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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

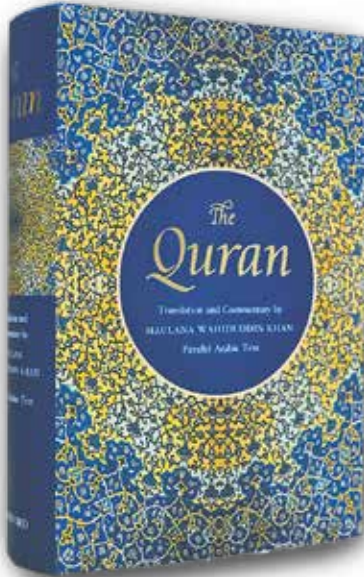


Man is born to succeed, but by his negligence
he makes himself into a failure.

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

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



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

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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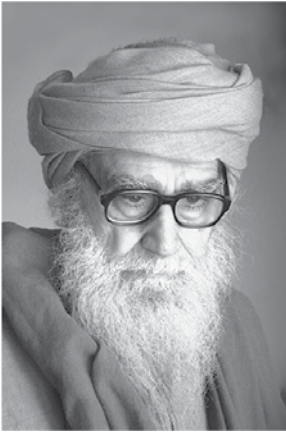
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognised as one of its most influential 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.

ANTI-ISLAM IN THE NAME OF ISLAM

SOME time ago, I met a Muslim who lives in America. In conversation, he mentioned that these days the image of Islam has become so negative in America that he hesitates to tell anyone he is a Muslim. 'If anyone asks me my religion,' he explained, 'I say that my religion is Humanism. If I tell them that I believe in Islam, they will at once say, "Then you must be a terrorist!"'

The man accused the media of creating this image of Islam. But I replied, 'No. This image has been created by Muslims themselves. It is a fact that Muslims are engaged in violent movements in various places in the name of Islam, which the media reports. Because Muslims spearhead these violent movements in the name of Islam, the media also attributes them to Islam. How can the media call them by some other name?'

The man responded by saying that just a few Muslims were engaged in such violent movements. Hence, he protested, it was wrong to create a negative image about all Muslims. My answer was, 'It is true that relatively few Muslims are engaged in such movements. But,

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

it is also true that the rest of the Muslims do not openly denounce such movements. They are silent. Hence, in accordance with Islamic principles, it would not be wrong to say that even if only a few people are directly responsible for spearheading these violent and hate driven movements in the name of Islam, the rest of the Muslims are indirectly responsible for them.'

This approach of Muslims is extremely lamentable. In the name of establishing 'Islamic Government' and 'The Prophetic System' (*Nizam-e Mustafa*) and engaging in 'Islamic Jihad', such acts are being committed as are completely opposed to Islam. Instead of attracting people to the religion of God, these deeds are only driving them away from it.

The Islamic System

In present times, numerous violent movements are being spearheaded in the name of establishing the 'Islamic System' or the 'Prophetic System'. These movements are a ruse for gaining political leadership in the name of Islam. This is despite the fact that launching and conducting a movement to acquire political dominance is not permissible in Islam. The aim of a genuine Islamic movement is the Islamisation of individuals, not the Islamisation of the government or the state. For

Because Muslims spearhead these violent movements in the name of Islam, the media also attributes them to Islam.

centuries the Sufis focused on the Islamisation of individuals, using peaceful methods. Never did they become a source for spreading hatred and violence. The Sufis have always promoted peace and humanity, while the so-called 'revolutionary Islamic' movements of today are producing diametrically opposite results.

The linking of Islam with hatred and violence is entirely the result of the misguidance of modern-day so-called Muslim leaders, who are spearheading violent movements in a quest to acquire political power. They have made Islam seem like a religion of hatred and violence, whereas the Islam sent by God is a religion of peace and concern for the welfare for all. A true Muslim is concerned about the welfare of humanity, not someone who is at war with humanity.

Islamic Jihad

If someone were to sit somewhere and move one's hands about and stand up and then claim to be offering prayers in the Islamic way, his actions would not represent the Islamic form of prayer. The Islamic form of prayer has well defined conditions. Only if an action adheres to these conditions can it be said to constitute the Islamic form of prayer.

The same holds true of Islamic *Jihad* (*struggle in the way of God*) which has clearly determined conditions or requisites. An action that fully observes these conditions would, in God's eyes be a *jihad*. Anything else is meaningless agitation, certainly not a *jihad* in the true sense.

Islamic *jihad* is engaging in the path of God. To unleash war for the sake of power, wealth and other worldly things and call it *jihad*, is nothing but strife or *fasad*. Involvement in such actions cannot, under any conditions, be credited as Islamic *jihad*. According to Islamic *shariah* only an established government has the prerogative of declaring war. An individual or a group has no authority to declare war on its own against anyone in the name of *jihad*. No matter what complaint an individual or a group may have, it must necessarily act within peaceful limits. It is in no way legitimate for it to resort to war and violence.

The aim of a genuine Islamic movement is the Islamisation of individuals, not the Islamisation of the government or the state.

Jihad, in the form of *qital* or war, is a wholly defensive action. Aggressive *qital* or offensive war is forbidden in Islam. Even if faced with an aggressive attack from another community, all possible efforts should be made to stave off war. War can be resorted to only when all efforts to stave it off or avoid it have failed. The opponents of the Prophet sought to entangle him in war and confrontation on more than eighty occasions, but he was able to avoid fighting through wise action. Only on three occasions (the battles of Badr, Uhud and Hunayn), when no option was left but war, did he participate in fighting.

Another aspect of a legitimate war in Islam is that it should be an open affair. To engage in secret military actions is unlawful in Islam. Proxy war is also regarded by Islam as illegitimate, because in such a war the government uses a group to engage in violence by providing it covert assistance, but it does not directly participate in the war.

Hostage-Taking

These days, a few Muslims are resorting to violence against their imaginary enemies through hijacking and taking people hostage. Such tactics are completely illegitimate in Islam. These misguided people have absolutely no fear of being held to account by God. Else they would never do such terrible deeds which target and harm innocent people. These cowardly actions are wholly against humanity as well as against the religion of God.

An instance from the life of the Prophet illustrates why taking people as hostages is un-Islamic. Opponents of the Prophet in Makkah captured some Muslims and kept them prisoners. The Prophet had entered into a treaty with the Makkans at Hudaibiya. While entering into this treaty, he did not ask the Makkans to return the captured men. He unilaterally announced freeing all Makkan polytheists falling into Muslims' hands and sending them back. This indicates that even if their opponents took hostages, it was still not legitimate for Muslims to retaliate similarly.

The Real Culprits

Who then, are really responsible for stirring up a storm of hatred and violence in the name of Islam? Muslim youth engaged in these hate-driven and violent acts cannot be responsible. The blame falls squarely on the so-called 'Islamic thinkers', who in the name of 'Islamic Revolution', gave these youth an ideology that led to such devastating consequences. These so-called 'Islamic thinkers' have concocted a false political interpretation of Islam.

No matter what complaint an individual or a group may have, it must necessarily act within peaceful limits.

The method of Islam is the method of *dawah* (communication of the message of God). The opposite is the method of politics. The two are direct opposites—*dawah* is based on peace, politics is based on confrontation. People who choose the political method consider others their enemies. This has resulted in

Islamic movements turning into political movements and unfortunately associating Islam with all those terrible deeds.

By its inherent nature, *dawah* looks upon opponents as potential friends. Typically, politicians see others as their rivals and foes. This is why *dawah*-related action engenders a 'mercy culture', while political agitation produces a 'hate culture'. In a society characterized by 'mercy culture', goodness will flourish; 'hate culture' will only spread violence. Goodness can never coexist with hatred.

The Real Work To Be Done

The fact of the matter is that the present-day political agitations and the violence fermented by Muslims are not just un-Islamic but are also completely useless. Recent history provides ample evidence of this.

In the first half of the 20th century, most Muslim countries were directly or indirectly under the control of Western powers. Then, movements for their independence were launched. Today, these Muslim countries are politically independent. Some 60 in number, Muslim states taken together form the largest block among the members of the United Nations. Despite this, Muslims carry no weight at the global political level. The reason being that in the ancient past political dominance counted for everything; today it has been reduced to a secondary status. Presently, education, knowledge, science, technology and economics are considered more important. Merely being politically independent does not count for much in today's world.

By its inherent nature, dawah (communication of the message of God) looks upon opponents as potential friends.

Muslim countries are today considerably behind others in these non-political spheres and consequently lack a standing on the global map. Most of their people are poorly educated or uneducated. In the fields of science and technology, they are still dependent on Western countries. By modern standards, they have not achieved economic progress. Despite being politically sovereign, they are backward in areas that matter. In reality, they are still dominated by others.

Several Muslim countries have, so they claim, witnessed an 'Islamic Revolution'—for instance, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, etc. However, these so-called 'Islamic states' are suffering from the same serious problems as secular Muslim states. These so-called Islamic countries are as backward as the latter in the intellectual and economic fields. The real work today is to help Muslims advance in these spheres. This work has nothing to do with politics or political dominance. Such non-political work is possible only in a purely peaceful framework. There is no occasion to spread hatred or instigate violence. This work is entirely positive and motivating. □

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LIVING WITH AN OPEN MIND

A Learning Spirit

UMAR FARUQ, the second Caliph of Islam, was a man of great wisdom. One of his traits is reported in these words: "He was able to learn from every person." This learning spirit is the greatest quality for a person.

Opportunities for learning are abundant in every circumstance. But a person has to have an open mind to benefit from this. The world is virtually a global university for learning, and requires no formal admission. The only qualification required to benefit from this university is the willingness or readiness to receive impressions or ideas.

People tend to accept anything that goes in their favour and get offended if something is said against them. This is the greatest obstacle to learning. A person having the learning spirit is free from prejudice and receptive to new arguments and ideas making it possible to learn from anyone—friend or enemy.

Opportunities for learning are abundant in every circumstance. But a person has to have an open mind to benefit from this.

To develop the learning spirit, it is important not to get offended. Taking offence leads to displeasure, anger and resentment. When a mirror tells you have dirt on your face, you don't get angry. Rather, you will accept it as true and promptly wash your face.

The learning spirit is the greatest source of intellectual and personality development. But the condition for making use of it for oneself is that whenever a person tells you something about yourself, you should give a positive response as you always give to the mirror. □

Harmony at Home

The best principle for maintaining harmony in the home is the art of difference management. Instead of making futile attempts to eliminate difference, we should learn to adjust to it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STABILITY

Be Like A Tree

STABILITY, in the sense of constancy of character or purpose, is essential for progress. To understand and develop this character, man can draw inspiration from the example of a tree.

The tree is used as a metaphor for man in the Quran (14: 24). The growth of man is likened to a tree. The same law governs both.

The tree has a trunk with branches above the ground and roots beneath. It is said that the height of the tree above the ground is almost the same as its depth beneath. This enables a tree to stand erect and stable at one place. If a tree is dug up with its roots and re-planted in other places time and again, its roots get shortened each time this happens. Ultimately, the roots dry up and the tree will neither be able to grow any further nor stand erect.

The same principle applies to man's existence. To develop his potential, stability is indispensable. Working at one place for a long time, helps him develop roots leading to stability and then he will be saved from unnecessary problems.

A person requires a society for balanced development; he needs people to interact and have discussions; he needs a library to pursue intellectual goals with continuity. Indeed, a person is in need of many things, but stability is the *sine qua non* for all his essential requirements. Stability is like a steadfast tree, while instability makes one no better than a tree without roots.

The best deeds are those which are done regularly, even if they are small.

With reference to stability, there is a verse in the Quran which acclaim "those who are steadfast in prayer"(70: 23). The same principle is mentioned in the *Hadith* in a general sense. The Prophet of Islam said: "The best deeds are those which are done regularly, even if they are small" (*Ibn Majah*). This saying of the Prophet emphasizes the importance of stability in life.

The general practice in employment is that if an employee goes on leave without notice, it constitutes a break in his service record. He will lose seniority and will have to return to the position he held earlier. The same principle applies to the larger history of an individual.

Just as a rootless tree has no place in the garden, similarly a person without a history has no permanent place in society.

A person who frequently changes his place of work is one who has had a 'break in his history'. When a person stays at the same place over a long period, he builds up a history there. But if he keeps changing his place, his history becomes fragmented and he will be cut off from his own history. A person projects an image in his environment because of the history of his experience. By frequently 'breaking' his history, he will project a broken image or no image at all.

This principle is very serious from the practical point of view. Just as a person without a history is like a rootless tree. A rootless tree has no place in the garden, similarly a person without a history has no permanent place in society. □



Learn from everyone

Knowledge is like a great ocean: faced with its immensity, no one can be a self-sufficient person. The process of seeking knowledge has to be a mutual venture, in the course of which everyone gains something from everyone else. Here the taker is the giver and the giver is the taker. Everyone plays both roles.

TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE

Responsibilities Over Rights

ONE always finds two types of people in the world. On the one hand, there are those who want immediate reward for all that they do, with their recompense exceeding the work they have put in. Then there are those who are not for any material reward. The knowledge that they have contributed in some way to a worthwhile cause is sufficient reward for them. If they receive no recompense for their efforts, it does not cause them concern or arouse their anger. They play their part, but forget about their personal contribution, so engrossed are they in the cause for which they are working.

Outwardly, both groups appear the same, but in reality there is a world of difference between the two. The first group, one might say, keep the markets of the world turning over, while the second group turns over new pages in human history. Such is the extent to which the two differ.

It is the second group who make meaningful, valuable contributions to the betterment of humanity, for it is they who are able to join in a common struggle, without which no worthwhile work can be achieved in this world. Whenever a number of people work together for a common goal, it is inevitable that some should receive more credit than others. Some are hailed for their achievements, while others are denied all recognition. This is true of all movements, whether popular or prophetic in nature. There is only one way for a common effort to prosper, and that is by people forgetting about their rights, and remembering only their responsibilities.

Unless there is a spirit of selfless struggle among those participating in a common cause, it is not only those who receive no recompense who will feel ill-treated, even those who are rewarded for their contribution will feel that they have not been done justice. Seldom does the reward a person receive for his efforts come up to his expectations. It is a case of either being satisfied with nothing, or never being satisfied at all.

Those who are destined to perform great deeds in life are those who do not seek reward for what they have done; the very fact that they have done something is sufficient reward for them. The knowledge that they have played their part is enough to make them content, even more so than those who have been abundantly rewarded for their efforts. □

THE ESSENCE OF HAJJ

Spirit Of Rituals

HAJJ is one of the basic pillars of Islam. Like other forms of worship in Islam, Hajj is based on God-consciousness. At the same time, it has a unique feature—it is linked to the life of Prophet Abraham.

Every Muslim capable of doing so, must perform Hajj at least once in his lifetime. By engaging in various actions during Hajj, he expresses his complete servitude to God. He symbolically performs actions that were performed by Prophet Abraham, kindling the zeal in man to mould himself on the pattern of this prophet of God.

After building the Kabah, in Makkah, Prophet Abraham called on people to perform Hajj for the sake of God. The journey of Hajj is an affirmative response to this call. During the Hajj, pilgrims call out, '*Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik*', which means, "Here I am at Your service O Allah, here I am." The air resounds with this cry as if in answer to the call issued by Prophet Abraham; the pilgrims appear before God, wholeheartedly willing to fulfill any command.

Hajj is a form of worship in which the spirit of other forms of worship are also present.

The literal meaning of 'Hajj' is 'to go on pilgrimage'. According to the Islamic *Shariah*, Hajj happens once every year when people circumambulate the Kabah, halt on the Plain of Arafat, and perform the other actions that are part of Hajj.

Hajj is a comprehensive form of worship. It entails spending one's wealth, and physical exertion, too. It involves remembrance of God, and sacrifice for God as well. Hajj is a form of worship in which the spirit of other forms of worship are also present.

Central to Hajj, is the 'House of God', the Kabah, located in Makkah. The Kabah is a reminder of the truly devout life of an exalted servant of God, Prophet Abraham. It is a reminder of how a devoted servant of God gave up everything for God, patterned his whole life in accordance with God's will and devoted himself completely to God's mission till his last breath.

Journey towards God

Hajj is a journey towards God, the ultimate form of closeness to God in one's life. When the pilgrim stands in front of the Kabah, it reminds him that man has to stand before God. The circumambulation of the Kabah symbolizes the pilgrim's focus around God on finding Him.

A special feature of Hajj is the location—Makkah and its surrounding areas. It is a place selected by God as it was the center of the religious mission of the great missionary, Prophet Abraham. The early history on the basis of which Islam unfolded emerged here. All around are reminders of the great spiritual revolution ushered in under the guidance of Prophet Muhammad some 1400 years ago. These traditions and special features have given Makkah particular significance. A special spiritual and historical atmosphere pervades the place. None who goes there can remain unaffected. One who returns after completing the Hajj is like someone who was earlier covered with dirt and dust and then emerges out from a stream, bathed pure and clean.

This special importance of the Hajj is its spirit, and not so much its external form, or rituals. Just going to Makkah and returning is not Hajj. It is to acquire those special spiritual qualities, for which Hajj has been made obligatory. Hajj is meeting with the Lord. When a pilgrim travels and arrives at places associated with the Hajj, he feels especially inspired. He feels that he has left 'his world' and arrived in 'God's world', that he is running towards his Master, and that he is journeying for His sake; that he is 'throwing stones' at Satan his enemy in the way of the Lord, that he is asking God for all his wants, and receiving from God all that he needs.

Hajj is a journey towards God, the ultimate form of closeness to God in one's life.

The Kabah is among the signs of God on earth. In Makkah, where the Kabah is located, the Prophet received revelations from God, which provide guidance for humanity. But only those who are willing and keen on acquiring it receive guidance. For other people, Hajj is just a sort of tour. They go on Hajj and return no different from what they were before they went.

According to a *Hadith (words of the prophet)* report, Hajj is the halting on the Plain of Arafat, indicating the importance of Arafat. During the Hajj, the Plain of Arafat presents an image of the vast assembly of

people on the Day of Judgment. On a particular date during the Hajj, vast numbers of God's servants arrive at the Plain of Arafat from all directions. This is an amazing sight. Every single person is wearing the same simple white dress or *ihram*, has lost his or her distinguishing marks and utters the very same words: *Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik. Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik.* On witnessing this sight, one is reminded of this Quranic verse:

The trumpet will be blown and, at once, they will rise up from their graves, and hasten to their Lord. (36: 51)

Hajj is a great form of worship. The status that the Kabah enjoys among all the mosques is the same that Hajj enjoys among all forms of worship.

The Psychological Aspect of Hajj

God, in the Quran says:

And I did not create the *jinn* and mankind except to worship Me. (51: 56)

This suggests that the urge to worship God is innate and deeply-rooted in human nature. This is what his very nature demands. Worshipping God is inherent in human nature. This is the reason why other than worship of God, nothing can give man true satisfaction.

One who returns after completing the Hajj is like someone who was earlier covered with dirt and dust and then emerges out from a stream.

Just as a little child spontaneously rushes to hug its mother, driven by a compulsive inner urge, so too impelled by an inner voice, man is driven to rush towards God. Man cannot change his inner personality. Hence God cannot be removed from his heart and mind.

Evidence From Anthropology

This fact has been proved in modern findings of Anthropology. Anthropologists have studied a number of human societies from the dawn of history to the present day. They discovered, among other things, a very important fact—that despite life's ups and downs, man has always been a worshipper of God. God and religion are so integral a part of human nature that under no circumstance can they be separated from it. The *Encyclopedia Americana* summarizes this finding in the following words:

From the earliest days of the world's history, man has been more or less a religious creature. Almost invariably he has had a god, or several of them, to whom he looked for protection. At times these gods have been crude fetishes of whittled wood or roughly hewn stone; at times they have assumed the form of animals or reptiles, or have appeared as cruel monsters eager for the life-blood of those who revered them. But, however they may have come, man has worshipped them, because religion, as represented in the worship of a super-natural power, is interwoven with the entire fabric of human nature. (*Encyclopedia Americana, 1961, vol. XXIII, p. 354*)

It is a fact that consciousness of God is embedded in man's nature, this being how man was created. That said, this consciousness lies dormant. That is why when man does not find the true God, he begins to worship artificial, self-created gods. The urge to worship emerges from a compulsion rooted in his own nature. If he follows the guidance of God's prophets, this urge will find its answer in the form of the worship of the one God. And if he does not follow this guidance, he will worship beings other than God, treating them as God to satisfy this urge.

Worshipping God is inherent in human nature. This is the reason why other than worship of God, nothing can give man true satisfaction.

Man's purpose is just one, the same purpose as that of his Creator and Master in creating him. If man closely examines his nature, he will discover signs of God in himself. Prophets help people to express their dormant innate desire to recognize and worship God.

Symbols Set Up By God

True vision of God will happen only in the Hereafter. But while having this faith, man still wants to find God in this world. He seeks to get close to God right away, now and not sometime in the future. How can this quest of man's be fulfilled in this world?

The answer to this is provided through symbols set up by God (THE QURAN 2: 158). God has made some things as His signs on account of their historical importance. Various conditions surround these signs as reminders so that on seeing them, one is reminded of God. God who cannot be found directly can be found indirectly. Man cannot see God

in this world, but he can see the symbols set up by God. He cannot find a manifest form of God that he can touch and experience a sense of closeness to Him. But man can touch the symbols set up by God, and through them experience the closeness to God.

Symbols are signs or reminders of something; something that is not the real thing but because of some connection with the real thing, reminds one of the real thing. An example of this are the two hills, *Safa and Marwah*, 'symbols set up by God'. (THE QURAN 2: 158)

Safa and Marwah are located in Makkah 500 feet apart, near the Kabah. When Prophet Abraham brought his wife Hagar (Hajira) and infant Ishmael and settled them here—which later became the town of Makkah—this place was uninhabited with no water available. As Hagar's supply of water exhausted, she ran in search of water—seven times—between *Safa and Marwah*. God was pleased with Hagar, and declared *Safa and Marwah* as His symbols—a reminder of her devotion to God. In remembrance of this, today pilgrims run seven times between *Safa and Marwah*.

God and religion are so integral a part of human nature that under no circumstance can they be separated from it.

Seeing *Safa and Marwah*, one is reminded of the history of how a devout servant of God, Prophet Abraham, left his fertile land in Iraq and came to a desert land with his wife and child, solely for the sake of God. This is a perfect example of faith in God and trust in Him.

Other things related to the Kabah, the *Hajar al-Aswad* (the Black Stone in the Kabah) and Hajj are also signs of God. They are symbols of the God-oriented genuine monotheist, Prophet Abraham and of those people in history who led ideal lives of devotion to God. All the rituals of Hajj are conducted amidst some of these symbols set up by God. Being in the environment of these symbols, one feels one is in God's environment.

Meeting With God

The Kabah is the 'House' of the One God. It was made by two great prophets of God, Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. The lofty lives of these two prophets and the amazing sacrifices that they made for the sake of God are linked with this 'House'. And then, the lives of devotion and service to God by the last prophet, Prophet Muhammad and his companions unfolded in its environment. □

FRIENDLINESS AND SEPARATION

True Understanding

MUSLIM scholars have the notion that there are only two bases on which Muslims can relate to people: friendliness (*wala*) and separation (*bara*). *Wala* means to be on friendly terms, while *bara* means to be separate from. They claim that Muslims are duty-bound to maintain *wala* with fellow Muslims. Those outside the fold of Islam are 'others' and friendly relations with them is discouraged. This is a communal, not an Islamic notion.

Muslim scholars championing this notion, base it on two Quranic verses, 60 : 1 and 60 : 4. However, this notion is unfounded and has nothing to do with Islamic teachings. This is evident from an examination of the occasion of revelation of the Chapter 60 of the Quran, in which these two verses are found. This Chapter was revealed prior to the victory over Makkah, when the well-known incident of Hatib ibn Abi Baltaah occurred. The Prophet maintained immense secrecy in his plans about marching to Makkah with his Companions. It was found that a Companion, Hatib, had sent a secret letter to the opponents—the Quraysh in Makkah—detailing the Prophet's movements. When confronted, he begged for understanding, explaining that he hoped the Quraysh tribe would in return protect his family residing in Makkah. It was under these circumstances that the above verses from the Quran were revealed. It was meant to dissuade Muslims from leaking the Prophet's secret plans of movement.

***Muslims' relations
with other
communities must
be based on the laws
of peace, not on the
basis of the laws of
war.***

The mention of *wala* and *bara* in this chapter is not for general application. Rather, they are related to the particular conditions that prevailed at the time of the incident concerning Hatib ibn Abi Baltaah.

What is stated in this chapter regarding *wala* and *bara* applies for times when war prevails between the followers of Islam and others and not when peace has been established.

Muslims' relations with other communities must be based on the laws of peace, not on the basis of the laws of war. The above-mentioned baseless notion that Muslim scholars have devised has caused Muslims to unnecessarily consider other communities as their enemies, to hate them, and even to go to the extent of unleashing violence against them. Undoubtedly, this has nothing whatsoever to do with Islam, if properly understood. □



Individual Earthquake

Death is like an individual earthquake. Everyone is doomed to die, but no one knows when he is going to face this fateful moment. Death means complete detachment from the present world. It is like compulsory eviction from the world he has built for himself.

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THE AGE OF SCIENCE & RELIGION—PART I

Discover God Through Reason

MAN finds himself in a world where there is a creation, but the Creator of this creation is apparently not in sight. There is design in this world, but apparently there is no visible designer. Great events take place in this world but the cause behind these remains inscrutable. The entire universe functions like a great industry, but the engineer of this industry is nowhere to be seen.

The prophets came to the world to answer these very questions. Prophets have told man that there exists an invisible, intangible being behind this visible, tangible creation; that this invisible being is God, who should be believed in and worshipped. The role of the prophets, was in a sense inferential in nature; they told man that he should use his reason and, by inferring from the visible, come to conviction that there is an invisible God.

To lend credibility to this inferential role, the prophets performed miracles. The Quran has this to say:

We sent Our messengers with evidence. (57: 25)

The prophets performed miracles to convince man that their message is true. For instance, the Prophet Moses came to Egypt between the 15th and 16th centuries BC. At that time, Pharaoh (Ramesses II) ruled Egypt. Pharaoh said to Moses: “Produce a sign if you are telling the truth” (7: 106). On this demand, Moses cast his staff on the ground, and it promptly turned into a live snake that went creeping along the ground.

Science replaces the miracles of ancient times as evidence to prove the veracity of religion.

The Prophet of Islam was born in Makkah and appointed Prophet in 610 AD. All the prophets who came before him performed miracles of different kinds to prove the veracity of the truth of their message. But the Prophet of Islam was the last of the prophets—the last link in the chain of prophethood. After him the method of performing supernatural miracles was discontinued (17: 59). God stopped sending the prophets after the Prophet of Islam, and with

him the chain of miracles also stopped. Now the prophetic call has to be given by *dayees* (those who call people towards God), who are not prophets, but who have to perform the prophetic role. No prophet will come in future. The reason is that the message of the prophets—the divine religion is fully preserved in its original form, there having been no possibility for any change or interpolation. Both the language and text of the religion brought by the last Prophet is preserved. It is in the same language as that in which the revelations were made to him.

Then what is the substitute for miracles? The veracity of *dawah* that was proved through miracles is currently served by natural facts discovered by modern science. Science replaces the miracles of ancient times as evidence to prove the veracity of religion.

Common to miracles and arguments based on scientific evidence is that they both provide arguments for religious belief at the level of inference.

Both these ways of giving evidence in support of religion are stated in the Quran.

We sent Our messenger with evidence.
(57: 25)

God gave His prophets miracles so that they might prove the veracity of their message. As for the second period of history, the Quran alludes to the matter of supporting evidence in the future tense.

“We shall show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth.” (41: 53)

The Prophet of Islam came to the world in the first quarter of the seventh century. Modern science came a thousand years after his advent. It did not emerge by chance. It was a direct result of the revolution initiated by the Prophet of Islam aimed at ending polytheism (*shirk*). After this a new process started in human history, the culmination of which is modern Science.

Polytheism is the worship of more than one god. In ancient times, man had made the phenomenon of nature an object of worship. It became a mental block in the process of research and investigation of nature, for the simple reason that if you hold something as a subject of veneration, you cannot treat it as a subject of scientific investigation.

In the wake of this revolution brought about by the Prophet of Islam, a new process originated in human history. Man devoted himself to the investigation of nature and this study continued leading to scientific discoveries. The secrets hidden in nature were brought to light. The same things had been interpreted in the Quran as the signs of God in the universe and within human beings. Modern science is another name for natural science. Doubtless, this serves to corroborate the prediction of the verses of the Quran.

In a way science is the equivalent of the theology of divine religion. It authenticates religion by the criterion of human knowledge. In ancient times, this same task of establishing the authenticity of the divine truth was achieved through miracles.

***New discoveries
have revolutionized
scientific knowledge,
changing the very
criterion of scientific
argument.***

There are two aspects of modern science—theoretical science and technical science. Theoretical science uses modern resources to discover facts about the universe, while technical science looks at their practical applications. Modern civilization has been greatly influenced by technology. We will deal in this article not with technical science but with theoretical science. For reference, Stephen Hawking, the renowned theoretical physicist and cosmologist, has written several books on theoretical science.

The fact that human knowledge authenticates divine religion is mentioned in a tradition of the Prophet.

“All the prophets were given such signs as their contemporaries believed in. And I have been granted the miracle of revelation (the Quran). That is why I hope that those who believed in me would outnumber others.” (Al Bukhari)

In ancient times, knowledge was not as advanced as it is today. This made it impossible to prove the veracity of the divine religion. Prophets of ancient times were hence given such miracles as their contemporaries believed in. For example, the people of Moses believed in magic, so Moses was given the miracle of magic. But the revolution brought about by the Quran resulted in extraordinary progress in human knowledge. It made possible for truth to be proved at the level of established human knowledge.

While the miracle made the contemporaries of the prophets experience their helplessness, they had no rational proof for the divine religion based on established human knowledge of the time. With progress in knowledge, arguments put forward with supporting proofs from established scientific knowledge found universal acceptance. Gradually it was easier for people to understand the message of the Prophet and verify it in the light of its own established principles. The benefit was the increasing numbers of those who believed in it.

Common to ancient miracles and arguments based on scientific evidence is that they both provide arguments for religious belief only at the level of inference. When a prophet performed a miracle, it did not mean that this was a mirror in which one could observe the actual claim of the prophet. One could infer that by performing such miracles which other mortals could not, the miracle worker had received divine succour.

The same is true of scientific proof. The evidence provided by science is not a direct demonstrative proof of any actual claim. It is only through inference that the claim of divine religion becomes understandable and convincing.

This difference is the result of modern nuclear science. But science has made extraordinary progress in the 20th and 21st centuries in the nuclear field. It has given access to the micro world, whereas earlier knowledge had been limited to the macro world. It was believed that every rational thing had a physical body which could be weighed and measured, but the discovery of the micro world has brought about a sea change in scientific knowledge. The level of analysis has progressed to so 'micro' a level that now things can only be called waves of probability.

It has become possible for religious beliefs to be established at exactly the same level at which other things of this material world are established.

New discoveries have revolutionized scientific knowledge, changing the very criterion of scientific argument. With the discoveries in the micro world, it is now believed that

inferential argument is as valid as non-inferential or direct argument. Direct argument has become insufficient to explain all the facts. It has now become necessary to recognise the validity of inferential argument so that laws governing the micro world could be formulated.

With this development of human knowledge, it has become possible for religious beliefs to be established at exactly the same level at which other things of this material world are established. For instance, when we say that the existence of design in this world proves the existence of a designer—it is as valid an argument as other scientific arguments of the material world. □



Art of Conversion

To attain success, man has to take stimulus from his environment, both positive and negative, his education, whether good or bad, his moral and physical inheritance and 'convert' these into success in much the same way that a plant converts nutrients from the soil into fruits. Even from his failures, he has to extract such experience as will set him on a better and more successful course for the future.

FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

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



THE PROCESS OF REVERSAL

The Quran describes a reality of life in the following words:

If We extend anyone's life, We reverse his development.
Can they not use their reason? (36 : 68)

THE human body that we have been gifted with is unique. It contains seventy eight organs, which work continuously and in remarkable coordination as different systems carrying out the essential functions of the body. This coordinated work happens in accordance with an automated system in the body that enables it to function continuously.

But, every human being after passing through various stages of life—childhood, and then youth and middle-age, finally reaches old age. When someone grows old, his organs begin to degenerate and fail—partially, in some cases, or completely, in others. This is the phenomenon of reversal and degeneration that makes a man old, and finally helpless, incapable of doing anything.

This process is referred to in the above-quoted Quranic verse as a reversal. That is, the taking back of the capabilities that have been given to one. This taking back or reversal proves that there is a powerful Creator, who first gives these capabilities to man, and then, in accordance with His will, takes them back. This process of reversal is bound to happen, and no one can stop it.

When man is born, he is in a completely helpless and powerless state. Then as he grows and develops it appears that there is a greater power that is bestowing him with strength and power. Then after acquiring full power and strength man enters into old age. It then appears that there is someone that is taking away his power and strength. Gradually, strength ebbs away from his limbs and organs. It is as though every human being in his own life gets the opportunity to discover God as a 'giver' and at the same time discover God as a 'taker'. If man has an open mind, his own life will become a source of God-realization for him.

In the process of aging, man in his own life gets the opportunity to discover God as a 'giver' and at the same time discover God as a 'taker'.

This process of reversal that takes place within the human body conceals a great lesson. If you ponder about it, you will discover two things at the same time: firstly, that there is an All-Powerful God; and secondly, that you yourself are an all-powerless creature. You will realize that if God gives, only then will you receive, and that if God does not give, you cannot receive. It is this discovery that is called *ma'rifat* or God-realization that makes a human being a real human being. □



Noble Personality

The greatest thing for man to target in this world is the nurturing of a noble personality. One who does so is a real human being. Such is the individual considered desirable by God according to His creation plan.

WORLD OF HOPE

Never Despair

THE British scientist Isaac Newton (b. 1643) is considered to be the founder of modern science. Three months before he was born, his father died. His mother remarried and went off to live with her new husband. And so, Newton was deprived of parental love in early childhood itself. One of his biographers' comments: "Basically treated as an orphan, Isaac did not have a happy childhood."

Because of these conditions that he had to face, the surroundings held little attraction for Newton. Consequently, he began living in the world of his own mind. He became a serious thinker. He would spend long hours pondering on various aspects of the universe.

Many people thought that this young boy was a lost dreamer and referred to him as a 'wool-gatherer'. But later on it came to be known that he and the extraordinary capability of concentration and had become a profound thinker. In this way, Newton grew up, able to maximize the use of his intellectual potential and discover aspects of the universe that had hitherto remained hidden to humanity.

This world is a world of hope, not a world of despair. Wise is the one who realizes this.

But this is not the story of Newton alone. It is nature's story, too. This story tells us that no matter what experiences we go through—even seemingly negative ones—there is always a positive aspect or plus point

contained in them. One should discover this plus point, and, using it, should seek to reach the heights of success.

This world is a world of hope, not a world of despair. Wise is the one who realizes this. □



PROMOTING PEACE IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES

On 30 April, 2015, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan was awarded the Sayyidina Imam Al Hasan Ibn Ali Peace Award at the Second Annual Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, held at Abu Dhabi, UAE.



Shaikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, Chairman of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, presented Maulana the award at the closing session of the three-day conference. The peace award was given in acknowledgement of the Maulana's decades-long efforts for promoting world peace. On the occasion, Shaykh Bin Bayyah said that 90-year old Maulana Wahiduddin Khan had worked tirelessly for over seventy years for the cause of establishing peace and promoting a culture of goodwill and tolerance across the world.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's Keynote Address at the 2nd Annual Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies

Bismillahi-r-rahmani-r-rahim

(In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful)

Rabbi-shrah li sadri wa yassirli amri wa-hlul uqdatan min lisani yafqahu qawli (My Lord! Open up my heart, and make my task easy for me. Loosen the knot in my tongue, so that they may understand my speech)

Distinguished guests, Brother Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, and Islamic scholars, We are here to discuss a very serious problem—how to promote peace in Muslim societies. There is no doubt at all that this is a very important issue. At the same time, I would say that mere condemnation of violence is not enough. The problem is an intellectual one. A section of Muslims are misguided into engaging in terrorism and we need to remove their misconceptions. Only then will it be possible for peace to prevail.

The Right, Peaceful Interpretation of Islam

According to a well-known dictum, 'Violence begins in the mind'. So, is the case with peace. Peace, too, begins in the mind. Hence, we need a peaceful ideology, the right ideology. Only then can we hope that the

Muslims who have wrongly taken to terrorism in the name of Islam will change their minds.

The sources of Islam—the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet—tell us that Islam is a religion of peace. The Prophet of Islam started his mission in 610 CE in Makkah. What was his method of preaching? He used to visit gatherings of people and say to them: *Ya ayyuhan-nas qulu la ilaha illallah tuflihu* (“O people! Say, ‘There is no god but God’ and you will be successful”). This is the ideology of Islam. It is based on *tawhid*, the oneness of God.

Whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options, he would always opt for the easier one [not the harder one].

Aisha, wife of the Prophet says of him: “Whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options, he would always opt for the easier one [not the harder one].” (*Bukhari*)

Now, what is the easier option, and what is the harder one?

An easier option is the peaceful method, while a harder option is violence. The Prophet always opted for the peaceful method. This was his practice.

These two—*tawhid* or the oneness of God, and peace—are the two basic principles of Islam. We need to make people aware of this.

It is an undeniable fact that due to wrong interpretations of Islam, some sections of our society are today engaged in hate and violence.

During a visit to America, I was invited to speak at a church. After the talk, a Christian scholar asked, “In the Bible, there is a beautiful teaching, to ‘love your enemies’. Can you cite any such teaching from the Quran as well?”

I could read this gentleman’s mind, at the back of which was lurking the misunderstanding that Islam teaches hate for others. His mind had probably been shaped by media reports of Muslims engaging in violence in various parts of the world, and so he might have been led to believe that there must be some intellectual basis for this in the Quran.

I replied to him, saying, “It is a fact that some Muslims are indeed engaged in violence. But this is not based on Islamic teachings. The Quran says: ‘Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what

is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend' (41: 34). It means to do good in return for bad deeds and you will see that your enemy has become your dearest friend."

I explained that this is a law of nature. According to this law, people should be categorized not as friends and enemies, but rather as friends and potential friends. Every person is our friend—either an actual friend or a potential friend. Turn your potential friend into an actual friend by doing good to him, and you will discover that everyone is your friend!

This is the Islamic teaching on the matter. It is based on friendship, harmony, peace, love, and compassion.

Dawah Work: The Greatest Target

Here, I wish to add an important point. If you want to make people peaceful, you will have to give them a target to fulfil. Giving them an ideology is good, but that alone will not work.

We have to give them a target. And what is that target? It is *dawah* work, the work of inviting people to God. It is to communicate the word of God to others.

We at the Centre for Peace and Spirituality, have prepared translations of the Quran in various languages, and many people in different countries are engaged in distributing these, as well as other literature on Islam and peace. Our young volunteers across the globe are engaged in *dawah* work. We have set specific targets for them to achieve. They distribute literature, interact with people and engage in *dawah* work in different ways. Earlier these people were living in negativity, in hate, but now they are living in love and compassion.

If we want people to be peaceful, we will have to help them change their minds. At the same time, it is also necessary to give them a purpose, a task, a target.

There are numerous Quranic verses and *Hadith* reports telling us that the Quran was sent for the whole of humankind. For instance, the Prophet of Islam said: "No house on earth—big or small—will remain but God's word shall enter into it." (*Musnad Ahmad*)

It is an undeniable fact that due to wrong interpretations of Islam, some sections of our society are today engaged in hate and violence.

It means that in the Divine Plan, this book, this message of God, must reach all of humankind. This work needed some resources and technology, which were not available in the 7th century. Now, however, everything is available. Today, there is openness and modern methods of communication and publishing, and so on. All that we need to perform the task of conveying the message of the Quran to people is available.

According to the Divine Plan, we have to spread this word of God to the whole of humankind. This is our target. This means that we must prepare translations of the Quran in every major language and spread them throughout the world to reach every human being. As mentioned earlier, if we want people to live in peace, we need to give them a target, and this is the greatest target.

People should be categorized not as friends and enemies, but rather as friends and potential friends.

It is a fact that we have the preserved book of God, the Quran. We have the *Sunnah* (practice and teachings of the Prophet). The Quran and the *Sunnah* are the only sources of Truth, Truth with a capital 'T'. It is our belief that everyone is born as a seeker. Everyone

wants to discover the Truth with a capital 'T', but only the Quran and the *Sunnah* are sources of this Truth. Thus, the Quran and *Sunnah* need to be conveyed to every person across the world.

If our youth have this target, it will create a great enthusiasm, a great sense of mission and purpose in them. When they are motivated by such a target, they will abandon all hatred and violence.

Two-Point Formula

To reiterate, the problem of terrorism is extremely serious, and the way out is a two-point formula. First, we need to help people engaged in terrorism to realise that Islam is a religion of peace, a religion of compassion, a religion of blessing. This can be done through literature and other means. Then, we have to set them a target. Without a target, a theory or an ideology will not work. And the best and biggest target is *dawah* work, conveying the message of the Quran to people across the world. This is the greatest mission. Muslims are *dayees*, those who invite people to God. The greatest mission of Muslims is *shahadah ala an-nas* (bearing witness to the truth before humankind), that is, *dawah ilallah* (calling people to God).

It is a mission that earns eternal Paradise for those who sincerely engage in it.

Political Interpretation of Islam

If we want to make the people engaged in terrorism to give up violence and become peaceful, we must change their minds. We will have to give them an alternative ideology. In the first half of the 20th century, Muslims were living in a sense of loss—a loss of political power. At this time, few thinkers emerged who propagated a political interpretation of Islam. This appealed to the mind-set of many Muslims who keenly felt the loss of Muslim political power. And so, they accepted this interpretation of Islam very easily. Today, many Muslims are obsessed with this interpretation. The real problem is this political interpretation of Islam.

The advocates of the political interpretation of Islam wanted to establish Islamic rule or Muslim rule all over the world. Finding the seats of political power already occupied by others, they set about trying to unseat them. This led to violence and terrorism.

From Living in a Sense of Loss to Living in a Sense of Gain

The political interpretation of Islam is the root of all this violence in the name of Islam that Muslims are today engaged in. And the only reason why it became so widely acceptable was that Muslims were living in a sense of loss. Given this, it is imperative that we provide them with a sense of gain. We have to help them realise that Islam is a faith that leads one to Paradise, and so in every situation a Muslim can live in a sense of gain. The Prophet of Islam lived in every situation in a sense of gain, not in a sense of loss.

*Calling people to
God is a mission
that earns eternal
Paradise for those
who sincerely engage
in it.*

This is the solution to the problem of terrorism. We need to present the right interpretation of Islam to people. In addition, we need to provide them with a target, a goal—which is *dawah* work. Then, I believe, the problem of terrorism in the name of Islam will be solved.

Thank you! □

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.



HAS THE AGE OF OPPRESSION RETURNED?

Abolishment Of Violence

IN the year 661 CE, Imam Hasan ibn Ali formally relinquished power and the Islamic Caliphate fell into the hands of the Umayyads. With the death of the first Umayyad Caliph, Amir Muawiyah, in 680 CE, several successive claimants to the Caliphate arose, and the Umayyads were continually involved in hostilities against them.

Abdullah ibn Zubair was one of these claimants. From his stronghold in Makkah, he held out against Umayyad rule. A force under Hajjaj ibn Yusuf was deployed to deal with the threat from Ibn Zubair. The two were engaged in constant hostilities, until finally Abdullah ibn Zubair died fighting his adversary in Makkah (692 CE).

The threat to Islam is from the violent behaviour of the Muslims themselves and not from anyone else.

Imam Bukhari has related in his *Sahih Hadith* of two people who came to see Abdullah ibn Umar while Abdullah ibn Zubair was involved in fighting against Hajjaj. "People are being destroyed," they complained, "and you—the

son of Umar ibn Khattab and a Companion of the Prophet—are doing nothing. What keeps you from going out and doing battle?"

"God prevents me from doing so, for He has forbidden me from spilling my brother's blood," Abdullah ibn Umar replied.

“But hasn’t God said: “Fight them until there is no more oppression?” they protested.

“We did just that,” Ibn Umar told them. “In the Prophet’s day we fought until there was no more oppression, and God’s religion reigned supreme. Now you want me to fight so that there should be oppression and the religion of others’ besides God should reign supreme.”

Another tradition goes into Ibn Umar’s reply in greater detail. The two men pointed out that Ibn Umar went on a pilgrimage to Makkah every other year, but did not join in *jihad*, although he knew the importance that had been attached to it in the Quran. Ibn Umar told them that Islam was based on five things: belief in God and His Prophet; prayer five times a day; fasting during the month of *Ramazan*; paying the poor-due and going on pilgrimage to Makkah. Then the two men mentioned the verse of the Quran in which Muslims are told to fight until there is no more oppression, and God’s religion reigns supreme. “That’s what we did in the Prophet’s day,” Abdullah ibn Umar replied. “At that time Islam was in the minority, and Muslims used to be persecuted—even killed—for their faith. As Islam grew in strength this persecution came to an end.”

The assumption that Muslims are being oppressed and besieged by others and that Islam is under threat is baseless.

The above stance of Abdullah ibn Umar is clear proof that religious persecution had ended at that time itself and people were free to practice their own religious beliefs. Since then, humanity has progressed in leaps and bounds to the present age of openness and intellectual exchange in every field.

The present attitude of some Muslims who are engaged in violence with the assumption that Muslims are being oppressed and besieged by others and that Islam is under threat is baseless. The threat to Islam is from the violent behaviour of the Muslims themselves and not from anyone else. □



THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE

Exemplify Or Enforce

THE root of the Arabic word *adl* meaning 'justice' appears 28 times in the Quran. In addition, synonyms for *adl* or justice appear several times in the Quran. This suggests that Islam gives great stress to justice. However, there is a difference in the usage of the word in the Quran. In most cases, the word *adl* appears in the intransitive form in the Quran. For instance, the Quran says: 'when you speak, observe justice' (6 : 152). In general circumstances, this is precisely the demand of justice. In such circumstances, this is exactly what is desirable for people to do—that they should speak and act justly. Believers are not charged with the responsibility of practically establishing a just government. Rather, their real responsibility is to exemplify justice in all their dealings.

Believers are not charged with the responsibility of practically establishing a just government. Rather, their real responsibility is to exemplify justice in all their dealings.

The command for *adl* also appears in the transitive form in the Quran—that is, to establish a system of justice. One instance of this is the following verse, which appears in connection with the Prophet David:

We said, "David, We have given you mastery over the land. Judge fairly between people. Do not follow your desires, lest they divert you from God's path: those who wander from His path will have a severe punishment, because they ignore the Day of Reckoning." (38 : 26)

In this Quranic verse, the word for justice is used in the sense of enforcement. This indicates that it is the duty of the ruler to establish a just system, to enforce justice or to make others abide by justice.

According to Islam, an individual's responsibility is based on his capacity (THE QURAN 2 : 286). The responsibility of an ordinary person, who does not wield authoritative power, is to act justly at all times within the sphere in which he operates. But someone whom God has blessed with authority must act justly himself and must also establish a just system according to the power he wields and, as far as possible, make people abide by justice. □

FAITH IN THE UNSEEN

Receive Divine Guidance

This is the Book; there is no doubt in it. It is a guide for those who are mindful of God, who believe in the unseen. (THE QURAN 2 : 3)

FAITH in the unseen is not just a matter of belief. It is directly related to guidance. An unswerving belief in the unseen will help you receive God's guidance. If you do not believe in the unseen, you will not receive this guidance.

By 'unseen' is meant a reality that cannot be seen but still is present. God is apparently invisible, in reality He is more present than all existing things. The above Quranic verse conveys that faith in the unseen, actually refers to faith in God. It includes all those aspects of faith which a believer is required to believe in—prophethood, divine revelation, angels, hereafter etc.

We recognize things in two ways—through observation and through inference. From the scientific point of view, both these methods are reliable.

Today, science is considered a reliable means for analysis. Science has theoretical and technical aspects. Technical science looks only at the appearance of things. But everything that appears to be visible is, in the final analysis, invisible. For instance, you can see a flower, but you can't see its fragrance, not even through the most powerful microscope. The flower's fragrance has an existence of its own in the same way as the flower.

The universe is so meaningful that it is simply impossible to explain it without accepting the existence of the Creator.

Science says all things are collections of atoms, and ultimately all atoms are collections of electrons. Referring to this, a scientist commented that the entire universe is an invisible 'mad dance' of electrons! Another scientist describes it as a collection of 'waves of probability'.

In this sense, one can say that it is not only the apparently invisible Creator who is in the unseen but also the apparently visible creatures. The British scientist A.S. Eddington wrote a book on this topic titled *Science and the Unseen World* a little less than a century ago.

We see only the external appearance of things that are visible in this world. Their actual reality remains invisible to us. This is true with God as well. In terms of His being, God is unobservable, but in terms of His creation, God becomes visible for us. The creation is itself evidence of the existence of the Creator. The universe is so meaningful that it is simply impossible to explain it without accepting the existence of the Creator.

The test of man is to discover God while He is in the unseen. If God were plainly visible, there would have been no test at all.

God's being invisible is in line with the requirements of the test to which we are put. The test is to discover God while He is in the unseen. If God were plainly visible, there would have been no test at all. God preferring to remain unseen, faith in Him is an 'examination paper' for us.

For God and other articles of faith to be unseen, is a great blessing. This sets in us the process of thinking, leading us to continuously reflect and ponder on things. God-realization can become a self-discovered reality for us. There is nothing greater in this world than a self-discovered reality. For God and other articles of faith to be in the unseen, is for us an endless source of intellectual development.

Faith in the unseen as a condition for God's guidance, is no arbitrary condition. In fact, it is a very reasonable condition for a creature like man. To understand a great reality, you need an awakened mind. Only such a mind is capable of understanding a profound truth. God is, undoubtedly, the most profound Truth—the Absolute Truth. And so, only the one who can truly have faith in God and truly realize Him, is the one whose mind has awakened, through study, reflection and deep pondering. An un-awakened mind flounders in intellectual blindness, and can hardly hope to arrive at God-realization. □



Jewel in the Crown

Perseverance is a virtue which can be practised at all times, even by one who is crippled by a disease, and even by one who had failed to get a degree from a university.

THE WEAKNESS OF MAN

Ungratefulness Amongst Blessings

The Quran relates that, in the beginning of creation itself, Satan turned against man. He issued a challenge, saying:

'Do you see this being whom You have exalted above me? If You reprieve me until the Day of Resurrection, I will bring all but a few of his descendants under my sway.' (17 : 62)

According to another verse in the Quran, Satan said to God:

'...then I will surely come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right and their left, and you will find most of them ungrateful.' (7 : 17)

WHERE did Satan get the nerve to make a declaration like this in such absolute manner? If you ponder on this, you will realise that it was the incident of Adam eating the fruit of the forbidden tree in Paradise that gave Satan the indication of the weakness of man. Adam was placed in Paradise after creation and was told that the entire Paradise was for him but that he should stay away from the forbidden tree and not eat its fruit. But Adam could not restrain himself and went and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree.

This incident tells us that man, because of his disposition, will want the whole, and will not be content with only a part of it. On the basis of this experience, Satan devised a plan—to exploit this mentality of man. He would not let man be content with a part and instead instigate him not to accept anything less than the whole. In this way, he schemed to drive the whole of mankind into deviance. History tells us that Muslims and others both fell victim to this deception, and were deprived of true gratitude.

This world is based on the principle of test. And so, here no individual or community gets everything. Rather, what always happens is that people get some things, but at the same time are deprived of other things. Yet, both individuals and communities do not remain content. Instead, they seek to get more of this world. As a result, mankind forever lives in ingratitude.

This is the summary of the whole of human history. □

SOCIAL LIVING

Healthy Principles

SOCIETY is a collection of individuals. Every individual constantly gives something to society and also receives back from society. By adopting this principle an individual can live with peace of mind and bring harmony in society.

There are certain healthy principles for social living. One is to have trust in oneself and not ask for anything from anyone. An equally healthy principle is that if a person gives one something without it being asked for, it should be accepted gracefully and not turned down. This develops a healthy psychology in the members of society.

Demanding or desiring something from others means that the person expects from someone other than God, when the right thing is to adopt the principle of 'In God we trust'. And gracefully accepting something from another person without demanding or asking for it also develops good will in society. Refusal can lead to arrogance, a great evil.

Opportunity always comes unheralded. A person has to recognize it, not doing so will be regarded as being blind, by God.

Quite often a person gets something as a result of circumstances, but ignores it as being unwanted and keeps praying to God for help. This is wrong; the right way is to accept the opportunity as gift from God. This will develop the psychology of gratitude in the person. As God says:

If you are grateful, I will surely bestow more favours on you. (THE QURAN 14: 7)

If the sun is shining and a person prays, 'O God, give me sunshine', it is against the law of nature. If the wind is blowing and giving you fresh air and oxygen, and you pray, 'O God, give me oxygen', it is an unnatural demand. These are occasions for thankfulness, rather than occasions of prayer requests.

Similarly, opportunities of life that come your way are from God. A person should be prepared to recognize the opportunity when it appears. When a person gets an opportunity and instead of recognizing it and utilizing it, he prays for an opportunity from God, he is going

against the law of nature. Such a moment is a moment of being thankful to God. Opportunity always comes unheralded. A person has to recognize it, not doing so and praying for something else instead will be regarded as being blind, by God. Angels will note that when he had to offer thanks to God for what He gave him, he kept praying to God for something else. ❑



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QURAN MAINTAINS ITS ORIGINALITY

World's Oldest Quran Found

FRAGMENTS of the world's oldest Quran, dating back almost to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, have been found bound within the pages of another copy of the Islamic holy book in the library of the University of Birmingham.

The two pages from the Islamic holy book manuscript are thought to be between 1,448 and 1,371 years old, making it the earliest copy of the Quran in existence.

Written in ink in the early Arabic script of *Hijazi*, on parchment made from animal skin, it is thought the pages were added to the younger manuscript due to confusion over where they belonged. Researchers say the script used in the two books is similar, meaning the older pages could have been thought to belong to the younger seventh century Quran.

The animal skin parchment was dated, using radiocarbon dating at the University of Oxford, to between 568 AD and 645 AD with around 95.4 per cent accuracy. The Prophet Muhammad is thought to have lived between 570 AD and 632 AD. The two ancient pages, which contain parts of the *Surahs*, or chapters, 18 to 20, may have been written by someone who actually knew the Prophet Muhammad.

Experts say the text contained on the pages is remarkably similar to modern copies of the Quran and suggests many parts of the holy book have not changed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

The discovery is thought to be particularly significant as in the early years of Islam, the Quran was thought to have been memorised and passed down orally rather than written.

Professor David Thomas, an expert on Christianity and Islam at the University of Birmingham, said: 'If it is what we now think it is, this is very important indeed. Islam is associated, of course, with the Prophet Muhammad, and he lived in the late sixth and early seventh century. Now this manuscript could well have been written just after he died.'

Speaking to the BBC, he added: 'The person who actually wrote it could well have known the Prophet Muhammad. He would have seen him probably, he would may be have heard him preach. He may have known him personally.'

During Prophet Muhammad's time, the Quran was memorised and recited orally but Caliph Abu Bakr, the first leader of the Muslim community after Muhammad, ordered the Quranic material to be collected into a book. The final written form was completed under the direction of the third leader, Caliph Uthman, in about 650 AD, which the Muslims today consider to be the standardized form.

Professor Thomas said the pages found in the Birmingham University library suggest the parts of the Quran it covers have not changed much since those early days.

He said: 'The parts of the Koran that are contained in those fragments are very similar indeed to the Koran as we have it today, and so this tends to support the view that the Koran that we now have is more or less very close indeed to the Koran as it was brought together in the early years of Islam.'

Professor Nadir Dinshaw, who studies interreligious relations at the University of Birmingham, described the discovery as 'startling'.

'The tests carried out on the parchment of the Birmingham folios yield the strong probability that the animal from which it was taken was alive during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad or shortly afterwards. These portions must have been in a form that is very close to the form of the Koran read today, supporting the view that the text has undergone little or no alteration and that it can be dated to a point very close to the time it was believed to be revealed.'

The pages formed part of the Mingana Collection, which was gathered by Alphonse Mingana, a Chaldean priest born near Mosul in modern day Iraq. Sponsored by Edward Cadbury, from the chocolate dynasty, he collected 3,000 Middle Eastern documents, which were placed into the care of the University of Birmingham by Cadbury.

The manuscript will be on public display at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham. Susan Worrall, Director of Special Collections, said, "The radiocarbon dating has delivered an exciting result, which contributes significantly to our understanding of the earliest written copies of the Quran. We are thrilled that such an important historical document is here in Birmingham, the most culturally diverse city in UK". □

From The Daily Mail (UK) 22 July 2015 and The Times of India 23 July 2015

UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN

Prerequisite

TO understand the Quran, you need to know the language, the occasions of revelation of different verses, and so on. These are the basics for understanding the Quran. To progress to a higher level of Quranic comprehension, the reader must have developed a “prepared mind”.

This intellectual preparation is a pre-condition for comprehending the Quran. The “prepared mind” that you need for this purpose can be developed through study, reflection, contemplation, discussion etc. Through such rigorous intellectual activity you can acquire additional knowledge that can help you develop a certain taste, which will lead you to discern the interpretation and veracity of a particular verse.

Conventional Quranic sciences familiarise you with the technical aspects. On the other hand, intellectual preparation can enable you to get an in-depth understanding of the aspects of the Quran that deal with the realization of God and higher realities. You will be able to draw spiritual lessons from the Quran and develop to be a God-fearing person with a strong affection for God. Your study becomes a creative one, and the Quran becomes for you a means to discover new meanings. Studying the Quran now, becomes a moment of meeting God. □

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

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THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

THE Quran is the book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety since its revelation to the Prophet of Islam between 610 and 632 A.D. It is a book that brings glad tidings to mankind, along with divine admonition, and stresses the importance of man's discovery of the Truth on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Translated from Arabic and commentary
by **Maulana Wahiduddin Khan**

Surely, God will not forgive the ascribing of partners to Him. He forgives whoever He will for anything other than that. Whoever ascribes partners to God has strayed far indeed. (4: 116)

Opposition to the call of truth and victimization of the followers of the giver of that call are unforgivable offences in the eyes of God. While all other sinful acts may have been committed out of human weakness, the act of opposing the call of Truth is entirely due to insolence and haughtiness: insolence and rebellion are crimes that God will not forgive unless man confesses his mistakes and gives up his rebellious stance. Whenever the call of truth is brought to people in its pure and original form (without making concessions to people's whims and wishes) it always is a divine mission supported by the special succour of God. To oppose such a mission is to stand in opposition to God Almighty. And can any individual succeed if he takes a stand against God?

One who firmly believes in God has his actions rooted in Him. He may err occasionally but, when he turns to God, he rejoins his real roots. On the other hand, one who has associated himself with anyone besides God, is as if deprived of the true base in this universe. An individual who has not established his roots in the one God may perform some good actions, but such actions do not emanate from the divine source; they have only a surface value and are easily nullified by the slightest jolt. That is why a good action based in monotheism unfolds its results in the Hereafter, whereas that based in polytheism is swept away in this world itself.

They [the polytheists] call upon female deities, and they invoke none but Satan, the rebellious one, whom God has rejected. He said

[to God], 'I will assuredly take a number of Your servants, and shall lead them astray, and fill them with vain desires and order them to slit the ears of cattle. I shall order them to tamper with God's creation. Whoever chooses Satan as a patron instead of God is utterly ruined: he holds out promises to them, and fills them with vain desires: but Satan's promises are nothing but delusion. (4 : 117-120)

Hell shall be their home: they shall find no refuge from it. As for those who believe and do good works. We shall admit them to Gardens through which rivers flow; wherein they will abide forever. This is a promise from God; and whose word could be truer than God's? (4 : 121-122)

Man's real challenge in this world is from Satan. Though Satan has no real power, he can lure human beings with fanciful promises to fulfil wishful, imaginary desires and thus manage to make them deviate from the straight path of truth. Satan's way of misguiding is of two main types: one is superstition and the other is interference in God's creation. Faith in superstition means expectation of such results from something as have no relation with that thing. For instance, on the basis of self-styled suppositions, one may believe that someone other than God is the controller of the affairs of the world, while it is a well-established fact that no one enjoys any power save God. Superstition can also take the form of being fully involved in worldly activities and then, by wishful thinking, hoping to achieve success in the Hereafter without having worked hard for it.

Another way of Satan's misleading man is by interfering in the divine scheme of things. God has created man with the innate desire to direct all his attention to God. Interfering with this involves diverting man's attention towards things other than God or else encouraging him to acquire things by other self-devised ways and not through the natural course set by God (for instance, homosexuality). In this manner Satan interferes with man's observance of God's divine plan for the entire universe.

It is not your desires, nor the desires of the People of the Book, that shall prevail. Anyone who commits evil will be rewarded accordingly. He will not find any protector or patron for himself besides God. Anyone who performs good deeds, whether it be a man or woman, provided that he is a believer, shall enter Paradise. No one shall suffer the least injustice. (4 : 123-124)

When the People of the Book, that is, believers in God and the Hereafter, become engrossed in the world, they do not do so by refusing to believe in God and the existence of the Hereafter. What they do is believe in these realities in the formal sense while, in practice, devoting all their efforts to worldly acquisition. They are very serious about the attainment of worldly honour and glory. They know that to achieve success in this world one must struggle. But for the attainment of Paradise, wishful thinking alone is believed to suffice. For instance, through the blessing of some saint, association with a certain group, recitation of some words and phrases, in short, by such cheap formulae or superficial actions, it is hoped that they will be saved from the raging fire of Hell and be ushered into Heaven. Such wishful thinking, in whatever beautiful words it may have been couched, is not going to come to their rescue. God's system is established on such firm grounds that all divine verdicts are based on realities and not on wishful thinking. In God's court everyone will be judged exactly in accordance with his actions. There will be nothing other than the law of justice promulgated by God Himself to influence His decisions.

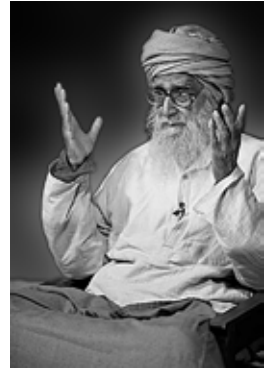
Who is better in faith than one who submits himself wholly to God, acts righteously, and follows the religion of Abraham, the upright in faith, whom God chose for a friend? To God belongs all that the heavens and earth contain. God has knowledge of all things. (4 : 125-126)

Who is that servant of God upon whom God will shower His blessings? One historical example is that of Abraham. It is believers like Abraham who submit themselves fully to their Lord; who reserve their loyalties exclusively for God; who carry out their affairs in the world with justice and modesty, scrupulously avoiding injustice and arrogance. Man's face represents his whole personality. Turning one's face towards God means turning towards Him with one's whole existence.

God is the Lord of the universe. He is the possessor of all kinds of powers. However, He has chosen to remain invisible in this world. Man commits all kinds of evil deeds, because he does not see God. He assumes that he is free to do as he pleases. If one were to realize that human beings are utterly powerless, one would experience the same state of utter helplessness as one will undergo on the Day of Judgement, when all the realities are laid bare before one. □

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered



You say that we should not refer to people of other faiths as 'non-Muslims'. Can you please explain the negative implications of this?

When a person uses the word 'non-Muslim' for another person, he is entering the domain of God. For us everyone is human. Declaring someone as Muslim or non-Muslim is a matter of Divine verdict, and no one can take the seat of God Almighty.

The negative implication of calling someone 'non-Muslim' is that it fosters the 'we and they' concept. This leads to the erosion of the feeling of universal brotherhood. Everyone is a human being like us. God has given the responsibility to all Muslims to convey His creation plan to mankind. In order to do this Muslims should have no hatred towards others and should always remain their well-wishers.

The evil that one can do—even for a person like Hitler—is limited, given that we live for a limited period of time. Is it likely that God would punish someone in Hell for an unlimited period of time—for eternity—for a limited evil he may have done while on earth?

Punishment in the Hereafter is a matter that belongs to a domain that lies beyond space and time. Man is, however, living within space and time, so at present man cannot comprehend this fact.

To be in the present moment, to calm the mind, to prevent it from straying, and to increase its focus, some people suggest focusing on the breath—observing the incoming and the outgoing of the breath for some time every day. Do you think this is a useful method?

I do not believe in this technique. Breathing is a physical practice, while negativity is a mental phenomenon. A mental phenomenon can be handled or dealt with only through intellectual practice. Physical practice has got nothing to do with this problem.

Some people also suggest a method of spending time observing one's thoughts. One watches the thoughts, both 'negative' and 'positive' pass through one's mind, without getting upset at the 'distressing' thoughts and attached to the 'pleasurable' thoughts. Would you recommend this as a means for introspection?

According to my experience there is only one solution to this problem. When you attribute your unwanted experience to some person, it produces negative thought. But if you attribute it to the law of nature, then you will develop no negative thought. We face different problems in the world of nature, for example, cold or hot weather, but we do not develop negative thought towards these phenomena. Similarly, if we attribute the problems we face in social life to the law of nature, we will be able to easily manage our negativity.

I think one of the major reasons why many people of other faiths have prejudices against Islam is because of widespread negative behaviour of many Muslims. As you have also written, many Muslims have hate for people of other faiths. Also, many Muslims interpret Islam in such a negative way that people of other faiths are repelled by their understandings of religion. How far do you see Muslims as being responsible for driving others away from Islam?

To some extent, Muslims are responsible for the negative perception of Islam among others. But even then, others are responsible, because everyone knows that Muslims are not the source of Islam. The source of Islam is its text, so people should refer to the text to form an opinion about Islam. For example, there is corruption in Indian society, but no one attributes it to the Indian Constitution or religious scriptures. Rather, they point to the Indian community as being responsible for it. The same principle should be followed even in the case of Islam.

If non-Muslims have negative views about Islam because of the way many Muslims interpret and claim to practice it, then do you think Muslims who believe and behave in this way really expect to be destined to heaven if they continue with their behaviour and practice and supremacist (mis-)interpretations of Islam?

Paradise is not the monopoly of any group. Muslims will be judged in the same manner in which others will be judged. There is no discrimination in divine law in this matter. This is very clear in the Quran. (4: 123) □

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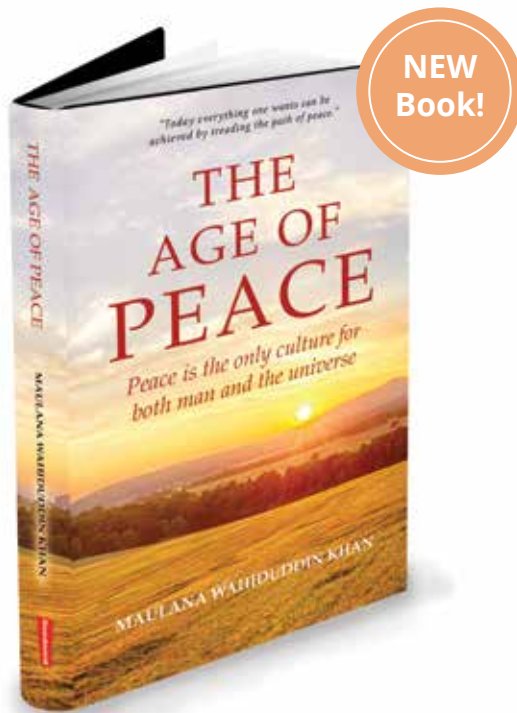
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