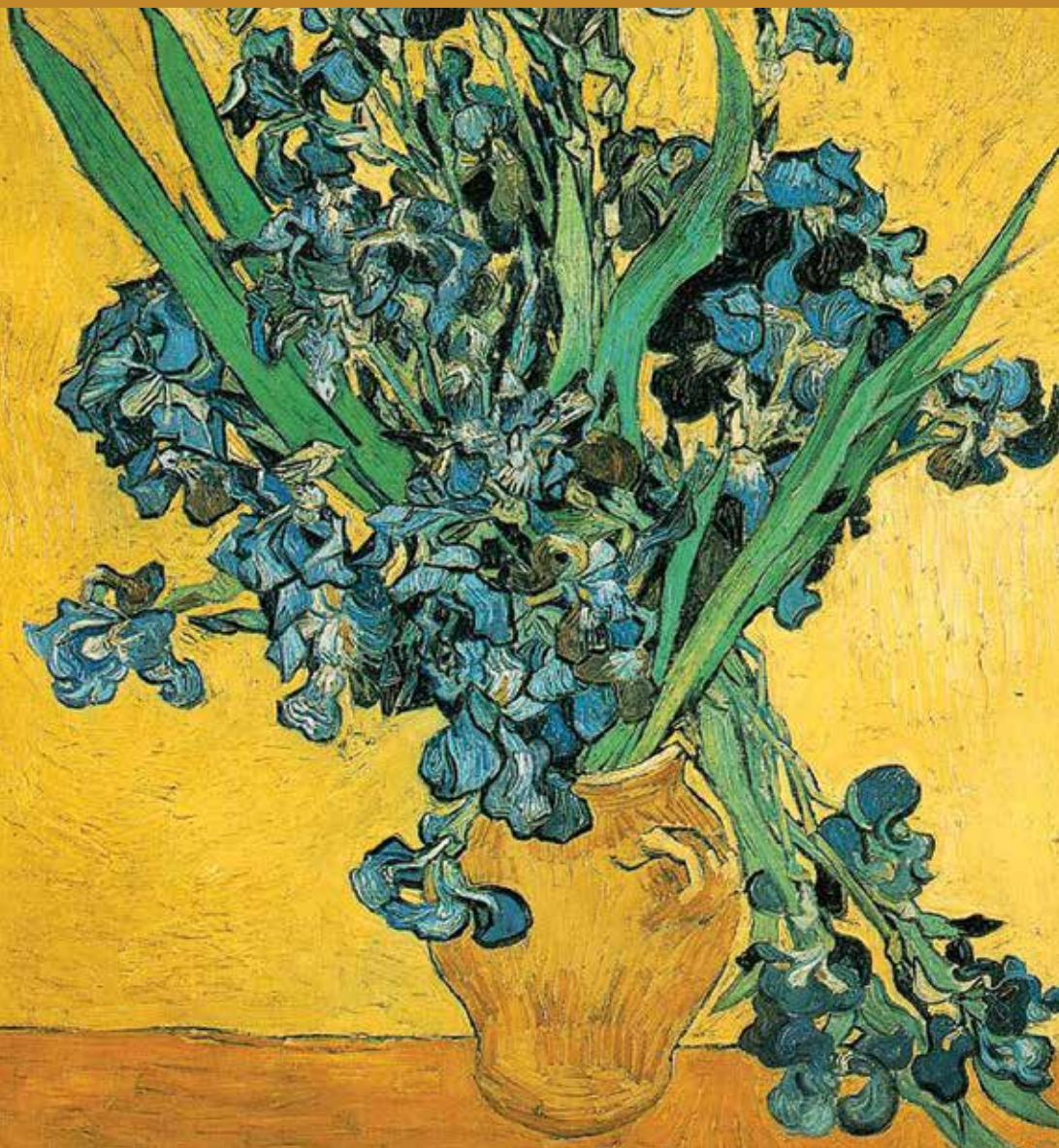


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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

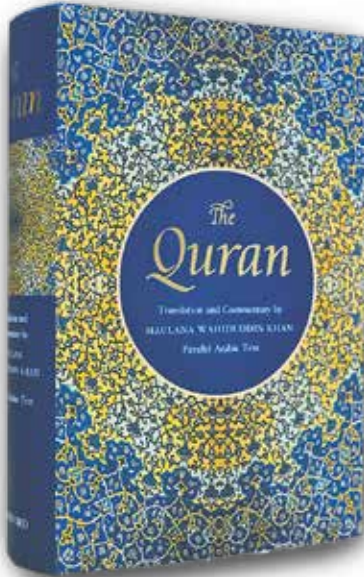


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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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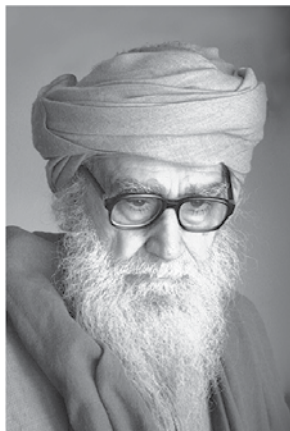
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognised as one of its most influential Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

THOUGHTS ON COUNTERING TERRORISM

AMERICA staunchly opposed communist Russia, but rather than drop a nuclear bomb on it, it devised and supported a literary campaign against the communist regime. Innumerable books were published in various languages and widely disseminated, which were critical of the philosophy of Communism. A great deal of careful planning had gone into challenging Communism at the ideological level. This strategy was successful, and in 1991 the USSR collapsed, after sixty-nine years of existence.

This is a good model for tackling the current so-called 'Islamic' terrorist movements.

Terrorism in the name of Islam is based entirely on the misinterpretation of Islamic texts. One example of this misinterpretation derives from a verse of the Quran, which says: 'All power belongs to God alone' (12: 40). In this verse, *power* is used to denote the supernatural power of God. However, Muslim extremist thinkers have misinterpreted it to mean political power. Furthermore, these extremist thinkers claim that Muslims, as representatives of God, should establish God's rule on

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

earth. This assumption is wrong because it is based on a Quranic verse taken out of context.

Another verse in the Quran says: (5: 8) 'Follow the principle of justice [in your life]'. Misinterpretation of this verse has given it the transitive sense, instead of the original intransitive sense used in the Quran. The verb used above does not have any direct object of action, but the wrong interpretation has taken the object of action as the outside world. Thus, the verse is being taken to mean that justice should be imposed on people by force. This misinterpretation has politicised the concept of justice, although such a notion cannot be inferred from the text.

Any interpretation of the above kind is false. And this falsehood must be made manifest so that people understand with certainty that the present militancy has no sanction in Islam, and so that the extremists abandon their violence on realising that their actions are completely un-Islamic.

The terrorist phenomenon is based on misinterpretation of the scriptures. It can be eradicated only by universally publicising the right interpretation of the Islamic texts.

In a speech on July 19, 2015, the British Prime Minister David Cameron, expressing his anxiety about youngsters travelling to Iraq and Syria to join the so-called 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' (ISIL), said,

'We must de-glamorise the extremist cause, especially ISIL. This isn't a pioneering movement—it is vicious, brutal and fundamentally abhorrent.'

It is true that present Muslim extremism is the result of the glamorisation of the self-styled concept of global *Khilafat* or Caliphate. The solution lies in de-glamorising this false ideology developed by extremists through a misinterpretation of Islamic sources. De-glamorisation of the *Khilafat* can be achieved only by de-Islamising this concept of the *Khilafat* based on a political interpretation of Islam. And political Islam has no basis in Islamic scriptures.

The UN has rightly adopted this dictum:

'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'

To eradicate terrorism, we shall have to reengineer the minds of terrorists along peaceful lines. No other method will be of any avail. □

Maulana Wahiddudin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org

PROPHET MUHAMMAD—PART II

Humility and Forbearance

THE Prophet was a man like other men. Joyous things would please him while sad things would sadden him. Realisation of the fact that he was first and foremost God's servant, however, prevented him from placing more importance on his own feelings than upon the will of God.

Towards the end of the Prophet's life Mariah Qibtiyah, his wife, bore him a beautiful and vivacious son. The Prophet named him Ibrahim, after his most illustrious ancestor. It was Abu Rafi who broke the good news to the Prophet. He was so overjoyed that he presented Abu Rafi with a gift. He used to take the child in his lap and play with him fondly. According to Arab custom, Ibrahim was given to a wet nurse, Umm Burdah bint al-Mundhir ibn Zayd Ansari. She was the wife of a blacksmith, and her small house was usually full of smoke. Still, the Prophet used to go to the blacksmith's house to visit his son, putting up with the smoke that used to fill his eyes and nostrils. Ibrahim, was just one and half years old when, in the tenth year after the *Hijrah* (January 632 AD), he died. The Prophet wept on the death of his only son, as any father would; in this respect the Prophet appears like any other human being. His happiness and his grief were that of a normal father. But with all that, he fixed his heart firmly on the will of God. Even in his grief, these were the words he uttered:

The Prophet lived among others as an equal. No bitter criticism or provocation would make him lose his composure.

'God knows, Ibrahim, how we sorrow at your parting. The eye weeps and the heart grieves, but we will say nothing that may displease the Lord.'

It so happened that the death of Ibrahim coincided with a solar eclipse. From ancient times people had believed that solar and lunar eclipses were caused by the death of some important person. The people of Madinah began attributing the eclipse to the death of the Prophet's son. This caused the Prophet immense displeasure, for it suggested this predictable astronomical event was caused out of respect for his infant son. He collected the people and addressed them as follows:

'Eclipses of the sun and moon are not due to the death of any human being; they are just two of God's signs. When you see an eclipse, then you should pray to God.'

On one of his journeys, the Prophet asked his Companions to roast a goat. One volunteered to slaughter the animal, another to skin it, and another to cook it. The Prophet said that he would collect wood. "Messenger of God," his Companions protested, "we will do all the work." "I know that you will do it," the Prophet replied, "but that would amount to discrimination, which I don't approve of. God does not like His servants to assert any superiority over their Companions."

So humble was the Prophet himself that he once said:

The Prophet lived in such awe of God that he was always a picture of humility and meekness.

'By God, I really do not know, even though I am God's messenger, what will become of me and what will become of you.'
(Hadith of Al Bukhari)

One day, a Companion, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari was sitting next to a Muslim who was black. Abu Dharr addressed him as "black man." The Prophet was very displeased on hearing this, and told Abu Dharr to make amends "Whites are not superior to blacks," he added. As soon as the Prophet admonished him, Abu

Dharr became conscious of his error. He cast himself to the ground in remorse, and said to the person he had offended: "Stand up, and rub your feet on my face."

The Prophet once saw a wealthy Muslim gathering up his loose garment to maintain a distance from a poor Muslim sitting next to him. "Are you scared of his poverty clinging to you?" the Prophet remarked.

Once the Prophet had to borrow some money from a Jew by the name of Zayd ibn Sa'nah. A few days before the date fixed for the repayment of the debt, the Jew came to demand his money back. He went up to the Prophet, caught hold of his clothes, and said to him harshly: "Muhammad, why don't you pay me my due? From what I know of the descendants of Muttalib, they all put off paying their debts." Umar ibn al-Khattab was with the Prophet at that time. He became very angry, scolded the Jew and was on the point of beating him up. But the Prophet just kept smiling. All he said to the Jew was: "There are still three days left for me to fulfil my promise." Then he addressed Umar, "Zayd and I deserved better treatment from you," he said. "You should have told

me to be better at paying my debts, and him to be better at demanding them. Take him with you, Umar, and pay him his due; in fact, give him 20 *sa'ahs* (about forty kilos) of dates extra because you have alarmed him with your threats." The most remarkable thing about this episode is that the Prophet could still behave with such forbearance and humility even after being established as head of the Muslim state of Madinah.

So successful was the Prophet's life that, during his lifetime, he became the ruler of the whole of Arabia right up to Palestine. Whatever he said, as the messenger of God, was accepted as law. He was revered by his people as no other man has ever been revered. When Urwah ibn Mas'ud was sent to him as an envoy of the Quraysh (627 AD), he was amazed to see that the Muslims would not let any water used by the Prophet for ablution fall on the ground, but would catch it in their hands, and rub it on their bodies. Such was their veneration for him. Anas ibn Malik, the Prophet's close Companion says that in spite of the great love they had for the Prophet, out of respect they could not look him full in the face. According to Mughirah, if any of the Prophet's Companions had to call on him, they would first tap on the door with their fingernails. One night, when the moon was full, the Prophet lay asleep, covered in a red sheet. Jabir ibn Samrah, another Companion says that sometimes he would look at the moon and sometimes at the Prophet. Eventually he came to the conclusion that the Prophet was the more beautiful of the two.

Being God's humble servants, we should always remain in a state of trepidation before our Lord and the life hereafter.

Arrows rained down on the Prophet from the enemy ranks, but his followers formed a ring around him, letting the arrows strike their own bodies. It was as though they were made of wood, not flesh and blood; indeed the arrows hung from the bodies of some of them like the thorns of a cactus tree.

Devotion and veneration of this nature can produce vanity in a man and engender a feeling of superiority, but this was not the case with the Prophet. He lived among others as an equal. No bitter criticism or provocation would make him lose his composure. Once a desert-dweller came up to him and pulled so hard at the sheet he was wearing that it left a mark on his neck. "Muhammad!" he said. "Give me two camel-loads of goods, for the money in your possession is not yours, nor was it your father's." "Everything belongs to God," the Prophet said,

"and I am His servant." He then asked the desert-dweller, "Hasn't it made you afraid, the way you treated me?" He said not. The Prophet asked him why. "Because I know that you do not requite evil with evil," the man answered. The Prophet smiled on hearing this, and had one camel-load of barley and another of dates given to him.

The Prophet lived in such awe of God that he was always a picture of humility and meekness. He spoke little and even the way he walked suggested reverence for God. Criticism never angered him. When he used to put on his clothes, he would say: "I am God's servant, and I dress as befits a servant of God." He would sit in a reverential posture to partake of food, and would say that this is how a servant of God should eat.

He was very sensitive on this issue. Once a Companion started to say, "If it be the will of God, and the will of the Prophet ... " The Prophet's face changed colour in anger when he heard this. "Are you trying to equate me with God?" he asked the man severely. Rather say: "If God, alone, wills." On another occasion a Companion of the Prophet said: "He that obeys God and His Prophet is rightly guided, and he who disobeys them has gone astray." "You are the worst of speakers," the Prophet observed, disliking a reference, which placed him in the same pronoun as the Almighty.

Three sons were born to the Prophet, all of whom died in infancy. His four daughters, all by his first wife, Khadijah, grew to adulthood. Fatimah was the Prophet's youngest daughter, and he was extremely attached to her. When he returned from any journey the first thing he would do, after praying two *rak'at* (units of prayer) in the mosque, was to visit Fatimah and kiss her hand and forehead. Jumai' ibn Umayr, a Companion, once asked Aisha (the Prophet's wife) whom the Prophet loved most. "Fatimah," she replied.

Biographies of the Prophet are full of incidents, which show his life to be a perfect model for mankind.

But the Prophet's whole life was moulded by thoughts of the Hereafter. He loved his children, but not in any worldly way. Ali ibn Abi Talib, Fatimah's husband, once told Ibn

Abdul Wahid a story about the Prophet's most beloved daughter. Fatimah's hands, he said, were blistered from constant grinding; her neck had become sore from carrying water; her clothes would become dirty from sweeping the floor. When the Prophet had received an influx of servants from some place, Ali suggested to his wife that she

approach her father and ask for a servant. She went, but could not speak to the Prophet because of the crowd. Next day, he came to their house, and asked Fatimah what she had wanted to see him about. Ali told the Prophet the whole story, and said that he had sent her. "Fear God, Fatimah," the Prophet said, "Fulfil your obligations to the Lord, and continue with your housework. And when you go to bed at night, praise God thirty-three times, and glorify Him the same number of times; exalt His name thirty-four times, and that will make a full hundred. This would be much better than having a servant." "If that is the will of God and His Prophet," Fatimah replied "then so be it." This was the Prophet's only reply. He did not give her a servant.

The truth revealed to the Prophet was that this world did not spring up by itself, but was created by one God, who continues to watch over it. All men are His servants, and responsible to Him for their actions. Death is not the end of man's life; rather it is the beginning of another, permanent world, where the good will enjoy the bliss of Paradise and the wicked will be cast into a raging hell. With the revelation of this truth also came the commandment to propagate it far and near. Accordingly, ascending the height of the rock of Safa, the Prophet called the people together. First he made mention of the greatness of God. Then he went on to say:

Devotion and veneration by people can produce vanity in a man and engender a feeling of superiority, but this was not the case with the Prophet.

'By God, as you sleep so will you die, and as you awaken so will you be raised after death: you will be taken to account for your deeds. The good will be rewarded with good and the evil with evil. And, for all eternity, the good will remain in heaven and the evil will remain in hell.'

One who goes against the times in his personal life is faced with difficulties at almost every step, but these difficulties are not of an injurious nature. They may wound one's feelings, but not one's body. At the most, they are a test requiring quiet forbearance. But the position is quite different when one makes it one's mission to publicly oppose convention—when one starts telling people what they are required to do and what not to do. The Prophet was not just a believer; he was also entrusted with conveying the word of God to mankind. It was this latter role that brought him into headlong collision with his countrymen. All forms of adversity—from the pain of hunger to the trepidation of

battle—were inflicted on him. Yet throughout the twenty-three years of his mission, he always remained just and circumspect in his actions. It was not that he had no human feelings in him and, therefore, incapable of bitterness; it was simply that his conduct was governed by the fear of God.

Three years after the Prophet's migration to Madinah, Makkan opponents mounted an assault on Madinah and the Battle of Uhud took place. At the beginning, the Muslims held sway; but later on a mistake made by some of the Prophet's Companions gave the enemy the chance to attack from the rear and sway the tide of battle in their favour. It was a desperate situation and many of the Companions started fleeing from the field. The Prophet was left alone, encircled by the armed forces of the enemy. Like hungry wolves, they advanced upon him. The Prophet started calling to his Companions. "Come back to me, O servants of God," he cried. "Isn't there anyone who will sacrifice his life for my sake, who will fend these oppressors off from me and be my Companion in Paradise?"

Imagine how dreadful the situation must have been, with the Prophet crying for help in this manner. Some of his Companions responded to his call, but such confusion reigned at the time that even these gallant soldiers were not able to protect him fully. Utbah ibn Abi Waqqas

The truth revealed to the Prophet was that this world did not spring up by itself, but was created by one God, who continues to watch over it.

hurled a stone at the Prophet's face, knocking out some of his lower teeth. A famed warrior of the Quraysh, Abdullah ibn Qumayyah, attacked him with a battle-axe, causing two links of his helmet to penetrate his face. They were so deeply embedded that Abu Ubaydah broke two teeth in his attempt to extract them. Then it was the turn of Abdullah ibn Shahab Zuhri, who threw a stone at the Prophet and injured his face. Bleeding profusely, he fell into a pit. When for a long period the Prophet was not seen on the field of battle, the word

went around that he had been martyred. Then one of the Prophet's Companions spotted him lying in the pit. Seeing him to be alive, he cried jubilantly, "The Prophet is here!" The Prophet motioned to him to be silent, so that the enemy should not know where he was lying.

In this dire situation, the Prophet uttered some curses against certain leaders of the Quraysh, especially Safwan, Suhayl and Harith. 'How can a people who wound their prophet ever prosper!' he exclaimed. Even this was not to God's liking, and Gabriel came with this revelation:

'It is no concern of yours whether He will forgive or punish them. They are wrongdoers.' (THE QURAN 3: 128)

This admonition was enough for the Prophet and his anger subsided. Crippled with wounds, he started praying for the very people who had wounded him. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud later recalled how the Prophet was wiping the blood from his forehead, and at the same time praying:

'Lord, forgive my people, for they know not what they do.'
(Hadith of Muslim)

Biographies of the Prophet are full of incidents of this nature, which show his life to be a perfect model for mankind. They show that we are God's servants, and servants we should remain in every condition. Being God's humble servants, we should always remain in a state of trepidation before our Lord and the life Hereafter. Everything in the universe should serve to remind us of God. In every event we should see the hand of the Almighty, and, for us, every object should portray God's signs. In all matters of a worldly nature, we should remember that everything will finally be referred to God. Fear of hell should make us live humbly among our fellows, and longing for Paradise should impress on us the significance of this world. So conscious should we be of God's greatness that any idea of demonstrating our own greatness should appear ridiculous. No criticism should provoke us and no praise should make us vain. This is the ideal human character, which God displayed to us in the conduct of His Prophet. □

The Prophet was not just a believer; he was also entrusted with conveying the word of God to mankind.



Second Best

Try, try by all means, to achieve the very best, but when you feel that you can only get the second best, then accept it gracefully.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH

Prepare Your Provision

THE renowned conqueror, Alexander 'the Great', said on the day he died: "I wanted to conquer the world, but death has conquered me! It is a pity that I could not derive from life the solace that is accessible even to a commoner!"

Towards the end of his life, Napoleon Bonaparte gave vent to his feelings of frustration and disappointment thus: "Frustration was a crime to me, but today, I'm the most frustrated of men on earth. I was hungry for two things: power and love. I acquired power, but it soon deserted me. I searched for love, but I never found it. If what I have got from life is all that there is to it, human life is meaningless, as its end is nothing but frustration and destruction."

The Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rasheed ruled over an empire the size of which was so vast that it was said that the sun never set on it. But

during his final days, he said: "I sought solace throughout my life, but in vain. I have lived a life full of anxiety and torment. Not for a single day have I been at ease. Now I have come to the verge of death, the grave is waiting to devour my body."

On the verge of death, all the splendours of the world appear meaningless and worthless.

This is the end of every human being. But everyone ignores his end. When the Caliph Al-Mansur Abbasi approached his end, he said: "Had I lived a little longer, I would have set such empires ablaze as caused me to deviate

frequently from the path of truth. In truth, one good action is far better than a whole empire. But I realised this truth too late, and death has me in its clutches."

Most of the 'successful' men of this world have breathed their last overwhelmed with the feeling that they have been the greatest of failures. Were man to experience such feelings in his prime, he would be utterly transformed.

On the verge of death, all the splendours of the world appear meaningless and worthless. Yet, while man lives, he is so engrossed in them that he finds no time to delve deeper into the realities of life. He leaves behind a world which he has lost, and beyond him is a world for which he has made no preparations.

What is the good of coming to one's senses when death is at hand? The time to do so is prior to death's approach, when one is in a position to act. If this could happen, there would be less injustice and oppression in the guise of justice. But before death approaches, man is unwilling to give a second thought to the propriety of his actions. He keeps on doing all he can to satisfy his ego. And when temporal power and physical strength fail him, he is lost for words.

Only when he finds that the unrelenting hands of the angels of death are inescapable, does he dwell on all his wrongdoings, although the time to think about this was while he was busy pursuing his selfish desires. But at that time, people, generally, are simply not willing to accept any advice that would deflect them from their false aims and set them on the right path. □



On Consultation

The habit of consultation creates a degree of trust between the different members of society.

The Harsh Reality

Man sees only this world. Death is to him, then, a cruel blow, removing him from the land of his dreams. But if he were to see the world beyond death he would realise that it is that eternal world of infinite blessings that should be worked for. What 'new lease of life' can there be when the spectre of death lies in wait? Those who seek new life will find it only in the world that lies beyond death.

MATURITY

Hallmark of Character

In an article on maturity, Anne Landers writes:

MATURITY is the ability to control anger and settle differences without violence or destruction. Maturity is patience, the willingness to give up immediate pleasure in favour of the long-term gain. Maturity is perseverance, sweating out a project despite setbacks. Maturity is unselfishness, responding to the needs of others. Maturity is the capacity to face unpleasantness and disappointment without becoming bitter. Maturity is humility.

A truly mature person is someone who can bear with unpleasantness and yet rise above negative reaction in situations of severe adversity.

A mature person is able to say, "I was wrong." And when he is proved right, he does not have to say, "I told you so." Maturity means dependability, integrity, keeping one's word. Maturity is the ability to live in peace with things we cannot change.

A truly mature person is someone who can bear with unpleasantness and yet rise above negative reaction in situations of severe adversity; is one who can keep emotions firmly under control and in the last analysis,

is a person of 'iron character'.

Maturity stands at the apex of human virtues. One who has cultivated this quality has reached the high point of humanity: the perfect person. It is such individuals who are the true achievers in life; who will carry their nation toward success. □



Purposefulness

Purposeful people never allow themselves to be diverted from their objective.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

The 'Trust'

In the context of the creation of Adam, the Quran (33: 72) says:

We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, because they were afraid of it. But man bore it: he surely proved unjust and ignorant.

HERE, the Quran refers to the distinctive feature of Adam (mankind)—free will. The rest of the universe has no such freedom. In accordance with this plan of freedom of choice, God created man. By 'the Trust' in the above Quranic passage is meant freedom of choice or free-will. A natural result of the capabilities given to man was that he became an adventurer. It is this reality that is referred to as 'unjust' and 'ignorant'.

God's giving man the blessing of 'the Trust' was for man a great mercy. There was an apprehension that on acquiring this freedom, man would become victim to corruption. But it is these very conditions in which a desirable human being is produced, referred to in the Quran as a '*momin*', or believer.

God's giving man the blessing of 'the Trust' was for man a great mercy.

Man is no angel, and it is only human to err. But, the glory of man is that he repents after he makes a mistake. He asks God for forgiveness. That is, he takes a U-turn. God promises that He will accept our repentance. Doing something wrong and then repenting and asking God for forgiveness is no simple matter. It is an intellectual process that leads man to higher levels of personality development, and finally, making him eligible for entry into Paradise. □



Right Approach

We have to understand the scheme of things in this world and adjust ourselves accordingly.

PRIDE AND MODESTY

Accept Reality

PRIDE is the root cause of all evils. And modesty is the source of all virtues. A human being's personality is largely defined by these two traits. One who is proud will, in every respect, have a deplorable personality, while one who is modest will possess all desirable qualities.

A society whose people are of a proud nature will be a jungle of negative psychology. It is natural that in every society there will be some, more privileged individuals and some less so. If a person considers the less privileged as inferior to him, it bolsters his pride. On the other hand, if he sees someone who is more privileged than him, he feels jealous. With such people in a society, no one can be in a normal state of mind.

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

The matter of modesty is contrary to this. A truly modest person will look at all matters in relation to God, rather than in relation to human beings. He will consider even a 'common' man an important person. He will not look at the human relationships as a case of man versus man, but as a case of man with respect to God. Such thinking will put an end

to any pride or jealousy which might otherwise have tarnished his personality. The modest man thinks that the greatest task ahead of him is to introspect, learn of his shortcomings, and reform himself. Through introspection, he becomes aware of his responsibilities and works on ways to fulfill them.

Modesty is another name for acknowledging reality, while pride is another name for the denial of reality. In this world, the acknowledgement of reality is the source of all virtues, while the denial of reality is the source of all evil. □

Tests of Life

Every situation is a test paper. Apply your wisdom and you will certainly stand the test.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHARIAH AND DEEN

Circumstantial or Eternal

The Quran (5: 48) says:

To every one of you We have ordained a law and a way, and had God so willed, He would have made you all a single community, but He did not so will, in order that He might try you by what He has given you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works; to God you shall all return; then He will make clear to you about what you have been disputing.

THE Quran (42: 13) says that the *deen* or religion that God has sent humankind is one and the same and that it has been sent to every messenger in the same form. Yet, from the above cited Quranic verse (5: 48), one learns that God had given different messengers different *shariahs* and different *minhaj* (methodologies of religious practice).

Here the Quran employs the terms *shirah* and *minhaj*. *Shira* or *shariah* refers to rules of worship, while *minhaj* is religious methodology.

This Quranic verse (5: 48) is not to be understood in the absolute sense. It is not that each prophet's *shariah* was totally different from that of the other prophets. The differences were in matters of minor details.

Worship has a spirit or an essence. For instance, according to the Quran, the essence of *namaz* (five times daily prayer) is humility and that of *roza* (fasting in the month of Ramazan), is gratitude. While the inner reality of worship never changes, it has certain external forms, where there can be variations. Worship is given to one prophet in one form and to another prophet in another form.

One example of difference in the external form of worship is that of the *qibla* or direction in which prayer is offered. As is known, the Bait ul-Muqaddas (Jerusalem) was made the *qibla* for the Jews. But the Kaaba, which is in Makkah, was made the *qibla* for the *ummah* (followers) of Prophet Muhammad.

As far as *minhaj* or method is concerned, God gave different methods to His prophets to accommodate the different circumstances. Only

that method can be proper that takes into account the prevailing circumstances. For example, Prophet Joseph directly told the ruler of Egypt “Place in my charge the storehouses of the land” (THE QURAN 12: 55), but Prophet Moses did not make this sort of demand on the king of that country. On the contrary, he asked for permission to depart from Egypt, taking along with him his people, the Children of Israel. (THE QURAN 26: 17)

It is wrong to claim that the differences in the *shariahs* of different prophets were on account of evolution—that the rudimentary *shariah* of the earlier prophets kept getting refined till the finally-evolved *shariah* was given to the final prophet, the Prophet Muhammad.

The above cited Quranic verse rebuts the evolutionary explanation of different *shariahs* to different prophets. According to the Quran, the differences in the *shariah* are on the basis of God’s testing people, and not on account of the supposed evolution of *shariah* laws.

God gave different methods to His prophets to accommodate the different circumstances.

Every act of worship has a spirit as well as an external form. Those who gather around a prophet and adopt a life of faith know this difference, and hence are more particular about the spirit of worship. But in later generations, stagnation gradually sets in, and people lose the inner spirit of worship. The performance of external forms of worship in a ritualistic manner is mistaken as true worship.

When stagnation sets in and a community loses the spirit of worship, God commands, through His prophets to changes in some external forms of worship. Thereafter, those who had taken the external forms to be the real thing continue to cling onto these ancient forms, unable to adopt the new forms of worship. They even deny the prophets of their times. But those in whom the spirit of *deen* (religion) is alive give no importance to the external differences and willingly adopt the new. This is precisely what happened in ancient Madinah, when, through Prophet Muhammad, the *qibla* or direction of worship was changed (2: 142).

Such changes in *shariah* are brought about through prophets. Now, no changes are possible in the external forms of worship that Islam prescribes, because no new prophet will come. However, as far as *minhaj* or method is concerned, the case is different.

Minhaj is essentially based on *ijtihad* (exercise of judgement with reasoning). Since *ijtihad* will remain operative among the Muslim *ummah* (followers of Prophet Muhammad) till the Day of Judgment, Muslim scholars agree that differences or changes in issues related to *minhaj* will continue to be made.

Addressing the Prophet, God says in the Quran (6: 90):

Those [the previous prophets] were the people whom God guided. Follow their guidance then and say, "I ask no reward for this from you: it is only a reminder for all mankind".

Hence, the Prophet repeatedly adopted the manner of earlier prophets in matters of *minhaj*. One can discover examples of this from the Quran—for instance, exercising patience in the face of the oppression of opponents (46: 35), following the *sunnah* or practice of the Prophet Joseph in the wake of the victory over Makkah and forgiving the oppressors (12: 92).

The differences in the *shariahs* of the prophets is no mysterious matter. It is based on a proven law of nature—that even if people's beliefs are exactly the same, the external circumstances in the context of which they function can never be identical. Even a prophet may face different circumstances at different points in his life. Hence, it is absolutely natural that in the application of the *shariah* there would be differences according to the prevailing circumstances. That the *shariahs* of different prophets have been different is because of the need to take into account the differences in the prevailing circumstances that the different prophets faced.

Every act of worship has a spirit as well as an external form.

For instance, as conditions grew severe for Prophet Muhammad in Makkah, God commanded him to leave Makkah and migrate to Madinah. In contrast to this, though conditions that the Prophet Jesus faced in Jerusalem had also become severe, he was not commanded by God to leave Jerusalem and go somewhere else. One reason for this difference is that when Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madinah, the conditions there were very different from those in Makkah and the centre of Islam could very easily be established there, while at the time of Prophet Jesus, there was no place outside Jerusalem like Madinah where he could have gone in order to preach under better conditions.

Here it is necessary to clarify that the sequence of conditions and events in the 23-year span of Muhammad's prophethood is a part of the history of Islam, and not a part of Islamic creed. For instance, the Prophet engaged in peaceful *dawah* (conveying the message of God) in Makkah. He then quietly migrated (*hijrat*) to Madinah. Thereafter, there were incidents of *jihad* (in the sense of *qital* or war). Finally there was the victory over Makkah. If someone takes this sequence of events to argue that the Islamic movement is but a name for three stages—*Dawah*, *Hijrat* and *Jihad*—it would be incorrect. This sequence of events was not based on any sacred concept but was wholly a result of temporal conditions, and not of any ideology. It is related to *minhaj*, and not to the *deen*; to method, and not to religion. Its status is entirely relative. It is an event of history that happened because of prevailing conditions and there is nothing sacrosanct about it.

Differences in matters of method were not specific to earlier prophets. This principle will continue to operate among the Muslim *ummah* even after the last prophet, the Prophet Muhammad. This is because the principle on which it is based is an eternal one—that is, of differences arising in the external circumstances. Hence there will be repeated need for differences in method.

In ancient times, much of the world was under despotic monarchism. A single tyrannical ruler controlled all the affairs of a country. Given this,

When stagnation sets in and a community loses the spirit of worship, God commands, through His prophets to changes in some external forms of worship.

one option for a God-worshipping people to lead a life of faith was by departing from the ruler's domains, as the Prophet Moses did. He could not lead a peaceful life worshipping the One God in Egypt under the rule of the Pharaoh. That is why, he left Egypt, taking the entire community of the Children of Israel with him, and went into the uninhabited Sinai desert to establish a God-worshipping society.

Another example is provided by the Companions of the Prophet. In their time, the powerful Sassanid and Byzantine empires ruled in the neighbourhood of Arabia. Both

these empires were based on political coercion. Under their rule, it was not possible for the votaries of monotheism to fulfil their responsibilities. The aggression of these rulers led the Prophet's Companions to confront them. With God's special help, the Prophet's Companions were victorious. These oppressive empires were finished off and the votaries of monotheism got the opportunity to lead a life pleasing to God on God's earth.

Today, conditions have vastly changed. The world is free from dictatorship and coercive political systems. The collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1991 ended coercive rule in the history of mankind.

These political changes have revolutionised the issue of 'method'. Followers of Monotheism no longer need to migrate from one land to another. Nor do they need to resort to military confrontation with ruling powers in order to lead a free life—because all these are available as a result of historical processes.

There are two major aspects of this revolutionary transformation: complete religious freedom and modern means.

For the first time in human history, intellectual revolutions and the establishment of the United Nations has given every person and group the inalienable right to believe in, practice and preach the religion of one's choice. The only condition is that one should not engage in violence against anyone. In other words, today there is no external obstacle whatsoever for leading a peaceful religious life and for engaging in peaceful preaching work.

Under such circumstances, Muslims should thank God for the new age of freedom and welcome it whole-heartedly. Unnecessary confrontation with political rulers on the basis of some self-invented ideology is meaningless. A Companion of the Prophet, Abdullah bin Umar, remarked that God had ordered Muslims to engage in war only to end religious persecution. The age of religious persecution had ended in a partial sense in Abdullah bin Umar's time. The establishment of the United Nations has put a definite end to religious persecution. Given this religious freedom, the order to fight to end religious persecution is no longer valid. Muslims must abstain completely from any involvement in such violence.

Following the scientific and industrial revolutions, modern technology has given such capability to ordinary people with its wide impact that political power has become secondary. What was thought possible only through the acquisition of political power, can be achieved in great measure through technology.

The media, with its potential for tremendous impact, can be used to pursue one's goals very effectively. It is no big effort to organise large international conferences, bringing together people from across the world. Modern means can be used to establish magnificent Islamic centres. Spreading the message of Islam to every corner of the globe is quite possible with the Internet. If these modern means are employed with wisdom and vision, one can establish 'religious empires' that were unimaginable in the earlier age of political empires. □

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



PERFECTION OF THE CREATOR

THE Quran declares as a challenge, that there is no flaw in God's creation (67: 3). Despite every effort and resource to prove to the contrary, there is nobody who will be able to find any sign of a flaw in the universe. This evidence in the creation is an affirmation of the attributes of God. It implies that the Creator of the universe is the Ultimate Perfect Being.

When God is perfect, God's bounties cannot be imperfect. It is not possible that God gives man a temporary existence in this world but deprives him of eternal life; that He gives man desires but deprives him of their fulfillment; that He gives man sorrow but deprives him of joy; that He gives man the experience of loss but keeps him deprived of the experience of gain; that He makes man an idealist but deprives him of an ideal world; that He creates man for the future but deprives man of a future.

***When God is perfect,
God's bounties
cannot be imperfect.***

Such discrepancy in creation would go against the perfection of the Creator, God. It is simply impossible that there exists any imperfect element in the perfection of God.

This is evidence of the fact that God's bounties for man can never be imperfect. However, these bounties will reach their perfection only in Paradise.

According to the Quran, God is Most Beneficent and Most Merciful. This implies that any deficiency in man's entitlement or what man deserves is made up for by the mercy of God, in the Hereafter. Therefore, the Prophet has advised that man should never despair on seeing the shortcomings of his deeds. Instead, with hope in God's mercy, he should pray:

'O God, do not pass judgment on me on the basis of my deeds. Instead, give your verdict on the basis of Your mercy'. □



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Importance of Mission

What inspires a man more than anything is to have a great mission before him. That is what arouses man's hidden potential. It makes him a peak performer.

NATURE BEARS WITNESS

To the Glory of God

IF one were to claim that by mixing crushed pieces of stone with wood, petrol can be produced, people would laugh at the suggestion. No man has in him the power to make such things happen. But far stranger events of such a nature take place in this world every day. Nature's chemistry causes innumerable occurrences, which remain only as an unintelligible mystery to the uninitiated.

Take hydrogen and oxygen, for example. Nature blends these two gases in a particular proportion and the resulting combination takes the form of a liquid—crystal clear water. When carbon and hydrogen are mixed together under certain conditions, crude oil, a very precious thing, is formed. When certain salts and minerals are mixed with carbon,

In all the known universe, only the earth permits man to survive and bring a civilization into being.

life comes into existence. A magnetic field and movement brought together gives the astonishing force called electricity. In a similar way, when a magnetic field and electricity are brought together, an immensely powerful movement comes into being. When a seed is sown in the soil, it is transformed into wood, leaves, flowers and fruits.

Innumerable miracles like these keep occurring at any given moment. On seeing them, man is dumbfounded. He realises that none of these objects have any power to come into existence on their own, nor does man possess the power to create any of these things.

How, then, is all this happening?

In an attempt to explain this, some people claim that all of this is a part or component (*Ansh*) of God. It is God Himself Who is manifesting in innumerable forms.

The Quran, however, rejects such explanations as misleading. According to the Quran, these things are not part of God, but are created at His command (*hukm*). God has created them by His power, rather than manifesting Himself in those forms.

For ages, the stars have remained at the centre of the romantic imagination of poets. Since antiquity, man has considered the sun and moon as gods. The truth, however, is that these are nothing of the sort.

The stars are huge balls of fire, while the moon and the other planets are just dry rocks, bereft of even a drop of water or plant life. Despite being unimaginably vast, the universe is extremely unfavourable for a creature like man. In all the known universe, only the earth permits man to survive and bring a civilization into being. The exception of the earth in the limitless universe is a clear proof of the existence of an intelligent Being who has consciously created the exceptional circumstances that prevail on earth. □

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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.



THE AGE OF PEACE

A *Hadith*, which appears in several traditions, is cited in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* as follows:

Khabbab, a Companion, complained to the Prophet about the oppression and persecution by the unbelievers of Makkah. The Prophet said, that the believers of earlier times faced much greater persecution and oppression. But these difficulties did not prevent them from following the religion of God, By God! there will come a time which will be in favour of the religion of God. During this time a traveller will make a journey from Sana'a to Hadramaut (a distance of about 1000 miles) alone without any fear except the fear of God. This time is sure to come by the will of God but you are hastening for this period.

THIS *Hadith* highlights the mission of the Prophet of Islam to usher in a revolution resulting in establishing religious peace in the world. Religious intolerance and persecution of earlier times were to end. The results of his mission were to appear in stages, and not fully during the Prophet's time.

The process began during the time of the Prophet. Religious persecution was sorted out first at the tribal level. It was gradually abolished de facto at the government level, through several stages. In the mid-20th century, the United Nations Organisation (UNO) was established. Under its aegis, representatives of every country pledged religious tolerance at the international level and ensured that no one would be made a victim of religious persecution.

Violence involves two (or more) people—one who engages in violence, and one who is victimised. Earlier, religion was considered as a state subject and the only legitimate religion was the official religion, the religion of the state. Practicing any other religion was considered a crime synonymous with rebellion against the state. Such bigoted attitudes perpetrated religious persecution.

Monarchs did not allow dissension, with any opposition being perceived as a threat to their rule; and hence did not tolerate it. This state of affairs was against God's Creation Plan. God wants that in matters of religion, every person should enjoy freedom to choose their own path. The Prophet of Islam and his followers were commanded to end religious persecution (THE QURAN 8: 39), and allow such natural conditions that God desires to prevail among people.

God wants that in matters of religion, every person should enjoy freedom to choose their own path.

This plan of God is referred to in the above-cited *Hadith*. It says that in accordance with God's decision, religious freedom must be established and religious persecution be rooted out for ever.

With the age of religious freedom well established in the 20th century, no one faces persecution any more. Only those individuals or groups engaging in unnecessary violence will face violence, giving their opponents the opportunity to engage in retaliatory violence. One who engages in violence will face retaliatory violence, irrespective of whether he does it in the name of religion or any other name. □



Spiritual versus Material

Being spiritual means rectifying one's relationship with other human beings. It is far from meaning the renunciation of all contacts with the material world.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF PARADISE

Towards a Spiritual Civilization

PARADISE is no mystery. As we know, the earth was initially an inchoate, molten mass. Over time the surface of the earth cooled and became the crust, eventually taking the form of our world as we know it today. In a similar way, another transformation will take place in the future—but to a far greater extent—at that time, our earth will be turned into Paradise.

In this world, many things are brought into existence as a result of conversion. For example, rain results from the conversion of water vapour in the atmosphere into liquid water. A tree represents the conversion of a seed, using the soil's nutrients. Machines are a conversion of raw materials such as iron and steel into complex mechanisms. The industrial world ensures the conversion of inert materials into socially-useful commodities.

Likewise, in future, a conversion shall take place on a far grander scale, changing this far from ideal world into an ideal one. This in religious terms would be Paradise. This instance of conversion is referred to, in the Quran in the following verse:

When the earth is changed into another earth. (THE QURAN 14: 48)

Paradise is the natural culmination of creation which at a certain point of time had a definite beginning.

On our earth, conversion from one form or state into another is a repeated, continuous, known natural process—a normal, everyday occurrence. This being so, believing in Paradise is the same as believing in the continuance of a predictable series of events. It is just like saying that the thousandth product is being delivered from a manufacturing plant that has already produced nine hundred and ninety nine of the same.

Paradise is not just a matter of religious belief or dogma. According to the eternal laws of nature, Paradise is a state that is bound to come into existence. A study of the laws governing earthly systems shows that the present world is under a continuous evolutionary process, of which Paradise, is the ultimate phase. Paradise is the natural culmination of a creation which at a certain point in time had a definite beginning.

Astronomical studies show that the universe is incredibly vast. It is

expanding at an accelerating rate, that even with the use of the most powerful telescopes its total dimensions have yet to be accurately estimated. In this immeasurably vast universe, the earth is an extremely tiny planet, a grain of sand.

Across the universe, our earth is a very rare exception, the only place where exceptional things such as water, vegetation, an atmosphere of air and oxygen are present. If life on earth prevails, it is because of these impeccable life support systems that are functioning on it. On earth, there exist all those valuable elements using which man can, if he wills, build a civilization. It is, and has been, the task of humanity to convert this potential into reality.

It is quite evident that civilization, passing continuously from one stage to another, is moving from its initial state of development to progressive higher levels altogether. Many studies of human history and civilization will confirm this fact.

As the Quran puts it:

You will surely move from one stage to another stage.

(THE QURAN 84: 19-21)

The evolution of history shows that human civilization is continuously advancing along the path of progress and development. The final result of such focused progress and sustainable development could be called a 'Spiritual Civilization', or Paradise.

In comparison to the universe our earth is infinitesimally smaller than a grain of sand.

The history of civilization shows that it has passed through three major phases, and now all the indications suggest that it is in the fourth and final stage of its journey. The three major phases of civilization are: the Stone Age; the Agricultural Age; and the Industrial Age.

It is a matter of common knowledge that these phases of civilization have already taken place. In his bestseller *Future Shock* (published in 1970), Alvin Toffler says that the fourth phase, probably the last period of civilization, will take place in the near future. He calls this fourth phase the Super-Industrial Age, a much more advanced civilisation. In religious terms, it would be appropriate to consider this fourth phase as a spiritual civilization.

Let us reflect briefly, on the different periods of civilization. There was a time when man could only use what was present on the earth in its original form. Of all these materials, stone was the most readily available and the most useful. Although other materials existed on earth, stone took pride of place as it was the most widely used, and so this phase came to be called the Stone Age. Early Stone Age Homo Sapiens possessed the same natural qualities as we do today. Research shows that the human brain during the Stone Age civilization was no different from the human brain today. It was only a lack of knowledge that withheld man from utilising all his hidden potentials.

Then came the Agricultural Age, when man discovered more and more ways to harness nature. This age saw the development of irrigation, ploughing, the rearing and breeding of animals, the use of iron and carts with wheels. In this way, it was possible to lead a better life as compared to that in the previous age.

Research has shown that the human brain during the Stone Age civilization was no different from the human brain today.

The Industrial Age began when man went beyond the use of animal power and invented mechanical power. He converted water into steam power and developed the steam engine. There was a further leap forward when oil was discovered as fuel and used for propulsion. Modern methods of communication were

developed, which converted the whole world into a global village.

By using mechanical power, man engaged in new enterprises such as mechanised transportation, rapid communication of news, and the building of cities along modern lines. In this way, there emerged a whole new world, both beautiful and meaningful, with a fresh viewpoint on co-operation and education. It was called the Industrial Civilization.

The fourth phase of civilization is what Alvin Toffler calls the Super-Industrial Age. The most exceptional aspect of this age would be complete automation, that is, the use of electronics and control systems will be on such a large scale that most jobs will be performed with minimal human intervention. In this age, a man would, ideally, be able to single-handedly fulfil all his personal requirements.

The advent of automation is an advance intimation of the joys of Paradise. Of Paradise, the Quran says:

There you shall find all that your souls desire and all that you can ask for: a rich provision from a Benevolent and Merciful God.

(THE QURAN 41: 31)

From the scientific and academic standpoint, the above-mentioned facts make the ideal age of the future—the ‘spiritual civilization’—understandable in terms of being a Super-Industrial age.

This fourth phase of civilization is yet to reach realisation, but it is in this phase that the ideal world—in religious terms, Paradise—will most probably take shape. The present transitional period is a condition which may be called ‘Paradise-in-the-making’.

Paradise is the final journey of civilization. By the laws of nature, such a world will definitely come into existence in due course. Therein, all limitations and disadvantages will come to an end; there will be no fear or grief, nor hurt or pain. All those potentialities which have been integral to man from the beginning of time, will be fulfilled in the world of Paradise.

Human personality will attain new heights of development. This, will be the culmination: he will become the perfect man. He will find eternal life where old age, accidents, disease and death are absent. This will be the ideal world, where man will be in a position to use the full potential of his personality and experience complete fulfilment.

***The pure bliss of
Paradise will not be
fleeting in nature but
truly eternal.***

Paradise will be the pinnacle of the evolutionary process of human civilization. It will be the dawning of the perfect and ideal world of which man has always dreamt. Paradise will be the ideal realm of joy, peace and eternal happiness.

Paradise will not be a place of stagnation. In Paradise, man will make unending discoveries. There will be no boredom in Paradise, because boredom prevails only where new discoveries do not take place. Fresh experience is the greatest source of happiness, and in Paradise, the doors of unlimited truth are ever open. The pure bliss of Paradise will not be fleeting in nature but truly eternal.

The making of Paradise is just as possible as the making of the earth and the development of civilizations. In ancient Stone Age lay hidden an Agricultural Age, which emerged in due course. Similarly, in the Agricultural Age, the hidden more developed Industrial Age emerged at the proper time. By the same token, we can say that there lies hidden in this Industrial period a far more developed, refined and spiritual world which will appear in time for all to see. The emergence of this spiritual, or heavenly period is, in practical terms, as much a possibility as that of previous periods of history.

In the Industrial Age, the earth has been beautified. Its cities have been meticulously planned. Developments in science and technology have made the earth a better place to live. Similarly, with the dawn of the final period—the Spiritual Age—the earth will be further improved to become an ideal world. A number of verses in the Quran give clear indications of this. For instance,

Praise be to God, Who has fulfilled His promise to us and bestowed upon us the earth to inherit, so that we may dwell in Paradise wherever we please. (THE QURAN 39: 74)

Paradise is described as being 'as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in God and his Messengers'. (THE QURAN 57: 21)

The earth will shine with the light of its Lord. (THE QURAN 39: 69)

By Divine arrangement, in Paradise, justice will prevail in its most perfect form.

Today our world is potential Paradise. Tomorrow this potential will become a reality, and the earth will become a place of eternal happiness and joy.

Although on earth there exists nature's life support system in its perfect form, events have shown that the present state of the earth is not an ideal one. Nature's system may be at its best, but the presence of both good and evil make it far from ideal. Here, individuals who do good and those who do bad exist alongside each other. The presence of people who misuse their freedom is the source of all kinds of evil. But as the final phase of civilization approaches, the bad individuals will be separated from the good. They will be deprived of the resources of the earth, and the earth will be entrusted solely to the good. This is the truth which has been mentioned in the following verse:

And indeed, We have written in Az-Zabur (Psalms) that My righteous slaves shall inherit the land. (i.e. the land of Paradise) (THE QURAN 21: 105)

This statement in the Quran is recorded in detail in the Book of Psalms in the Bible:

The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell in it forever. (PSALMS 37: 29)

The process of civilization set in on the earth once human beings came to exist. In the first phase, man was only able to build a primitive world. He later became more and more successful at constructing a highly developed world. This human success goes hand-in-hand with a continuous evolutionary process. And it is but natural to believe that one more stage is in the offing—that of a perfect world.

The emergence of this spiritual, or heavenly period is in practical terms as much a possibility as that of previous periods of history.

This evolutionary process indicates the earth is heading towards a superior stage. This will be the last evolutionary stage of the earth, which we can call the perfect world. This ideal world will have no limitations. By Divine arrangement, justice will prevail in its most perfect form. The wicked will be removed and only the virtuous will gain entry into this ideal world, where there will be no pollution of any kind. Calamities will cease to occur, and all disadvantages such as disease, accidents, old age and death will be eradicated forever.

Now, all tasks are performed by hard work. Indeed, hardship and success are inseparable. In Paradise however, such refined changes will take place that each activity will be enjoyable. As it is said in the Quran:

Truly, the dwellers of Paradise that day (the Day of Resurrection) will be busy in joyful activities. (THE QURAN 36: 55)

In Paradise, there will be no need for any human diversion, since all activities will be a source of entertainment and enjoyment.

For thousands of years, man has been seeking a heaven on earth. In response to this natural urge, he will find a life of joy, peace and happiness forever in a state of perfection in this world. There will be no necessity for physical labour; pleasant intellectual activities will suffice for the achievement of all desired goals. □

The Test of Man

Although many allurements exist in this world, they are there to put man to the test. In avoidance of temptation, a person shows that he is a man of principles.

A MOST EVIDENT MYSTERY

Irrefutable Existence

WHAT everyone is most convinced of, is one's own existence. Despite this, in purely scientific terms everyone is a mystery. For man is not what he physically appears to be, but consists of what he calls "I", and the "I" is not observable.

Philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650), to give proof of his own existence did not say: "I consist of a body that is observable, therefore I exist." Instead he said: "I think, therefore I exist."

Man undoubtedly has an observable existence. We all know that man exists. But, in fact, this existence is at the level of "I", and the cognizance of "I" is at the level of perception or comprehension, and not at the level of observation.

***The truth is that
God's being
comprehensible is an
undeniable proof of
His existence.***

Exactly the same is true of God. It is as if God is a Greater "I". God at the level of His creation is directly observable. But God at the level of His Being is not directly observable by man. We shall have to believe in God on the basis of the same logical principle which Descartes employed to know himself, and on the basis

of which all of us believe in our own existence.

I can comprehend God, therefore God exists. The truth is that God's being comprehensible is an undeniable proof of His existence. If we deny God, we shall have to deny our own selves. Since we cannot countenance our own denial, we cannot countenance God's denial either. Everyone who believes in his own existence is logically compelled to say, "I exist, therefore, God exists." □



No Shortcuts

*No seed turns into a tree by leaps and bounds. Similarly,
it is not possible for a person to reach his destination
without travelling for the requisite period of time.*

APPLICATION OF THE QURAN

Purposeful Guidance

SCHOLARS have expressed a range of opinions on what they think is the key to understanding the Quran. Some believe that one must know 15 different disciplines in order to understand the Quran. Some contend that for this purpose, the most important thing is to know the occasions of revelation of different verses. Others think that the best way to understand the Quran is through the Quran itself. Yet others think the most crucial thing to know in this regard is the order of the Quranic verses and chapters. According to them, knowledge of the connection between the verses of the Quran is the master-key to understanding the Quran.

The fact, however, is that all these claims are only partially correct. There are two levels of Quranic comprehension—the first is the Quran, and the second is the applied Quran. The first level in understanding the Quran is to know how those who lived at the time when the Quran was being revealed understood it. The second level is to try to understand what its applied meaning is in the context of the changed conditions of today.

These conditions for understanding the Quran can be helpful only at the first level of understanding. But, for the second level of Quranic comprehension—the understanding of its applied meaning in the contemporary context—these conditions are wholly insufficient. The only benefit of understanding the Quran at the basic level is that the Quran becomes an understandable book in the historical sense. But as far as the present age is concerned, the current generation will not gain any guidance from it. They may accept the Quran only as a matter of belief, but it will not be possible for them to make the Quran as a living guide, although the actual significance of the Quran is its guidance meant for all times and for all people.

Consider, in this regard, Chapter Joseph (*Surah Yusuf*) the twelfth chapter in the Quran. God has referred to the story of Joseph recounted in this chapter as the 'best story'. This indicates that this chapter narrates something exceptional.

Quranic commentaries written in Arabic and other languages, feature considerable discussion about this chapter. But there is no clear guidance from any commentary on why the story of Prophet Joseph is the 'best story'. Reason demands that if this story is the 'best story',

then it cannot be because of the historical past; it is essential that it also provides some beneficial guidance for the present-day.

Considered from this angle, the term 'best story' that appears in this chapter of the Quran means 'best method'—that is, the best method of action.

The story of the Prophet Joseph who lived some 3500 years ago, appears in both the Quran and the Bible. In his time, Egypt was under monarchical rule, and the kingdom was an agrarian economy. The king of Egypt ruled as the political authority and appointed Prophet Joseph as the administrative authority. According to the Quran, the

law of the land remained with the king, while the agricultural economy was under Prophet Joseph's control. The Bible describes this arrangement in the words of the Egyptian king as:

There are two levels of Quranic comprehension—the first is the Quran, and the second is the applied Quran.

Only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you. (Genesis 41: 40)

Prophet Joseph got this opportunity because of the personal bent of mind of the king as an individual. In terms of applied understanding of the Quran, one can say that in today's age

this same opportunity is available to all believers in general, because of the changed times. Democracy gives an elected ruler a few years to rule. Today, the role of government is essentially to manage the governance of a country. All fields other than governance, such as businesses, education, media and religion, are free and open to all. Every individual now has the right to do as he pleases in all the many non-governmental spheres, provided that in seeking his goals he uses peaceful methods and does not foment conflict against anyone else, whether ordinary citizens or the government.

As a result of the global changes that have taken place through the ages, the 'best story' has become a universal principle, an applied living guide for people today. This is a case of applied reflection and understanding of this chapter of the Quran.

This same method of applied interpretation is desirable for the whole Quran. In this way, the Quran becomes a book of guidance for humanity today, whereas if the Quran is studied in the light of the earlier-cited principles of exegesis, it will only appear like a story of an age long past. □

GOD HAS CREATED YOU FOR A HIGHER PURPOSE

Find Your Purpose

ROBERT CLIVE was a clerk in the East India Company in the eighteenth century. Dissatisfied with his salary of a mere five pounds a year, he decided to end his life. He pointed his revolver to his head and pulled the trigger, but it misfired. Then, suddenly he cried out that God had made him for a bigger task! After this, he joined the East India Company's Army, and gradually reached the top.

Robert Clive went on to become instrumental in establishing British rule in India.

The Quran and *Hadith* tell us that if God prevents a task from happening the way you had planned it, it is a clue that He wants you to do something else. A *Hadith* report says that when God loves a people, He tests them through difficulties. (*Tirmidhi*)

It is to make you rethink and re-plan your life. If your plans do not get fulfilled, it is an indication from God. It tells you that He has created you for something bigger than what you are presently involved in. God has not created you to make this world your goal and purpose and to get lost in it. He has created you to worship Him. So, instead of chasing the world, devote yourself to God-realisation and to inviting other people to God.

Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's palace but God created such conditions that his stay there could not continue. God had created Moses not to live in the palace but for a far higher purpose—to invite people to God.

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

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IDEOLOGY OR HISTORY?

Abiding Principle and Practical Strategy

IDEOLOGY is an integral part of any mission. Another part is what can be called 'practical strategy'. The basic ideology enjoys the status of a permanent principle. In contrast, practical strategy is something that one adopts depending on the prevailing conditions. These two—ideology and practical strategy—are found in every mission, religious or secular.

Take the case of Mahatma Gandhi's mission. This was a completely secular mission, with its ideology being based on '*Ahimsa*' or non-violence. Gandhi spearheaded his movement on the basis of this nonviolent secular ideology. Along with this, in accordance with the practical demands of the times he adopted a method known as 'Civil Disobedience'.

Gandhi's ideology of peace was an integral part of his mission, but Civil Disobedience was a policy that was adopted for a certain limited period of time and purpose which was considered desirable according to the prevailing conditions. When the conditions changed, this method of Civil Disobedience became irrelevant.

Islam's ideology is the ideology of *tawheed*, or monotheism. It is a completely peaceful ideology, that of a permanent principle.

The same thing is true in the case of Islam. Islam's ideology is the ideology of *tawheed*, or monotheism. It is a completely peaceful ideology, that of a permanent principle.

Together with the peaceful mission of *tawheed*, the early history of Islam also shows that battles were fought in Arabia between Muslims and their opponents. But in Islamic history these battles have the status of practical strategies relevant to the times. They are not an integral

part of Islamic ideology.

To understand the Quran, it is essential to consider both types of teachings—ideology and practical strategy—separately. The verses of the Quran that talk of *tawheed* are part of the eternal ideology of Islam, while the verses that talk of *qital* or battles should be considered as related to the practical strategy adopted in response to prevailing conditions.

Today, global conditions have completely changed. If earlier the age of war prevailed, now it is the age of peace. In such circumstances, *qital* or battles must be considered as part of the ephemeral history of Islam, not as a part of the eternal mission of Islam. □

THE MOST DIFFICULT, AND THE MOST EASY

Character Building

THERE appears to be only a minor difference in these two phrases: “*You are wrong!*” and “*I am wrong!*”, but in reality the difference between the two is immense. There are millions of people in the world who will readily accuse others of doing wrong, but almost none who willingly acknowledge their own.

When you accuse others of doing wrong, you negate or put *them* down, while when you admit that you’ve done wrong, you negate *yourself*. Negating others is easy, while negating oneself is the most difficult.

Many movements in recent times have mobilised vast numbers of people based on the slogan “*You are wrong!*” The sole reason for the popularity of these movements and their ‘big’ leaders is that they have targeted some external person or community, accusing them of doing wrong. Had they emerged to negate themselves, they would have won no supporters at all!

“I am wrong” are words of wisdom. They help develop your character, and take you from a lower to a higher plane.

“*I am wrong*” are words of wisdom. They help develop your character, and take you from a lower to a higher plane. In contrast, “*You are wrong!*” is a superficial phrase and of no help in inner realization. Accusing others of wrongdoing entangles you in matters of no benefit whatsoever to you. Saying “*I am wrong*” helps you reform yourself, while the “*You are wrong!*” approach only promotes destruction. “*I am wrong*” reflects devotion to, and worship of, God, while “*You are wrong*” reflects worship of the ego. Admitting that one has done wrong is a meritorious thing, while accusing others of doing wrong is only a cheap way of asserting yourself over others. Not hesitating to say “*I am wrong*” is piety, while condemning others for having done wrong is worldliness. □



GOD: A SOURCE OF CONVICTION

Power In Faith

IF you have a super-telescope that can view the entire universe, you will first of all see that rare planet called earth. You will observe that, amidst the totally lifeless universe, this tiny planet has an abundance of life and various kinds of life-supporting elements. This exceptional sight would be so overwhelming that you would be wonder-struck.

You would also see that—the earth, along with its moon and the other planets, are continuously in motion, rotating on their axes, and orbiting around the sun; at the same time, this entire solar system revolving in the wider circle of the Milky Way Galaxy; and the galaxy rotating in the much wider circle of other galaxies.

***In this vast universe,
man's only source
of support is God. It
is by God's guidance
that man's ship
is brought safely
ashore.***

The movement of the stars and planets in this vast endless space will appear astonishingly strange to your sight. You will then see an unbelievable number of vast balls of fire called stars, moving with great speed. Amidst these astral bodies, our earth will appear no more than a grain of sand.

This sight will be so astounding that your own existence will appear to be totally insignificant and worthless. This experience will lead you to the discovery of two things. Firstly, there

is a powerful God in this universe, its Creator and Sustainer. If you can recall this sight of the universe your heart will automatically call out that the universe itself is a clear proof of its Creator. Secondly, in the face of the immensity of the universe you will feel helpless and insignificant, and understand that without God, your very existence is not possible. This is the most important reality of life. Comprehending this, one will voluntarily turn to God. One's whole being, will call out:

**“O God, help me, for, without Your help
everything will go wrong!”**

In this vast universe, man's only source of support is God. It is by God's guidance that man's ship is brought safely ashore. Belief in God is vital for man. Man is nothing without this belief.

Sometimes in the course of daily life a feeling of helplessness overcomes man, the same kind of helplessness that he experiences while observing the universe through a telescope. All men and women have the feeling that they suffer from limitations when they cannot achieve what they want. These limitations make them feel dejected and helpless. Illness, accident, loss, death or old age are a part of man's experience. They are constant reminders of the fact that we are in need of a superior power. Without the help of such a superior power, we cannot go on with our lives. These feelings are a psychological proof of the existence of God. We go through this psychological experience at various points in our lives. Each one of us, in our inner feelings, thus bears witness to the existence of God.

The nature of every human being constantly urges one to recognise the need for God. Without God, our lives will not be complete. Without the help of God we cannot succeed.

Man's position is further illustrated by the following example.

A hundred years ago, a ship sailed from the coast of America towards Africa. When the ship was far out in the open sea, a severe storm broke out, making it heave and shudder. The passengers were all shaken and in a state of great fear and anxiety. At this time of crisis, one of the passengers noticed a little girl in a corner on the deck playing with her dolls, quite undisturbed by the storm. Seeing her, he got curious and asked, "Do you know what is happening to our ship?"

The girl asked, "What is the matter?"

The passenger told her that the ship was caught in a dangerous storm.

The girl calmly replied: "You know, my father is the Captain of this ship. He is not going to let it sink."

The girl's faith in her father saved her from being a victim of fear at this crucial moment. The same is true of a person of faith. He has the same childlike faith in his Creator, God Almighty. But his is a faith of far greater intensity. When catastrophe threatens, he can say with much stronger conviction that God Almighty is the Captain of the ship of his life: He will never let it sink under any circumstance. □

Each one of us, in our inner feelings, bears witness to the existence of God.

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

Opportunities for Gratitude

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

There are certain healthy principles for social living. One principle is that the individual should have trust in himself and not ask for anything from anyone. But an equally healthy principle is that if someone offers help without being asked, then one should accept it and not turn it down. This develops bonding and a healthy psychology among the members of society.

A person demanding of others or desiring something be given to him, leads to an unhealthy psychology in the person. It means that he expects from other than God, when the right thing is for everyone to adopt the principle of 'In God we trust'.

A person demanding of others or desiring something be given to him, leads to an unhealthy psychology in the person.

Another healthy principle is that if someone gives a person something without his asking for it, then he should not refuse it. Because if he refuses it, he will develop the psychology of arrogance, which is greater than every other evil.

Therefore, the healthy attitude is not to ask anything from anyone, but if someone gives, then one should not refuse it.

Often, it happens that a person gets something as a result of circumstances but he ignores it, thinking it to be unwanted, and keeps praying to God to help him. This is a wrong thing to do. The right way is that a person should accept the opportunity he gets as coming from God. In this way, he will develop the attitude which has been stated thus in the Quran:

Remember also the time when your Lord declared, "If you are grateful, I will surely bestow more favours on you; [...]" (14: 7)

A person praying, 'O God, give me sunshine', even as the sun shines, goes against the law of nature. If you pray, 'O God, give me oxygen', when there is fresh air all around you, it is an unnatural demand. Such

occasions are for expressing thankfulness, rather than praying for favours.

Similarly, the opportunities in life that come your way are from God. A person should be so prepared that he is able to recognise an opportunity when it appears. Such a moment is a moment for being thankful to God. Instead of recognising and utilising it, if he prays for an opportunity, he is going against the law of nature.

Opportunity always comes undeclared; a person has to recognise them on his own. If a God-sent opportunity comes to a person but, instead of recognising it, he keeps praying for something else, such a person will be regarded as blind by God. Angels will note that when he had to offer thanks to God for what He had given him, he kept praying to God for something else. □

The healthy attitude is not to ask anything from anyone, but if someone gives, then one should not refuse it.



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THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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

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

GREED FOR MORE AND MORE

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

Greed for more and more distracted you [from God] till you reached the grave. But you will soon come to know. But you will soon come to know. Indeed, were you to know the truth with certainty, you would see the fire of Hell. You would see it with the eye of certainty. Then on that Day you shall be questioned about your worldly favours. (102: 1-8)

Man wants to earn more and more so that he may accumulate more and more material assets. He remains immersed in that thought till the day he dies. After his death, man realises that what was worth accumulating was something else. But the realization after death will be of no avail.

Any increase in worldly goods increases a man's accountability. But man, in his foolishness, thinks that he is adding to his success.

THE PASSAGE OF TIME

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

I swear by the passage of time, that man is surely in a state of loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds and exhort one another to hold fast to the Truth, and who exhort one another to steadfastness. (103: 1-3)

At every moment, man is advancing towards his death. If a man does not make the best of the time still available to him, he will finally face total destruction. In order to be successful, a man has to exert himself, while for failure he has to do nothing. Failure is itself rushing towards him.

A venerable gentleman said that he understood the meaning of this chapter of the Quran from an ice vendor who was shouting in market, 'O, people! Have mercy on one whose assets are melting away!' On hearing this, the gentleman said to himself that just as the ice melts and reduces, similarly the lifespan given to man is fast passing away. If the existing opportunity that life affords us is lost in inaction or in evil actions, this is man's loss. (*Imam Razi, Tafsir Kabir*).

To utilise time properly in the present world, one needs to adopt three courses. Firstly, that of Faith, i.e. consciousness of Truth or reality, and its acceptance. Secondly, virtuous deeds, i.e. doing that which is required to be done as a matter of religious duty and abstaining from what is sinful. Thirdly, advising people about Truth and forbearance. This follows on such a deep realisation of Truth that the concerned person becomes its preacher.

THE BACKBITER

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

Woe to every fault-finding back-biter, who amasses wealth, counting it over, thinking that his wealth will make him live forever. By no means! He shall surely be cast into the crushing torment. Would that you understood what that crushing torment is like. It is a Fire kindled by God. Reaching right into the hearts of men, it closes in on them from every side in towering columns. (104: 1-9)

If a person has some difference with another, he can settle it through argument. But it is not proper for him to denigrate the other person, defame and make him the target of allegations. While the first course of action is legitimate, the second is not.

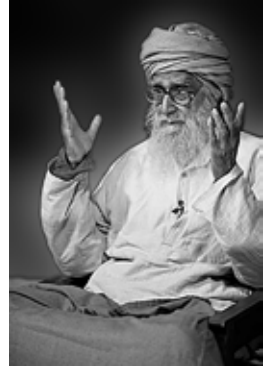
Those who resort to calumny do so because they think that their worldly position is safe and strong. They think they are not going to lose anything by levelling baseless allegations against another. But this is utter foolishness. The fact is that their doing so amounts to jumping into a pit of fire—a pit of fire from which there will be no escape. □

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

**Q&A With Maulana Wahiduddin Khan on
*Challenges in Life***

Maulana, this world is aggressively competitive. Competition, you say, is good, but it often escalates into aggressive confrontation. How should one manage this?



Competition is part of nature. Take the case of children. They fight with each other every other day. But then they quickly make up. This is nature.

Your question reflects a concern about relating to negative people, who see competition as aggression or who react to competition with aggression. If someone like this gets angry with you, quickly say, 'You are right, and I am wrong.' At once you will find that the problem has been solved!

It is in your hands, not in someone else's. It all depends on how you handle the situation.

You repeatedly stress that we should save ourselves from distractions and that we should focus on positivity. But in the corporate world where I work, vindictiveness is a part of the culture, and often leads to confrontation. Because of this, one gets embroiled in distractions and sinks into negativity.

If you try to be competitive, confrontation with vindictive people is inevitable. If I adopt the formula you suggest, saying, 'You are right, and I am wrong', wouldn't I be stunting my intellectual development?

I'll say just one thing here—that you need to learn the art of retreat. Be ready to retreat at any moment. You must realise that no situation can be entirely good or entirely bad; it's always a mix of the two. So, in every situation, focus on the good and ignore the bad, and you can progress. Otherwise, you will be constantly escaping from challenging situations, constantly running or seeking to run away.

I don't hesitate to retreat when I need to. My sole concern is that the process of my intellectual development should not stop. And so, whenever I need to, I quickly and willingly retreat.

Learn the art of retreat management. In a negative situation, do not react emotionally or negatively. And then you will see that things will fall into place.

Retreat is a time-buying strategy. You need to do this sort of buying-time in your life, too. You can defuse any negative situation if you learn how to manage it properly, if you know how and when to retreat. Personally, I've gained a great deal from retreating when and where I need to.

Do you think human beings are naturally and inherently destructive, or is this a human invention?

According to my experience, man is born a pacifist. It is violence that is a human invention. Violence is a corruption. Every person is born as a peace-loving creature. Our true nature is peace. Weapons, war, a history full of violence—all these are human inventions. Not only me, but all pacifists across the world believe that man is born a pacifist and that peace is interwoven in human nature.

Earlier today, I was watching a pigeon. Its every action was very beautiful! Each action reflected an innocent beauty!

This is the real nature of man, too!

Pigeons and other animals have no choice about their behaviour. They are governed by their instincts and have no option to engage in violence. They live by their nature. They behave according to their instincts. But man has choice. He has freedom. Violence is nothing but misuse of this freedom. Otherwise, man is basically a peace-loving creature, just as a pigeon or a dove is. □



Peace or Destruction

If we fail to establish peace, we must face destruction in every field of life. The option for us is not between peace and no peace, but between peace and annihilation.

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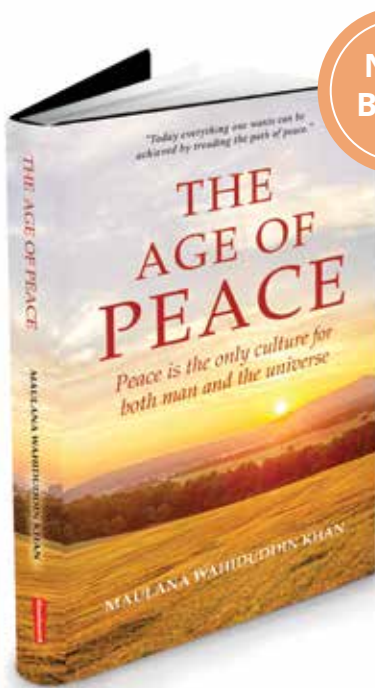
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