

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Setbacks of life can be blessings in disguise.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Spirit of Islam is a monthly magazine which is now in its sixth year of publication. The aim of this journal is to present Islam in the contemporary idiom, while at the same time the contents are of universal appeal and of interest to a wider circle of spiritual seekers. It is our desire to help Muslims rediscover Islam, focusing on its message of peace and spirituality as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, and in general we strive towards religious understanding for bringing about greater harmony.

Another purpose of this magazine is to assist its readers to deal with life's challenges, deriving positivity even from negative occurrences, gaining in spirituality and developing themselves intellectually so that they may contribute constructively to society.

The magazine's regular readers will appreciate that the entire thrust of its articles is directed to the individual—a collection of intellectually prepared individuals being the sole foundation on which a peaceful and harmonious society can be built.

As the subtitle indicates, *Spirit of Islam* is working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The articles on peace based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam offer us an ideology of peace—principles which lay down how peace may be established between conflicting groups, controversies resolved and conflicts defused. We believe that violence begins in the mind and so an effective ideology of peace needs to be presented to counter its influence.

We hope and pray that God helps us in this noble endeavour and grants us His special blessings!



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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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CHIEF EDITOR

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
www.facebook.com/maulanawkhan

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

PROF. FARIDA KHANAM

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

DR. NAGHMA SIDDIQI
MARIA KHAN
PROF. ZAHEERUDDIN
AIJAZ AHMED
MOHAMMAD USMAN

PRINTER AND PUBLISHER

FATHIMA SARAH

OFFICE

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



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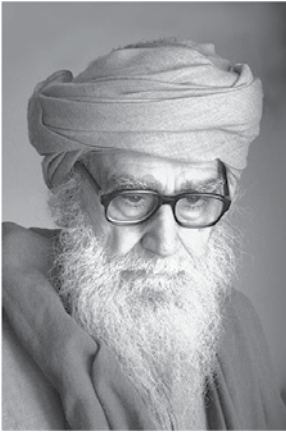
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

ASPIRING FOR MORE AND SETTLING FOR LESS

IN the present world, there are many people who have become habituated to a number of addictions like alcohol, tobacco and psychotropic drugs. It is well known that these habits are very bad for health; yet, people are unable to give up these habits that eventually become addictions.

I have often met such people and, curious to know why they were entrapped in this unhealthy habit, asked a person the reason. He smiled and said to me, “*Ye mere liye ek bhulawa habit hai*” (This is how I try to forget my frustrations). He told me he knew full well that this was a harmful habit but still, he said, he did it to lessen his pain.

I studied several people to understand why they live in frustration and pain. There is no other reason for this, except that of having unrealistic goals. As people grow older and seek material progress, they often fail, because of their own ambition, and their inability to distinguish between what is realistic and what is unrealistic in the workplace. A realistic job is always doable; an unrealistic job is quite the reverse. When they take up an unrealistic job and find, throughout the rest of

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2018, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

their lives, that its targets are never achievable, they live in a state of perpetual anxiety. Faced with the demands of day-to-day life, neither are they able to leave their jobs nor be comfortable at it. The result is frustration.

There is a way out. Adopt a unique formula, *aspiring for more and settling for less*. One is ambitious by nature and therefore feels compelled to aim for unachievable goals. At the same time, one should reason and become aware of their inherent weaknesses and accept the fact that

***Happiness is
an internal
phenomenon; it
is not an external
achievement.***

no one has the power to ideally achieve all the things that they want. Therefore, a successful person is one who adopts the formula of desiring more but remaining satisfied with less.

If you are living in contentment, then you will be happy. But if you are discontented with what you have achieved, you are bound to live in a state of unhappiness. If you become aware of this fact, you will easily be able to

fulfil your ambitions and instantly achieve happiness. Happiness is an internal phenomenon; it is not an external achievement.

Jawaharlal Nehru completed his studies in law from Allahabad University following which he practised in the Allahabad High Court. He first wanted to make his career in the field of law but he was not successful. He then took the second option of politics and became successful as a politician.

In this world, there are always several options and if one option does not work, one should take another and try it out. Of course, it is not as easy as it sounds, especially for the less privileged, but the right attitude may help one deal better with life's challenges.

Every person should realize that the world in which they are to lead their life is full of options. All one needs to do is refuse to succumb to despair and embark immediately on an alternative option even if that option was never the first choice. That is the secret of success. Don't give up, plan once again, try something new and look ahead with hope. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org

Follow Maulana at speakingtree.in

FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Dr. Farida Khanam has been a professor at the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. A Study of World's Major Religions, A Simple Guide to Sufism are two of the books amongst many others, of which she is the author. She has also translated many books on Islam authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently, the chairperson of Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS International), an organization founded by her father Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, she is a regular contributor of articles to journals, newspapers and magazines. Dr. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. Under Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Peace Foundation, along with the CPS team, she has designed a series of courses on peace-building, countering extremism and conflict resolution.

THE STATUS OF WOMAN IN ISLAM

O mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul. He created its mate from it and from the two of them spread countless men and women [throughout the earth]. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations in respect of ties of kinship. God is always watching over you.

(THE QURAN 4: 1)

THIS verse of the Quran tells us that God has created man and woman from the same soul, that is, from the same substance. The entire human race has come from Adam and Eve—the first man and the first woman. Looked at in this way, human beings on this earth are blood brothers and blood sisters.

A study of the Quran and *Hadith* tells us that in Islam a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. The Quran says:

You are members, one of another. (3: 195)

There is no difference between the two as regards status, rights and blessings both in this world and in the Hereafter.

Another verse of the Quran reads:

It is He who created you from a single soul and made from him his mate so that he might find comfort in her. (7: 189)

This verse stresses the aspect of commonness between man and woman, that is, both are a source of comfort to one another.

The word 'comfort' relates to all the activities of life, meaning thereby that God has created men and women in such a way that they assist one another in all matters of life, in order to traverse life's journey peacefully and successfully.

There is another verse in the Quran which tells us that men and women have equal status in God's eye. None is superior to the other.

I will not let the deeds of any doer among you go to waste, be he male or female. You are members, one of another. (3: 195)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the well-known commentator on the Quran, remarks in his commentary on this verse:

"In Islam the equal status of the sexes is not only recognized but insisted on. If sex distinction, which is a distinction in nature, does not count in spiritual matters, artificial distinctions, such as rank, wealth, position, race, colour, birth, etc., would count even less."

Thus it will be the very same virtues in thought, word and deed which will be prerequisites for both sexes to enter Paradise. If the qualities of piety, humility, honesty, patience and compassion are demanded of men, they are in like measure demanded of women as well.

There is a *Hadith* which also explains that "women are the other half of men." That is, they are equal halves of one another.

The Quran says that men are in charge of, that is, 'maintainers' of women (4: 34). This does not mean that men have a distinctive status over women. Being maintainers of women has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment. It rather concerns the practical management of the home, for which the man is held responsible. However, this does not mean that a woman will never be allowed to shoulder these responsibilities. If she finds that she can bear this burden, no objection will be raised from any quarter.

Hijab in Islam

Now the question arises as to the concept of veil in Islam. Nasiruddin al-Albani, a famous scholar, has written a book titled *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was Sunnah*. The author has discussed the subject in the light of the Quran and *Hadith*. He says that whenever a woman steps out of her home it is incumbent upon her to cover herself completely

so as not to show any part of her body except the face and the hands. According to his findings the following rules of *Hijab* must be observed by a woman:

The whole body, except for the exempted parts should be covered.

Any veil which in itself becomes an attraction is to be avoided.

Garments should not be transparent.

Dress should not be tight-fitting accentuating the body.

The first rule of *Hijab* has been derived from the following verse of the Quran.

Say to believing women that they should lower their gaze and remain chaste and not reveal their adornments save what is normally apparent thereof.... (24: 31)

Allama Nasiruddin al-Albani interprets the wording "to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed", to mean that the hands and face are exempt from covering.

He has drawn extensively from the *Hadith* in support of his argument. After studying the interpretations in connection with the Quranic verses (24: 31, 33: 59) he writes: "It is clear from the instances drawn from the Quran and the *Hadith* that though it is preferable for a woman to cover her face, it is not compulsory for her to do so."

"It would be better if women followed this practice, but there is no harm if they do not." He concludes his argument with these words: "The garment should cover the entire body of a woman except the face and hands, and should not become an attraction in itself. Neither should it be thin or tight. It should not accentuate the body."

This exemption of face, hands and feet, derived from verse 31 of chapter 24 is extremely important. This shows that Islam does not intend to stop women from going out to receive education or to work but rather desires them to observe the Islamic culture known as *Hijab*. *Hijab* requires a dress which properly covers the body, for a woman is obliged to observe the rules of modesty.

Another vital matter concerning women is education. A study of the life of the Prophet of Islam tells us that education is as essential for women as it is for men. The actual goal of education from the Islamic point of view is to make a person aware. And without doubt it is only aware men and women who can conduct the practical matters of life smoothly.

We find an example in this connection in the life of the Prophet of Islam in relation to his wife Aisha. There are many reports that tell us that the Prophet's conversations with Aisha were aimed at educating her. Aisha says that when the Prophet of Islam would get up at night after a few hours, in that peaceful atmosphere he would converse with her for a long time. (*Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim*). This course of informal education continued uninterrupted, for Aisha used to accompany the Prophet even on his journeys.

This informal education was so important for Aisha that she became the most distinguished personality so far as religious knowledge was concerned. She survived the Prophet for a full fifty years. Throughout this period she remained a very valuable source for the acquisition of religious knowledge. Her house served as a school of religious learning.

In the early period of Islam—regarded as model for all believers—we have a number of examples that show that women used to take part in practical matters. For instance Khadija, the Prophet's wife, conducted business, and Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter helped with giving first aid to the wounded in battle. Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter, looked after her camels and date orchard, etc.

Modern civilization believes in equality, which means there is no difference between the two genders. But Islam regards this equality as unnatural. In the light of Islamic teachings men and women both are, without doubt, equal. In God's eyes, both have equal rights and duties. Owing to their biological structure, however, they are different from one another. That is to say, they are equal but different.

The characteristics of true believers, both men and women, are referred to in the Quran in these words:

Those.... who are devout, sincere, patient, humble, charitable and chaste, who fast and are ever mindful of God—on these both men and women, God will bestow forgiveness and a rich reward. (33: 35)

These are the attributes which both men and women must cultivate if they want to become God's favoured servants. These are the qualities that form the basis of Islam, and are the true means of salvation in the Hereafter. □

Dr. Farida Khanam
hub@thespiritofislam.org

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS

A Superior Life

PSYCHOLOGISTS have estimated that man puts to use only ten percent of the abilities with which he is born. Professor William James of Harvard University has very aptly observed, "What we ought to be, we are not ready to be." In spite of the innate qualities nature has endowed us with, the successes which should have been ours in this world keep eluding us for the simple reason that we quite unthinkingly consent to lead inferior lives.

It is most important that we should consciously seek out the principles which will lead us towards a superior life and get a share in the success. A few of these principles are elucidated here.

Learn the Difference between Motion and Direction

Not knowing the difference between motion and direction is a road block to success. One intrinsic quality of activity is movement. When you are walking, driving or riding a bicycle, you are moving but in what direction? Are you moving towards your destination, or away from it? The actual motion in both cases seems to be no different in quality. The difference between the two is that the former brings you ever nearer to your destination, while the latter takes you farther and farther away from it—leaving you where? Nowhere, at least nowhere worth going. It is direction that is all important. Even if we only get on to the slow-moving bullock cart or a cycle rickshaw, we shall do better than a jet plane which has no sense of direction.

Starting out in the right direction is the first important principle of success.

Both in our private lives and social existence it is imperative that we take stock of our means and resources and then set off in the right direction, if sooner or later, we are to reach our destination.

Often people launch themselves on careers without giving due thought to their actual capacities and whether they have any real potential which can be developed. Starting out in the right direction is the first important principle of success.

Start From Small Beginnings

This is another important principle one should accept wholeheartedly

to climb the ladder of success. Progress can seldom be made by leaps and bounds. The climb is up the ladder one step after another, you cannot make a success of your life by the lift expecting it to do everything for you. There are no buttons which you can just push and then automatically reach your goals. You can only make progress step by step.

Accept the Law of Nature

There is a price to be paid for every end in life; without paying that price, nothing can be achieved. In this world one has to sink before one can rise; one has to resign oneself to loss before one can gain; to backwardness before one can advance; one has to be able to accept defeat before one can claim victory. The world in which man lives has been created by God, not by man himself. This may appear to be a simple fact, but it is one that man usually forgets in his everyday life. Since we are living in God's world, we have no alternative but to understand His laws, and follow them. There is no other way we can make a place for ourselves in the world.

Those who wish to advance and be successful in life without passing through the necessary stages, will have to build another world for themselves—one which satisfies their own requirements; for in the world that God has created, their dreams can never come true.

Thus anyone who wants success to come their way in this world will first have to make themselves deserving of it. They must know their strengths and weaknesses and circumstances. They must organize and channelize their energies properly. They must enter the field fully equipped in every respect, then others cannot fail to recognize their true value. They must be like the tree which forces its way up through the undergrowth to take its place in the sun. □



Imaginary Problems

If the problem concerns the future, it is a non-existent problem, simply based on fear. Why bother about something which has not yet happened? Maybe it never will.

GIVE NATURE A CHANCE

An Achievable Target

AN educated person who used to consider himself a social activist worked in the field for decades. He suddenly stopped social work completely and when asked about the reason behind his decision, he replied that he used to think he was a social activist, but in reality all this while, he had only been a social critique. He realized that he had been wasting his time in negative speech and writing instead of giving anything positive to the world.

This remark is not only applicable to the above social activist, but holds true for all those whose work is targeted at the system. The reason is that they set their goal as reformation of the system—for example, eradicating injustices and disparities. However, when they are not successful in achieving their goals, they lay the blame on the government or authorities. They begin to write and speak against the system, and at times even resort to violence.

All these people have set themselves unachievable targets as their goals—for instance, the elimination of inequalities, which is not possible in this world. Since they cannot achieve their target, such people remain permanently negative.

Deeper analysis shows that what these people regard as social justice or economic parity cannot be attained in its ideal sense. Trying to set this as one's target is akin to making an unachievable objective as one's aim. This causes people to become negative, intolerant and even violent.

The root cause for this state of affairs is a lack of understanding of the law of nature. There are certain phenomena which arise due to the law of nature. If people consider these phenomena a result of the system, then they develop radical thinking leading to clashing with the system and causing the initiation of an unending conflict. But if these issues are attributed to nature, they would be managed normally.

The truth is that the present world is based on challenge and competition. Success in life is associated with what British historian Arnold Toynbee has referred to as the 'challenge-response mechanism'.

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In the face of challenges, a person's mind automatically tries to find a solution. Here, the matter is man versus nature. When faced with a challenge, a person would make effort for peaceful management of the situation and thus succeed. However, if a person attributes the problems or challenges to the system or an authority, he would clash with them and even perpetrate violence to vent his anger.

When certain reformers study human life they observe some unwanted phenomenon, for which they coin words such as 'discrimination', 'injustice', 'victimization' etc. Such people should consider those persons who were able to make progress against all odds, for example

A life full of challenges is not due to any particular system, rather it is the way the world has been made.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) who started his life in abject poverty, but later on emerged as the principal architect of the Constitution of India. Similarly, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam had humble beginnings but went on to hold the highest office of the country.

When a person finds himself among the deprived classes of society, a law of nature begins to play a very important role in his life. He develops the incentive to achieve all that which he could not gain through the

circumstances in which he was born. Had he blamed his circumstances on the system, then instead of working for his self-development he would have become negative towards the system.

A life full of challenges is not due to any particular system, rather it is the way the world has been made. In such a situation if we struggle to fight with the system, our actions go against the very creation plan of God. Thus the matter does not remain 'man versus man' but becomes 'man versus God'. This is why in this situation, peaceful management alone can be effective on the path to success. □



Adjust to the Divine Plan

A person has only two choices—either he should adjust to the divine plan and be successful or go against it and be ready to face failure.

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.



PROPHET OF PEACE

DUE to the intolerance and violent extremism of small groups of people who call themselves ‘Muslims’, Islam is currently widely perceived to be a religion of violence, with objectives that appear to be achievable only through terrorism. This, however, is untrue.

Islam is not the name given to the behaviour or the actions of a particular group of people who call themselves ‘Muslims’. Islam is a system of beliefs and ethics, and people who say that they hold those beliefs and value those ethics are called Muslims. It follows, then, that the behaviour of Muslims must be judged by the principles of Islam and not vice versa. Islam cannot be evaluated based on the actions of Muslims.

If individuals calling themselves ‘Muslims’ adopt terrorism or violence, then the responsibility for their actions lies with them, not with the religion they profess. In spite of their professed Islamic agenda, the actions of such people cannot be deemed Islamic. Islam is not the name given to the behaviour or the actions of a particular group of people who call themselves Muslims. Islam is the name of the revealed religion professed by the Prophet Muhammad, and exemplified in his life. The Prophet Muhammad was a prophet of peace, not a prophet of violence. In the Quran, he is called a ‘mercy to humankind’.

Ali ibn Abi Talib was the son-in-law of the Prophet of Islam. When a boy was born in his household, Ali named him *Harab*, meaning war. Arab

tribes were frequently at war and took pride in names that displayed a warrior like nature. When the Prophet heard about the boy's name, he asked Ali to change the name to *Hasan*, meaning goodness. From this incident we can get an idea of the personality of the Prophet of Islam.

His was a peace-loving personality in the complete sense. His peace-loving nature was so heightened that he did not even like to hear the word *Harab* which had connotations of violence. Whereas *Harab* was a symbolic name for violence, *Hasan* was a name that symbolized peace. The Prophet of Islam believed in cultivating a peaceful character.

Zaid ibn Muhalhil, a poet from Najd, was born before the Prophet. He was also a skilled swordsman and horse rider, because of which he was known as Zaid-ul-Khail. Khail means horse, and in those days,

horses were associated with cavalry. When Zaid embraced Islam, the Prophet did not like his title and changed it from Zaid-ul-Khail to Zaid-ul-Khair. *Khail* was a symbolic name associated with battles and violence. *Khair*, on the other hand, was symbolic of peace and goodness.

The Prophet of Islam believed in cultivating a peaceful character. The Prophet conveyed God's guidance to humankind in a peaceful manner.

The Prophet changed the direction of Zaid's character by changing his name. He instructed him to be a professor of goodness, giving the gifts of peace and prosperity to people instead of being a harbinger of death and violence.

He wanted his followers to do good works for the people, giving them the message of peace and prosperity and not of death and destruction.

From these examples we can understand that peace was the guiding principle of the Prophet's character. The battles that took place during his life were only incidental and under exceptional circumstances, rather than being the main features of his life. However, most of the Prophet's biographers have painted an altogether different picture of him. Instead of presenting him as a prophet of peace they have portrayed him as a prophet of violence.

The battles which were fought during the Prophet's time were related to the culture then prevailing amongst the Arab tribes.

The Prophet Muhammad was born in the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe of Arabia. At that time, Arabia was divided into many different tribes, each with several clans, all vying for domination. Fights between tribes and clans over trivial issues were common. Due to this

culture, there were skirmishes between the Prophet's followers and their opponents. Most of the incidents that have been presented by the biographers of the Prophet as battles can be better classified as minor skirmishes instead.

The Prophet Muhammad was born in the year 570 AD in Makkah and attained prophethood at the age of forty in the year 610 AD. He began his mission of conveying God's guidance to humankind in a peaceful manner. There was never any act of violence by the Prophet against those who objected to his teachings or oppressed him and his followers during the entire thirteen years of his life as a prophet in Makkah. While he was in Makkah, his teachings were always those of patience, tolerance and avoidance.

One of his Companions, Ammar, of the family of Yasir, was tortured by the Prophet's opponents, but the Prophet said, "O Yasir's family, forbear with patience, surely your compensation is Paradise." (*Seerah ibn Kathir*)

Another of his Companions, Khabbab ibn Arth, complained to the Prophet about the oppression by the Quraysh. When the Prophet heard this, he said, "This is nothing; messengers before us have suffered much more for having upheld the message of *tawhid* (oneness of God)." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

The behaviour of Muslims must be judged by the principles of Islam and not vice versa. Islam cannot be evaluated based on the actions of Muslims.

The Prophet and his followers had to face the hardships of a three-year social boycott by their tribe, and they spent this time in tolerating and patiently enduring their difficulties. His opponents plotted to kill him, so he quietly escaped from Makkah with a few of his Companions to Madinah. He gave the same advice to his followers.

Even in Madinah his opponents did not leave the Prophet and his followers in peace. They did everything possible to make life miserable for them. The Quran says: "Will you not fight against those who have broken their oaths and conspired to banish the Messenger? They were the first to attack you. Do you fear them? Surely God is more deserving of your fear, if you are true believers." (9: 13)

The outcome of these hostilities were the battles of Badr and Uhud. Even after this when the Prophet got to know that his opponents were marching towards Madinah with an army of 10,000, he employed a strategy of avoidance by creating a trench outside Madinah due to which an armed conflict was averted.

The Prophet was on a divine mission to present God's message to humankind. Any mission of communication can only be successful when the circumstances are harmonious and peaceful. In an atmosphere of violence and warfare, no mission, however strong, can be successful. In such a situation, even minor differences can instantaneously escalate to violent conflict and war. For an atmosphere of peace, though, a price has to be paid, and that was in the form of perseverance in the face of all obstacles; in ignoring the problems whilst availing of the opportunities.

The Prophet's opponents were constantly provoking him and his followers to engage with them in battle over small issues, but the Prophet and his Companions always chose the divine teachings of patience and forbearance to circumvent conflict.

....Whenever they kindle the fire of war, God puts it out... (THE QURAN 5: 64)

In the 6th year in Madinah, the Prophet entered into a 10-year peace treaty called the Treaty of Hudaibiya with his opponents by accepting all of their conditions. Two years later, when the Makkans were forced to surrender to the Muslims, his opponents were brought before the

Any mission of communication can only be successful when the circumstances are harmonious and peaceful. In an atmosphere of violence and warfare, no mission, however strong, can be successful.

Prophet. These people had troubled the Prophet and his Companions for many years, having forced them to leave their homes and properties in Makkah. They had committed many atrocities on him and his people. They were established war criminals and captives. According to the prevailing tribal custom, the punishment for such crimes was death. The Prophet, however, did not even allow them to be insulted and, instead, announced a general pardon in the following words: "Go, you are free".

If we were to objectively study the entire 23 years of Muhammad's prophetic life, it would be absolutely clear that Muhammad was a prophet of peace, not a prophet of violence.

If we compare the Prophet's battles with other battles in history, we will find that the mission of the Prophet was a non-violent mission; and the battles that happened were defensive in nature and only happened under exceptional circumstances.

The number of people killed in these battles was very few when compared to the casualties of many other battles in history. Sorting

in order of the number of casualties or by the duration of battles in history, the armed conflicts that the Prophet Muhammad and his people were forced to engage in, do not even figure in the records.

Before the Prophet's birth, there was an ongoing conflict between two major tribes of Madinah, the Aws and the Khazraj. It is said that this war continued for 120 years and thousands of people perished in these battles, the prominent one of which was known by the name of Battle of Buath. (*Ibn Ishaq*)

As a comparison here are some details of some of the famous battles in the history of humankind¹.

Battle / War	Period	Duration	Casualties
World War I	1914 - 1918	4 years	Over 15 million
World War II	1939 - 1945	6 years	About 65 million
American Civil War	1861 - 1865	4 years	About 500,000
Iran Iraq War	1980 - 1988	8 years	Over 500,000
Battle of Waterloo	18 Jun 1815	1 day	47,000
Battle of Panipat	14 Jan 1761	1 day	Over 100,000
Gulf War	Aug 1990-Feb 1991	7 months	25,000
Iraq War	Mar 2003-Dec 2011	8 ½ years	35,000

In comparison to the above sampling of battles from history, the defensive battles fought by the Prophet were those at Badr, Uhud and Hunain. The combined total duration of actual fighting was equivalent to only 1½ days². The total number of casualties in all these battles was 1,018.

Because of a lack of objective understanding of the Prophet's life, Muslim biographers have misrepresented the facts by ignoring the prevailing customs and culture of the time. Due to this, their writings about the Prophet's life show a war-like pattern. On the other hand, non-Muslim biographers of the Prophet have adopted a different approach. These people have largely ignored the main events of the Prophet's life choosing to focus on a few, exceptional incidents that

1. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_battles_by_casualties

2. Battle of Badr (morning to noon) ~6 hrs; Battle of Uhud (one day) ~12 hrs; Battle of Hunain (one day) ~12 hrs

they have used as the basis of a picture of the Prophet's life they have painted, that portrays him as a warrior prophet.

They have also been unable to see the Prophet's life as different from Muslim culture, which has led them to assume that terrorism in the name of Islam is an outcome of the teachings of the Prophet of Islam.

The true modest personality of the Prophet appeared to many of his biographers as deficient in some way or the other. This image of the Prophet appeared to them as falling short of the standards of leaders of other peoples of the time, who were great conquerors and warriors. Hence these biographers tried to present a certain image of their Prophet, which, in their eyes was a superior image. This is the reason why, when we read the biographies of the Prophet we find that the Prophet is portrayed as a warrior prophet rather than a prophet of peace. The misleading image we get is that the Prophet relied on the power of the sword rather than the power of peace; that the Prophet believed in subduing and conquering his opponents rather than winning their hearts.

However, this picture of the Prophet is totally baseless and self-assumed. In truth, the Prophet's was a peace-loving personality. The example of the Prophet was not one of overpowering people by fighting with them; rather it was by winning the people over with love and compassion and giving them life. The Quran says:

Believers, obey God and His Messenger when he calls you to
that which gives you life. (8: 24)

It is obvious from an understanding of the Quran that the mission of the Prophet was different from that of emperors and kings. A king's purpose is to conquer and rule over people. Hence, the way of a king is one of conquests and wars. Without subduing people by force, a king will be unable to achieve his goal. On the other hand, the mission of a prophet is not to rule over people, but to change their minds and hearts towards spirituality; to teach them God-oriented living, making them divine personalities so that they can be successful in this world and the Hereafter; to make them peaceful personalities so that God will give them a place in His eternal 'Home of Peace'.

From the above analysis it should be obvious that the Prophet Muhammad was a prophet of peace, and not a prophet of violence. □



RE-ENGINEERING MINDS TOWARDS PEACE

MAULANA WAHIDDUDIN KHAN PEACE FOUNDATION was established under the aegis of CPS International, New Delhi on 2nd April 2016. The foundation carries forward the peace activism of CPS. It re-engineers minds towards a culture of peace, by conducting peaceful interfaith dialogue for peace-making. It aims to counter extremism by providing a network for peace globally.

Peace Foundation's Aims and Objectives

To re-engineer minds towards peace

To disseminate the ideology of peace

To train Ambassadors of peace

To develop and disseminate peace material

To counter extremism

To train in peaceful interfaith dialogue for peace-making

To train in conflict resolution

To develop and disseminate peaceful translations of the Quran

To disseminate peace literature free or at subsidized rates

To use media—television, radio, internet, social networking etc. effectively for educating for peace

To run offline and online courses for lifelong learning

To undertake academic researches on peace

To set up peace counters globally

To network for global peace and unity

THE WAY TO PEACE

CPS explains in all its activities that the practical way is to establish peace for its own sake, without linking it to justice and other conditions. As such, peace is not desirable for the sake of justice. It is desirable to establish normalcy. When normalcy is established it opens doors to opportunities, the peaceful availing of which leads to development, obtaining justice and all other constructive initiatives. The formula for peace and development being:

Ignore the problems and avail the opportunities. □

THE PHARAOH OF MOSES

Quranic Prediction

But we will this day deliver you with your body so that you may be a sign to those who come after you. And most surely the majority of the people are heedless of our signs. (THE QURAN 10: 92)

THIS passage from the Quran revealed in the seventh century, has reference to the death of Pharaoh near the Red Sea, while in pursuit of Moses and the Israelites, and indicates that his body was not lost in the sea, but cast ashore, and afterwards embalmed and that this should, in due course be made known to generations to come.

The Bible makes no mention of it, nor do we find anything about it in any book of history. Amongst the ancient Egyptian mummies that have been discovered is the body of the Pharaoh, Merneptah son of Ramses II, who has been identified with the Pharaoh of Moses. As early as the seventh century AD, the Quran had asserted that the Pharaoh's body was preserved as a sign for man, but it was only in the 19th century that the body's discovery gave concrete proof of this prediction.

Those who seek among modern data for proof of the veracity of the Holy Scriptures, will find a magnificent illustration of the above verse of the Quran dealing with the Pharaoh's body by visiting the Royal Mummies Room of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. □



Align Your Cogwheel with Nature's

A cogwheel is a toothed wheel that works with another cogwheel to facilitate movement.

Likewise life runs with the help of two cog wheels: one is yours and the other is nature's. For life to move on unhindered we have to align our cogwheel with that of nature's.

THE SUPERIORITY OF TRUTH

Truth is Supreme

ONCE an *'alim* (religious scholar) criticized his *Shaikh* (spiritual guide) having a difference of opinion with him. Someone pointed out to the *'alim* that it was not proper for him to differ with his mentor. The *'alim* replied, "The *Shaikh* is dear to me, but the truth is dearer to me than the *Shaikh*."

This incident tells us what the proper attitude should be in matters of differences of opinion and criticism. That is, each person must be accorded the respect and honour due to him. The human and ethical rights of everyone should be duly honoured. But when it is a matter of the truth, the truth will be held superior to everything. That is to say, if the issue is man versus man, personalities will be considered more important, but when the issue is man versus truth, the truth is important, in the absolute sense, while man's importance is relative.

Human behaviour is subordinate to ethics. But when it comes to truth, ethics itself will become subordinate to truth. It is because there is nothing greater in this world than truth. Truth is important because it is God's representative on earth. The appearance of truth is like the appearance of God. When God appears before one what else will be more important in comparison?

There is nothing greater in this world than truth. Truth is God's representative on earth.

This does not mean that one who claims to be the champion of truth will wield unlimited power over others. In this matter, the truth will be considered supreme, and not the person who claims to be the upholder of truth. In actual fact, the claimant of truth will be judged by the same standard as he employs for judging others. Anyone who does not come up to the standard of truth is to be condemned. The best course of action for such a person is to willingly accept the decree of truth against himself. Truth represents God in this world. That individual is blessed before whom when truth reveals itself and on recognizing it, he bows before it. □



DON'T LIVE IN SUSPICION

The Good Life

SUSPICION means believing something to be bad without there being any substantial evidence. In the social sense allowing suspicion to become a habit can have a disastrous effect on any society and in moral terms, suspicion is a sin. In both cases it is to be completely avoided.

One of the divine commandments given in the Quran is that of avoiding suspicion. In the chapter *Al-Hujurat* (The Apartments), the Quran gives important guidance:

Believers, avoid much suspicion. Indeed,
some suspicion is a sin. (49: 12)

The Prophet said: "Do not be suspicious of your fellow men." Suspicion is tantamount to a lie. When you suspect another person of some wrongdoing and you have no irrefutable evidence in support of your suspicion, you are committing falsehood. In other words, you are telling a lie.

Man being a social being, collective living is must for humankind in this world. Collective living is always based on mutual trust. Without mutual trust, no healthy society can be established. In a society where people are subject to misgivings and everyone becomes suspicious of everyone else, there can be no mutual trust.

The habit of suspicion is like smoking. It not only ruins the health of the individual who has this bad habit, but it also pollutes the whole of the social atmosphere. Suspicion is just like moral pollution. Just as air pollution is harmful for everyone so also is this kind of moral pollution. It is, in fact, like spiritual pollution.

All those living in society where the majority of its members are of a suspicious cast of mind, are bound to inhale its morally polluted air. Everyone is bound to suffer from bad health in terms of morality. So suspicion is not an individual, but rather a social evil.

In such a society, everyone becomes unpredictable, causing mutual trust to disappear. And an absence of mutual trust leads to many other problems. For example, in such a society, no one will dare to support any other person and then there can be no development of the culture of friendship.

There will be no unity and solidarity in such a society. This being so, its members will lose their self-confidence and will not venture to launch any large-scale projects. This is because such projects need collective efforts, and collective efforts are not possible in a society where people live in an atmosphere of suspicion.

Suspicion is not a solitary evil; it leads to many other evils. Suspicion is like a poisonous weed which rapidly multiplies in a jungle of moral evils. Suspicion has no plus points. On all counts it has only negative points. Anyone who wants to inculcate sound thinking in his mind must avoid suspicion at all costs.

Anyone who wants to inculcate sound thinking in his mind must avoid suspicion at all costs.

When the individual develops the habit of suspicion, it gradually becomes his second nature. He starts suspecting everything, he loses conviction and he feels that every person except himself is a suspicious person. He does not realize that suspicion is the result of confused thinking and that having a suspicious nature is very dangerous for himself as well as for other individuals.

Suspicion is a kind of confusion, and confusion is like poison to the mind. It is quite in order to form opinions about others, but it is completely wrong to form opinions about others based on suspicion. □



Peace leads to progress and development

War depends entirely on the aggressive use of weaponry and can only be a source of destruction. On the contrary, peace, based on education and positive planning, inevitably leads to progress and development.

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 SIMPLE FORMULA OF MA'ARIFAT

*I recognized my Lord by failing to execute my will.
— Ali ibn bin Abi Talib, the fourth Caliph of Islam.*

THIS is a simple formula of *Ma'arifat* or God realization. All human beings undergo such experiences daily when they realize that whatever they desired was not achieved. Sometimes this is a small experience and, sometimes a bigger one. Every such experience reminds man of his limitations. Such experience tells man that he can desire, but to achieve his desire is not in his control. Whenever any of a man's plans is unaccomplished, it reminds him of this reality that he has his limits.

Whenever man reaches his boundary, he should realize that immediately after this, the boundary of God starts; whether it is a small experience, for example, letting something fall from one's hand, or else a bigger experience, like a plan or idea not being fulfilled according to one's desire. If a man is intellectually awakened, he will discover God on every such occasion, and it will become a source of *Ma'arifat* or God realization for him.

This is the simple way in which man can derive food for *Ma'arifat* or God realization on all occasions. Whether one is educated or uneducated, rich or poor, owner or employee, one undergoes such experiences every day.

If a man awakens his mind, and he has the potential for contemplation, he will derive provision for *Ma'arifat* or God realization from every moment in his daily life. The fountain of *Ma'arifat* or God realization will flow continuously in his heart and mind. □

If a man is intellectually awakened, he will discover God on every occasion, and it will become a source of Ma'arifat or God realization for him.



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FAILURE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL SEARCH

Search for Truth

ALL philosophers are impelled by the search for truth. Down the centuries, all of them have sought to find or discover the truth through the path of knowledge. But experience shows that every philosopher has failed in his search.

The well-known English philosopher Bertrand Russell was no exception in this regard. Despite spending many years searching for the truth, he was unsuccessful. In this, he was no different from other philosophers. Yet, very few other philosophers acknowledged this failure of theirs. In contrast, Bertrand Russell honestly admitted his inability to find what he had spent much of his life seeking. In his autobiography, he wrote:

“When I survey my life, it seems to me to be a useless one, devoted to impossible ideals [...] My activities continue from force of habit, and in the company of others I forget the despair which underlies my daily pursuits and pleasure. But when I am alone and idle, I cannot conceal from myself that my life has no purpose, and that I know of no new purpose to which to devote my remaining years. I find myself involved in a vast mist of solitude, both emotional and metaphysical, from which I can find no issue.” □

Making Difficulties Stepping Stones of Life

*It is a fact that ease and facility are
constant obstacles to intellectual
development, while effort and difficulties
are stepping stones to the sharpening of
the intellect.*



USA

Centre for Peace and Spirituality
2665 Byberry Road, Bensalem, PA 19020
kkaleemuddin@gmail.com

FORGIVENESS

What is its Value?

ALMOST every day of our lives, we inescapably meet with some kind of bad experience, great or small, with people. One has two options; either to ignore it or try to take some counter measures. The first option is a form of forgiveness, while the other amounts to seeking revenge. Which is the better option? We must decide by looking at the outcome, for that will be the determining factor.

Forgiveness is certainly the better option, for it is based on a proven formula of saving yourself from even worse experiences. For example, forgiveness saves you from unworthy distractions, saves your precious time, and saves you from creating even more problems. It is an instant solution to any problem. On the contrary, taking revenge is bound to complicate the matter, for that means making everything go from bad to worse. Where forgiveness can buy time, taking revenge just wastes time without there being any benefit.

In such a situation, people are generally too prone to place the onus for the predicament entirely upon others. But this is an unwise reaction. The better plan is to examine one's own role in the affair. In other words, if you have had some sad experience, don't focus on the other person. Think about your own self and adopt a course of action which is better for you. Many times in our lives, we are faced with two kinds of choices; anti-other thinking and pro-self thinking. Anti-other thinking makes you descend to a low level, whereas pro-self thinking elevates you to a higher plane of human behaviour.

If forgiveness is a full stop, revenge is punctuated by commas. Forgiveness means ending an unwanted situation, while taking revenge means endlessly extending it. Forgiveness maintains your positive thinking uninterruptedly, while revenge fosters negativity. And negative thinking can lead to all kinds of evil actions.

Forgiveness is an instant solution to any problem. On the contrary, taking revenge is bound to complicate the matter.

Some would argue that forgiveness does not always work, and that it is better to adopt the tit-for-tat policy. But tit for tat is not a real solution; it does not end the problem, it only leads to a chain of action and reaction. Forgiveness puts an end to the problem once and for

all, while a tit-for-tat policy only aggravates and prolongs it. There are those who will argue that the policy of forgiveness will only encourage others to indulge in further wrongdoing against us. But this is a flimsy supposition and moreover, runs counter to the law of nature.

Psychological studies show that every human being is born with an ego and a conscience. If you follow the tit-for-tat policy, it arouses the ego of the other person, whereas if you follow the policy of forgiveness, it will activate the other person's conscience. And it is a fact that, in controversial matters, the conscience always plays a positive role.

The culture of forgiveness helps in the building of a better society—a society where positive values flourish, where the spirit of co-operation prevails.

The culture of forgiveness helps in the building of a better society—a society where positive values flourish, where the spirit of co-operation prevails, where disparate groups join together and turn themselves into a peaceful society. The outcome of vengefulness is quite the reverse. The revenge culture creates an environment of mistrust, in which everyone takes others as their rivals. In the final analysis, it rules out the growth of a healthy society.

Sooner or later, everyone is bound to do something wrong. But then the well-known saying “to err is human” should be borne in mind. This being so, taking revenge means making not just one mistake, but making mistake after mistake. On the contrary, forgiveness means undoing wrongs with rights. It is better to concede that, if to err is human, to forgive is even more human. Indeed it is this concept which is expressed in the well-known saying: “To err is human, but to forgive is divine.” □



***Free your mind
from prejudice***

*When one is free of prejudice
and predilection, one becomes a
super-planner.*

GOD ALMIGHTY

The One and Only

THERE are several kinds of beliefs about God. The concept of God in Islam is outlined here. The concept of God handed down to man by the Prophet is one of pure monotheism that is, "There is no god but one God". This prophetic concept has been briefly set forth in a short chapter of the Quran: "Say: He is God, the One, The Self-sufficient One. He does not give birth, nor was He born, and there is nothing like Him." (112: 1-4)

He is eternal and beyond time and space. He alone is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. *Allah* is the Arabic name.

Another passage in the Quran reads: "God: there is no deity save Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on earth. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all that is before them and all that is behind them. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; and their upholding does not weary Him. He is the Sublime, the Almighty One!" (2: 255)

"It is He who splits the grain and the date stone. He brings forth the living from the dead, and the dead from the living. He splits the sky into dawn. He has made the night for repose and the sun and the moon for reckoning. Such is the ordinance of God, the Mighty, the Wise. It is He who has created for you the stars, so that you may be guided by them in the darkness by land and sea. It is He who sends down water from the sky." (6: 95-99)

The following are a selection of a few more verses from different chapters of the Quran which describe God:

It is God who is your protector; He is the best supporter. He is aware of your inner most thought. He is forgiving and forbearing. It is God who gives life and causes death. He sees all that you do. God is sufficient for us, He is the best guardian. His bounty is infinite. God has the power to will anything. The kingdom of heavens and earth belong to God. He is always watching over us. He is sufficient as a Reckoner. All Knowing and Wise. He wishes to lighten your burdens. He wishes to explain things to you and guide you to the ways of those who have gone before you and to turn towards you in mercy. He is a witness to all things. God has full knowledge of what is in the human hearts.

All praise is due to Him in this world and the Hereafter. His is the Judgement and to Him we shall be returned. He is independent of all His creation.

“Say: He is God, the One, The Self-sufficient One. He does not give birth, nor was He born, and there is nothing like Him.”

We know those of God’s attributes which He has mentioned to us in the Quran. He is the Compassionate, the Merciful, The Sovereign, the Holy, All Peace, the Giver of peace, the Protector, the Irresistible, the Superb, the Maker, the Shaper, the Forgiving, the Dominant, All-Giving, the All-Providing, the Opener, the Seizer, the Expander, the Abaser, the Exalter, the Honourer, the Humiliator, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the Judge, the Just, the Subtle, the All-Aware, the All-Clement, the

All-Glorious, the Appreciative, the Sublime, the Great, the Guardian, the Reckoner, the Majestic, the Generous, the Watchful, the One Who Answers All, the All-Embracing, the Wise, the Loving, the Glorious, the Resurrector, the Truth, the Trustee, the All-Strong, the Firm, the Praiseworthy, the Originator, the Restorer, the Finder, the Noble, the Everlasting Refuge, the Powerful, the Prevailing, the Promoter, the Detainer, the First, the Last, the Evident, the Hidden, the All-Exalted, the Beneficent, the Acceptor of repentance, the Avenger, the Forgiving, the Gentle, the Lord of the Kingdom, the Lord of majesty and generosity, the Gatherer, the Enricher, the Withholder, the Afflictor, the Light, the Guide, the Innovative Creator, the Forbearing and the Everlasting. □



Successful crisis management results in peace

The result of successful crisis management is peace, whereas failure in crisis management leads to war and violence.

LOSERS CAN BE GAINERS

Benefits of Patience

AN elderly holy man living in a small town in northern India, once had the misfortune to witness the constant harassment of an outsider who had come there to take up residence. Just because he belonged to another community, he was subjected to all kinds of unfair treatment. When matters escalated, it became a point of communal prestige. Not wishing their untoward behaviour to be seen by others as such, the townspeople began to twist the story so that the whole blame would fall upon the outsider, while they themselves appeared entirely innocent.

However when the holy man was asked about what had really happened, he simply told the truth, that the townspeople were the wrongdoers and that the outsider was their victim.

At this, all the townspeople became enraged at the holy man, but he uttered no word of reproof, and carried on with his daily routine as if nothing had happened. Finally, one of the townspeople came to him one day and asked him why he was maintaining such a strict silence when so much was being said against him. He wanted to know if he was not worried at the infamy that was being heaped upon him. The holy man replied that there was no just cause for worry. "If I am quite content, it is because these people are distributing my sins amongst themselves. They are, in fact, taking the burden of my sins upon their own selves. Thus enabling me to enter into the next world, free of all burdens."

The blessing of compensation will await only those who remain patient under oppression for the sake of God.

Later, he narrated a *Hadith* in which—according to Abu Hurayrah—the Prophet once asked: "Do you know who is poor?" His Companions replied that the poor amongst them was the one who had no money and no possessions. Then the Prophet said: "The poor man in my community (*ummah*) is one who comes on Doomsday with his prayers, fasts and *zakat*, but who, despite all his seeming piety, had abused people, made false accusations, appropriated other's belongings, and acted like a tyrant. Then all his virtues will be given to those he had oppressed. And when all his virtues have been used up without his account having been cleared—there still being some of the oppressed who have to be compensated by his virtues—then the

sins of the oppressed will be transferred to him, whereupon he will be thrown into hellfire."

This *Hadith* is a stern warning to all those who treat others with cruelty, who commit acts of misappropriation and usurpation, and who indulge in calumny and defamation. Even the virtues of such individuals will not stand them in good stead on the Day of Judgement. And if, on that day, they can give no evidence of having performed good deeds, they will be fated to bear the burden of others' sins along with their own.

Conversely, this *Hadith* gives consolation to the oppressed. Those who have been treated unjustly may live in the expectation that their sins will be transferred to their oppressors, while they themselves, rid of all that burden, will be allowed to enter Heaven. But it should be borne in mind that this blessing will await only those who remained patient under oppression for the sake of God. □

Two Strengths

'Strong' refers to physical strength and 'honest' refers to spiritual strength: both are equally important. One who has these two qualities can be described as a well-equipped person.

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AN INTELLECTUAL TRANSFORMATION

Rational Outlook

WHEN an individual belonging to one religious group joins another religious group after converting to that religion, in religious terminology that is called proselytism. But this is a limited concept of conversion, which needs to be viewed in a broader perspective.

The religious view of conversion relates only to religious tradition. In this respect it is relatively limited in its spectrum. The rational outlook, on the contrary, is much broader in scope, being based on the eternal principles of nature itself. Although it would be proper to say that, in the religious context, conversion for human beings is a matter of choice, in the rational sense, this is not so. It is an eternal principle of life, in exactly the same way as the laws of nature have the status of being immutable. We are compelled to accept the principle of conversion, just as we are compelled to accept the morning following the evening, or one season coming after another.

ISLAM AND CONVERSION

Conversion in Islamic thought is not synonymous with proselytism in the formal sense. It is an event, which takes place in a person's life as a result of an intellectual revolution or spiritual transformation. It is not simply leaving one religious tradition for another. The Islamic ideal of conversion is for the individual to discover the truth after an exhaustive search for it and then by his own choice, abandon one religion for another. The study of the Quran invites its readers towards transformation in thinking, and not a change of religion in the simple sense.

In the first phase of Islam, some Arab bedouins had accepted Islam just by reciting the *kalima*, the creed of Islam, while they had not undergone any change in character at a deeper level. The Quran admonished them in strong terms: "The Arabs of the desert say 'We believe.' Say, 'You have not believed yet'; but rather say, 'We have accepted Islam', for the true faith has not yet entered into your hearts."^(49: 14) From this we learn that conversion according to Islam means a thorough transformation of the person and not just a change of religion in the everyday sense.

The Quran refuses to give its seal of approval to conversions, which are mere formalities and outlines the character of those who transform truly in the following manner:

“When they listen to that which was revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes filled with tears as they recognize its truth. They say: ‘Lord, we believe. Count us among Your witnesses. Why should we not believe in God and in the truth that has come down to us? Why should we not hope for admission among the righteous?’” (5: 83-84)

Similarly, the Quran speaks of true believers “as those whose hearts tremble with awe at the mention of God, and whose faith grows stronger as they listen to His revelations. They are those who put their trust in their Lord, who pray regularly, and give in alms out of what We have provided for them. Such are the true believers. They have a high standing with their Lord, His forgiveness and an honourable provision made for them.” (8: 2-4)

This shows that religious conversion in fact is the result of a realization. When the individual’s search for truth finds a convincing answer, it is such a profound experience that his heart is intensely moved. His eyes are filled with tears. His whole existence is moulded in the cast of truth. It is then that he emerges a new and altogether different person, having undergone a transformation.

Religious conversion in fact is the result of a realization. When the individual’s search for truth finds a convincing answer, it is such a profound experience that his heart is intensely moved.

Those who enter the fold of Islam after being influenced by their study of the Quran have been thus described in the Quran: “Is then he who knows that what has been revealed to you by your Lord as the truth, like him who is blind? Truly, none will take heed but the wise.” (13: 19)

According to this verse, the real conversion is one, which has taken place when the convert is aware that he has entered the phase of gnosis and has left behind the phase of ignorance. This same reality has been

expressed in different ways in the Quran, for instance, by the simile of the earth. When the rains come, the fertile earth blooms, becoming green with vegetation. “Good soil yields fruit by God’s leave. But poor and scant are the fruits, which spring from barren soil. Thus we show our signs to those who render thanks.” (7: 58)

Then there is the parable of the tree: “Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree whose root is firm with its branches in the

sky, yielding its fruit all the time by God's leave? God gives parables to men so that they may become mindful. But an evil word is like an evil tree torn out of the earth, and has no stability. God will strengthen the faithful with His steadfast word, both in this life and in the Hereafter. He leaves the wrongdoers in error. God accomplishes what He pleases." (14: 24-27)

These verses from the Quran tell us the difference between one who has found the truth and one who has failed to do so. The latter is like the shrub growing on the upper surface of the soil; it is short lived, either vanishing on its own or being pulled out, and is of no use to humankind. The former resembles a profitable, fruitful tree planting its roots deep down into the earth. It seems that it is for the earth and the earth is for it. Receiving sustenance from the earth as well as the atmosphere, it benefits people in many ways. Rooted as it is in the earth, it has a desirable and meaningful existence.

CONVERSION—A UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE

Another aspect of conversion, pointed out repeatedly in the Quran, is that it is not confined solely to religion. It is rather a universal principle, by which all kinds of progress have been set in motion. The present universe was originally composed of condensed matter, then it underwent a process of internal change, by which it began expanding until this vast universe, with which we are now familiar, was formed (21: 30). Similarly, the earth lies dry and barren, then it is transformed by the rain so that, "it begins to stir and swell, putting forth every kind of radiant bloom" (22: 5). Again, some apparently unformed matter passes through well-defined stages in the womb, until it assumes the form of a complete living creature—this goes for both humans as well as animals. Then, grass and grains enter the cow's belly and, by a certain natural system undergo a transformation, until the grass and grains are converted into milk, a precious food for man. (16: 66)

Conversion is a universal law established by nature itself, on the basis of which all the material progress of the modern world has been taking place.

By citing such natural phenomena, the Quran demonstrates how this world has been established on the universal principle of conversion. Here all kinds of progress are instigated through the process of transformation. For instance, the combination of two gases resulting in water, iron being transformed into steel, chemical combinations of

various kinds producing useful products, etc. All these are examples of conversion in its broader sense. The same kind of conversion is at work in the world of human thought. There is an ongoing interchange of ideas in this world. Through this process one school of thought gives way to another better school of thought. For instance, for several hundred years the geocentric theory of the earth dominated world thought. Then as a result of intellectual advances it began to erode, until finally it was rejected by the academic world, being replaced by the heliocentric theory, this having stood the test of observation.

Conversion in the world of thought is called religious conversion, which is only a small part of the vaster scheme of nature. The truth is that conversion is a universal law established by nature itself, on the basis of which all the material progress of the modern world has been taking place. Just as the physical growth of living beings (humans and animals) has depended wholly on this principle of conversion, so also has all the progress made in the world of thought over thousands of years. That is, theories have become established truths when proven by available facts.

Religion is deeply related to conviction and conviction in turn is related to discovery. There is no conviction without discovery and there is no religion without conviction.

In this world no meaningful development can take shape without going through this process of conversion. This is especially true of the acceptance of religion, which is another name for recognition of spiritual truth. Only that religion can become one's own, which

has been discovered as a result of personal struggle. Religion is deeply related to conviction and conviction in turn is related to discovery. There is no conviction without discovery and there is no religion without conviction. The true follower of a religion is not one who is simply born into it. Finding religion must be a matter of conviction and is possible only after a long period of self-analysis. Then the would-be adherent should feel that he is rediscovering something of which he is already in possession.

THE REALITY OF CONVERSION

Conversion does not mean just saying some formal words, changing one's name and leaving one cultural group to join another. It entails not just an outward change of religion, but a profound alteration of the mindset after passing through many stages of soul-searching and self-analysis. Conversion, in essence, is the emergence of a new individual—

one of the most significant events of human history, for it is only with the proliferation of such spiritually reformed personalities that any given society will attain true moral uplift, and reach the highest levels of achievement.

Conversion, in reality, is an event resulting from a sense of discovery. After making a great discovery, one does not remain as before. One becomes a new man. Only a truly revolutionary change of this kind merits the name of conversion. When it does take place, it stems from personal decision-making, and not from greed or external pressures. It causes those lacking in awareness to become intellectually receptive; the dormant come fully alive in all their senses; the morally "blind" gain a code of ethics; the non-curious develop a questing spirit; those living in a circumscribed environment suddenly enter a world without limits, where they can breathe freely; creatures existing at the purely physical level rise above it and begin really to live on a higher conceptual plane; the aimless wanderer, becoming spiritually focused, learns the secret of leading a purposeful life.

Conversion is not just an outward change of religion, but a profound alteration of the mindset after passing through many stages of soul-searching and self-analysis.

Religious conversion is only a small part of this whole process. When the dialogue or conversion process is set in motion, it cannot have limits set to it. It is not possible to allow one kind of conversion and to prohibit another. Being a stormy process, it is boundless.

To sum up, conversion is a universal and inescapable law of nature. A study of psychology and history tells us that, in order to give a new impetus to an individual or a group and to bring about a moral and intellectual revolution, what is most effective is the sense of discovery. This feeling of having discovered some truth, which was as yet unknown, awakens all the dormant powers of the individual. This feeling turns an ordinary man into a superman. It is such supermen who cross the ocean, who scale mountains, and who by their heroic character cause history to enter a new age.

Today, human history is once again facing a deadlock. History is once again in need of people who pass through this experience of discovery. For it is such people, charged with new spiritual power, who will give a strong push to human history to enter a new and a better age. □

ISLAM: A SCHEME OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The dictionary meaning of spirituality: The quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. The Quranic term for spirituality is Rabbaniyat. It is the elevation of the human condition to a plane on which the mind is focused on the higher, non-material realities of a godly existence. The Prophet said: "God plants wisdom in the heart of one who shows disinclination for the world." To be a spiritual person one should understand the principles of life which Islam expects from its believers. In the following article we bring you a bouquet from the garden of Islamic principles.

PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM

PEACE

A believer is necessarily a lover of peace. In his mind, faith and a desire for peace are so closely interlinked that, regardless of circumstances, he will strive to the utmost for the maintenance of peace. He will bear the loss of anything else, but the loss of peace he will not endure. The life that the true believer desires in this world can be lived only in the propitious atmosphere which flowers in conditions of peace. Conditions of unrest breed a negative atmosphere which to him is abhorrent.

But if peace is to be maintained, it calls for a certain kind of sacrifice. That is, when conditions become disturbed, the believer must overlook both the misdeeds leading up to this situation and the identity of the wrong doers. He must suffer all the harm and injustice done to him without making any attempt either to retaliate, or to bring the miscreants to book, so that a state of peace continues to prevail. The believer has to be willing to pay this price, so that his pursuance of constructive ends proceeds unhampered.

The believer is like a flower in the garden of nature. Just as a hot wind will shrivel up a bloom and cause it to die, so will constant friction distract the believer from achieving positive goals. And just as a cool breeze will enable the flower to retain its beauty for its natural lifespan, so will a peaceful atmosphere enable the believer to fulfil the obligations of divine worship in a spirit of great serenity. Peace is thus central to the life of the believer.

Islam is a religion of peace. And peace is a universal law of nature. That is because God loves the condition of peace, and disapproves of any state of unrest. God's predilection for peace is enough reason for the believer also to love peace. In no circumstances will the true believer ever tolerate the disruption of peace.

FEAR OF GOD

Fear of God, or *taqwa*, means leading a life of caution and restraint in this world. Umar Farooq, the second Caliph once asked a Companion of the Prophet what *taqwa* was. He replied, "O leader of the believers, have you ever crossed a path which has thorny shrubs on both sides?" The Companion then asked another question, "What did you do on such an occasion?" Umar Farooq replied, "I gathered my clothes close to me and moved ahead cautiously". The Companion said, "This is the meaning of *taqwa*."

The present world is a testing ground. Here, various kinds of thorns have been scattered for the purpose of testing man, such as negativity, false issues raised by non-serious people and the lure of worldly things. Besides these, there are many unpleasant occurrences which disturb people's minds and lead them away from the path of virtue.

All these things are like thorny shrubs lining both sides of the path of life. At any moment it is feared that man may embroil himself in these thorns and then instead of going forward, remain entrapped in these snares of life.

In such a state of affairs the wise man is one who travels the paths of life by 'gathering up his clothes' to avoid becoming entangled in these unpleasant snares. In this way, he is able to continue his journey unhampered. Yet at all times he must remain conscious of the fact that he must protect himself. He has to adopt the path of avoidance, not of entanglement.

Man has been created with an upright nature. If no hindrance comes in the way, then every man will, on his own, take the right course. That is why, the utmost precaution must be taken against allowing unnatural obstacles to come in the way.

Then, guided by this upright nature, man will continue to walk along the right path until he meets his Lord. □



DEATH

The Inevitable

OF all the stages through which a person will have to pass, death is the most certain. Yet, it is something that few people bother to seriously think about, leave alone prepare for. Everyone who is alive now will be dead sometime in the future. One day, the eyes of those who now see will fade and their tongues will freeze into silence. Every human being will one day be leaving this world, never to return, and will enter a world which he will never leave.

Death is commonly defined as the end of life in an organism. Upon death, apparently all biological and other related activities of a living being stop, including the mind and the senses. Research suggests that about 150,000 people die every day around the world.

To remember death often is an attribute of a truly sensitive person. Not to remember death is a sign of extreme insensitivity.

Dictionaries often define death as ‘the permanent cessation of life’. This definition reflects a negative understanding of death. It seems to suggest that death is the complete extinguishing of a being after having been alive on earth for a short while. It is as if when one dies, one ceases to exist forever. In contrast to this, religion presents a positive understanding of death. It teaches us that death is not the end of life. Rather, it marks the beginning of a new phase of our life.

We often see or read or hear about people dying. We should take this as a very valuable learning experience. Someone else’s death should lead us to be mindful of our own impending death. It should provoke us to remember that we, too, will have to meet the same fate, some day or the other. It should remind us to suitably prepare for our own death, which is on its way. Death is the end of the pre-death period of life for the deceased, while for those who are still alive in this world it is a reminder of their own impending death. When a person dies, it appears that someone who could speak has now fallen silent. But his silence is in itself a loud announcement to those who remain in this world. It calls out to us: “What had to happen with me has now taken place! It will happen with you, too! And so, prepare yourself for it!” Offering funeral prayers on the occasion of someone’s burial is not a mere ritual. Rather, it is a reminder of a very serious reality—of the fact

that just as the person who has died has encountered death, one day, we, too, will meet the same fate. To say funeral prayers in congregation is actually a reminder of this fact.

A truly meaningful funeral prayer is one in which someone else's death provokes you to remember your own impending death. It leads you to realize that whatever has happened with the deceased is bound to happen with you as well. If this is how you think when you see a dead person, when you attend a funeral prayer you will feel that you are praying at your own funeral. We should be constantly aware of death. We must think of it often. A person who is so heedless that someone else's death does not provoke him to think of his own impending death is a cold, unfeeling stone. To remember death often is an attribute of a truly sensitive person. Not to remember death is a sign of extreme insensitivity. □

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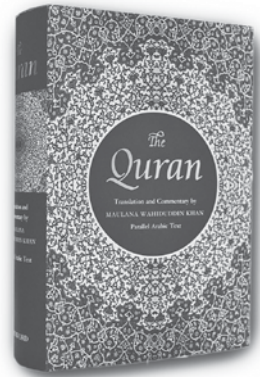
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THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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



Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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

Believers, do not push yourselves forward in the presence of God and His Messenger. Fear God—God hears all and knows all. (49: 1)

To hold one's opinion superior to that of the Prophet is forbidden. During the life of the Prophet Muhammad, this attitude on the part of an addressee took the shape of indulgence in verbosity at his meetings, the object being to excel the Prophet's discourse. Subsequently, this meant the forming of opinions in disregard of the guiding principles laid down by God and His Prophet.

This sort of lapse occurs because man forgets that God is keeping a watch over him. If he came to know that his utterances reached God before they reached other human beings, he would prefer to remain silent rather than talk.

Believers, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak as loudly when speaking to him as you do when speaking to one another, lest your actions come to nothing without your realizing it. Those who lower their voices in the presence of God's Messenger are men whose hearts God has tested for piety—they shall have forgiveness and a great reward—those who call out to you from outside your apartments are lacking in understanding. If they waited patiently until you came out to see them, it would be better for them. But God is forgiving and merciful. (49: 2-5)

The Bedouin tribes from the areas surrounding Madinah were not mature in understanding. When they used to come to the meetings of the Prophet Muhammad, they did not address him as 'O Prophet of

God', but rather as 'O Muhammad.' Their manner of speech was not modest or humble, but overbearing. Such behaviour was prohibited. A Prophet is God's representative in this world. Rudeness to him of this nature amounts to rude behaviour towards God, which renders a man absolutely worthless.

After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad, the guidance brought by him stands in his place. Now this divine guidance necessitates obedience just as obedience to the Prophet personally was required during his lifetime.

Fear of God makes a man serious. If fear of God really enters a man's heart, he will come to know automatically, as a matter of instinct, all those realities of which others remain unaware in spite of being informed of them.

Believers, if an evil-doer brings you news, ascertain the correctness of the report fully, lest you unwittingly harm others, and then regret what you have done, and know that the Messenger of God is among you. If he were to obey you in many things, you would suffer for it. However, God has endeared the faith to you, and beautified it in your hearts, and has made denial of the truth, wickedness, and disobedience hateful to you. People such as these are rightly guided through God's bounty and favour; God is all knowing, and wise. (49: 6-8)

If anyone provides information about another which takes the form of allegations against the latter, ready acceptance of this news on simply hearing it is absolutely against the precautions imposed by the Faith. It is essential on the part of the hearer of the news to make the necessary investigation about it, and whatever opinion he forms should be after impartial inquiry and not before.

It frequently happens that when information of this kind is received, there are immediate suggestions of taking punitive action. This is a case of gross irresponsibility. Nobody should form any opinion about such news before investigation; nor should others suggest direct action without a thorough probe.

Those who tread the path of righteousness and guidance develop an entirely different temperament from those who do not. They are averse to levelling allegations against others. They prefer to remain silent rather than talk about a supposed misdemeanour which is as yet uninvestigated. Being of such a nature is an indication of their having been blessed with a share in God's Graces. The Faith that has really permeated their lives now is being acknowledged in verbal form. □

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

What is the greater significance of Hajj?

The Prophet was once asked by his Companions about the animal sacrifice performed during Hajj. The Prophet replied: "This was the way of your forefather Abraham." (*Mishkat*)

The Prophet Abraham has been mentioned in a verse in the Quran: "Strive for the cause of God as it behooves you to strive for it. He has chosen you and lain on you no burden in the matter of your religion, the faith of Abraham, your forefather." (22: 78)

This verse implores believers to strive and do *jihad* and follow the footsteps of Abraham. God has chosen the believers for this task. But what kind of *jihad* did Abraham undertake? There is no proof whatsoever to establish that Abraham used sword or fought battles against others. *Jihad* in this case, refers to the practical struggle undertaken by the Prophet Abraham on the path of *dawah* work, or conveying the message of God to people. Abraham initially did *dawah* among the people of Ur, a city in ancient Iraq where he was born. When people there did not respond to his message, he travelled to Syria, Egypt, Palestine and Makkah for the sake of conveying the message to people in these regions. Thus Prophet Abraham's life was entirely devoted to God's cause—he was one who made universal planning for the sake of *dawah*. When people in one region did not accept his message, he travelled wherever he possibly could in order to continue the divine mission.

This is the true message and learning we gain from Hajj; when we perform the rites of Hajj, we must pledge to follow the path of the Prophet Abraham in the sense of his utmost devotion to the task of *dawah*.

What is Hajj-e-badal?

According to an Islamic teaching, when a person dies, he is completely cut off from this world; the only thing that survives is his intention (*niyyah*), which remains alive even after death. For example, when a person who wished to perform Hajj passes away before doing so, his heirs can appoint another person to perform Hajj on the behalf of the deceased. This is referred to as *Hajj-e-badal*. Such an act is rewardable for both—the one who performs Hajj and also the deceased who intended to perform it.

Unfortunately, people have a very limited understanding of this Islamic teaching. And, it must be understood that no teaching of Islam has a limited purview.

For example, suppose a person desired to be part of the **Al-Quran Mission**. That is, he wished to spend his lifetime in God's mission, however, he passed away before being able to devote himself to God's cause. Then the fulfilment of the deceased person's intention now devolves upon his heirs. This case made me realize that instead of the common practice of performing Quran recitation (*Quran khwani*) after the death of a person, the task one should engage in is Quran distribution. This would be no ordinary matter, because not only those who distribute the Quran, but also the departed soul, would become eligible for God's high reward. Doing so would amount to fulfilling the intention of the deceased to become part of the divine mission.

What can we learn from the Prophet Muhammad's last Hajj (Hajjat al-Wida)?

The focus of the Prophet's Last Sermon (*Khutbah al-Hajjat al-Wida*) was to instill in his Companions the spirit to undertake planning for *dawah* work. Human beings need guidance to make their lives successful in this world and the Hereafter. Prophets and messengers were sent by God for the purpose of guiding people on the path of spirituality and wisdom. The Prophet's Last Sermon marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one; The culture of fighting and bloodshed, which was prevalent in the tribal age, was to be completely abandoned. Now, a new era was to begin in which believers were to strive to impart the message of God to people. During his final Hajj, the Prophet while addressing his Companions said:

"O People! No prophet or messenger will come after me and no new faith will be born. All those who are listening to me should pass on my words to those who are not present." (*Ibn Hisham*)

Therefore, those who return from performance of Hajj must be imbued with the spirit to act on this prophetic advice and should henceforth make it their goal to devote their lives to God's cause so that they can fulfil the prophetic mission of having the word of God reach every home on the planet.

The problem of stampede during Hajj is often reported in the media. What is the solution?

Several pilgrims at Makkah have died in stampedes. These incidents tell us of our lack of planning. The reason for these kinds of stampedes

is that there is a wrong notion prevalent among people. During Hajj, pilgrims have to perform the rite of stoning, that is, to hit a certain stone with pebbles. This rite is known as *rami al-jamar*. The stone they are required to hit represents Satan and hitting it with their pebbles signifies their pledge not to come under satanic influences. Therefore, this rite is performed to consciously instill in oneself the spirit of not letting oneself be influenced by satanic promptings and remain steadfast on God's path.

Pilgrims think that unless they physically hit the stone with their pebbles, their rite will not be complete. But this is a wrong notion. One does not need to actually hit the stone with the pebble, stoning from a distance too is enough, as it is symbolic stoning and not real stoning. Stampedes occur when pilgrims rush to actually hit the stone with the pebbles in their hands. Pilgrims need to understand the underlying spirit of the rite of *rami al-jamar* and realize that a symbolic but conscious stoning is sufficient to complete the rite.

Which aspect of Hajj highlights the concept of Ijtihad?

Ijtihad means to reapply the teachings of Islam to a new situation. In today's age, the principle of *ijtihad* is a necessity. *Ijtihad* is a principle to be followed in every age. It was used even at the time of the Prophet.

For example, the Quran says: "Call humankind to the Pilgrimage. They will come to you, on foot, and on every kind of lean camel, by every distant track" (22: 27). This verse calls on all Muslims to perform the Hajj to Makkah on camelback. In today's times, this command cannot be followed literally, and is taken to mean: 'Use the available means of transportation for the Hajj.' This is why we see today Muslims travelling to Makkah from around the globe by modern means of conveyance; nobody comes on camel. This is an example of reapplying the above Quranic verse to modern-day situations.

In life, situations and circumstances always change and thus there is a need to re-study and re-apply the original teachings of Islam, rather than following religious teachings literally. □



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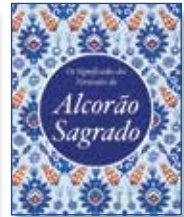
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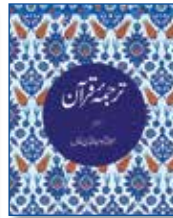
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