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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

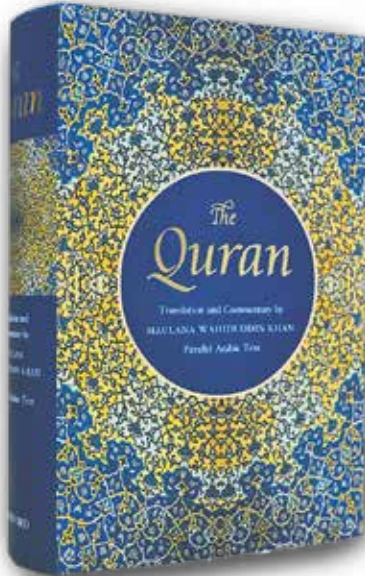


Sound thinking inculcates realistic thinking and it is realistic approach that leads to all kinds of success.

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

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



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

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 36 DECEMBER 2015

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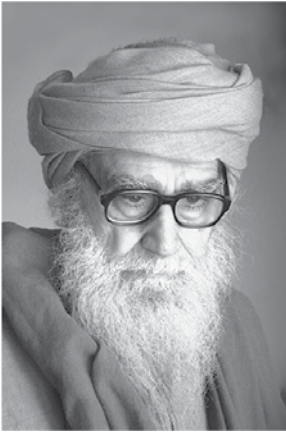
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

UNGODLY ACTIVITIES IN THE NAME OF GOD

Paris Attacks—highly condemnable

ON November 13, 2015, six coordinated terrorist attacks occurred in and around Paris. Armed gunmen engaged in mass shooting and suicide bombing at several public places including a concert hall, cafes and restaurants. According to reports, a total of 129 people were killed and over 300 injured. The deadliest attack was at the Bataclan theatre, where about 90 people were shot at by men wielding AK-47 assault rifles. A witness to the shootings at the theatre said that the terrorists shouted '*Allahu Akbar*' (God is great) before opening fire. These self-styled *mujahideen* were practically saying, 'Violence is great', but used 'God is great' as their slogan. This incident reminded me of a saying of the Prophet of Islam, who once said to his Companions that a day would come when Muslims would commit unlawful acts. His Companions asked with surprise how this would happen. He replied: 'They would give it a name other than its real name and thus make it lawful.'

The present-day violence in the name of *jihad* is a clear example of the above *Hadith*. These so-called *mujahideen* have given their acts of

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

violence the name of '*jihad*' and are thus engaged in perpetrating terror. This kind of violence can be termed 'justified violence'. Since these people have sought justification for their violence, their conscience does not refrain them from killing others. Taking the lives of innocent people is an act for which there is no excuse whatsoever. Committing such an act in the name of God only aggravates the heinous nature of the crime. Those who perpetrate such acts have no relation whatsoever with Islam. To those who—based on such incidents—form an opinion that Islam is a religion of violence, I will say that Islam should not be judged by the acts of Muslims. Islam should be judged through its scripture and not through the practice of Muslims.

According to the Quran, killing of a human being is the worst act in God's eyes. The Quran states that killing one person is like killing all of humankind. (5: 32) This verse certainly applies to people who went on a killing rampage in Paris. Those engaged in this self-justified violence should know that no self-styled justification can make an unlawful act lawful.

Taking the lives of innocent people is an act for which there is no excuse whatsoever.

Committing such an act in the name of God only aggravates the heinous nature of the crime.

How could we banish violence and terror from our lives? UNESCO has adopted the dictum: 'Violence begins from the mind.' Therefore any effort to meet this challenge needs to begin in our minds. We have to dispel from the minds of terrorists, the ideology they have adopted.

The Quran gives us an example. Before the revelation of the Quran, Arabs were continually engaged in warfare. The Quran offered them a message of peace, which reengineered their minds, and they became peaceful as a result. Reference to this incident has been given in a verse of the Quran. (3: 103)

In modern history, we find an example of this nature in Japan. Before the Second World War, the Japanese people had adopted the violent method to achieve their goal. One of the methods used was known as *hara-kiri*, a form of suicide attack. However, after World War II educated people of Japan rose up to guide people towards the path of peace by giving up violent means. Thus Japan emerged as a peaceful country. This miracle occurred by way of dissemination of peaceful ideas through literature and several public speeches and broadcasts. It helped bring about a transformation in the mindset of the Japanese people and as a result Japan became a peaceful nation.

This tested method has to be applied to those who have today taken to violence. God has blessed each one of us with the same nature. Just as it was possible to address the nature of the Japanese people, it is also possible to address the nature of present-day terrorists.

We have to work for this cause at two levels: first, we have to condemn violence in unequivocal terms. We must tell the perpetrators of such acts that their actions go against both Islam and reason. No positive result is going to come out of it. On the other hand, we must present the peaceful teachings of the Quran to those who are under the influence of violence. For example, the Prophet once said: 'God grants to peace what He does not grant to violence.' (*Sahih Muslim*). Similarly, we must inform them of past events which clearly point out that violence has only carved out a history of death and destruction.

Any individual or group having a target can succeed in achieving it only by following the peaceful course of action.

All relevant facts go to show that war and violence are not options before us. Any individual or group having a target can succeed in achieving it only by following the peaceful course of action. No positive goal has ever been attained through violence. □

Maulana Wahiddudin Khan
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Best Way of Settlement

The conciliatory approach always minimizes the problem. In contrast, the confrontational approach aggravates matters while leaving the initial problem unsolved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE TRUTH

Realization of God

GOD manifests Himself on earth through truth. Disbelief in the truth is disbelief in God. There is no greater crime than to refuse to accept the truth after it has been made plain. Truth emanates from God, so whoever rejects it is, in fact, rejecting God.

There is nothing strange about the truth. It is inherent to human nature, yet people fail to accept it. This is because they are psychologically inhibited from doing so. Acceptance of the truth might disrupt their materialistic life-pattern. They might have to lower their worldly status.

Since man is being tested in this world, God does not make Himself manifest in visible form; He appears in the form of truth.

If the truth is presented by some insignificant person against whom they are prejudiced, they are reluctant to acknowledge it. Psychological barriers such as these dominate their minds preventing straight thinking. They reject matters, which a little honest thought would surely have led them to accept as the truth.

Since man is being tested in this world, God does not make Himself manifest in visible form; He appears in the form of truth. Man must recognize God as enshrined in truth and bow down before it. When truth

appears on earth, it is as if God has appeared in all His majesty. Rejecting truth on the grounds of prejudice, pride or expediency, is to reject God Himself. It is a failure to recognize God in the truth. It is equivalent to placing yourself above God and giving precedence to your own petty requirements. God will have scant regard for such people on the Day of Judgement and, whomsoever God scorns will find no refuge on earth or in heaven. They will wander helplessly, forever abject and forlorn. □



Start with Opportunities

In this world there is only one starting point, and that is based on opportunities rather than on problems.

INTELLECTUAL FOG

Clear Your Vision

PARTS of northern India get very cold in winter, resulting in thick fog. Trains get held up in the fog or move very slowly. To solve this problem, the Indian Railways has developed a 'fog-safe device' and plans to equip more than 2,000 trains with the device. These portable GPS driven anti-fog or fog-safe devices will track in real time the location of the next signal on the train's route. It lets the driver know exactly how many metres away he is from the signal. This device now enables trains to be driven at high speeds even in dense fog and ensures they reach their destination safely.

While this anti-fog device relates to material fog, there is also something that can be called 'intellectual fog' that hampers intellectual development. In ancient times, the means of acquiring knowledge were limited. With the prevalence of print and electronic media it has become very simple to acquire knowledge. People express themselves—through writing and speech and with new forms of communications and media, the volume and exchange of such expression have increased enormously. The internet has made it very easy to access information on any subject.

But there is a problem with this information overload. Despite access to a wealth of material on any subject, many are unable to decipher a clear understanding of the matter. The information overload has only resulted in a jungle of confusion for them and it is easy to be trapped in this 'intellectual fog'. One's thoughts and actions will then get determined by the 'thick fog' that surrounds them.

The information overload has only resulted in a jungle of confusion for people.

How do you keep yourself safe from this fog? How do you maintain right thinking in the midst of such intellectual darkness?

The 'fog-safe device' that trains use illustrates a solution to this problem. We need to have our own 'intellectual fog-safe device'. This device is an internally prepared mind trained in the art of differentiation.

How does this device work?

One should develop the capacity to put aside all unrelated matter and extract only information relevant to the subject. This technique could be

Eliminating the irrelevant from the relevant is critical for success.

called the principle of elimination. Eliminating the irrelevant from the relevant is critical for success. This ensures that our thinking remains untouched by the intellectual fog that is present all around us. In line with the laws of nature, this external fog will never end. All we can do is to develop the skills to stay safe from its negative effects and proceed on our intellectual journey, just as the train moves

ahead and reaches its destination in spite of the fog. □



Intellectual Boost

Living in worry or stopping your thinking process is not the solution. Instead of stopping your thinking process, enhance it, and you will soon discover that the stress you felt was acting as an intellectual booster in your life.

Making your Critic Speechless

When provoked by a critical remark, you generally react. But if you resist provocation and do not react, you will be in a position to give an answer that will render your critic speechless.

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 IDEOLOGY OF PEACE IN ISLAM

SCHOLARS have defined peace thus: “Peace is the absence of war.” This definition is absolutely correct. Peace in fact means the absence of a situation of war or violence.

However, some hold this definition of peace to be inadequate. They say that justice should accompany peace; that peace devoid of justice is no peace. But setting such a condition for the attainment of peace is impractical. Peace on its own does not bring justice. Justice is not necessarily an element of peace. Peace in actual fact, opens up opportunities. It creates favourable conditions to strive for justice and other constructive ends. Peace is always desirable for its own sake. Everything else comes after peace, not along with peace. The case of Japan is a concrete example of the success of this formula.

Peace on its own does not bring justice. Justice is not necessarily an element of peace.

A peace policy always serves as a peace ‘bomb’, in the sense that it conquers the enemy without any bloodshed. History shows that the peace bomb has always proved to be mightier than the violence bomb.

A peace ‘bomb’ means life and progress, whereas a violence bomb means death and destruction. Peace enhances creativity, whereas violence does the very opposite. The power of a peace ‘bomb’ is based on love, while that of a violence bomb is based on hatred.

According to Islam, peace is therefore not just an absence of war; peace opens doors to several different opportunities that are present in any given situation. Planned activities are possible only in a peaceful situation. It is for this reason that the Prophet Muhammad went to great extents to establish peace. The Treaty of Hudaibiya, between the Prophet and his opponents, provides one such clear example. Details of the peace treaty show that no clause regarding justice was included. Instead the conditions of this treaty were quite against justice. But the Prophet accepted this treaty not because it gave them justice, but because it paved the way to work for justice. It is for this reason that the Quran says 'reconciliation is the best' (4: 128).

According to Islam, the only practicable formula for obtaining peace is:

'Ignore the problems, avail the opportunities.'

Given the importance of peace, the Quran has clearly declared that there can be no aggressive war in Islam. Muslims can engage themselves only in a defensive, not in an offensive war, irrespective of the circumstances (2: 190).

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

Similarly the Prophet Muhammad has observed: "God grants to gentleness (*rifq*) what He does not grant to violence (*unf*)". (Sunan Abu Dawud)

The Quran describes the Prophet's mission thus: We have not sent you forth but as a mercy to mankind. (21: 107)

No wonder, the Prophet Muhammad so earnestly used to entreat his Lord in his daily prayer: "O God, You are the original source of Peace; from You is all Peace, and to You returns all Peace. So, make us live with Peace; and let us enter Paradise: the House of Peace. Blessed be You, our Lord, to whom belongs all Majesty and Honour!"

A Counter Ideology

There is no doubt about the fact that the terror attacks worldwide are highly condemnable. However, the big question in the minds of everyone is, how to solve this problem? People the world over are trying to find a solution to this menace. Even as authorities are trying to crush terrorism through legal action, reformers are trying to curb it by engaging in condemnation. However both of these methods have apparently proved ineffective.

The present problem of terrorism is based on an ideology, and an ideology cannot be countered through legal action or by mere condemnation. We have to develop a counter-ideology to overcome it.

UNESCO states that 'Violence begins from the mind', it has to, therefore, be uprooted from the mind itself. This succinctly captures the root cause of terrorism. To eliminate this root cause, we need to initiate our efforts by beginning from the right starting point—that is, re-engineering the minds of individuals by taking them away from the culture of violence and bringing them closer to the culture of peace.

To understand this, let us take two parallel examples from history. The American campaign against Communist Russia and the American campaign against Saddam-led Iraq. Where the US succeeded in curbing the menace of Communist Russia, the same US failed to cope with the menace of Saddam-led Iraq. This is because America met the communist challenge at an ideological level while it opted for military action against Saddam's Iraq.

Terrorism will persist in one form or another until the ideology of violence is countered with another ideology based on peace.

Ideology of Violence

The ideology behind present day terrorism is that, Islam being a political system, it is the duty of all Muslims to establish Islamic rule in the world. This thinking was not prevalent during the time of Prophet Muhammad. It is a later innovation developed in the last few centuries by a handful of people. Having become widespread in the Muslim world today, it has led to the current violence. It has influenced many Muslims, especially the vulnerable youth. They have become obsessed with establishing the political rule of Islam, thinking it to be their ticket to Paradise. Failing to achieve this objective by peaceful methods, they resort to suicide bombing. The idea being that if we cannot eliminate the non-Islamic rule, then let us at least de-stabilize it and pave the way for Islamic rule.

The political interpretation of Islam is an innovation and the real Islam is based upon peace, compassion and tolerance.

Having studied Islam through its original sources—the Quran and *Hadith*—it can be said with certainty that this political interpretation of Islam is an innovation and the real Islam is based upon peace, compassion and tolerance.

Ideology of Peace

Peace is not prevalent in the world as people the world over are acting intolerantly and indulging in acts of violence, saying, "Give us justice and peace will ensue." But when people, ostensibly seeking justice, stoop to violence, peace can never prevail. Peace is always desirable for its own sake, and every other desirable state comes after peace, not along with it. When peace is the desired state, the maxim to be followed is: Ignore the problems, and avail the opportunities.

Peace is always desirable for its own sake, and every other desirable state comes after peace, not along with it.

Once people become tolerant and obtain peace for its own sake, it opens up opportunities to strive for their ideals. Eventually this leads to justice and other constructive ends.

This ideology of peace can counter the ideology of violence and is based on the original sources of Islam. The Prophet of Islam provides a great historical example in his negotiation of the Hudaibiya peace treaty by unilaterally accepting all the opponents' conditions. While not receiving justice or rights, he gained a 10-year no-war pact. This gave him and his Companions an opportunity to work uninterruptedly on a constructive program. Using this peaceful non-political program, they were able to consolidate themselves so thoroughly that without waging war they acquired Makkah peacefully.

This example shows that Islam is a truly peaceful religion and the Islamic method is a completely peaceful method.

What can be done?

What can be done in the present alarming situation? What is the practical solution to the present state of affairs? There are two parts to the solution. Half the solution depends on the work of government agencies, with the remaining left to non-governmental organizations.

In every country, there are strict laws to curb violence and terrorism, but are of no avail unless enforced by governmental agencies. All those elements involved in heinous acts of terrorism must be punished in a fitting manner.

The second half of the task pertains to the re-engineering of the minds. This task has to be undertaken by non-government agencies. An entirely peaceful task, the re-engineering of people's minds can be achieved

only through education and positive training, which naturally includes a counter-ideology to violence. Once this is done, the ultimate peaceful result will be achieved through the combined efforts of both governments and reformers.

The common man in every community has a major role in this process. First is not to believe in rumors. One should not believe anything however genuine it sounds, until thoroughly enquired. This will remove misunderstandings prevalent on both sides. Historically, it is misunderstandings that have always led to violence and war.

In Conclusion

The ideology of peace in Islam banishes the notion that there can be anything acceptable about terrorism. Islam is a religion unequivocally committed to peace and the Islamic method is equally so. By following the ideology of peace, each individual's mind can be re-engineered, away from the culture of violence and closer to the culture of peace. □

An ideology cannot be countered through legal action or by mere condemnation. We have to develop a counter-ideology to overcome it.



No Complaints

Complaining about things is a fruitless exercise. One is sure to find plenty to complain about in life. Wisdom lies in forgetting the unpleasant things which are an inevitable part of life, bury grudges, and carry on seeking to fulfill one's true purpose in life.

POWER OF AN INDIVIDUAL

The Beginning of Reformation

GUSTAVE LE BON (1841–1931), a French social psychologist, best known for his 1895 work *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, observes that:

“Civilisations as yet have only been created and directed by a small intellectual aristocracy, never by crowds. Crowds are only powerful for destruction. Their rule is always tantamount to a barbarian phase.”

The right way to bring about a revolution is through individual effort, not crowd-based effort. A true reformer must adopt a low-profile approach; a microscopic way of thinking. He should first train individuals and form a team of selected people before trying to bring about change in society or the system.

This method was successfully adopted by the Fabian Society of England, founded in 1884. The society laid the foundations of the Labour Party and subsequently affected the policies of states emerging from the decolonization of the British Empire.

The right way to bring about a revolution is through individual effort, not crowd-based effort.

Several great minds such as George Bernard Shaw were involved with the Fabian Society. They trained the British people on lines that were rather unpopular during the post-war period. Although the British had emerged victorious from World War II, the Fabian Society recommended decolonization. This was against the grain of popular thinking. However, a literary campaign by the Fabian

Society proved successful in the post-war elections when the British people rejected Winston Churchill and elected Lord Clement Attlee who was never in favour of colonization while Churchill was known to be strongly against the policy of decolonization. This decision at that critical juncture saved the British nation and helped maintain their dignity in the post-colonial era.

We can understand from the above examples that whatever one wants to accomplish at a mass level, one has to adopt the method of addressing individual minds. Even if one feels there is dearth of time to do this type of work, one should not be tempted in trying to reach out to multitudes, for in terms of results one person who is sincere and serious and understands the importance of the mission is better than a thousand half-hearted volunteers. □

LESSONS FROM JESUS CHRIST

Prophet of God

WE find from the Quran and *Hadith* that a large number of God's messengers were sent to different nations and regions. The majority of these prophets are unknown from the historical point of view. It is because the books written by the contemporaries of the messengers make no mention of them or their work. To these chroniclers the prophets and the incidents connected with them were not worthy of being mentioned.

Without doubt, the prophets are examples of the loftiest human character. But because of the unscientific methods of history-writing which prevailed in their times, only events connected with kings, royalty and generals were considered worthy of being recorded, thus depriving posterity of the precious details of the lives of the prophets. The Quran opened this chapter for the first time in history.

But to what end? It might seem that a recital of the facts relating to the life and mission of the Prophet of Islam would have sufficed. But there was a very good reason for making frequent mention of these prophets individually, and also testifying to their having received God's guidance, a blessing which exalted them above all other creatures. It was so that the Prophet of Islam and his *ummah* (followers) might learn valuable lessons from the ways in which these prophets dealt with their circumstances and the situations in which they found themselves.

God has instructed us not to differentiate between the prophets as they essentially brought the same message to mankind.

In the Quran(6:90), the Prophet of Islam is thus addressed:

'These are whom God guided aright, so follow their guidance.'

Every one of them was an upright man guided by God along a straight path and as such was superior to all others. Chapter 6 mentions a number of these prophets by name. They are: *Ibrahim* (Abraham), *Ishaaq* (Issac), *Yaqub* (Jacob), *Nuh* (Noah), *Dawood* (David), *Sulaiman* (Solomon), *Ayyub* (Job), *Yusuf* (Joseph), *Musa* (Moses), *Haroon* (Aaron), *Zakariya*, *Isa* (Jesus), *Ismail* (Ishmael), *Yahya* (John the Baptist), *Yunus* (Jonah), and *Lut* (Lot).

God has also instructed us not to differentiate between the prophets as they essentially brought the same message to mankind. (THE QURAN 2: 285)

Prophet Muhammad was instructed by God to follow the guidance of the Prophets before him. By extension, all the followers of Prophet Muhammad must also seek guidance from the lives of the other prophets. By this, it is meant that each one of us must evaluate the situation he faces and then whilst examining the lives of other prophets, determine in which prophet he can find a similar example. His response to the situation should be the same as that of the prophets in whose example he found the similarity.

Prophet Muhammad was instructed by God to follow the guidance of the Prophets before him. By extension, all the followers of Prophet Muhammad must also seek guidance from the lives of the other Prophets.

For example, from Prophet Abraham we can learn what should be our behaviour towards unbelieving parents. 'If your parents are unbelievers, obey them until doing so contradicts God's commands. Give them the message of God in a gentle, kind hearted and reasonable manner, but if they choose to disbelieve, do not force them'.

Prophet Ismail's example shows us what should be our behaviour towards believing parents. 'Follow your parents and seek guidance from them. Assist them in their work.'

The lesson from Prophet Yusuf's example however is: 'Do not stand against the rulers and confront them in the political field. Accept their position and avail of the opportunities that arise in other non-political spheres.'

LESSONS FROM JESUS CHRIST

The Quran repeatedly mentions Christ. In Jesus' life we have many lessons of guidance. Some of these lessons are presented below:

Unilateral Good Character:

Jesus Christ says:

"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you". (Luke 6: 27-30).

The same teaching is echoed in the Quran:

And good deeds and evil deeds are not alike. Repel evil with good and he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend. (41: 34)

This is a practical code of conduct for us in society that shows us the way to live in peace and harmony.

Duty Consciousness

The people asked Jesus what they should do under the oppression of the Romans ruling over them. He said:

Give to king what is due to the king. And give to God what is due to God.

This was in the time when there were kings and people were subjects. If the kings want wealth or taxes, give it to them and then you are free and at peace to do whatever you want.

This is the same situation with us now days; if we give to the government whatever is our obligation to them—taxes and abide by the law, then we can do whatever we want in the countless other fields.

A similar *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet of Islam) from *Bukhari*:

Give the ruler his rights. Ask for your rights from God.

Peace under all circumstances

Similarly Jesus says:

To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back.

According to the Quran: 'Reconciliation is the best' (4: 128).

This message of peace preached by all the messengers of God is the answer to the mindless violence that we witness throughout the world in the present day. □



A GOOD START

Pomposity or Austerity

HERE are my entire life's savings. So saying, an elderly scholar, who had spent his whole life reading and writing, in the utmost simplicity placed a cheque for Rs. 10,000/- in the hands of his newly wed daughter and son-in-law. He explained that he had been able to save this amount of his meagre income by living frugally and never wasting anything. "I could have spent all this on lavish wedding celebrations," he added, "but I preferred to hand it over to you young people so that you could make a good beginning in life."

The millions of rupees which are habitually lavished on short-lived magnificence could then be channelized into areas of the national economy which are at present unfairly neglected, thus creating favourable conditions for general economic uplift.

The young couple were extremely grateful for this decision and lost no time in investing the money in a small business. To begin with they had to work very hard to make a success of it, and passed through various difficult stages. But they never lost courage, and a time eventually came when they had considerably increased their profits and were able to live a happy, comfortable life. Knowing, too, that their children's future was assured. But without the scholar's initial providence, foresight and courage in resisting public opinion, they might never have had the wherewithal to make a start in life at all and might well have ended their days in penury.

One's wedding is a very serious event in life, not just an occasion for senseless showing off. It is rather a day to shoulder life's responsibilities as mature, grown-up people and future parents. It is a day for a man and a woman to enter into a 'firm contract' (Quran 4:21), not just an opportunity to impress friends, neighbours and relatives with one's spending ability. It is at all events advisable that the marriage ceremony should be simple and straightforward, thereby avoiding pointless expenditure. Before anyone spends his entire life's savings, on gaudy displays—for money, after all is hard earned and difficult to accumulate—he should reflect seriously on the above-mentioned incident.

All things considered, would it not be better to avoid ostentation altogether and to think of how best one can help the young couple

concerned? If this practice were to be widely adopted, it would not only benefit young people in general, but would actually make a positive contribution to national construction. The millions of rupees which are habitually lavished on short-lived magnificence could then be channelized into areas of the national economy which are at present unfairly neglected, thus creating favourable conditions for general economic uplift. □



Psychology of Success

The conviction that one's goals are worthwhile, the observation of discipline, with no contradiction between words and thoughts, cool thinking even in times of crisis—all these are qualities of mind and heart which determine success and obviate failure in life.

Difference

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

IDLENESS

An Evil Breeding Evils

THE second Caliph, Umar ibn Khattab, often used to express his sense of disillusionment about people he had come to like, when, on further acquaintance with them he discovered them to be idle. "On learning that he does not work, he appears to me of no value (he has debased himself in my eyes)."

Whichever way you look at idleness, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is a great evil, causing one to fritter away one's best talents and leaving one unqualified to face life. A student who is too lazy to study cannot ever hope to acquire knowledge, or have his critical faculties sharpened in any way, and his failure in examinations will leave him without the 'paper' qualifications which is the 'open sesame' to good jobs. Without the necessary ground work, he will find himself leading a vacant existence simply drifting from pillar to post. Even people who have managed to qualify themselves suitably cannot afford to rest on their laurels. When the period of education is over, it is equally necessary to be consistently hard-working. Many make the excuse between the receipt of a degree and entry into a profession that they are waiting for the right job to come along. But one cannot go on waiting forever, simply idling away one's time.

A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon lapse into utter degeneracy.

Sometimes one inadvertently slips into idle ways because there are no economic pressures in one's life. Those who inherit legacies, or have property or investments which bring them some return are an easy prey to idleness. But this is no existence for a human being. Anyone who allows the poison of idleness to creep into his system might as well be dead.

One must opt for a regular job, which brings one a suitable income and keeps one mentally healthy. This ensures that one never becomes a financial or emotional burden on anyone else. If one is financially independent, one should turn one's attention to higher things, pursue noble ends, serve worthy causes and keep oneself fruitfully occupied day in and day out. A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon

lapse into utter degeneracy. No really superior being has ever been found among the ranks of the idle.

As the old saying goes, the Devil finds work for idle hands. □



Benefit of Patience

The benefit of patience and tolerance is that even after suffering losses, the bereft one does not lose his balance. In spite of temporary defeat, he never loses the ability to think cool-mindedly and by making a realistic assessment of his situation, plans his life anew. By forgetting what is lost, he reorganizes his work.

Accepting Defeat

The great secret of life is realism, and there is no form of realism greater than accepting defeat. To do so is to acknowledge the fact that, far from being ahead of others, one is behind them. In other words, it is to know where one stands in life.

ON DEATH'S DOORSTEP

A Step Into The Hereafter

OF all the stages through which man shall have to pass, death is the most certain. It is possible for one not to be endowed with life at all, but one who is alive is sure, also, to die. Everyone who is alive now will be dead sometime in the future. One day the eyes of those who see will fade and their tongues will freeze into silence. Every human being will one day find himself standing at death's doorstep, with this world behind him, and ahead of him the eternal world of the Hereafter. He will be leaving this world, never to return, and entering a world which he will never leave. In the world which he is entering, there will be no opportunity for action; there will be only salvation or damnation in accordance with one's actions on earth.

While life is indefinite, death is absolutely definite. We are only alive because we have not yet died, and there is no fixed time for death. We are forever advancing towards it; death is closer to us than life itself; People consider themselves alive, but it would be truer to say that they are dead. No one can be sure when death will come; it might strike at any instant. Death, then, is not some future event; we are already as good as dead. For this reason the Prophet Mohammad has told us to think of ourselves as lying in the grave.

Death obliterates all in its wake. It is the most tremendous event of our lives. But the prospect would not be so formidable if death were just the end of life. If all that death meant was the end of man—the moving, seeing, hearing being who lives on earth—then it would still be an event of frightful proportions; but it would be a temporary calamity not a permanent one.

Death obliterates all in its wake. It is the most tremendous event of our lives.

The gravity of the situation lies in death not being the end of life, but rather the beginning of a new, eternal life, a world of everlasting reward or retribution.

Everyone is on a journey from life unto death. Some have set their sights on the world, others on the Hereafter. Some dwell on what meets the eye, others on what lies beyond the superficiality of human vision. Some strive to

satisfy their own desires and egos, while others bestir themselves in love and fear of God. Both types of people appear the same in this

world: they both take rest when night comes, and in the morning once again pursue their chosen paths in life. But in relation to the life after death, there is a world of difference between the two: those who live in God and the Hereafter are redeeming themselves, while those who live in worldly pleasures and selfish desires are condemning themselves to eternal punishment. □

While life is indefinite, death is absolutely definite.



Positive Thinking

In moments of crisis, when you opt for the way of peace, you cultivate positive thinking. You raise your moral standards and give proof of being human.

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

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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



THANKFULNESS

MAN is never satisfied with what he has; he always seeks more. As a result, he is perpetually discontented. God has favoured everyone in some way or another, but man is more concerned with what he does not have, and pays scant regard to what he has. People with this attitude cannot be moved to offer thanks to God. They lack that priceless virtue which is essential for admission into Paradise.

No one can be absolutely happy on earth. That is the way the world has been made. If cold climates have their drawbacks, so do hot climates. If low-income groups encounter difficulties, so do high-income groups. If the weak have a hard life, neither is it easy for those who wield power. There is no end to problems, yet man should persevere in spite of all the difficulties he encounters, for he is being tested in this world. He should concentrate on earning God's pleasure, and not achieving a trouble-free life, for that can only be achieved in the next world.

The greatest offering that anyone who wishes to earn a place in Paradise can offer his Lord is a thankful heart. The only way to cultivate a feeling of thankfulness is to rise above the difficulties and problems of life. The price of heaven is gratitude; only those who have paid this price will enter heaven. □

PREDICTING THE AFTERLIFE

Scientifically Speaking

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

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

Scientific discoveries made in the 20th century, however, should have made it much easier for people to believe in the afterlife. In their initial stages most scientific discoveries have been no more than conclusions reached from theoretical, abstract data; they have constituted an inference of scientific “truths” from scientific “facts”. In several cases it has been many years before discoveries have been observed in the laboratory. Yet even before these discoveries had reached the experimental stage, they were accepted as facts: they were not denied on the basis of the theoretical and abstract method of their presentation.

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

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

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

Clearly Dirac's prediction of everything from anti-particles to an anti-universe was based entirely on abstract theories. He had not observed anti-particles, nor had he experienced an anti-world; but he knew that the theoretical data at his disposal implied their existence. He started off with the laws of quantum theory and relativity, and conceived an equation to describe the motion of electrons in accordance with

The very existence of a finite, imperfect world implies the existence of another infinite, perfect one.

these laws. His equation made the spin of the electron a logical consequence of the union of relativity and quantum theory. The inference that he then made was that the equation for the electron implied the existence of another particle having the same mass and spin as an electron, but with a positive instead of a negative electric charge. This is the electron's anti-particle, now known as a positron.

What Dirac did on a scientific level, the preacher of God's word, one who calls mankind to belief in the afterlife, does on a spiritual level. He takes the "equation" of this world and sees that it implies, with absolute certainty, the existence of an anti-world—the Hereafter—to balance it out. This world is finite: there must be an infinite world as well, for otherwise this world will be incomplete. Injustice prevails in this world: there must be a world of absolute justice, for otherwise, in a world founded on principles of justice, injustice will persist, and that is inconceivable. Certain limitations are inherent to this world; opportunities and potentialities, on the other hand, are unlimited. There must be another world where our unlimited potentialities can find unlimited fulfillment. Without an "anti-world" this world is incomplete: the very existence of a finite, imperfect world implies the existence of another infinite, perfect one.

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

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



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DON'T BE A SLAVE TO YOUR DESIRES

Master Yourself

DESIRES are integral to human nature. All men and women have a strong inclination towards fulfilling their desires and this is their greatest weakness. Pointing out the gravity of this failing, the chapter *Al Jathiyah* (Kneeling) of the Quran admonishes us on this weakness in alarming terms:

Consider the one who has taken his own desire as a deity, whom God allows to stray in the face of knowledge, sealing his ears and heart and covering his eyes—who can guide such a person after God (has abandoned him)? Will you not take heed? (45: 23).

Desire is an essential part of one's personality. But it is like grease to an engine and not like the driver of that engine. Desire can serve as a motivating force, but mindless yielding to desire will be disastrous. To succeed, try to steer your life in a rational manner. Don't give in to your desires. Remember that where desire is blind, reason has the capacity to discern the true nature of things.

It is said that man is a slave to desire. But this saying expresses only half the truth. The human mind is full of desires but at the same time, it also has the capacity for logical thought.

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

When your mind is overwhelmed by desire, examine that desire in the light of reality. Assess it for its potential returns, and objectively evaluate the feasibility and consequences of fulfilling it. Judge by all the possible effects it can have whether good or bad. If you are satisfied that its results will be beneficial, go ahead with fulfilling your desire—but with great care and planning.

Don't run after your desires. While following your desires, check, re-check and re-evaluate them as you go along. It is important to turn back if you find that you have taken a wrong step. Stop before reaching the point of no return.

There are different kinds of desires, some of which are improper too. You have to distance yourself from desires of this kind. Always keep in mind that every desire must remain within certain boundaries. Even good desires have their limits.

Right desires are helpful for the development of your character. And bad desires are detrimental to your personality. Pursuing your bad desires can ruin your future to the extent that you can never recover from their effects. Therefore live a life that is reason-based and not desire-based.

Desire can serve as a motivating force, but mindless yielding to desire will be disastrous.

Never judge a desire for its own sake—always judge it in terms of the results of its fulfillment. This is the only criterion to determine whether a desire is good or bad. Desire cannot be eliminated, but it can certainly be controlled. Don't become a victim of your desires. Prove to be well in control of your desires and success will be yours. □



Intelligent Designer

When we behold a magnificent machine for the first time, we immediately become aware of the skill of its manufacturer. In the same way, if we observe the world and ponder on the many wonders it contains, the Creator Himself will appear before us; we will gaze on creation and see there the face of the Lord.

PATIENCE: SOURCE OF CERTAINTY

Seek an Unlimited Reward

ISLAM gives great importance to patience. It holds out the promise of immense reward for those who practice patience. Thus, the Quran (39: 10) says: 'Truly, those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure.' Elsewhere, the Quran (76: 12) says: '[...] and their reward for being patient will be a Garden and silk [clothing].'

Patience helps you ignore factors that threaten to weaken your resolve and focus on things that can strengthen your conviction and stir you to action.

This is the reward for patience that people can earn in the Hereafter. But there is reward in this world too. Patience helps save you from despair. If you fall prey to the psyche of despair you will live in constant uncertainty. You cannot plan the course of your life confidently nor achieve anything great.

On the other hand, someone who cultivates and practices patience does not get obsessed about the trials and difficult times of the past. He lives with a strong sense of certainty. He is

able to courageously plan the course of his life. And, because of this, he is able to achieve great successes.

Conviction is a positive attribute. With firm conviction you can achieve wonders. Patience helps you ignore factors that threaten to weaken your resolve and focus on things that can strengthen your conviction and stir you to action.

In this world, we are faced, at every moment, with experiences that can provoke and push us into uncertainty. In such situations, patience keeps us stay on course. It enables us to remain firmly rooted in our conviction. □



True Human Being

Being predictable in character is the best description of a true human being.

LIVING IN DICHOTOMY

The World is Your Supporter

PRESIDENT of US (from 2001 to 2009) George Bush said the following words during the Iraq war: "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror." (CNN, November 6, 2001).

It is a general tendency to divide people into two categories—friend and enemy. However, this dichotomous thinking is not in accordance with the law of nature. There might be some who seem to be friends or enemies, but in reality, friends and foes are very few. There is a third and larger category of people and that is the supporting category. Here, everyone is yours. If you have objective thinking and know the art of wise planning, you can make everyone your supporter.

For example, the modern civilization was developed in the western world. But if you are free of bias, you will discover the modern civilization as a supporting civilization for yourself. This is because all the bounties discovered by the harbingers of this civilization are common to all: everyone may use these gifts for one's personal development. In this sense, the modern civilization is a supporting civilization. What is needed is right thinking to realize this fact.

This is a law of nature referred to in a saying of the Prophet of Islam in these words:

God provides support for His religion even through non-believers. (*Bukhari*)

The first outcome of this 'supporting theory' is that you become positive towards everyone and free of negative thinking. The other benefit is that when you begin to work on a plan, you will feel that you are not alone, rather the whole of humanity is with you. The third aspect of this theory is that it will save you from all negative activities. The concept that there are no enemies puts an end to all negative thoughts.

The greatest benefit of regarding everyone as your supporter is that you discover the Creator as a great benefactor for yourself. You come to believe that God is so merciful that He created a world which is entirely friendly towards you. Even those people who apparently seem to be your enemies, are practically your supporters. Now, you have but one task—discover potential supporters and convert them into actual supporters and friends. □

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Immortal Soul

CONSCIOUSNESS may continue even after death, scientists now believe. Doctors claim to have found scientific evidence that patients have had experiences of an afterlife when they were clinically dead. Research suggests the mind may continue to exist after the brain has ceased to function and the body is clinically dead, with no pulse, no respiration and fixed dilated pupils.

Similar to sleep are those instances resulting from a mishap where a person briefly 'dies' and then wakes up again after a while. Such accounts have been found in many cultures and have been reported throughout history. In earlier times such cases were related as unbelievable or inexplicable. In present days however, medical studies conducted and documented on such cases provide mounting evidence that man has a separate and distinct existence from his body; an enduring existence that remains even when separated from the body. These instances provide observable evidence that that the mind continues to exist after death.

There has been observable evidence that that the mind continues to exist after death.

Scientists at the University of Southampton conducted a four-year study of 2,060 cardiac arrest patients. The research spanned cases at 15 hospitals in the UK, U.S and Austria. Findings revealed that nearly 40 per cent of the 330 patients who survived, described some kind of 'awareness' during the period when they were clinically dead and before their hearts were resuscitated. They explicitly recalled 'seeing' and 'hearing' events

after their hearts had stopped.

Known medical explanations cannot account for these out-of-body sensations. One in ten heart attack patients experienced emotions, visions and lucid thoughts during their unconscious state with no pulse and breathing activity, say the researchers.

Dr. Sam Parnia, a former Southampton University research fellow now based at the State University of New York, who led the study, said: 'The evidence thus far suggests that in the first few minutes after death, consciousness is not annihilated. Whether it fades away afterwards, we do not know, but right after death, consciousness is not lost.'

'In the past it has been assumed that consciousness comes to an end when the brain stops functioning, but there may be some kind of independent existence,' he said. 'It would imply that the mind may continue to exist after the death of the body, or an afterlife.'

There have been several recorded medical cases where patients on an operation table have had such out of body experiences. In one such case, during a critical surgical operation, the patient was clinically dead and the heart had stopped functioning. On regaining consciousness, when the patient was asked how he felt during the operation, he said that he had left his body and was floating above the operating table observing the doctors operating on his body. He related factual details about actions and conversations of the attending surgical staff and doctors as if while 'dead', he was still able to see and hear what was going on. If a man's soul was just a function of the body, then how was it possible to have remained alive when separated from the body? A conscious being that remains even after separation from the body is evidence of the fact that man is an eternal creature that continues to exist completely even after separation from the body.

Research suggests the mind may continue to exist after the brain has ceased to function and the body is clinically dead.

In another case, scientists heard one patient recall leaving his body and watch his resuscitation from the corner of the room. The 57 year-old man from Southampton was 'dead' for three minutes yet managed to recount detailed actions of the nursing staff and the sound of the machines.

Dr. Parnia said: 'We know the brain can't function when the heart has stopped beating.' The brain typically shuts down within 20-30 seconds after the heart has stopped. 'But in this case conscious awareness appears to have continued for up to three minutes into the period when the heart wasn't beating.'

'Furthermore, the detailed recollections of visual awareness in this case were consistent with verified events.' He said the recollections were not like hallucinations because they were 'highly structured narratives, easily recalled and clear'.

He added: 'During cardiac arrest, brainstem activity is rapidly lost. It should not be possible to sustain such lucid processes or allow the formation of lasting memories.'

In another case, a doctor relates an instance when he was treating an old woman suffering from bone cancer. Her cancer had metastasized all over the body and her condition was critical. All efforts at relieving her pain and suffering were in vain. During her treatment, she suddenly lost consciousness. After a while, when she regained consciousness, she looked peaceful and her pain had alleviated considerably. When the attending doctor asked her the reason for this change in her condition, she said that just a few moments ago her dead mother had come to meet her and had told her that very soon they would be together again. After this conversation with her mother she felt at peace. A little while later she died. This case shows that the old woman's mother was fully conscious even after her death, else it wouldn't be possible for her to meet her daughter. The fact the patient died soon after her mother's visit proves that the experience was real and not an illusion.

In Chapter 56, the Quran says:

Why, then, when the soul of the dying man reaches the throat, and you are [at that moment] looking on [helplessly]—and We are nearer to him than you, although you cannot see Us.

(56: 83-85)

A conscious being that remains even after separation from the body is evidence of the fact that man is an eternal creature that continues to exist completely even after separation from the body.

This verse explains that when a man is close to death and before the soul leaves the body, windows into the other side of death are opened up for him. To a certain extent, the veil covering the other world is lifted. Whilst alive in the present world, he is able to see some of the things of the world hereafter.

The most commonly reported sightings of the Hereafter are of their dear departed souls. Such observations are reported when the person is very close to death. They call out to their dead relatives and friends as if they are right there close to them.

One patient said, 'There is definitely something there after death—I don't care what anybody else says.' □



MARS OR PARADISE?

Man's Future Abode

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

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

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

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

This world was created only for a temporary period. At the culmination of this period, the whole world will undergo a great change and then a new world will be formed.

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

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

It is a fact that this world is gradually becoming uninhabitable for humans. This is why scientists are searching for an alternative for planet earth. Some people are in pursuit of a 'space colony', while others

***According to the
creation plan of
God, Paradise will be
man's future abode.***

are planning to develop Mars into another earth. All these are only romantic ideas and not scientific schemes. If it were possible for science to make a planet in space habitable for man through new technology, then the first application of this technology should be to reshape the earth and make it once again habitable as it was created.

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



Ungratefulness

A great disadvantage of an ungrateful attitude is that it produces a mentality of non-acknowledgement. Failing at first to acknowledge the favours of one's fellow men leads one to failure to give wholehearted credence to the Lord of the Universe.

SIMPLE LIVING, HIGH THINKING

The Art of Living

SIMPLE living, high thinking is a well-known formula. But it is very rare to find someone who sincerely follows it in letter and in spirit. Although it seems to be very simple, why is it that people fail to follow it?

The reason is that this seemingly—simple formula requires great sacrifice—possibly the greatest sacrifice. Most people are not ready to make this sacrifice. And so, they do not follow, although it is the greatest—actually, the only—secret of success.

What is simple living?

Simple living is need-based living.

We all have some needs, and we seek to fulfill them. Our needs are limited. The problem arises when one doesn't remain satisfied with one's needs being fulfilled, and, instead, gets caught up in greed. Unlike need, greed has no limit. If one starts chasing unlimited greed, one will never be content.

Simple living means living according to limited needs, and not according to unlimited greed. Simple living is a safeguard from all kinds of distractions. It results in saving of time, energy, money and other resources, which can be put to optimum use, for one's development.

Distractions lead to destruction of life. Today, people are surrounded with distractions—shopping, outings, movies, reading useless novels and everything else that is part of the entertainment culture. Most people are wasting their lives in this way. Intellectually, they are dwarfs. One cannot discuss any serious subject with them. They know only about their desires, their fantasies, the things that give them pleasure, their comforts and luxuries. They have great knowledge about these things, but not about serious subjects of life and death.

Unlike need, greed has no limit. If one starts chasing one's unlimited greed, one will never be content.

Everything that is more than a need gives some temporary pleasure or comfort. But in the long run, it leads to deviation from the right path. It distracts one from the goal. Hence, it is very important that only needs

be fulfilled. Everything other than need is greed. And satisfying greed can give, at best, only temporary pleasure.

Islam is a religion of simplicity. A believer should lead a simple life. The Prophet of Islam laid great stress on simplicity. There is a *hadith*, according to which the Prophet said that simplicity is part of faith.

Things of comfort, outings, entertainment opportunities are not to be looked at as 'allowed and forbidden' we need to understand them as distractions. And distraction is a giant killer of progress and a major obstacle in one's development. It is an unwise step. The reason being that when one indulges in these distractions it leads to a waste of time, energy and every other resource. Given that we have very limited resources, we cannot afford to waste them on distractions.

High thinking means to think beyond one's desires, transcending surroundings and immediate attractions. It makes a person wise and safeguards one from going astray in the jungle of trivialities.

Simple living, therefore, is not a mere moral or ethical formula. Rather, it is a key principle for a successful life. It is a safety device from all kinds of distractions. And saving oneself from distractions ensures that time, money and energy is used in a better way to attain success in this world and the next, after death. So, simple living is the only sensible way of living. All other ways of living are simply disastrous.

And what is high thinking?

High thinking means to think beyond one's desires, transcending surroundings and immediate attractions. It makes a person wise, and safeguards one from going astray in the jungle of trivialities. People's minds are generally entangled in trivialities. They don't think about the serious issues of life and death.

Why does this happen?

It is because such people fail to develop their minds. Only someone with a developed mind can be safe from getting bogged down in trivialities. When mind is occupied by trivial matters and desires, when time is wasted in amusements like reading useless novels and watching movies, the development of the mind will not take place. This will lead to failure to achieve the purpose for which God has sent human beings into this world.

The greatest achievement in this world is intellectual development. The Creator has blessed us with a mind. It has great capacity. But all these things are in the form of a potential. It is for us to unfold this potential of our mind, to turn this potential into actual. The greatest task for us is to focus completely on developing our mind.

Now, the question arises: How can we develop our mind?

The mind can be developed through study, through intellectual exchange on serious matters, and through thinking and contemplation. These are all tools for intellectual development of the mind. In the short span of time that we have in this world we simply cannot afford to waste ourselves in matters other than intellectual development. This is what the concept of high thinking is about.

The very first word that was revealed to the Prophet was *iqra*, which means 'to read'. So, reading is very important in Islam. This was the first lesson that was revealed to the Prophet. Reading and study of serious books written by great thinkers, great scholars, great minds, lead to learning great things, and this will enhance the intellectual development. There is a *hadith* report, according to which the Prophet said to seek knowledge even if one has to go to China. The seeking spirit is the most important in Islam. Only a seeker will try to find the Truth.

Simple living makes one a wise person who can manage resources in a proper manner.

Simple living and high thinking are interrelated. High thinking is a result of simple living. Without simple living, there is no high thinking. A truly wise person, a genuine scholar, necessarily leads a simple life.

Another aspect of simple living is that it conduces to good health—mental and physical. If we conduct a survey, we will find that people who enjoy good health have adopted simple living. This is the secret of the good health of healthy people. Simple living is an integral part of good health.

Simple living is also a natural way of living. Everything in nature is simple. It is free from complications. So, simple living means natural, complication-free living. Nature loves simplicity. Every person must follow his own nature. Simple living and following nature are one and the same thing.

Simple living opens the door to all kinds of success. Good health, wisdom, true joy, in fact every kind of goodness is hidden in simplicity.

Happiness lies not in comfort, in luxury, but in simplicity. All those who have adopted simple living are living in happiness.

Simple living, high thinking is related to the art of de-stressing. All stress and tension is a result of not following simplicity. It is the easiest remedy for de-stressing. It reduces all anxieties and negative thoughts, because when there is simple living, there is no hate, revenge, anger, lust, and stress. And so, those who adopt simplicity in their lives will be in complete peace, tranquility and be blessed with a stress-free life.

This is by no means an exaggeration. One needs to experience it to be convinced of its benefits. There is no doubt about it at all. Simple living, high thinking makes a person a good, valuable and positive member of the society. It enables one to contribute towards the betterment of mankind. One will have enough time for worship, for remembrance of God, for reading the Word of God, and for engaging in conveying the message of truth to the whole of mankind. This type of work requires dedication, and dedication requires simplicity. All the prophets and their true followers made this work their focus in life.

The concept of simple living, high thinking is relevant in every aspect of life. It applies to one's personal life as much as it does to one's family life, social life, religious life, national life and professional life. It is the best art of living. All of us need to manage our lives. The art of life management is every person's need. Based on experience, one can say that simple living, high thinking is the ABCD of the art of living, of the art of life management. Without adopting this principle, one cannot manage one's life successfully.

Simple living and high thinking are interrelated. High thinking is a result of simple living.

All great people throughout history have followed it, including the Prophet of Islam. The Prophet is a model for us to emulate. His life is a model in every respect for us, including his simple living and high thinking. His lifestyle, his residence, his clothes—everything was very simple. He was able to do the great things he did because he led a simple life, saving himself from all kinds of distraction and dedicating himself to his mission.

To achieve true success in life, there is no option but to practice simple living, high thinking. Some people take spirituality as a mystery. Spirituality is not a mysterious discipline. There is no mystery in spiritual life. Spiritual life is nothing but simple living, high thinking. This is the simplest definition of spirituality. Spirituality is a science, like

other sciences. When one adopts simple living, high thinking, the result will be a transformed personality- and this is spirituality.

Spirituality ought to have the highest place in life. It is very simple because spirituality is interwoven in nature. It isn't something that is imported from outside. So, when simplicity is adopted the innate spiritual potential begins to unfold. It makes the inherent spiritual potential begin to express or actualize itself. This is the gist of spirituality. Spirituality is not some mysterious discipline. It is a scientific discipline. It can be defined in scientific, logical and rational terms. The above statements are based on experience from personal realisation and not based on bookish knowledge. Adopting simple living, high thinking will make one a spiritual person.

It is very important that one knows what true spirituality is. There are some false kinds of 'spirituality'—and one needs to be careful to avoid them. Scientific spirituality is what one should believe in. It is based on intellectual development, on the unfolding of one's own potential. But this requires simple living, high thinking, which enables to bring out the spirituality that is hidden inside.

The greatest achievement in this world is intellectual development.

The Prophet was a spiritual person—not in a mysterious sense, but in a scientific sense, in the Islamic sense. One will discover this if one studies the life of the Prophet of Islam. Once this discovery is made it will give conviction. The inner content of Islam is spirituality. According to the study of Islam spirituality is the gist of Islam, not in a mysterious sense, but in a scientific sense.

Some people take Islam as a political system. But this is wrong. Islam is not a political system. It is a spiritual system. Islam begins from spirituality, from spiritual experience. This is the crux of the religion of Islam. All those who take it as a religion of violence in the name of *jihad* and political revolution do not know anything about Islam.

Islam is a way of the spiritual life, based on simple living, high thinking. Simple living, high thinking is an integral part of Islam. The Prophet said that simplicity is part of faith.

Thus, simplicity is part of Islam and the source of success both in this world and in the Hereafter. □

THE ORDER OF NATURE

Pleasant alongside Unpleasant

TRY closing your room, going away, and returning after a few weeks. What do you find on your return? A thick layer of dust all over the room. This is so unpleasant that you don't feel like sitting in the room until it has been dusted. Equally unpleasant is the dust blown in your face by a high wind, you find yourself longing for the wind to drop, so that there should be no more irritating dust.

But what is this dust that we find so annoying? It is in fact a loose surface layer of fertile soil, the very substance which enables the growth of all forms of vegetables, fruits and cereals. If this soil did not lie on the face of the earth, it would be impossible for us to live on the earth at all.

Life contains an amalgam of both pleasing and displeasing objects.

It is this same dust that makes the earth's atmosphere dense enough for water to vaporize, forming clouds which produce torrents of water to revive and replenish the earth. Without rain, there would be no life on earth, and rain is only possible because of the dust in the earth's atmosphere. The redness of the sky which we see at sunrise and sunset is also due to the presence of dust in the atmosphere. In this way dust, besides

possessing multiple practical benefits, also contributes to the beauty of the world.

From this straightforward example we can see how God has placed unpleasant things alongside the pleasant things of life. Just as the rose bush, along with its exquisite flowers, also possesses piercing thorns, so also does life contain an amalgam of both pleasing and displeasing objects. This is the way God has created the world. There is nothing for us to do but to fit in with this order of nature that He has laid down. Much as we may try, it is impossible for us to have things any other way.

To complain about things, then, is a fruitless exercise. If one wants to complain, one is sure to find plenty to complain about in life. The intelligent thing to do is to forget the unpleasant things which are part and parcel of life, bury grudges, and carry on seeking to fulfill one's true purpose in life. □

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**

We created man from an essence of clay, then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a safe place, then We developed that drop into a clinging form, and We developed that form into a lump of flesh, and We developed that lump into bones, and clothed the bones with flesh. Then We brought him into being as a new creation—glory be to God, the best of creators—after this you shall surely die. Then you will be raised up again on the Resurrection Day. (23: 12-16)

The young one of a human being grows in the womb of his mother. In ancient times, the period from conception till child-birth was shrouded in mystery. It was only in the twentieth century that modern scientific developments made it possible to observe the development of a baby in the mother's womb and obtain direct information about it.

The vivid Quranic description of the various developmental stages of the formation and birth of human beings is surprisingly identical with modern scientific findings. This provides a clear proof of the fact that the Quran is the Book of God. Had it not been so, such similarity between the findings of modern research and the statements of the Quran, revealed fourteen hundred years ago, would not have been possible.

The development of the embryo in the mother's womb shows that the Creator of this world is the most perfect Being. Our knowledge of the creation of man from the very beginning, is sufficient to make us believe that a second creation will take place and will occur in exactly the manner described by the prophets.

We have created seven paths above you; We have never been unmindful of Our creation. We sent down water from the sky in due measure and lodged it in the earth—but if We please, We have the power to take it away—We have produced palm-groves and vineyards for you, in which there are abundant fruits for you; and you eat these, also a tree growing on Mount Sinai which produces oil and a condiment for those who eat it. You have a lesson in livestock. We provide you with drink from what is in their bellies, and you have many other benefits from them; some of them you eat, and you ride on them as you do in ships. (23: 17-22)

Man is a small creature. Compared to him, the universe is so large that it strikes terror into man. In the vastness of space, innumerable stars and planets revolve at high speed. Yet, the most wonderful aspect of the universe is that it is highly favourable to the existence of human beings. Moreover, the planet appears to have been exceptionally made keeping all of man's needs in mind.' For example, man is able to domesticate a variety of animals and put them to various uses. The cow's stomach, for instance, is a wonderful factory which converts grass into a valuable commodity—milk.

All these factors warrant man's recognition of his Kind and Merciful God and his remaining ever grateful to Him. □



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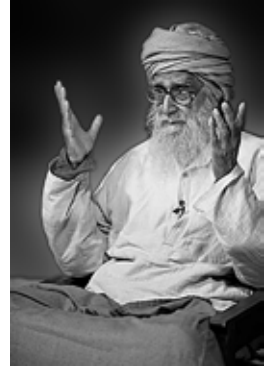
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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Many people argue that in present times our scholars should not be standing next to despotic rulers of many Muslim countries. Many call for democratic reform, however, we have seen what happens through the overthrow of many of these leaders in the Arab world. What should our response be here for those who call against such rulers?



Present Arab rulers are not despotic kings, they are basically Islamic rulers. The only difference is that they were not elected by the western democratic process, but rather are members of a dynasty. To be an Islamic ruler, there is no criterion that one should be elected according to democratic principles. The criterion is whether under these dynastic rulers there is religious freedom to follow Islam, and such religious freedom is certainly present today in every Arab country.

Democracy in the European sense is not an article of faith in Islam. The history of early Islam shows that there were four *khulafa* (Caliphs) who were all Companions of the Prophet. But none of them was elected to caliphate according to any particular pattern. After the first four Caliphs, people realised that this way of electing caliphs was not workable, rather it was leading to anarchy. Therefore after the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the dynastic pattern was adopted in the very times of the Companions. It is seen that in the history of Islam, Muslim scholars never disapproved of this pattern. This is because it was a feasible pattern and so it was accepted by scholars. This practice continues to this day including in the present Arab states.

The political ideology of Islam is based on pragmatism, that is, to follow the pattern that works. If a pattern does not work, it results in anarchy. This is why during the time of the Companions, the dynastic pattern was adopted and continues to this day. Those who want to change this pattern are creating anarchy instead of bringing stability to their region. The sole reason for adopting dynastic rule during the period of the Companions was for the maintenance of stability.

The political philosophy of Islam is not based on any set pattern, rather it is based on the practical and workable pattern. Western

democracy follows an absolute pattern that is, government of the people. However, in Islam there is no such absolute principle, rather the principle that works is followed. This is why the four early caliphs of Islam were elected through four different methods. Umar ibn Abdul Aziz is considered the fifth Pious Caliph, however, his appointment to caliphate was different from the way in which each of the previous four Pious Caliphs was elected. The dynastic pattern was adopted in the period of the Companions and in entire Islamic history no noteworthy Islamic scholar issued any condemnation against it. This continues, and present Arab rulers are a part of it. Islam has no such criterion that the rulers should be elected by the people, rather the concern of Islam is religious freedom, which is available in Muslim countries today.

The activities of those who want to bring democracy to Arab countries have nothing to do with Islam. Experience shows that Muslim countries where democracy was introduced in a partial sense has only led to anarchy. Where there is a choice between anarchy and stability, stability will certainly be preferred. This is the Islamic stand.

Many of the commentators who explain the Conquest of Makkah view it as a military conquest whereas it was more so a fath (an opening). How do we best understand and articulate this concept of an opening?

Historical documents do not subscribe to the view that Makkah was a case of military conquest in the political sense. There is no evidence that force was involved in this operation. The truth is that the Prophet's march to Makkah was entirely a peaceful one. It was not, therefore, a conquest, rather it was an acceptance of Islam by free choice at the mass level.

According to historical documents, there were some very strong opponents of the Prophet in Makkah. They were all killed in the Battle of Badr in 624 AD. On removal of this opposition, almost all other Makkani people had accepted Islam, first without open declaration and later with declaration. This happened because prior to and after the Hudaibiya agreement, extensive *dawah* or preaching was done among the Makkans. This created a soft corner for Islam among an overwhelming majority of the Makkans. When the Prophet entered Makkah along with his Companions, he faced no resistance. This shows that the Makkans accepted Islam by choice and not through political compulsion. Hence the reference to this in the Quran is in these words: 'When God's help and victory come, and you see people entering God's religion in multitudes.' (110: 1-2)

It is true that the conquest of Makkah is generally referred to in terms of *fath*, but in fact it was an ideological *fath* rather than a political *fath*. *Fath* means one group surrendering before another group. The Makkans had not surrendered to any particular group, rather they had surrendered to Islam, which was the voice of their nature.

The surrender of Makkah was an ideological one. There is no difference between the Islamization of Madinah and that of Makkah. Both were cases of acceptance of Islam by choice. □



Learning from Cow

The cow indeed shows us what God requires of us in this world. We may take in 'grass'; but we must give out 'milk.' Even when people wrong us, we are required to convert that wrong into a right. When beset by adversity, we are required to turn it to good account.

Wise Approach

Every person is between two things—his desires and the external situation. Simply by running after one's desires one cannot achieve one's goals. One must know the external situation, the external circumstances and the external opportunities. You can achieve your personal target only by taking into consideration the external factors. It is this realistic approach that is the wise approach.

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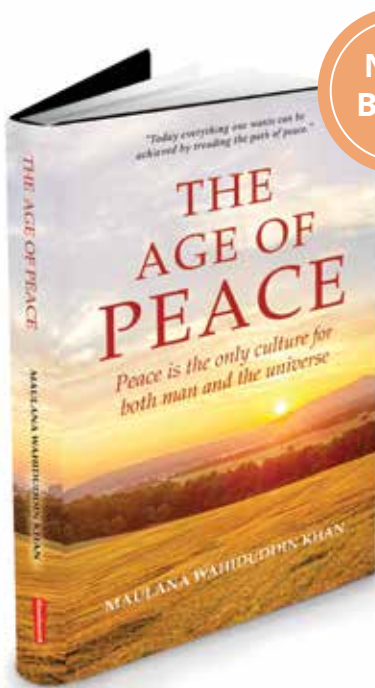
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