

ENGLISH MONTHLY ISSUE 45 SEPTEMBER 2016 ₹35

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

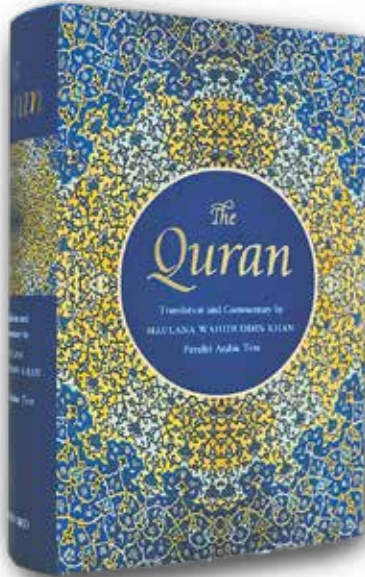


Wise planning is that in which considerations other than your emotions have been taken into account.

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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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 45 SEPTEMBER 2016

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002, HM WIMBERLY, 6, BERLIE STREET CROSS
LANGFORD TOWN, BENGALURU 560025, INDIA

PRINTED AT

COSMOS PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS
450, 3RD CROSS, WILSON GARDEN, BENGALURU 560027

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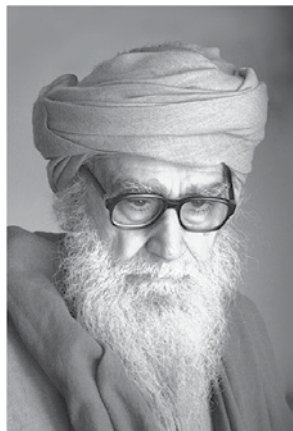
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

CONVERSION VERSUS DAWAH

ONE of the readers of *Spirit of Islam* wanted to know the difference between conversion and *Dawah* (calling people towards God). According to the reader's understanding, both terms mean the same.

This, however, is far from the truth. It is very important to know the difference between the two terms. Conversion literally means the adoption of new religious beliefs that differ from the convert's previous beliefs. Thus conversion to a religion is one's personal choice—it is every person's birth right. Taking conversion in the sense of proselytization is incorrect.

Since the word 'conversion' creates misunderstanding, it is not used in Islam. Instead of this, the word adopted in Islam is *dawah*. In its literal sense, *dawah* means 'to call'. It is another name for the peaceful use of freedom of expression. According to the modern concept of freedom, every one has the right to peacefully express one's ideas.

Dawah is a bilateral process which involves sharing of thoughts. It is an invitation, while at the same time it is a means for mutual learning.

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

Therefore, *dawah* is the other name for peaceful dialogue. It is a healthy practice to share one's ideas with others in an atmosphere of openness.

Dawah is a bilateral process which involves sharing of thoughts. During this process, one gives to others and also gains from others' learning. In this sense, *dawah* can also be termed mutual learning. We can say that it is a process in which one shares one's discovery of the truth with others. In one respect it is an invitation, while at the same time it is a means for mutual learning. Contrary to imposing one's ideas on others, it stands for sharing one's discovery with others.

If *dawah* is taken in the sense of proselytization, it would serve to be a cause for intellectual stagnation. If, however, it is taken in the sense of dialogue and mutual learning, it would prove to be effective in the intellectual development of people involved.

Dawah is not the same as debate. In a debate, one aims to establish one's superiority over another. This is not a method suitable for an intellectual discussion. Debate does not ignite our thoughts to new ideas presented by others. On the contrary, while doing *dawah* one enters into a healthy exchange with others on religious subjects. The target for this exchange is to further one's creative thinking in order to explore and discover new aspects of the truth.

Conversion, in Islamic thought, is not synonymous with proselytism. According to Islam, conversion is an event which takes place in a person's life as a result of an intellectual transformation. It is for the individual to discover the truth after an exhaustive search for it and then willingly make a choice in this matter.

Conversion is an event which takes place in a person's life as a result of an intellectual transformation.

Dawah refers to creative interaction. It is a bilateral process. A peaceful exchange of ideas in human society is the basic aspect for the development of the world. Every development was an idea which was converted into action resulting in benefit to humanity. Sharing of ideas with others in an atmosphere of peace and openness is the source of human and intellectual development.

During this process, one also learns from others. It is mutual learning. One presents what one has discovered and listens to what the other person has to offer from his discovery in life. If this does not happen then it will lead to intellectual stagnation. If taken in the sense of dialogue

and mutual learning, it would prove to be effective in one's intellectual growth and add to the wisdom of those who are participating in such dialogue.

Dawah ends at this point. Any further thinking about the ideas presented by others is the responsibility and freedom of the individual, a process in which no second person is involved. This major point of difference is to be understood clearly. When we speak of conversion it immediately brings to mind the presence of two persons: a 'converter' and a 'convertee'. This, however, is not an Islamic teaching. When a person accepts a faith different from his previous faith, he alone should make the choice on the basis of his discovery of that faith. It is a result of his own discovery of God: there is no one in between him and His Creator.

Thus the entire work of conveying the message of God is about being a true worshipper of God and a true well-wisher of mankind. The framework for this task is to maintain unilateral peace and to live as a giver member of society in every way.

The process of *dawah* has always helped me in my self-development. In this connection, I would like to relate an incident. By birth, I am a Muslim. Through my study of the Quran, I have found that Islam's concept of life is that a person should intellectually develop himself to such an extent that he is able to turn a minus into a plus. I had learnt this principle through my study of Islam. Later, I came to know of an incident of the famous Indian monk Swami Vivekananda.

When a person accepts a faith different from his previous faith, he alone should make the choice on the basis of his discovery of that faith; there is no one in between him and His Creator.

Once one of his Christian friends invited the Swami to his house and led him to a room. Here on a table lay a pile of books one on top of the other. These were sacred books of major world religions. They were placed in such an order that the Gita was at the bottom and the Bible was right on top. Would the Swami get provoked, the host wondered. The host pointed towards the books and asked: "Swamiji what is your comment on this arrangement?" Swamiji smiled gently and said: "The foundation is really good."

This incident of Swami Vivekananda provided a very good illustration of the principle I had learnt from the Islamic scripture. *Dawah* is the name of such creative interaction. □

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WAR IS NO CHOICE AT ALL

Seek Positive Solutions

IN 2003, an American-led coalition launched a war against Iraq, which lasted till 2009. On the face of it, America won the war, but after this a huge problem in the name of the self-styled 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria' (IS) was born.



The former British Prime Minister Tony Blair played a key role in this war. He admitted that the war was wrong. According to a media report titled "Iraq War contributed to rise of IS":

Britain's former PM Tony Blair has apologized for the mistake made over the Iraq war and said there were 'elements of truth' to claims that the 2003 US-led invasion was the principle cause of the rise of IS.

War is really no choice at all. Instead, the right choice is to try to manage a war-like situation in a peaceful manner.

In this regard, it is more proper to say that the Iraq war was a case of a wrong choice. In this war, more than 4000 American and British soldiers were killed. The cost of the war was around 3 trillion dollars. But the result was counterproductive, and the problem of the Middle East became only even more serious than before.

The fact is that war cannot cease by one party defeating another. In practice, what happens is that the defeated party does not accept its defeat. Instead, a thirst for revenge overtakes it. This negative reactionism can become so severe that if the party does not have the strength to engage in regular war, it can resort to suicide-bombing—destroying itself and the other party, too.

War is really no choice at all. Instead, the right choice is to try to manage a war-like situation in a peaceful manner. One should seek to strengthen oneself on positive foundations in such a way that positivity itself becomes enough for one's victory. □



RID YOURSELF OF COMPLAINTS

Root Cause of Problems

COMPLAINT culture is a self-destructive culture. Complaints harm none other but one's own self. A complaint culture is very common in our society. It is this culture that develops over time into a hate culture, culminating in violence. A complaint culture is the root cause of all problems.

What is the remedy for this complaint culture?

It is *Sabr* (patience), the only workable remedy to overcome the complaint culture. Most remedies are based on transforming others, but *Sabr* seeks to bring about change in oneself. Changing someone else is not possible.

Muslims who are involved in violence today are actually a case of impatience. First they develop complaints, which grow till they get converted into hatred. By exercising patience at the initial stage, the complaints can get nipped in the bud. But they ignore this quality. Instead they exaggerate matters to the extent that it dominates their thoughts and eventually makes them stoop to violence.

According to a Quranic verse, Paradise would be for those who develop *Sabr* (complaint-free culture):

Sabr or patience is a two-fold blessing. One is that patience makes you "tension free" and the other is that it qualifies you for entry into Paradise.

We will certainly give those who are patient their reward according to the best of their actions. (16: 96)

Sabr or patience is a two-fold blessing. One is that patience makes you "tension free" and the other is that it qualifies you for entry into Paradise. □

Desire

Where desire is blind, reason has the capacity to discern the true nature of things.

HARMONIOUS MARITAL RELATIONS

Acknowledge and Appreciate Differences

A NEWLY married couple wanted to know how they could make their marital life harmonious. There is only one answer to this question. The husband should learn to adjust with his wife's emotional nature and the wife should learn to adjust with her husband's tenacious nature. After this, if God wills, the couple will enjoy harmonious relations for the rest of their lives.

Women and men are not opposing genders, but complement each other. On this basis, each of them has been blessed with certain additional qualities. Women are generally more emotional, an added quality of theirs. It does not indicate weakness or shortcoming. Likewise, if men are generally more unyielding, it is not their weakness but rather, an added quality. Both these unique qualities are necessary in life. Men and women should see these differences as part of God's Creation Plan. If they realize this, they will acknowledge and appreciate each other, instead of complaining and clashing.

Women and men are not opposing genders, but complement each other. On this basis, each of them has been blessed with certain additional qualities.

In line with being emotional, most women are soft in nature. They are able to solve problems using this natural trait they have been blessed with. The good that lies in men's tenacity is that where needed, they can deal with issues in a strong manner. In this way, both women and men are able to play their respective roles, making the family and the wider society function harmoniously. □



Being Hopeful

If man could but know the hopeful circumstances of tomorrow, he would never lose heart over the depressing circumstances of today.

SECULAR KNOWLEDGE AT ITS ISLAMIC BEST

Freedom of Science from Religion

Revealed knowledge is the only source from which to learn how to make spiritual progress, while material progress is based on a knowledge of nature.

SUCCESS or failure in the Hereafter rests entirely on the revealed knowledge passed on to mankind by the Prophet. The Prophet Muhammad is enjoined to proclaim to mankind that 'God's guidance is the only guidance.' (THE QURAN 2: 120)

Nevertheless, Islam holds that while the principles for attaining salvation in the Hereafter derive solely from divine revelation, the attainment of material progress is got through knowledge of the laws of nature as discovered and established by secular scientific research. Islamic schema therefore, by reason and by tradition, has always accorded secular sciences the status of an independent branch of learning. The Quran repeatedly urges us to give serious thought to the natural phenomena of the heavens and the earth, as being 'signs for men of sense—those who remember God when standing, sitting and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying, 'Lord, You have not created this in vain' (3: 191). These verses clearly suggest that we should proceed to our own conclusions on the basis of logical reasoning in matters of the world.

The difference between the scientific and the religious approach to practical matters has been made clear in a *Hadith*. Fifty out of the sixty three years of the Prophet's life were spent in Makkah, a desert city where there was no agriculture. Later, he migrated to Madinah where agriculture and horticulture were practiced—in particular, the growing of date palms. Naturally, the Prophet had no experience of either farming or fruit growing. One day, as the Prophet passed through the outskirts of Madinah, he noticed some people, who had climbed up the date palms, were engaged in some activity. On inquiring what they were doing, they

What is demonstrable in nature, yielding itself to research and experiment, will be accepted by Islam as established, empirical knowledge.

explained that they were fertilizing the trees. Traditionally, they did this through artificial pollination of the date flowers to ensure a good crop. But when the Prophet said, "What if you don't do it?" In deference to his question they climbed down the trees without completing their task. That year the yield was very low.

When the Prophet inquired about the low yield that particular year, the orchard keepers replied that the yield depended on the pollination, which they had been carrying out when he had stopped them. On hearing this, the Prophet replied: "Continue doing as you used to, since you know the matters of the world better than I do."

This incident illustrates how the Prophet separated religious knowledge from practical matters. This principle is applicable to all matters governed by the laws of nature. The clear inference is that what is demonstrable in nature, yielding itself to research and experiment, will be accepted by Islam as established, empirical knowledge.

Revealed knowledge is the only source from which to learn how to make spiritual progress, while material progress is based on a knowledge of nature.

The same principle may be applied to all other scientific disciplines—geology, astronomy, engineering and so on. Islam is quite clear that these are the subject matter not of religion but of scientific research.

This Islamic policy of the division of religion and science is extremely important, as it opened the door to scientific progress for the first time in human history. Prior to the advent of Islam, this policy of division had never been followed, so that science remained the mere handmaiden of religion. Attempts at true scientific research were generally hampered

or stopped altogether by the forces of dogmatism and superstition. Independent progress was an impossibility. The division recognized by Islam was epoch-making precisely because it freed secular science from the grip of religion. This facilitated conducting of research and experiment without any fear of interference. This process of liberation continued for a thousand years, until the modern era, now known as the scientific age. □



LESS SPEECH, MORE SILENCE

Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak

A wise man, once asked why he was so miserly with words replied: "The Creator of the world has given man two ears, but just one tongue. This is so that we may listen more than we speak."

LISTENING more than speaking is a prudent course to adopt. In doing so we increase our knowledge, have a better understanding of the other person's viewpoint, prepare what we wish to say and encourage in the speaker a greater receptivity to what we wish to say when finally it is our turn to hold forth. When we speak, it is not generally sufficient just to utter the truth. We have to be able to talk persuasively if our listeners are to be convinced. This is where our having listened carefully is an advantage. We get to know in advance what misapprehensions we have to sweep aside, what illusions we have to dispel and what emotional barriers we have to break down. If we speak without ever listening to others, we shall always find ourselves in a weak, uncertain, and ill-informed position.

Sometimes we voice opinions which are not well supported by facts. We can save ourselves embarrassment by first hearing the subject discussed from different angles by different speakers. It is only after mature reflection upon what was said that we should venture to air our views. And even then, they should be aired with full consideration for the feelings of our listeners.

The propensity to talk too much is often a sign of wanting to sing one's own praises than of getting to the matter, and shows a lack of seriousness towards others. The effect of this is at its worst when the flow of talk is based on insufficient or superficial knowledge. What it most obviously betrays is a lack of character.

The practice of listening more than speaking is not just the external expression of one isolated personality trait; it reflects rather a whole state of mind. Indicative of sincerity and humility, it is the essence of a fine character. □

If we speak without ever listening to others, we shall always find ourselves in a weak, uncertain, and ill-informed position.

THE HEREAFTER

Life After Death

THOSE huge masses of ice, which we know as icebergs, found floating in the seas of the North and South poles are amongst the most deceptive and, therefore, most dangerous phenomena of nature. Their deceptiveness lies in the fact that no matter how huge, or wonderful in configuration, what we see of them amounts to only one tenth of their enormous bulk. What lies below the surface of the ocean, spreading far and beyond the visible perimeter, poses tremendous hazards to the unwary. In some ways, our lives are similar to those floating mountains of ice. The part we spend in this world—about a hundred years or less—is like the part of the iceberg which is visible above the surface. We can see it, touch it and feel it. We can take its measure and deal with it effectively. But the part which comes after death is like the submerged one—vast, unfathomable and fraught with peril. It defies the imagination but must nevertheless be understood, for that is the part of human life which God has decreed should be eternal and, as such, ineluctable.

Nothing that we can experience in this world will ever match the extremes of agony and bliss of life after death.

We are familiar with the facts of our origin and the course which life takes from womb until death. But at the end of our lifespan, whether it terminates in youth or in old age, our familiarity with the nature of things comes to an end. It has been surmised that death means total and final annihilation. But this is not so. Death is simply a means of consigning us to a new womb, to the womb of the universe itself. From that point, we are

ushered into another world: the Hereafter.

While the present, physical world as we know it has a finite time-frame, the Hereafter stretches into infinity. We fondly imagine that there is some parallel between the pleasures and pains of this world and those of the next, but, in truth, nothing that we experience in this world will ever match the extremes of agony and bliss of life after death. Those who merit punishment in the Hereafter will be condemned to suffer the most horrific pain for all time to come. But those who merit God's blessings in the Hereafter shall know the most wonderful joy and contentment.

It is because life in this world is intended to be a testing-ground that the world of the Hereafter remains beyond our reach. But all around us, we

have innumerable signs which can help us by analogy, to understand and appreciate the nature of the world to come. Imagine a room which ostensibly consists of four walls, furniture, a few material objects and some human occupants. To all outward appearances, that is what the room adds up to. But the moment we switch on the TV set, we are introduced to a hitherto unsuspected world of colour, movement, and highly vocal human activity. This bustling and lively world has existed all along. It needed the flip of a switch to make us aware of it.

Similarly, our terrestrial existence is made up of a world within a world. The world we know is concrete, visible, audible and tangible. The 'other' world, the world within it, or rather, beyond it, cannot be apprehended through any of the normal human senses; no switch can be turned on to make us understand what it is really like. Only death can do this for us. And when we reopen our eyes after death we find that what had formerly been impalpable and quite beyond human comprehension is now a stark, overwhelming reality. It is then that we grasp what had hitherto existed, but remained invisible.

Once we are clear in our minds that the after-life truly exists, we realize that the sole aim of our earthly existence should be to strive for success in the life to come. Unlike the present ephemeral world, the Hereafter is eternal and real. What we understand by suffering and solace in this world cannot be compared with the suffering and solace of the Hereafter.

Many individuals lead immoral, even criminal existences because they feel that we are free to do as we please in this world. Freedom we do have, but it exists only so that God may distinguish between the good and the evil, and determine who deserves a place of honour and dignity in the Hereafter and who should be condemned to eternal disgrace.

While there is nothing to prevent the good and the evil from living cheek by jowl in this world, they will be separated in the Hereafter like the wheat from the chaff and will be judged according to their record in this life. Some will be condemned to an eternal Hell of pain and distress, while others will be blessed with eternal bliss and pleasure. Each will get his deserts.

Now let us look at the Hereafter from another angle. During a visit to a senior official's house while seated on the lawns of his palatial bungalow the following lament from him set me thinking. The official exclaimed

The sole aim of our earthly existence should be to strive for success in the life to come.

“Maulana Sahib, you don't know how bad our life is! Tomorrow I have to be at the airport before sunrise to welcome a foreign dignitary. Not only shall I have to deprive myself of sleep, but I shall have to welcome him with smiles—and that in spite of the fact that he is somebody I despise!”

This simple anecdote shows there are two sides to the lives of those in high office. They enjoy power, prestige and the many perquisites that go with them but there is also an unenviable side to their lives. If you look deep into some of these ‘great’ men, you will discover that they achieve their high positions because they persuade themselves to be content with triviality. If outwardly they lead glamorous existences, it is because, privately, they stoop to hypocrisy, sycophancy, opportunism and unscrupulousness. This double life is the price they pay to bolster their self-interest. Most people unthinkingly follow the trends of the time. Every ‘great’ person has two sides to one's life—one of brilliance and glitter, the other dark and soulless. The power and glamour which one achieves has something animal-like about it when one agrees to kill what is human in oneself.

Just as there are two sides to every life in this world, there is a similar duality to every act in relation to this world and the Hereafter. One aspect of each act is our acceptance of it as what it is seen to be in this world. The other aspect is what results from this act in terms of the Hereafter. Imam Ahmad narrates that the Caliph Umar once said: ‘No drink of milk or honey is better than swallowing one's anger.’ Overcoming one's anger is an extremely bitter experience, but in the Hereafter the result of doing so is sweeter by far than milk and honey. Today we reap the worldly fruits of our actions! Tomorrow in the Hereafter, we shall have to face the results of our deeds and misdeeds. Today, we can see only one aspect of our actions—

It is because life in this world is intended to be a testing-ground that the world of the Hereafter remains beyond our reach.

that of immediate pleasure or gain—but the Day of Resurrection will place us in a position to see much more. Just as a person standing on top of a wall can look down on both sides, so shall we be able to see both aspects of the truth. We will get to watch our entire history unreel before us like a film and witness the consequences of our own worldly actions. ‘Then,’ as the Quran says, ‘shall each soul know what it has sent forward (to the Hereafter) and what it has kept back (in the world behind)’ (82: 5). Whatever was done for worldly reasons will be left

behind, unconsidered. Only those actions which were carried out with the Hereafter in mind will benefit us in the life to come.

Two men once brought a case before the Prophet for judgement. One had misappropriated the other's land, but because of certain legal quirks, it was difficult to pass a verdict against him. After due consideration, the Prophet warned him: 'If the court gives a verdict in your favour, think of it as being fire and brimstone which you have been awarded'. The piece of land might be a prized possession, but in the Hereafter it would assume the terrible properties of fire and brimstone.

By analogy, the present world and the Hereafter are two sides of the same event. The worldly side is trivial and temporary, while the Hereafter is substantive and permanent. It is the latter side we will face after death. Here we have complete freedom to live our worldly existence as we will; in the life-to-come, we will have no choice about the future course of our life. One will either be raised to eternal glory, or cast down into the pit of everlasting Hell. □

Freedom exists only so that God may distinguish between the good and the evil, and determine who deserves a place of honour and dignity in the Hereafter.



Be Mindful Of God

If one is unmindful of God, one will react in whatever manner one's desires and interests demand. If however one's faith in God is strong, every event throughout one's life will remind one of God; the entire range of one's emotions is then not concentrated on oneself, but on God.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF REALITY

Face the Facts

SHAH FARUQ, the tenth ruler of Egypt from the Muhammad Ali dynasty was overthrown in the 1952 military coup and forced to abdicate. He went into exile in Italy until his death in 1965. While leaving the country he said: *"The whole world is in revolt. Soon there will be only five kings left: the king of spades, the king of clubs, the king of hearts, the king of diamonds and the king of England."*

Shah Faruq's abdication is generally seen as the result of a military coup. But in reality it was the result of a global, political revolution. In the wake of the democratic revolution in the 20th century, the age of dynastic rule ended forever.

***What finally remains
in life are not our
wishes and desires
but the law of nature.***

Besides having a good command over Arabic and French, Shah Faruq had studied the developments of the modern age. Acknowledging the end of dynastic rule, he was able to take his forced abdication as inevitable. That is why he was able to accept the reality of his situation. Thanks to this acceptance of matters as they stood, he saved himself from negative thinking and spent the rest of his life peacefully in exile.

This is the secret of life. What finally remains in life are not our wishes and desires but the law of nature. If man were to acknowledge this reality, he would spare himself from the pangs of anger, complaint, protest and violence. □



Be Grateful

*Be grateful for the seeming setbacks
and problems you face in life. They
may be God's way of telling you that
He has some higher purpose for you.*

THE TEACHING OF PATIENCE

Essential Islamic Virtue

A WESTERN commentator, William Paton, has observed: *One of the fruits of Islam has been that stubborn durable patience which comes out of the submission to the absolute will of Allah.*

This observation is indeed very apt. Islam attaches great importance to patience. Most of the verses of the Quran have a bearing, directly or indirectly, upon this virtue. In truth, patience is an attribute without which the very thought of Islam is unimaginable.

The present world is designed such that one has to often face unpleasant experiences, both within and outside the home. Now if people were to fall to wrangling on all such occasions, they would fail to advance along the path of human progress. That is why Islam places great emphasis on patience, so that by avoiding all unpleasantness, man may continue his onward journey towards the higher goal of God-realization.

***With patience
man can avoid all
unpleasantness and
continue his onward
journey towards the
higher goal of God-
realization.***

The Quran repeatedly stresses the need for patience. We are enjoined to remain patient in these words, "Endure with fortitude whatever befalls you" (31: 17). We are told to "have patience. God is with those that are patient" (8: 46). Another verse says, "Perdition shall be the lot of man except for those who believe and do good works and exhort one another to justice and to fortitude" (103: 1-3).

Similarly, the traditions have laid great emphasis on the importance of patience. The Prophet once said, 'Listen and obey and be patient.' On another occasion he observed: 'God has commanded man to be patient and forgiving.' A Companion of the Prophet said: 'The Prophet and his Companions always remained patient in the face of persecution at the hands of enemies.' Patience provides the basic quality for Islamic activism. In this world no one can adhere to the path of Islamic virtue without remaining patient. □



GOD'S BLESSING

Peace and Provision

RIGHT from a glass of water to political power, everything that people possess in this world is from God. Everything is a direct blessing of God. Whatever one finds in this world is there because of the will of God. If God does not will it, no one can have anything, no matter how hard he tries for it. This is an undeniable truth proved by the Quran and the *Hadith*.

Another thing that we learn from the Quran and the *Hadith* is that there are two forms of divine blessing. One special and the other general. Political power is a special blessing of God. We learn from the Quran that political power is not given to everyone. Neither can it be received through political movements or the gun culture. It is directly related with the way of God. One of the *sunnah* of God is that if a group proves, in the real sense of the word, to have true faith and to be virtuous in action, then God grants that group political power: God has promised those of you who believe and do good works to make them masters in the land. (THE QURAN 24: 55)

Two things are called the blessings of God: peace and provision. From the worldly point of view these two things are essential for human beings.

That is, even when power is desirable, the movement will begin from the point of character building and individual reform instead of political action.

Then God's general gift is what is shared, more or less by everyone. In principle, it consists of two kinds of things—peaceful circumstances

and the easy availability of the necessities of life. This we learn from the following verse of the Quran:

God has made an example of the city, which was once safe and peaceful. Its provisions used to come in abundance from every quarter: but its people denied the favours of God. Therefore, He afflicted them with famine and fear as a punishment for what they did. (16: 112)

Two things in this verse are called the blessings of God: peace and provision. It shows that from the worldly point of view these two things are essential for human beings. If a group comes to possess these two things, then it should not wage war for anything else, such as political power. Rather considering those blessings to be sufficient, believers should engage themselves in thanksgiving to God, until God himself paves the way for whatever else is to come.

What is thanksgiving to God? It is that whatever God has given us should be put to proper religious and constructive use. Remaining content with what one already has is thanksgiving, whereas regarding what one already possesses as unimportant and launching stormy movements for things not in our possession is ungratefulness.

Any one in possession of both peace and provision ought to occupy themselves with spiritual matters rather than political activities. Now is the time to engage themselves in producing spiritual fervour in their people; in launching movements of moral reform; in educating their people; in planning the way to communicate God's message to other communities; in spending their time in their places of worship, in developing their academic institutions, in setting up their settlements as a model abode of godly people, etc.

This is true thanksgiving. This is to pay the due of God's blessings. A true believer's eyes are on his responsibilities. That is why he does not run for what he has yet to possess, and always engages himself in discharging his responsibilities within his own sphere.

Those who do not follow the path of thankfulness launch heated movements towards political goals or revive the gun culture against their supposed enemies. Such people are undoubtedly anarchists. Their case is one of adding insult to injury, even if their movement has been launched in the name of Islam.

For such people it is the decree of God that they never reach their political goal, and whatever blessings of peace and worldly provision they have already enjoyed be denied to them. They will lose what they already possess. This is the way of God. □

***Remaining content
with what one
already has is
thanksgiving,
whereas launching
stormy movements
for things not in
our possession is
ungratefulness.***

Peace

*Peace in actual fact opens up
opportunities and creates favourable
conditions to strive for justice and
other constructive ends.*

REFORM YOURSELF

Success through Introspection

Whatever good befalls you, it is from God: and whatever ill befalls you is from yourself.

(THE QURAN 4: 79)

Whatever misfortune befalls you is of your own doing—God forgives much—[...] (THE QURAN 42: 30)



FROM these Quranic verses we learn that God has made this world in such a way that every person must face the consequences of his own actions. Whenever you confront a problem, you should search for its cause, not outside, but, rather, within yourself. This cause is always internal, located inside you.

Two examples from the time of the Prophet of Islam clearly illustrate this point. One is related to the defeat Muslims faced in the Battle of Uhud, in the year 625 CE. The other to the heavy losses that Muslims incurred in the Battle of Hunayn, in the year 630 CE. The Quran refers to these battles, and in both cases it places the entire responsibility for whatever happened on Muslims themselves, rather than calling for protests against those who were opposed to them—the Quraysh of Makkah.

With regard to the Battle of Uhud, the Quran (3: 152) relates that the Muslims' weakness owed to their internal differences and their not obeying their central command. It tells us that this is what made them

God has made this world in such a way that every person must face the consequences of his own actions.

face defeat at the hands of their opponents in this battle. Similarly, the Quran (9: 25) relates with regard to the Battle of Hunayn that the losses that Muslims faced was because of their pride. Here, too, the cause was identified within the Muslims themselves, rather than without.

In both these cases, it might have been possible to place the entire blame for whatever happened wholly on the Quraysh instead and to say bad things about them. But

when, in the Quran God commented on these events, He placed the entire blame on the Muslims alone.

This fact stands as an eternal testimony to how Muslims should think in similar situations: instead of identifying the conspiracies of others, they should engage in introspection. Removing their own weaknesses, they should try to move ahead. This is the way to succeed.

To further clarify this point, it is instructive to reflect on the following letter sent by Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (died. 720 CE), regarded as the fifth Pious Caliph of the Muslims, to a subordinate officer, Mansur ibn Ghalib, whom he had sent on a military campaign against some opponents. He advised Mansur to remain established in God-consciousness, because, he wrote, the fear of God is the best form of preparation, the most successful way and the strongest power. The best way to save oneself from one's enemies, he explained, is to save oneself from sin, because sin is even more dangerous than the wiles of the enemy. Victory over opponents owes to the latter's sinfulness, even if they are more numerous and better in terms of preparation. If the Caliph's army, which was smaller than its opponents, were also to fall prey to sinfulness, they would not be able to gain victory over their opponents. Umar ibn Abdul Aziz advised Mansur to fear his own sins even more than he feared anyone's enmity.

Instead of identifying the conspiracies of others, one should engage in introspection. Removing personal weaknesses, one should try to move ahead. This is the only way to succeed.

The fact is that this world is God's world, not man's world. Here one has power only over one's self. In reality, no individual or community has any power over any other individual or community.

This means that in this world whenever you get anything, you actually get it from God, even if it appears to reach you through somebody else. Similarly, whenever something is taken away from you, it is actually taken away by God, even if it appears that there is a person behind the loss you have incurred. An intelligent person is one who in both situations turns to God.

In the face of the treatment that some Muslims face today in some places, they typically respond in just one way; by screaming and protesting against what they brand as 'oppressors'. This is a completely un-Islamic approach and method. When everything that happens is from God, then, undoubtedly, whatever Muslims are facing is also from God. This is why the only way to respond to this situation is for Muslims to turn to God. They should try to find out what errors they

have made with regard to God because of which they are facing this punishment. In this way, they can rectify their mistakes, and once again make themselves eligible to receive God's blessings.

If stones begin to rain upon you from above and you start looking below to find out where they are coming from, you will never succeed in saving yourself from being hurt by them! ❏



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THE GOAL OF MAN

Purpose of Creation

"I created the Jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me." (THE QURAN 51: 56)

WE learn the purpose of man's creation from the above verse of the Quran. Mujaahid Tabii, a disciple of Abdullah ibn Abbas (died. 687 CE) has explained worshipping God in terms of the realization of God. (*Tafsir Al Qurtubi*)

Realization or *Maarifat* means the discovery of God. Man is born with an extraordinary mind. Man is required to utilize his thinking capacity to reflect upon all the related aspects of existence. In this way, he discovers the truth through personal contemplation. He must take his place in this world on the basis of self-discovered truth.

That is to say, in a world where everything is subjected to compulsory submission, man should engage in voluntary submission given his developed mind.

Self-discovered truth is no simple matter. This state can be achieved only by saving oneself from distraction, by being focused in one's thinking and by becoming a seeker in the full sense. When a person devotes himself fully to study and contemplation, he receives special divine help. He becomes God's chosen servant (*mukhlas*) and starts to receive divine inspiration.

With his experience and study, and God's special support, he discovers the truth and thus develops a realized personality. It is such individuals who have surrendered to God of their own free will, who epitomize the true purpose of creation. □

Man is required to utilize his thinking capacity to reflect upon all the related aspects of existence and discover the truth through personal contemplation.

Peace with Yourself

If you truly want to enjoy your life you must be at peace with yourself.

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 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BELIEVER AND AN UNBELIEVER

THE Quran says that on Judgement-day, when mankind is gathered before God, man will look upon his deeds. Those who denied God, and rebelled against Him, will behold the doom that awaits them. In anguish they will cry out:

“Would that I were dust!” (78: 40)

When Umar, the second Caliph of Islam, lay on his death-bed, stricken by the dagger of Abu Lulu Firoz, his son, Abdullah Ibn Umar was resting his father’s head in his lap. “Rub my cheek in the dust, Abdullah,” Umar said to him. Abdullah Ibn Umar did so. Then, with his head resting on the ground, Umar addressed these words to himself:

“Woe betide you, Umar, and woe betide the one who gave birth to you, if God does not forgive you.” (*Tabqat Ibn Saad*)

If one compares both these events, one will find that the very words uttered by unbelievers in the next world, are those uttered by believers in this world. In the life after death, unbelievers will wish they were dust. But here we have a believer saying, before he dies, in this life on earth: “Join me with the dust.”

Who dare rebel against God when He appears before man? Everyone will submit to Him then. But the only creditable submission of God is that which comes before He makes Himself manifest. Unbelievers will bow to God when He reveals Himself before them. But a believer bows to Him while He is still invisible.

Unbelievers will bow to God when He reveals Himself before them. But a believer bows to God while He is still invisible.

The only reason that people rebel against God is that He is not now present before them. But how can one rebel against Him when He manifests Himself in all His might? Man is cowed into submission before a lion. How then can he dare otherwise when he comes face to face with God, the Creator of the lion?

The truth is that a believer experiences in this world what an unbeliever will experience in the next world. An unbeliever will humble himself on seeing God: a believer does so without seeing Him. □



Patience

The benefit of patience and tolerance is that even after suffering losses, the bereft one does not lose his balance.

In spite of temporary defeat, he never loses the ability to think cool mindedly and by making a realistic assessment of his situation, plans his life anew. By forgetting what is lost, he reorganizes his work.

QURANIC WISDOM

Guidance for Life

ACCORDING to the Quran, wisdom is of greatest value for a human being. There is a verse in Chapter *al-Baqarah* which states: "Whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant wealth" (2: 269). This verse means that wisdom is *summum bonum*, or the greatest good. Wisdom ensures success, while the lack of it signals failure. I have tried to understand what wisdom is from the Quran and *Hadith*, that is, what is the concept of wisdom, as defined in the Quran and the prophetic practice.



After deep study, I have come to conclude that the definition of wisdom according to the Quran is the ability to discover the relevant by sorting out the irrelevant. After studying the life of the Prophet of Islam, I have realized that the best title for him is that he was a 'Prophet of Wisdom'.

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

In 1978 the American author Dr. Michael Hart wrote a book with the title, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*. In this book he ranked the Prophet Muhammad as the greatest achiever in entire human history. But Dr. Hart does not explain in his book the reason for Prophet's super-achievement. I have discovered through my study that the reason for Prophet's success was his application of Quranic wisdom to

the situations he faced. The Prophet experienced various kinds of situations and in every situation he adopted Quranic wisdom. I will give some examples to illustrate how the Prophet applied this wisdom.

The Prophet in Makkah: Ignoring the Problem and Availing the Opportunity

The Prophet began his mission in 610 CE in ancient Makkah. Prophet's mission was based on *tawheed*, or monotheism. At the time, the whole of Arabia was polytheistic. The Kabah was built four thousand years ago by Prophet Abraham as a centre of worship of one God. But now polytheism was practised by the different tribes of Arabia. This was a grave situation confronting the prophetic mission.

Here the Prophet applied wisdom. Since the Kabah was used as a place of worship and venerated by the various tribes of Arabia, people from

all over the peninsula would gather to pay respects to their tribal gods. As a result, the Kabah had acquired a central position where people would gather on a daily basis. It hence became possible for the Prophet to have an Arab audience present in Makkah, to whom he could preach the teachings of his religion.

We therefore see that the Prophet never travelled in Arabia for the sole reason that Arabs from the surrounding regions would themselves visit Makkah for their worship. The Prophet had access to an audience from all over Arabia. The Prophet would visit the Kabah daily, offer his prayers and then engage in the task of conveying the message of Islam to those gathered there. He would recite verses from the Quran to people (*Ibn Hisham*). The Prophet used to tell people: "O people, say that there is no god but God and you will find success." (*Ibn Hisham*) Similarly, he would recite verses from the portions of the Quran that had been revealed at that time. This was a wise method followed by the Prophet because of which many Makkans embraced Islam, including those who are known as the foremost Companions of the Prophet, for example Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muadh ibn Jabal and others.

The reason for Prophet's success was his application of Quranic wisdom to the situations he faced.

Had the Prophet fought with the Makkans or forcibly prevented people from their methods of worship, the prophetic mission would have come to an end in Makkah itself. This is because such action would have initiated a violent confrontation, leading to killings on both sides. Muslims today have been fighting for the past two hundred years and have not been successful. The only reason for this failure is their inability to apply the above prophetic wisdom to the present day situation. Muslims of today are fighting with problems and are unaware of the opportunities that can be availed.

The whole of Prophet's life can be explained by the single principle of following divine wisdom. God has created this world in such a way that every person here enjoys freedom. No one has the right to abolish the freedom of another. Thus we have to manage other people's freedom rather than attempt to abolish it. Islamic wisdom is therefore to carry on with your mission while managing the issues that arise on account of other people's freedom.

Migration: Re-planning of the Prophetic Mission

Prophet's mission of monotheism did not suit the people of ancient Makkah because the Kabah was an attraction for different polytheistic tribes resulting in the flourishing of trade, serving as a source of income for the people of Makkah and a means to bolster the economy of the city. It therefore did not suit the Makkans to believe in a religion based on monotheism. But because the Prophet could not abolish the God-given freedom of people, he adopted a different option of managing the situation. Instead of making an issue out of the worship aspect of the place the Prophet availed the gathering as an audience for his mission. This is an example of wise management.

Opposition to Prophet's mission increased in intensity. Due to the wisdom adhered to by the Prophet, a number of Makkans had come to accept Islam. This group comprised of some of the best people of the society of Makkah. The best minds of Makkah became followers of the Prophet due to his adoption of the wise strategy explained above. However, Prophet's opponents still held sway in Makkah and after thirteen years of his mission, they became even more hostile. Now the Prophet had two options before him: he could either continue to

God has created this world in such a way that every person here enjoys freedom. No one has the right to abolish the freedom of another.

stay in Makkah and fight with those opposed to Islam or leave Makkah for another place. The Prophet again applied wisdom. Ancient Makkah had become a controversial spot for the Islamic mission. When a place becomes controversial for one's work, it is difficult to remain there and work normally. Thus the Prophet gathered information about other places and found that Madinah, which was then called Yathrib, was free of all such controversies. The Prophet hence decided to

migrate to Madinah. Therefore, migration means re-planning of one's mission. Migration was not merely leaving of one place for another, rather it involved a re-planning of prophetic mission. At the time of his migration, the Prophet made a very historical statement: "I was ordered to migrate to a town which will swallow all other towns. People call it Yathrib and it is Madinah" (*Sahih Bukhari*). The Prophet had predicted that his re-planning would give new success to Islam. In this way, as part of a great vision, the Prophet decided to leave Makkah and migrate to Madinah.

Avoiding Confrontation

Makkans became angry with Muslims' having found a peaceful centre for their mission, causing them to initiate wars out of revenge. The Prophet was carrying out his mission in Madinah in a non-provocative way, but the Muslims' success did not go down well with the Makkans, who thus launched attacks. But it was due to Prophet's wisdom that he reduced into skirmishes the wars waged by the Makkans. A full-fledged war lasts at least for six days. There is no such war in the life of the Prophet. On this basis we can say that there was no war during the lifetime of the Prophet. Other people tried to engage him in war, but using his wisdom he turned every such war into a mere skirmish.

With God's special succour Muslims emerged victorious at the Battle of Badr (624 CE) while the Makkans suffered losses. It is human nature to thirst for revenge after facing defeat at the hands of their opponents. This is why after their defeat, every time the Makkans tried to enmesh the Muslims in confrontation.

Another event from the early history of the Prophet is known as the Battle of the Trench (627 CE). No battle, however, took place. Traditions have it that a 12,000 strong confederation advanced on Madinah for attack. The Prophet realized that there would be no use of fighting as many would die. Before this, two years ago, seventy of the Companions had died at the Battle of Uhud.

The Prophet did not want this to be repeated. Thus he adopted a unique strategy—he had a trench dug between the Muslims and the attackers. This trench served as a buffer between the two sides. This wise strategy, which prevented confrontation, was unknown to the Arabs of the time. Due to this those who had come for attack were compelled to leave without fighting.

Muslims today are engaged in fighting, wielding guns and committing suicide bombing. They do not know that in every situation there are relevant aspects alongside irrelevant aspects. Success comes with sorting out the two.

The Peace Treaty of Hudaibiya

The Prophet wanted peace to prevail in Arabia so that the work of *dawah*, or conveying the message of God to people, could be performed without any obstruction. *Dawah* cannot happen in the absence of a peaceful atmosphere. Peace brings normalcy. The task of *dawah* involves addressing the mind of those to whom the message of God is to be conveyed. This is possible only in a normal situation.

So, under a great planning, the Prophet decided to go to Makkah with his Companions to perform the *umrah*, or the lesser pilgrimage. In 628 CE, the Prophet left Madinah for Makkah with a number of his Companions. This was not acceptable to the Makkans. When they learnt that Muslims were approaching their city, they went forward and stopped the Muslim advance at a place called Hudaibiya, about ten miles from Makkah. This was followed by two weeks of negotiations for peace. The Makkan opponents were bent on their conditions being accepted for peace to be concluded between the two sides. Their

The greatest practice of the Prophet that we need to revive today is to discover prophetic wisdom and apply it to our present circumstances.

conditions were unilateral and did not take into consideration Muslims' interests. The Prophet accepted all of the conditions of the Makkans. After this the Prophet began to dictate the terms of the agreement to Ali to write on paper. He said: "O Ali write: 'This is what has been concluded between Muhammad the Messenger of God and...'" At this, Suhayl ibn Amr, the representative of the Makkans, immediately said: "We do not believe that you are a messenger. You will have to remove the words 'Messenger of God'

and write instead 'Muhammad, son of Abdullah.'" It is very astonishing that the Prophet did not waste even a second and said to Ali: "O Ali write: 'This is what has been concluded between Muhammad, son of Abdullah...'" Ali was not prepared to erase the words 'Messenger of God', thus the Prophet asked where these words had been written and erased them himself. In this way, the peaceful agreement, known as the Hudaibiya Treaty was signed.

There were many among the Companions of the Prophet who thought that the treaty was a humiliation. But the Prophet remained firm on the agreement he had entered into with the Makkans and returned from Hudaibiya. He had not yet reached Madinah when the Chapter al-Fath was revealed in the Quran. The first verse of this chapter declares: "Truly, We have granted you a clear victory" (48: 1). What everybody had considered to be a unilateral defeat and humiliation was declared by the Quran to be a clear victory. What was this clear victory? The Prophet ignored the irrelevant aspect and focused on the relevant aspect. The irrelevant aspect was to temporarily have 'Muhammad, son of Abdullah' written on a piece of paper instead of the words 'Muhammad, Messenger of God'. This would have not changed the course of history. The Prophet knew that changing words on paper would not change

the course of history. Here we have an example of focusing on the relevant aspect and ignoring the irrelevant aspect. As a result, after the Hudaibiya Treaty was signed peace prevailed in Arabia.

Before this, there had been a situation of war between the Makkans and the Muslims, both sides anticipating war to break out any time. When it became known all over Arabia that the two groups had mutually agreed on peace and would not fight for a period of ten years, movement of people from both sides became common. Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 741 CE), an early authority on Islam, has explained why people embraced Islam in large numbers after the Hudaibiya Treaty. The reason for this was the greatly increased interaction between the Muslims and the Makkans. Before the treaty, there had been no interaction at all between the two groups, however, the Hudaibiya Treaty broke the barrier between the two sides, leading to more and more interaction between people. This interaction led to exchange of thoughts and ideas and thus made people knowledgeable about Islam. Hence the numbers of Muslims rose rapidly.

The Hijrath or migration was not merely leaving of one place for another, rather it involved a re-planning of the prophetic mission.

In this way, in his twenty-three year prophetic mission the Prophet always separated the relevant from the irrelevant in the situations he was faced with. In the present times, Muslims are totally unaware of this wisdom. Muslims today are engaged in fighting, wielding guns and committing suicide bombing. They do not know that in every situation there are relevant aspects alongside irrelevant aspects. Success comes with sorting out the two. For example, Muslims today have complaints against the West. Whether the complaint is right or wrong, it must be acknowledged that the West has made many positive contributions—freedom, openness, print and electronic media, means of communication and so on. If there are certain complaints against the West, they should be taken as irrelevant. The relevant fact is that in today's age, there has been an opportunity explosion. Modern civilization has opened up an age of opportunities. Since Muslims are engaged in confrontation, they cannot recognize these opportunities.

The Supporting Role of Modern Civilization

I have discovered after a study of Prophet's life that wisdom is the ability to sort out the relevant from the irrelevant. Due to lack of prophetic wisdom, Muslims have been making numerous sacrifices but have not

been able to make any positive achievement. If Muslims were to adopt this wisdom, they would realize that the entire modern civilization is an example of this tradition of the Prophet: "God will certainly make secular people support this religion" (*Sahih Bukhari*). The modern civilization is a supporter of Islam and not an enemy of Islam. Because Muslims are too engrossed with irrelevant aspects, they could not discover the modern civilization as a supporter of Islam. If they sort out the irrelevant aspects, they would realize that in reality this civilization provides support to the religion of Islam.

The greatest practice of the Prophet that we need to revive today is to discover prophetic wisdom and apply it to our present circumstances. God has ushered in a new age in which the equation between people has changed. At the time of the Prophet, some people had been enemies of Islam while others were its friends.

It was due to Prophet's wisdom that he reduced into skirmishes the wars waged by the Makkans. A full-fledged war lasts at least for six days. There is no such war in the life of the Prophet.

In the present age, this equation has come to an end. Today if there are Muslims on one side of the equation, there are supporters on the other side. The entire world has become a supporter of Islam. A new revolution has been brought about in the world, which has given us communication, religious freedom, openness, all of which are supportive for the cause of Islam. There was a process which started at the time of the Prophet and this has culminated as modern civilization today. According to a tradition of the Prophet: "A time will come when you will advance to a place where there will be a fort with closed

doors. You will not use swords or lances. Rather you will just say *La ilaha illallah* and the doors will be opened up" (*Sahih Muslim*). Right now, I am speaking at a place and my voice is potentially reaching the entire world. Thus this tradition means that an age of communication will dawn in the future which would open up all doors for Islam.

Muslims of the present day should revise and reassess their actions and plans. I pray to God to guide us and accept us for Paradise in the Hereafter. □

(Transcript of the lecture delivered through Skype by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan at the 'Selected Members Camp' of the Students Islamic Organisation of India (SIO), Headquarters of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, New Delhi, 19 July 2016.)

DON'T TAKE THINGS IN NEGATIVE TERMS

Positive Thinking

ONCE I addressed a group which was said to be involved in an unhealthy practice. I advised them to abandon this practice. A member of that group responded: "*Aap to naraz ho gaye.*" (You became angry). I said: "No, I am not angry. Rather I have pointed out an unwanted practice that you are engaged in. Anger is a negative response. On the other hand, I have given you healthy advice only so that you could correct yourself."

There is a negative and positive side to all things. If you think negatively, your mind will become negative. By being positive, your mind remains positive.

Passing a remark against someone affects your thought process. Adopting negative terms to express your feelings will activate your mind in the negative direction. Consciously or unconsciously it triggers a negative process in your mind. By expressing your views positively, your mind will be positively oriented.

Man is a social animal. He communicates his ideas with others by speaking. When a person speaks, he initially addresses himself. His voice reaches his mind before it reaches others. Every speaker first addresses himself and then others. It is therefore imperative for each individual to recognize and understand the kind of signal they are giving to their mind. Whether the other person gets affected or not, surely he himself gets affected by what he says. Given this, every person should be very cautious while expressing themselves. □

*If you think
negatively, your mind
will become negative.
By being positive,
your mind remains
positive.*

Modest Person

*A truly modest person will look at
all matters in relation to God rather
than in relation to human beings.*

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Achieve Your Goals

PEOPLE want to progress as much as possible. They aspire to achieve the greatest possible success. For such people, "The sky is the limit", as the saying goes. But this saying is actually unnatural. The fact is that man's abilities are very limited. On account of our limitations we can move up only to a certain limit, not beyond it.

If you take the saying "The sky is the limit" literally and you forget your limitations, imagining that you can achieve any and every thing, you are bound to fail to achieve all that you want. You are sure to suffer frustration and despair and to leave the world in that condition.

Unlike what this saying claims, man's true target is not the 'sky'. What we need to do, instead, is to know our natural limits and, accordingly, plan our lives.

If you take the saying "The sky is the limit" literally and you forget your limitations, imagining that you can achieve any and every thing, you are bound to fail to achieve all that you want.

In place of 'The sky is the limit', the aphorism 'Stress is our limit' makes much more sense. It indicates that we need to make efforts to achieve our purposes, but when we feel that we have fallen victim to stress we should know that we have reached our limits. Our limits, then, are defined by the limits within which we enjoy peace of mind.

We should make full use of our abilities, and should continue to do this as long as we do not face mental tension. That is what remaining within our natural limits is about. But when we find ourselves falling prey to tension, we

should realize that we have reached our limits. We must halt at this point, and not futilely proceed further.

Whatever we might obtain in this world is possible only as long as we remain within the limits of nature. We cannot get anything transgressing these limits. □



A DREAM WORLD

Answer to our Every Desire

GOD has created man with innumerable desires and longings. The means exist in this world for the fulfilment of his desires, but even so, man is unable to fulfil them. Sometimes old age intervenes and sometimes man's inherent limitations prevent him from achieving what he wishes; he is hindered by some weakness and sometimes he is not favoured by fortune.

Is man fated to come into the world with all sorts of desires and then leave the world, disappointed at having achieved none of them? This is not the case: God has prepared a Paradise for man where he will be granted all that he desires. After death man enters into a complete world, a world free of all defects. He will find there everything that he had longed for on earth but had been unable to obtain.

Heaven after death is for those fortunate ones who live righteous lives on earth; who prove by their noble actions that they deserve an equally noble reward. Man will find in the next life the dream world which eludes him on earth. Only those who have paid the price in this life will deserve heaven in the next. □

Heaven after death is for those fortunate ones who live righteous lives on earth; who prove by their noble actions that they deserve an equally noble reward.

A Hidden Treasure

When a piece of glass breaks up, it breaks into many parts. When a live amoeba breaks up, it becomes two living amoebas. Unlike glass there is no question of defeat and destruction for a living being. Man has a hidden treasure within him. Difficulties and setbacks bring it forth. It is not in the least difficult for one who can conquer himself, to conquer others.

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.



PEACE IS POSSIBLE, BUT ONLY THROUGH THE RIGHT WAY

IF your house is on fire, you will immediately get into action to try to put out the flames. Now, there are two ways of doing this. The first way is to act according to the principles that the Creator of this universe has set for dousing a fire. The other way is that, overwhelmed by emotions, you try out some other method, a method of your own making.

You are free to choose either of these two methods. But the results of the two are not the same. God has set pouring water as the method for putting out a fire. You cannot extinguish a fire by pouring fuel on it. If you do that, it will only add to the fire.

The same holds true for other challenges in life. If God has made patience the secret of success in this world of His, you cannot attain success through impatience. If God has made positive action the means to arrive at a particular result, you cannot hope to get there through fiery speeches, angry rhetoric and inflammatory statements. If God has established pragmatism as the solution to worldly problems, you cannot get what you want through emotionalism. If God has placed the secret of reform and progress in the silent transformation of individuals, you cannot

God has made patience the secret of success in this world of His, you cannot attain success through impatience.

hope to progress by stirring up agitation and strife. If God wants us to get ahead in life by acknowledging our mistakes, you cannot advance

by trying to prove others to be criminals and yourself to be faultless. If God has established a rule that if you want to pluck a rose, you can do so if you steer clear of the thorns, you won't be able to obtain the rose if you start fighting against each thorn that you come across.

This world is a place for us to be tested. This is why every human being has been given the gift of free will. But this freedom is of action alone, and not that of obtaining results or the fruits of our actions. Undoubtedly, we are free to do whatever we like to, but we have not been given the power to acquire the results that we seek. You are free to choose whether to dive into the sea or not, but if you do not know how to swim, you do not have the power to stop yourself from drowning! Please remember that this world is merciless when it comes to accepting useless excuses, no matter how beautifully you might seek to embellish them.

The fact of the matter is that we do not live in a world of our own making. Instead, this world has been made by God. We can obtain what we seek only if we live in accordance with the principles that God has put into place that govern the universe. If we deviate from these principles, we cannot get anything positive at all. The devastating results of the merciless violence engaged in by terrorists is ample proof of this. □

We can obtain what we seek only if we live in accordance with the principles that God has put into place that govern the universe. If we deviate from these principles, we cannot get anything positive at all.



Unattainable Goals

To lead the community in pursuit of unattainable goals is a dastardly and inimical act: such hot pursuits lead not to the heights of success but to the depths of despair.

CRITICISM OR ALLEGATION?

With or Without Evidence

IF you have only allegations to prove someone wrong, you need to understand that it is you who is in the wrong. Point out other's flaws or errors only if you have proper evidence to back this. Without such evidence, finding fault with others and hurling allegations is a major sin. It is tantamount to killing someone—or what is rightly called 'character assassination'. It is no less a sin than physically murdering someone. In the Hereafter, you will face stern punishment for this.

Criticism must always be based on evidence and proof. Criticism that is bereft of such evidence is a grave sin.

According to a *Hadith*: "Three things of a Muslim are inviolable for his brother in faith: his blood, his wealth and his honour."

The word "Muslim" appears in this *Hadith*, but in the extended sense it relates to every human being. Being aware that finally you have to appear before God, will make you alert and save you from such action.

Criticism is everyone's legitimate right. But criticism must always be based on evidence and proof. Criticism that is bereft of such evidence is a grave sin. □

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HUMAN VALUES THROUGH ISLAM

Serving Mankind

ALL the teachings of Islam are based on two principles—the worship of God and the service to mankind. Without putting both principles into practice, there can be no true fulfillment of one's religious duties.

Islam inculcates the spirit of love and respect for all human beings. On the one hand, by serving human beings they please God and on the other, they achieve spiritual progress.

According to a *Hadith*, you should be merciful to people on earth and God Almighty will be merciful to you. In this way Islam links personal salvation to serving others. God's reward in the Hereafter can be earned only if one has striven to alleviate the sufferings of mankind.

The following incident brings out the concept of service to others in a very profound way. During the British monarchy, one of the British Emperors disguised himself as an ordinary person to inspect his military establishments. During an interaction when one military officer admonished him in a very stern and harsh manner, the disguised king asked, "Do you know who I am?"

Taken aback at such a question and doubting himself the officer said, "Are you a military officer just as I am?" The king replied, "I am of a greater position than that". The officer said, "Then you must be a Captain." Again to this the king replied, "I am greater than that." "Are you a colonel?" asked the officer. "No, I am greater than that", was the reply. The officer said, "Then you must be a General". "No, I am even greater than a general", said the king.

Then the officer who was by now in total shock said, "Then you must be the Emperor". He said, "Yes, I am the king". The officer handed his gun to the king and said, "You may shoot me for my crime, I have failed to recognize my king". The king said, "No, you are a good military officer but I have an advice for you. Whenever you interact with any common man think of him as your king and of yourself as an ordinary soldier then you will treat every individual in the best manner and will consider the common man's affairs as the affairs of the king".

A person who treats every human interaction as an interaction with God will not commit any excess in his behaviour.

In this incident there is a principle for living a God oriented life. When God created man and asked the angels to bow down before man all the angels obeyed God's command but Satan refused to do so. The angels considered the issue as a matter of God's command but Satan considered it as a personal issue between man and himself.

To understand the above more clearly the following *Hadith* is very important. On doomsday, God says to a person, "I was ill, but you did not come to nurse Me." The man will reply, "God, You being the Lord of the universe, how can You be ill? God will answer, "Such and such servant of Mine was ill. Had you gone there, you would have found Me there with him." Then God says to another person, "I was hungry but you did not feed Me." The person will reply, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You go hungry?" God says, "Such and such of My servants came to you, but you did not feed him. Had you done so, you would have found Me with him." Then God says to yet another man, "I was thirsty,

God's reward in the Hereafter can be earned only if one has striven to alleviate the sufferings of mankind.

and you did not give Me water to drink." That person will also say, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You be thirsty?" God says, "Such and such servant of Mine came to you, but you did not give him water to drink. Had you offered him water, you would have found Me there with him."

In this *Hadith* the teaching is that you consider every interaction with others as an interaction with God. The words used in the *Hadith* are symbolic otherwise this *Hadith* guides us towards the character of a believer. A person who treats every human interaction as an interaction with God then such a person will not commit any excess in his behaviour.

The Islamic principle highlighted here is that if a person wants to find God, he shall first have to make himself deserving of this by serving others. This paves his way to spiritual progress. Only those who have elevated themselves spiritually will find God.

This culture of mercy and compassion approved by God is not limited to human beings, but extends also to the animal world. We must be equally sympathetic to animals. The *Hadith* gives us many guidelines laid down by God on how to care for all of God's creatures and treat them with kindness. Cruelty to animals risks being deprived of God's mercy.

Islamic belief softens the hearts of its believers. When this penetrates people's hearts, they will of necessity become kind and compassionate to others. They will see everyone with eyes of 'love and compassion and feel this urge to serve others, and fulfill others' needs.

If even after adopting the beliefs of Islam, feelings of love and compassion do not well up in the heart of its adherent, he should rethink about his faith. He should ask himself—have Islamic beliefs truly found a place in my heart and mind? Can I fully practise my beliefs and succeed and mould myself entirely on the model of Islam?

Umar Faruq, the second Caliph of Islam, had taken only one camel with him when he travelled on a journey from Madinah to Palestine. He realized that if he continued to ride the camel during the entire journey, it would be cruelty to the animal, and it must be given rest. Therefore, he decided to ride and walk by turns to give the camel periods of rest, until he reached his destination.

If the true spirit of Islam is inculcated in a person, he becomes so compassionate to all living beings, that even at the cost of personal comforts, he extends a helping hand to others. According to a *Hadith*, "By God, he is not a Muslim who eats his fill, while his neighbour goes hungry." This shows that a Muslim is one who is concerned with others' hunger and thirst as he is with his own; who is concerned not only with his own person but with the whole of humanity.

All the teachings of Islam are based on two principles—the worship of God and the service to mankind.

According to another *Hadith*, you should, "extend greetings to people, feed them and earn your place in heaven." According to Islam, a person is worthy of heaven whose heart is eager for others' peace and well-being, who is eager to share with everyone, whether it be food, clothes or medical help, etc. In short, one should share in people's pain and suffering.

Islam is a religion of humanity. Islam considers serving others as a great act of worship. According to the teachings of Islam, it is only in serving people that we shall have a share in God's mercy. □



PROCESSION OF DEATH

The Final Journey

A COFFIN is being carried aloft towards the grave. It seems like a journey, not just from one point to another, but from man's beginning to his end.

When man is born, he immediately has recourse to a mother's compassion and a father's protection. He grows up among friends and relatives. On reaching adulthood he forges ahead on his chosen path through life.

His journey continues until finally death comes. Those relatives who had supported him through life now carry him to his final resting place. They lay him under a mound of earth where he is alone; where there is just him and his Lord.

Up till that point, he had been confronted with humans like himself; now he is face to face with God infinitely greater than him. Till then he had been in a world where he had power of his own, but now he finds himself absolutely powerless. Man, the most helpless of creatures, will come before God the All-Powerful—a meeting so awesome that it is almost beyond imagining.

People are continually dying here on earth. Not a day goes by without our seeing or hearing of the death of someone. Yet we fail to realize

Man, the most helpless of creatures, will come face to face with a God infinitely greater than him.

A meeting so awesome that it is almost beyond imagining.

the implications of death. This is because we lack a living mental picture of Heaven and Hell. We are preoccupied with unrelated matters—busy making homes for ourselves instead of looking to our eternal home; we are only concerned with worldly profit-making and not caring to do enough to earn the life everlasting; we are too involved with improving our position in society rather than to consolidate our relation with God. We think of every human being in the same worldly terms, so when a person dies, we feel only a sense of loss that one who gave so much to

the world has been taken away from it. We see man in relation to this ephemeral world, but fail to see him in relation to the next eternal world. How then can we realize the true implications of death? How can we see that, as one is laid to "rest", one is, in fact, being led to one's meeting with the Lord and one's eternal fate? □

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 CE. It is a book that brings glad tidings to mankind, along with divine admonition, and stresses the importance of man's discovery of the Truth on a spiritual and intellectual level.

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

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

He frowned and turned away when the blind man approached him, for how can you know that he might seek to purify himself, or take heed and derive benefit from [Our] warning? As for him who was indifferent, you eagerly attended to him—though you are not to be blamed if he would not purify himself—but as for one who comes to you, eagerly and in awe of God you pay him no heed. Indeed, this [Quran] is an admonition. Let him who will, pay heed to it. It is set down on honoured pages, exalted and purified by the hands of noble and virtuous scribes. Woe to man! How ungrateful he is! Of what [stuff] has He created him? Out of a drop of sperm! He creates and proportions him, He makes his path easy for him. (80: 1-20)

The Prophet Muhammad was once preaching to the chiefs of the Quraysh in Makkah, when a blind man, 'Abdullah ibn Umm al-Maktum, arrived at the gathering and said, 'O, Prophet of God! Please teach me something of what God has taught you.' The arrival of a blind person at this juncture displeased the Prophet. These verses were revealed on that occasion. In these verses the apparent addressee is the Prophet Muhammad, but in the eyes of God, those prominent people who have turned away from religion have no value. Before God, the valued person is the one who is imbued with the God-fearing spirit, though apparently he may be a 'blind' person.

Then He causes him to die and be buried. Then when He pleases, He will bring him back to life. Yet man declines to do His bidding. Let man reflect on the food he eats. We let the rain pour down in torrents and then We cleaved the earth asunder. We make the grain grow out of it, and grape vines and vegetables, and olive trees and date palms

and burgeoning enclosed gardens and fruits and fodder as provision for you and for your cattle to enjoy. But when the deafening blast is sounded, on that Day a man shall flee from his own brother, his mother, his father, his wife and his sons: on that Day every man among them will have enough concern of his own—on that Day some faces will be beaming, laughing, and rejoicing, but some faces will be covered with dust and overcast with gloom: those will be ones who denied the truth and were immersed in iniquity. (80: 21-42)

The driving force behind the true godliness required of a man is in reality his sense of gratitude. If he gives serious consideration to his creation and the various natural systems around him, he will eventually develop a sense of gratitude towards his Lord. The state of being resulting from these feelings of gratitude and obligation is known as godliness, or adoration of God in the real sense.

Rejection of truth and being arrogant about it are the worst crimes. Arrogant people will have absolutely no personal worth in the Hereafter, while those who accept the Truth and bow down before it are the ones who will carry weight in the Hereafter. The honour and successes of the Hereafter will be theirs. □



Competitive World

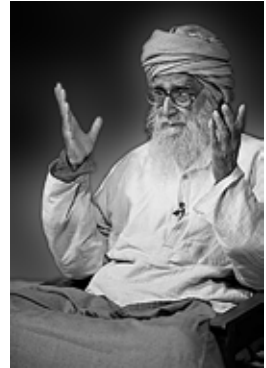
In the competitive world of today, those who want concessions will always find themselves in the back seat. It is only those who make every effort to earn excellent qualifications who will ever come to the fore.

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

**SOPHIA SCHAFFER IN CONVERSATION
DIALOGUE-PLUS
WITH MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN**

(Sophia Schafer is a student of Theology in Germany).



Together with the Jesuit scholar Father Victor Edwin (who teaches Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Vidya Jyoti College of Theology, a Jesuit centre in Delhi) I met Maulana Wahiduddin Khan twice in March 2016, in New Delhi. In this article I would like to present a portrait of this great Islamic scholar who is internationally recognized for his engagement in efforts for peace and interfaith understanding. He has been awarded many peace prizes, including the Demiurgus Peace International Award (under the patronage of the former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev), the Padma Bhushan, the Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavna Award and the National Citizen's Award. A recent book, *The 500 Most Influential Muslims of 2009* by Georgetown University, Washington DC, has named him "Islam's Spiritual Ambassador to the world."

Wahiduddin Khan was born on 1 January 1925 and grew up in Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh, India). He was educated in a traditional Islamic seminary, the Madrasatul Islah in Sarai Mir. Afterwards, he gained modern knowledge through self-study. His brothers had studied in secular, Western-style institutions in the 1940s, and members of his family were engaged in India's independence struggle. So, the young Wahiduddin found himself exposed to many questions about religion, politics, society and his own future. Highly influenced by Gandhian ideals, he stood for non-violence, peace dialogue and peace. In 1970, he founded the Islamic Centre in New Delhi, and in 2001, the Centre for Peace and Spirituality.

The Islamic Centre publishes a monthly journal in Urdu called *Al-Risala*, while the journal *Spirit of Islam* contains his articles in English. He has translated the Quran into Urdu, with versions in English and Hindi, and has authored over 200 books on Islam, Prophetic wisdom, spirituality, and peaceful co-existence in multi-ethnic societies, including *The Prophet of Peace*, *The Teachings of Prophet Muhammad*, *True Jihad*, *Peace and Inter-Community Relations in Islam*, *The Ideology of Peace*, and *The Age of Peace*. Even at the present age of 91, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

is actively engaged in scholarly work, interacting with people and engaging with groups working for interfaith and peace efforts.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan invited Father Victor Edwin and me to his house in New Delhi. As his granddaughters Maria and Sufia (who are graduates in Islamic Studies) led us up the stairs to his living room, I already felt happy and blessed to be welcomed so openly at his home—I, a “stranger”, a “foreigner”, having grown up in a completely different context and following another religion, too.

I asked the Maulana how he understands interfaith dialogue. There are three types of dialogue, he replied. The first is debate, that is, when someone wants to win by showing or proving his or her theology's superiority. The Maulana says that this actually is no dialogue at all. It even kills the spirit of dialogue and makes people either scream in anger or be silent. The second is the search for unity. This means that you try to unite all religious doctrines by seeking to eliminate their differences. But by this people also deny their own identities and the distinguishing thoughts, understandings and behaviours that characterize their lives and communities. Nature, traditions and social structures are never uniform and cannot pretend to be, the Maulana says. The third form of dialogue is intellectual partnership. In this case, we learn from and about each other, and even about ourselves by being shown a mirror from another perspective. This, the Maulana says, is the only genuine way of dialogue.

These days, the Maulana says, many Christians are skeptical of Islam and do not listen to its wisdom and see its beauty. Many Muslims, on the other hand, he says, have developed a certain arrogance and are not interested in others anymore. But the Maulana wants to remind us of something that Jesus says: to love our neighbours, and even to love our enemies! Solidarity and harmony in religiously-plural societies are possible if we not only love people of our own faith communities but also those who do not belong to our religion or subscribe to our way of thinking.

According to the Maulana, Islam seeks to establish peace and bring people together. Yes, some Muslims got lost on the way and began to take to the course of violence. But people should follow the path of peace that Moses, Isaiah, Jesus and Muhammad and all the other prophets have shown: “Those are the ones whom God has guided, so from their guidance take an example”(QURAN 6:90). The key is never to be extreme in your religion, but to believe in the goodness and justice of God. Interfaith dialogue brings people together to talk about their lives

and become partners, working on this in the spirit of God, who is there for the entire humanity, even if we may understand God differently. We might learn to see a different face of God's grace in the other's eyes.

How can we do this? The Maulana explains this by invoking something that Jesus teaches us: that man shall not live by bread alone. The Maulana says (in a video podcast) that for him this means that although bread is just baked flour, in the eyes of a believer it can become more than bread: we could call it "bread-plus". That is, he or she will be able to see the deeper spiritual lesson in everything. When a believer eats food, he will not simply engage in the act of eating. Rather, he would also think about all the many processes in nature that help in the production and development of food. This would engender profound thankfulness to God for creating so many beneficial things for human beings. In this way, a believer would try to see the spiritual in every material event, causing him to develop God-consciousness. Accordingly, he would exist not only at the physical level but would be nourished at the spiritual level also. This is how a believer converts "bread" into "bread-plus", or the material into a non-material or spiritual lesson.

By understanding the spiritual character of things, we see things and people who are with us as gifts from God. God nourishes us, makes our environment and life beautiful, gives us love and wisdom, which we cannot produce out of ourselves. Water not only quenches our thirst, it also freshens and cleanses us. In hot weather, a glass of water can cool us down. It becomes "water-plus". Likewise, two persons are not only two, but a community, if they come into contact. They become a community, "people-plus". The ones, who see the "plus" in life, will flourish.

I was very inspired by a great Muslim scholar sharing his view of Biblical stories and sayings of Jesus, and even asking Father Victor Edwin and me to share our opinions on his camera. This was the dialogue we talk about all the time! The Maulana went further and asked Father Edwin to pray for all the Muslims in the room who had come to hear the Maulana speak before they started to offer their *namaz* (prayer).`

Did we pray together?

Yes, everybody prayed—to God, the One and Only!

I cannot say exactly what was on other peoples' minds—the other Christians and the Muslims—but I'm sure God hears and knows. Many people came to us afterwards and the whole room was filled with conversation, and I realized: Yes, God had brought us together! This was "dialogue-plus"! □

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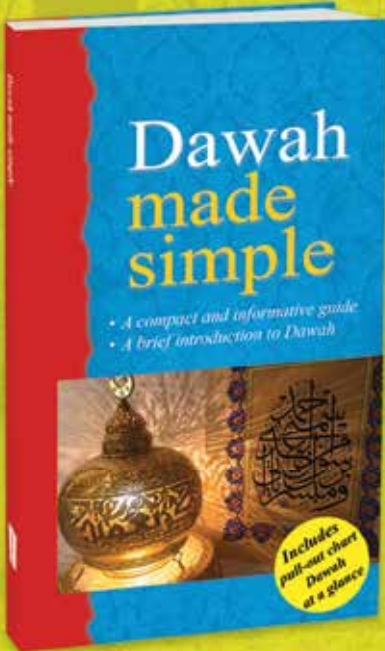
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Spirit Of Islam | Issue 45 | September 2016 | 52 Pages
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Regd. Under Postal Regn. No: KRNA/BGE-1101/2015-2017 | RNI No: KARENG/2012/46265
Posted at Bangalore PSO, Mysore Road, Bangalore-560026 on 24/26th of every month



Printed, published & owned by

Fathima Sarah, 002, HM Wimberly, 6 Berlie Street Cross, Langford Town, Bangalore - 560025
Printed at Cosmos Printers and Publishers, 450, 3rd Cross, Wilson Garden, Bangalore - 560027