he would qualify for the ideal world of Paradise. Those who succeed in this test will be selected and granted admission into the eternal world of Paradise, while those who fail in the test will be sent to the eternal trash can of the universe, i.e. Hell.

According to the Quran, Paradise would be eternal as well as ideal. Here it would be possible that man may live free of all fear and sorrow. This world of Paradise would have no limitations or disadvantages. Man would find everything he desires.

In the Quranic model of Paradise, man will have the opportunity to live in the 'neighbourhood of God' where there will be an abundance of supreme goodness and bliss.

In Paradise, all desires would be fulfilled to complete satisfaction and in an ideal manner. Though all the good things of Paradise are available in the present world, this world in itself is an imperfect world. Paradise, on the other hand will be a perfect world in every respect. There will be no pollution of any kind. It will be free from all kinds of negative things. The present world is an imperfect world while Paradise will be perfect. Existence of an imperfect version is a proof in itself that a perfect version of this world can also come into existence. This is the Quranic model

of Paradise. This model without doubt is fully consistent with the demands of nature as it corroborates with all related observations and experiences.

An important feature of this Quranic model of Paradise is that man will live with full consciousness at his highest level of intellectual development. This Paradise will not be realized at any level lower than the conscious nor will it be limited in any way.

The Quranic model of Paradise will not be a mysterious place; it will be a place very much like this present world. The Quran says about the righteous: "He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them." (47: 6) It has been clearly outlined in the Quran that all the good things of this world will also be available in Paradise in

their most excellent form. Similarly, the inhabitants of Paradise will have every opportunity for all kinds of activities that will be fulfilling from their beginning to their end. There would neither be any boredom nor any tiredness. In this world, man's power to enjoy something is constrained. The people of Paradise will have the capacity of unlimited enjoyment. More than anything else, in the Quranic model of Paradise, man will have the opportunity to live in the 'neighbourhood of God' where there will be an abundance of supreme goodness and bliss. □



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WRATH, MERCY

The Two Attributes of God

WRATH and mercy, both are attributes of God. If a person assumes that God created man in order to make him experience His wrath, then it will undoubtedly be an underestimation of God, the Lord of the universe. It is more correct to say that God created man so that He might make him experience His mercy. This concept is in accordance with the glory of God. This fact is stated in the Quran thus: My mercy encompasses all things. (7: 156) This fact is again emphasized in a *Hadith* as follows: My mercy prevails over my wrath. (*Sahih al Bukhari*)

***God's mercy
overcomes His wrath.
When God's servant
thinks of his Merciful
Creator, his hope of
receiving mercy from
God prevails the fear
of God's retribution.
He hopes that his
Merciful Creator
will overlook his
wrongdoings.***

The father has a noble and loving passion for his son, which is called fatherliness. This passion compels the father to take care of his son's mistake, not to let his son suffer the consequences of his mistake. The Creator undoubtedly possesses this attributes many times greater than the father. Because of this attribute, God's mercy overcomes His wrath. In the same way, when God's servant thinks of his Merciful Creator, his hope of mercy from God prevails his fear of God's retribution. He hopes that his Merciful Creator will overlook his wrongdoings; that He will save him from the consequences of his misconduct. This realization assures man of God's mercy.

This concept of life creates in man a temperament that on the one hand, he is always afraid of the grip of the Hereafter, on the other hand, this same feeling creates in him the mentality that he is always hopeful of God's mercy. God's attribute of mercy is the norm, while His wrath is an exception. □



TRYING TO DECEIVE GOD

Maximizing One's Guilt

A CHARACTER is mentioned in the Quran in these words: They seek to deceive God and the believers, but they only deceive themselves, though they do not realize it. (2: 9)

Who does the work of deceiving God? This is the same person who, in order to create his positive image in the society, speaks in such a way that the common people get misguided about him. They accept his lies as true, and consider the fabrication as reality. To be cautious in one's worldly affairs, and to consider superficial expectations about the Hereafter sufficient, is like lying before God. Those who do so are as if they are deceiving God, the Lord of the universe. However, trying to deceive God is to double one's guilt. Man must save himself from such an endeavour at all cost.

For example, why differences arise between people? In fact, there is no real justification for conflicts and differences. At the root of differences is always some personal interest. However, people justify their disagreement by offering some lame excuses which apparently legitimize these conflicts. They give the name of justified disagreements to their personal grievance.

This is what is called in the Quran as 'seeking to deceive God'. That is, their real purpose is self-interest. But they use words that conceal their true purpose, and show that they are doing so only for the sake of truth. Such an approach is called deceiving God. God is the Knower of the unseen world. He is aware of all the facts. He knows under which psyche one is raising the flag of disagreement. People should know that in the Hereafter their case will be judged by the facts, not by what they utter. □

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ACCOMODATING ONE'S SHORTCOMINGS

The Key to Contentment and Progress

A CERTAIN individual reached old age and was still unmarried. When asked his reason for remaining a bachelor, he said that he had always been looking for a perfect spouse. "But in all this time, did you not find one?" he was asked. "Once I did," he replied, "but unfortunately she was looking for a perfect spouse too, and I did not come up to the required standard."

Generally, people acquire expertise at detecting the faults of others. That is why they become inept in getting along with others. If they were to seek out their own faults instead of those of others, they would realize that they were in the same position as they found others to be in. Awareness of one's shortcomings makes for a spirit of humility in individuals and unity in society. On the other hand, if someone sees only the faults of others, he will become arrogant, and at odds with others.

It is a fact that no single person can be an amalgam of all good qualities. As there are many shades of grey between black and white, so are there many gradations of good and evil in ordinary human beings. While few are saints, few also are the outright villains of this life, and many people are combinations of different qualities and defects than one can find in any given individual. It is no simple matter to label a person unequivocally good or categorically bad. If there is to be harmony within a community, the dark sides of its members must be tolerated while their good sides are appreciated. In this way, no talent will be lost in society, and fellow feeling will prevail. This principle should be remembered in all relationships. Man and wife, employer and employee, businessman and partner—all need to bear it in mind. If we want to pluck "flowers", we have also to bear the "thorns" that come with them. One who cannot put up with thorns will never be able to possess the flowers of life.

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There are few great tasks which can be accomplished by individuals single-handedly. Only the talents of several individuals combined can

achieve any substantial work. Just as it is true in commercial and political spheres, so is it true of religious work. But irrespective of whichever field the work is going on in, people will be able to work together only if they are patient and tender-hearted in their outlook.

They will have to bear with one another, putting ill-feeling behind them, and not become alienated towards one another over petty issues. It is good to be an idealist, but if someone eternally seeks the ideal in people, he is bound to be disappointed. The only way to be able to work with others, then, is to overlook the fact that they do not match up to our ideal standard, and to extend moral support to those who seem the most deficient. □



*Converting revenge
into forgiveness and
anger into equanimity
is the highest form of
spirituality.*

THE TWO COURSES

A Sincere Inclination towards Truth

IN the present world, there are two courses open to man. One is the straight path. The other course has many deviations from the straight one. The Quran (16: 9) explains: 'The straight way leads to God and there are ways which deviate from the right course.'

The straight path is that man should have a central place in his life for his Creator. He should make the Creator his supreme concern. The path that deviates from the right course is that man loses himself in worldly beings and things. He plans his life only in relation to these created things. In the universe, there are only two things: the Creator, and the creation. The religious term for making the Creator one's sole concern is *tawheed*, while the religious term for making creation one's concern is *shirk*.

Starting with the birth of humankind, in every age God sent prophets, who gave people guidance regarding right and wrong. The mission of

The straight path is that man should hold a central place in his life for his Creator. He should make the Creator his supreme concern. The path that deviates from the right course is that man loses himself in worldly beings and things.

all the prophets was one and the same—to invite people towards *tawheed* and exhort them to save themselves from *shirk*. It is a fact that just as in every age *tawheed* was one and the same, in every age *shirk* too has been the same.

Ancient *shirk*, or the ancient version of *shirk*, was based on nature worship. Nature's status is that of a creation. It has been created by God. But ancient man gave natural objects the status of a deity. He adopted the evil of nature worship. That is, instead of worshipping the Creator, he worshipped the created. This is referred to as the 'worship of natural phenomena'.

Today also, this *shirk* remains with its full strength. Man is doing the same thing as before—instead of the Creator, the creatures have become his supreme concern. The difference between ancient *shirk* and modern *shirk* is only in terms of external appearances, not in terms of their reality.

Ancient man had made nature an object of worship. Modern man has made nature an object of entertainment. The centre of his devotion earlier was in creation, and it is so now as well.

Modern man's ideology is based on instant pleasure and gratification: to find immediate pleasures, with no concern for the morrow. Man seeks to derive these pleasures from the bounties of nature provided to him by God. These blessings are a direct provision of God, none have been made by man. It is the Creator who has created all these things. But modern man has only taken these bounties of nature completely neglecting the Giver. He uses these blessings of God, but he has left the Creator of the blessings aside. Abandoning the Creator, man has selectively appropriated only the creation. He has abandoned a God-oriented life, adopting a worldly life in its place.

It is in man's nature to acknowledge his benefactor. Gratitude is an innate sentiment that arises whenever man is given something. In the present age, man has again directed this sense of gratitude towards the created instead of the Creator. Instead of acknowledging God as the Giver, his heartfelt feelings of gratitude are directed towards the beings and things created by God.

Listen to what people have to say today or read about what they write—you will find many such examples. Anyone can see these examples in his daily life. Here is one such article published in *The Times of India*, New Delhi, March 18, 2008. The author of the article is Donna Devane.

Be Happy Here and Now

"Gratitude fills my soul as I enjoy my computer, more about my home, enjoy the feeling of a hug from my daughter. There is so much to be grateful for each moment of each day. I find that where gratitude goes, joy flows, spend a few moments throughout the day with thought shifter statements. A few of the thought shifter statements that I use are—I am so happy and joyful to believe. I am so happy and grateful for this wonderful mind, and body that allows me to enjoy touch, taste, sound, and movement. I am so happy and grateful for my family, and friends, and the love we share. I am so happy and grateful for my computer, my internet, my ability to type and share with friends all over the world."

It is in man's nature to acknowledge his benefactor. Gratitude is an innate sentiment that arises whenever man is given something.

Today, a number of people are afflicted with tension and stress. What is the reason behind this? It is because man fails to properly nourish this natural urge of gratitude that he possesses. Making full use of the bounties provided by the Creator, he fails to acknowledge the Creator.

This non-acknowledgement or ingratitude is against human nature. This fundamental failure, consciously or unconsciously, is the root cause of tension and stress. In the present-day, man has come up with unnatural solutions for the problems of stress, i.e. expressing gratitude to the things that he has been given, instead of to the Giver of these things. So, people may be thankful to their family and friends, to their computers and their jobs, to the trees and the rivers, but how many are genuinely thankful to the Giver of all these things—God?

Just as the powerful feelings of hunger and thirst, man also possesses the strong emotion of expressing gratitude to his benefactor. By his very

Peace of mind can be obtained only through the remembrance of God. The Quran tells us clearly: 'Surely in the remembrance of God, hearts can find comfort.'

nature, man cannot accept something useful without acknowledging the giver. Whenever he is bestowed with generous gifts, his whole personality wants to cry out in gratitude to the giver. No person is bereft of this quality.

All that man has in this world is a gift from the Creator, the Giver of all bounties. Be it man's own being or everything outside of him—the 'life-support system'; everything that man has is a unilateral gift from God. This being the case, man's nature desires to fully acknowledge the Giver of all these blessings.

Among these gifts are those that man receives directly—for instance, oxygen, water and sunlight. And there are those that he gets indirectly. These are things that man has produced through the use of intelligence gifted to him by God, by using the discoveries and resources of nature that God has created—for instance, all sorts of consumer goods.

All these gifts demand that man should acknowledge and thank their Giver—God—with his full heart and mind. But in line with self-invented philosophies, man willingly grabbed these gifts, but abandoned the Giver of them all. This was an enormous blunder. The result is that a basic demand of human nature—the need to acknowledge and express gratitude to the Giver—remained unaddressed.

This is an issue of internal contradiction or conflict for a man. In the present age, almost every person is living with this contradiction. The present-day phenomenon of tension and stress is a direct result of this same inner contradiction.

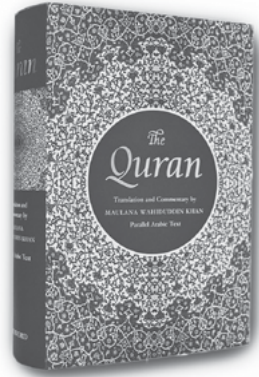
It is a fact that peace of mind can be obtained only through the remembrance of God. The Quran tells us clearly: 'Surely in the remembrance of God, hearts can find comfort.' (13: 28) □

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 CE 610 and 632. It is a book that brings glad tidings to humankind, 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



Believers! Fear God, and let every soul look to what it lays up for the future. Fear God: God is aware of what you do. Do not be like those who forgot God, so that He caused them to forget their own souls [their own true interests]. It is they who are the rebellious ones. The people of the Fire and the people of Paradise are not equal. The people of Paradise are the victorious ones. (59: 18-20)

Human life is divided into two parts: 'today' and 'tomorrow'. The present world is a man's 'today' and the world of the Hereafter is man's 'tomorrow'. Whatever a man does in the present world, he has to face the consequences in the ensuing longer life.

This is the truth and the other name for it is Islam. Man's success depends upon his always keeping this reality in mind. The whole life of one who is forgetful of this, will go wrong. In this matter, there is no difference between a believer and a non-believer. Believers will have the advantage only if they acknowledge realities. If they become forgetful of them, they will also meet the same fate as their precursors.

Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down and splitting asunder, because of the fear of God. We set forth these parables to men so that they may reflect. He is God: there is no deity save Him. He knows the unseen and the visible. He is the Compassionate, the Merciful. He is God, there is no deity save Him, the Sovereign, the Most Pure, the Source of Peace, the Granter of Security, the Protector, the Mighty, the Subduer, the Supreme, Glory be to God, who is far above what they associate with Him. He is God—the Creator, the Originator, the Giver of Form. His

are the most excellent names. Everything in the heavens and Earth declares His glory. He is the Mighty, the Wise One. (59: 21-24)

The Quran is a declaration of the vital fact that man is not free, but is answerable for all his deeds to God who is all-powerful and who keeps a close watch on the actions of all humankind. This fact is of such grave import that it is enough to make even mountains tremble. But man is so negligent, forgetful and insensitive that, even after knowing this awesome fact, he is not perturbed.

The names of God mentioned here are, on the one hand, an introduction to God's Being. On the other hand, they show how Great is that Being who is the Creator of human beings and who keeps a constant watch over them. If an individual actually realizes this, he will be completely engrossed in the remembrance and praises of God.

The universe, by virtue of its creative meaningfulness, mirrors the attributes of God. It is itself wholly taken up with singing the praises of God and urges human beings to follow suit. □



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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

The remedy for ignorance is asking questions. (Prophet Muhammad)

The spirit of enquiry is the hallmark of an open society and the above saying of the Prophet aptly illustrates this principle. A culture of curiosity and open-mindedness will foster development in any society by motivating its members to learn enthusiastically and enrich their knowledge. This is because awareness of one's ignorance is half of knowledge, as it becomes a stepping-stone to seeking and finding answers. A questioning mind is like a flowing river that is replenished with fresh thoughts and ideas and continues on its journey.

Does the world of the Hereafter exist?

We can subject the enquiry of the existence of the Hereafter to the same scientific principles as we use to study the physical phenomenon around us. We present here a few ideas in support of the argument that the world of the Hereafter is a rational and scientific fact.

Sir James Jeans once observed that the Creator of the universe must have possessed a mathematical mind. Here, we must add that the very meaningfulness of the universe is a proof that its Creator must have had a deep sense of purpose. Such a purposeful Creator could not have created a world which was imperfect—and therefore meaningless—if this objective was to be fulfilled.

Despite all its meaningfulness, our world in its present state is incomplete. We can come to grips with this paradox by examining the observable phenomenon of the principle of pairs, which is universally operative. Everything in this world exists in pairs; everything becomes complete only in a pair—the negative and positive particles in an atom, the male and female in humans, animals and even in plants. Therefore, it follows that along with this world there must exist another parallel world, and in its existence lies the completion of our present world.

It is such a world that all the prophets have called the world of the Hereafter. This world of the Hereafter is not just a matter of dogma. It is an entirely scientific fact.

First of all, we must define what is scientific proof? Scientific proof does not mean that there can be any degree of absolute certainty about whatever is to be proved. This kind of undeniable certainty is not

possible. When something is said to have been proved scientifically, this statement only means that its probability has been established. And, from the scientific viewpoint, we cannot refuse to apply to the case of the world Hereafter a method that we hold valid in most scientific matters. As we know, the steps to a scientific enquiry include—hypothesis, observation and verification.

If we apply this three-point formula to the world Hereafter, we can certainly arrive at an understanding of its probability. And as we know, in the field of science, probability paves the way for certainty.

Can man fulfill all his desires?

A careful study of the human society shows that all men and women have two contradictory themes running throughout their lives. On the one hand, they are consumed by a limitless desire to establish a dream world for themselves—a world that is in keeping with their ideals and where they may lead their lives—with all the sought-after pleasures and comforts. But, on the other hand, they are faced with this contradiction that, despite surrounding themselves with all the material things conceivable, they fail to build their desired world. Boredom, loss, illness, accident, the infirmities of old age and finally death—within a period of around a 100 years or less—that is the story of every individual born into this world.

The following example is an apt illustration of the same.

Billy Graham, a well-known American missionary, writes that he once received an urgent message from an American billionaire who wanted to meet him without a moment's delay. On receiving this message, Billy Graham cancelled all his other appointments and immediately set out to meet this man.

When he arrived at the billionaire's palatial home, he was immediately taken to a private room, where the two men sat on chairs facing one another. Then, with great seriousness, the billionaire said to Billy Graham, "You see, I am an old man and life has lost all meaning for me. I am going to take a fateful leap into the unknown...Young man can you give me a ray of hope?"

The American billionaire is not the only person to be faced with this kind of desperation. Every individual, born into this world, is faced with this question at one time or another.

Therefore, fulfillment of all desires in this world is not possible at all. It goes against the creation plan of God. ❑



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