

*Discover Islam*

# ISLAM AND THE MODERN MAN

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*In the name of Allah  
The Merciful, the Compassionate*

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# Islam and the Modern Man

The problems that confront man in the present age can all be traced, directly or indirectly, to one underlying cause: the separation of man from God. In this modern age man has acquired many material comforts, but he has lost his faith in God. Material progress has provided man with plenty of physical nourishment, but it has left his soul to starve. The soul is essential to the life of the body. If it is separated from the body entirely, then the body dies; and if it is deprived of spiritual nourishment, then it starves in the same way as the body does. It is this spiritual nourishment, which the Quran describes as 'better and more lasting' (20: 131). And this is what Prophet Jesus was referring to when he said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Matthew, 4:4).

The greatest asset that Islam has to offer man today is this belief in God. All religions originally preached the true concept of God, but as time passed, none of them were able to preserve the concept of God

in its original form. Some groups turned God into a national fetish. Others took to worshipping a variety of objects in the name of God. In some religions the concept of God was tuned into an abstract philosophy. Thus no religion remained capable of offering a true picture of God. Only, Islam has preserved the true concept of God in a pure and complete form. So only in Islam will modern man find the God he so desperately needs (3:85).

## Spiritual Starvation

It is thanks to modern civilization that man has been deprived of God and his soul left to starve. It is this spiritual starvation that has driven some young people in Japan to say: 'Our culture is a merchant culture, and a merchant culture does not fully cater to man's needs.' The phenomenon of the hippy culture is also an expression of modern man's hunger for true faith in God.

The case of a hippy youth, seen walking down the streets of Delhi, illustrates this point. He was dressed in simple eastern clothes. He wore beads around his neck, rings on his fingers, and bracelets on his wrists. In his hands he held a tambourine. He was from Canada. 'There I had my own house,' he said,

‘my own car, a good wife, a suitable job... Here I have no house. I sleep wherever I feel sleepy, even if it happens to be on the pavement. I have no car, no job. My wife has left me.’

‘But why did you leave all these comforts in Canada and come to India to rough it on the road?’ someone asked him.

‘There I was comfortable physically, here I am comfortable spiritually,’ he answered thoughtfully.

Modern civilization has provided man with countless material benefits. But these things have brought comfort to only (one half) of his being; they afford no comfort or satisfaction to the rest other half. Modern man’s loss of inner peace—the result of this contradiction in technological civilization—finds expression in hippyism, boredom, unrest and frustration.

The late Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), the renowned Swiss psychologist, made a correct analysis of this modern spiritual malaise when he wrote: “Over the last twenty years people all over the globe have consulted me about their psychological problems. All of my patients who were in the latter stage of their lives, that is, over the age of thirty-five were, in the last analysis, suffering from one thing alone: lack

of religious belief. One can truthfully say that each one of them was suffering from a lack of the very thing that present day religions have provided their adherents with, throughout the ages. These people could only be cured by a renewal of their faith in God.”

## The Process of Separation

Philosophy places emphasis on total knowledge of things. It seeks to delve beneath the external nature of things into their inner essence. For almost five thousand years, particularly in the period when Greek philosophy dominated human thought, philosophers had been attempting, with no success, to achieve this aim.

But in the 16th century, when scientific research began in Europe, scientists found it to be in their interests to separate the reality of things from the properties of things. They divided knowledge up into two categories: *Knowledge of things and Knowledge of truths.*

They came to the conclusion that it was not possible to achieve absolute knowledge of truths, for truth is of a subtle nature and cannot be weighed and

measured in the scales available to man. (The Quran: 17:85) Unlike the philosophers, they came to the conclusion that man has been given, as the Quran points out, only a 'little knowledge.' Science is determined to put this 'little knowledge' to practical use, rather than delve into a knowledge of truth that could not be uncovered. It concentrated on properties, and eliminated realities from its field of study; it dealt with quantity, not quality; it answered the question 'how' but left the question 'why' unanswered; it limited its study to things concerning which absolute knowledge could be obtained.

This way of thinking continued to gain ground. For the first time, in Galileo's day, the fragrance of a flower was separated from its chemistry. Scientists then studied the chemistry of flowers, but not their fragrance, which could not be analyzed. Descartes (1596-1650) took this principle of dualism one stage further by applying it to his study of the human being. He studied the body and ignored the soul. The spiritual part of man was thus separated from his material being.

This dualism was not apparently harmful when applied in the field of science. One does not have to know the reality of a magnetic field, for instance, to be able to utilize it in the production of light and



motion; knowledge of the properties of a magnetic field is sufficient for this purpose. But when this same principle of dualism was applied to man, it did irreparable damage.

Why was it that a method, which was so successfully applied to the lifeless objects of nature, was harmful when applied to man? The reason for this is that man is not analyzable in terms of dualism as inanimate matter is.

This can be understood from a simple illustration. If a stone statue is confined to a small dark cell, it will remain unaffected. But man is a psychological being; if one were to confine him to the same cell, he would die. Statues will not react if they are deprived of their freedom, but if man is deprived of his freedom, it will adversely affect his whole personality.

So matter was separated from its meaning and body from its soul. Such were the precepts on which western thought came to be based, and these were the precepts, which later led to the separation of man from God in the western world.

# Differences Between Islam and Christianity

Until the 15th century, science had flourished in the Muslim world, with important centres of research in Spain and other Muslim countries. There had been no clash between religion and science while science was based in Muslim countries, because there is no clash between a true religion and true knowledge. The God who has revealed His religion in the scriptures has also created the universe which science explores. How, then, can revelation and knowledge (science) come into clash with one another?

But when the work of scientific research shifted from Muslim Spain to Italy, France and Britain, a third party soon came in the way of scientific activity. This third, hitherto disinterested party was the Christian Church. When Christianity was disseminated from Syria and Palestine into Europe, it came into contact with Greek thought. Instead of resisting it, the Church moulded its whole theology according to Platonic logic. Eventually, after a few hundred years, the Christians came to revere Greek philosophy as sacred. Later, when scientific research

exposed Greek thought as baseless conjecture, the Church felt that if science were to become popular, the whole foundation of Christian belief would become suspect. Instead of admitting its own mistakes, it determined to suppress science by force. At this time the Church was a mighty power in European affairs and it perpetrated dreadful oppression and tyranny in its attempt to eradicate science. But without success.

The fact that Christianity and Science clashed, whereas Islam and Science did not, is explainable in terms of the difference between the two religions.

Here is an example that illustrates the difference between Islam and Christianity in this matter. The ancient Greeks had two theories concerning the revolution of the sun and earth. One was the theory of Aristotle, (384-322 B.C.) according to which the earth was stationary and the sun revolved around it. The other was theory of Aristarchus, (2nd century B.C.) according to which the earth revolved around the sun.

The theory of Aristotle became very popular with the Christians. According to his geocentric theory, the earth was of prime importance, and it seemed more appropriate to the Christians, who believed in the divinity of Christ, that the centre of the solar

system should be the planet where the Lord Jesus was born. At the time when Copernicus (1473-1543) put forward his heliocentric theory, churchmen reigned supreme in Europe. To preserve their belief, they suppressed Copernicus's views. The portrayal of the place of the Lord Jesus's birth as a mere satellite was a crime, which Christianity could never tolerate.

It was Christianity in its corrupt form, which was an impediment to scientific progress, not divine religion in its pure sense. The Muslims, not having deified their Prophet as the Christians had done, had no scruples about accepting the very reasonable theory that the sun was the centre of our solar system. The question of rejecting it on the basis of religion did not arise. In this connection Professor Burns, in his book entitled *Western Civilization*, writes: "In no subject were the Sarracens further advanced than in Science. In fact, their achievements in this field were the best the world had seen since the end of the Hellenistic civilization. The Sarracens were brilliant astronomers, mathematicians, physicists, chemists and physicians... Despite their reverence for Aristotle, they did not hesitate to criticize his notion of a universe of concentric spheres, with the world at the centre, and they admitted the possibility that the earth rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun."

# Changes in Christianity

When Christianity made its way into Europe from Syria and Palestine, Greek philosophy dominated European thought. In order to facilitate the spread of their religion, Christian theologians presented the faith of Jesus in a manner, which would fit into the intellectual framework of the day. In the words of the Quran, ‘They imitated the sayings of those who disbelieved before them.’ (9:30) The Greeks, for instance, worshipped Zeus and considered him to be the only son of Saturn, the oldest divinity. The Christians imitated this by calling Jesus the only son of God. They also adopted prevalent theories in the fields of geography and physics as explanations of the Holy Scriptures. These theories were then incorporated into their religious books, as if God had also revealed them.

The conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity provided the Church with a welcome boost. Constantine presided over the mighty Roman empire for more than thirty years (306-337), and under his imperial influence the Christian faith spread throughout Europe. But the people who entered the Church during his reign did not do so because of any deep-rooted intellectual conviction.

They became Christians without changing their thoughts and attitudes. For most of them, faith was a matter of expediency, not conviction. They started moulding Christian beliefs according to their previous, non-Christian beliefs. Eventually a religion with little relation to the teachings of Jesus came into being. The historian, Adolf Harnack, has quite rightly pointed out that ‘by the 4th century the living Gospel had been masked in Greek philosophy,’ (Adolf Harnack, *Outline of the History of Dogma*).

Anything that is associated with a religion for a long time becomes sacrosanct. So after a few hundred years, this altered version of Christianity came to be revered as sacred. That which had initially been adopted on the grounds of expediency came to be considered as a genuine part of the religion taught by Jesus. The Greek sciences, which had no evidence to support them, came to be known as Christian science. Subjects such as ‘Christian topography’ came into existence, which in fact were only a new expression of old Greek ideas.

# The Separation of Religion from the Rest of Life

When the decline set in in the Muslims, the modern research into these subjects started in Europe, these 'Christian sciences' were proved to be mistaken in their notions. There was indignation in religious circles in Europe when modern scholars made new discoveries in the fields of astronomy, geography, and physics. Firstly, these scholars were excommunicated. When this measure failed to hold them in check, Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) gave special orders for the establishment of courts of Inquisition in Spain and other Catholic countries. It is estimated that about three million people had to face these courts. Severe punishments were meted out to them. Approximately 30,000 people were burnt at the stake, even famous scientists as Galileo and Bruno had also to face the wrath of the Church.

This sparked off a conflict between the Church and Science, which eventually became a conflict between religion and science in general. Because of inordinate insistence on the sacrosanctity of certain hypothetical beliefs, people received the false impression that religion and science were

opposed to each another, and that progress for one meant inevitable decline for the other. Knowledge, according to the Quran, should draw one closer to God (35:28), but as a result of Christian interpolations, knowledge came to make one, more distant from the Lord.

The conflict between Christianity and scientific knowledge continued for about two hundred years. Then, in 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous book *The Origin of Species*. The Church was bitterly opposed to this book, but by now the Church's power had waned. Compromise was reached in the form of secularization. Religion and Science were separated from one another. Religion came to be considered as a private matter. In all other walks of life man's right to freedom was accepted: that he should be allowed to do what he liked and carry out research into whatever he deemed fit.

## Religion: An Appendix to the Rest of Life

This was not simply a division between science and religion: it was a division between religion and life itself. The Church did not get rid of those unrevealed



thoughts and ideas, which had been incorporated into Christianity. Despite the irrationality of these additions, the Christians insisted on treating them as part of their religion. This meant that religion could not even find a place in the life of a thinking person. Man is a rational being. To believe in something, he has to be able to understand it. The inevitable result of the separation of religion from knowledge was that religion became nothing but a ceremonial appendix to the rest of life. It ceased to play a vital part in human activities.

It is stated in the Quran that ‘God has not put two hearts within one man’s body.’ (33:4) This means that two incompatible concepts cannot occupy an equal place in one person’s mind. That which does not come up to rational and intellectual standards may be an appendix to a person’s life, but it cannot become an integral part of his existence. It will remain ineffective. For religion to survive, even on a personal level, it has to conform to reason. Religion that does not come up to accepted standards of knowledge can be compared to an obsolete piece of machinery, which not longer serves any useful purpose.

# The Need of Human Nature

As a result of the soul being separated from the body and God being separated from the rest of life, man was confronted with a new problem: despite his worldly affluence he still felt as if something within him was lacking. Modern man has been given everything in life, but he shows no signs of true happiness. Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) begins his book, *The Conquest of Happiness*, with these words: “Animals are happy so long as they have health and enough to eat. Human beings, one feels, ought to be, but in the modern world they are not, at least in a great majority of cases.”

The reason for this is that modern civilization, despite its impressive achievements, has been able to provide man with only half of what he is looking for. It was provided for his body, but it has been unable to provide for the needs of his soul.

Man desires a world full of meaning, but modern civilization gives him only a piece of stone with no meaning attached to it. Man desires life, but modern civilization gives him only a replica of life. Man seeks peace of mind, but modern civilization places him in a mobile machine, which cannot convey him to

his destination. Man wants to know the Creator of the universe, but Science can acquaint him only with creation. Man wishes to throw himself at the feet of his benefactor, but he cannot find his benefactor anywhere in the world of science and technology. Unable to find the true God, he bows down before false ones, but they cannot satisfy him any more than a plastic doll satisfies a childless mother. According to the Quran, they are only 'names,' not realities. (12:40)

Man's need for a superior God is an established fact. It has even been accepted by thinkers who do not care to believe in any God or Religion. Bertrand Russell's statement in his book, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, can be cited as an example: "If life is to be fully human it must serve some end which is, in some sense, outside human life, some end which is impersonal and above mankind, such as God or truth or beauty."

This is an admission, by an atheist, of man's intrinsic need for God. The predicament of modern man lies in his loss of God; His salvation is dependent only on rediscovering his God.

In their attempt to understand human nature, anthropologists have studied different societies. They are all agreed that thousands of years of

human history testify to the fact that the idea of God is inherent in man's nature. Just as sheep are instinctively herbivorous and cats instinctively carnivorous, and it is impossible to change these instincts, so the concept of God is inseparable from human nature.

Communist society provides us with a contemporary illustration of this fact. After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, socialist dogma completely excluded the idea of God. Education and training in every field was based on atheistic principles. Even so, consciousness of God is profoundly embedded in the younger generation of Soviets, who have been brought up in an entirely atheist environment. This is clear from the following incident.

In 1973 a Soviet jetliner was flying over the eastern part of India. The engine failed and the plane crashed in Bengal. A special tape recorder, known as the 'black box' placed in the tail end of planes where it is least likely to be damaged, records conversations which usually provide clues as to the cause of any accident. On this occasion, a replay of the recording revealed that the last words that the young Russian pilot had uttered were. 'Peter save us!'

# Making Up for Man's Helplessness

The course of man's life on earth is such that he is eternally reminded of his helplessness. The educated and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the great and the weak—all are equal in this respect.

Physically, man is so weak that even a small accident can incapacitate him. He has also to be in a highly balanced geographical situation to survive in this world; he cannot bear any upset in this balance. Moreover, man sees himself as insignificant in comparison to the vast universe in which he lives. In exploring any academic field one soon apprehends that realities are too immense and complex to be encompassed by the limited human intellect. When one sets about any task, one is often confronted by unknown factors that ruin one's aspirations. And if, by chance, one avoids such bitter experience in life, there is no escape from death. Man is powerless before death. Death will come and shatter all his dreams, leaving them in ruins like a fine city that has been razed to the ground by a devastating earthquake.

Every man is plagued by this feeling of helplessness. It compels him to seek the support of something

stronger than himself, which can make up for his sense of inadequacy. Consciousness of how powerless one is makes one turn towards God. Man needs a God to whom he can express his thanks; a God in whom he can trust on all occasions; a God to depend upon when all the other props in life have failed him; a God who can reverse every setback and ease every hardship. The God of Islam provides for all these needs of man. His presence can always be felt. He is All-Powerful and All-Knowing.

## The Concept of God in Different Religions

Man's feeling of helplessness cannot be soothed unless he has a God to whom he can turn. Every religion provides man with some God, but with the exception of Islam, every religion has been spoiled by interpolation and alteration. No religion, except Islam, has preserved a true image of God. They all present an unrealistic picture of the Almighty, which cannot fully satisfy man.

Cat Stevens was an internationally renowned pop musician. He was brought up as a Christian, but

in 1976 he accepted Islam and is now known as Yusuf Islam. Speaking of his conversion to Islam, he said: ‘The Christian Church taught us to believe in God, but the only way to communicate with God was through Jesus—you have no direct contact.’ To him, ‘the importance of Islam lies in the fact that it acquaints one with a God who speaks directly to the man and his soul.’ (*Arabia*, London, July 1983)

Man’s nature demands a God whom he can contact directly, but existing religions offer him a God who can be contacted only through some intermediary. Islam is the only religion in which man establishes direct contact with his Lord. This is because Islam is preserved in its original, revealed form, whereas other religions, having been altered and corrupted by man, are nowhere to be found in their pristine form.

All religions were essentially one and the same at the time of their origin. But now these differ from one another due to human interpolation. (10:19) Now, some religions have many gods to offer, but this is clearly not what man is looking for. Man is looking for a single being on whom he can focus all his feelings. There can be only one such focal point, not several. Some religions present God in the form of some man. But man is looking for a God who is

superior to him; he cannot worship a God who is human like himself. Some religions think of God as no more than a vague spirit. But man is seeking a God who sees and hears and speaks; abstract things like ether and magnetism cannot meet his demands.

Arthur Koestler was a renowned thinker and writer, and had an estate of approximately £ 400,000. He married three times, but even so he was childless. He was suffering from Parkinson's disease and leukemia. In utter despair he took his own life at his London residence in March, 1983. He was 77 years old at the time of his death.

Hundreds of such sad events take place everyday all over the world. They happen because people lose hope in their desires being fulfilled in this world. But there are very few cases in history of true believers in God committing suicide. The reason for this is that belief in God gives a person hope for his future in the next world. In God's scheme of things, life is not limited to this world alone; it continues after death as well. When believers are afflicted in this world, they look forward to happiness in the next world. When they despair of the human world, they fix their hopes on the world of God. Thus the distress of a true believer is changed into healthy optimism.



## A Distorted Picture of God

The distorted picture of God which is found in other religions cannot fulfill man's inner yearning. The reason is that man requires a perfect God and these religions provide him with imperfect ones. Some people, compelled by an inner longing for God, attach themselves to false gods, but true spiritual fulfillment can be achieved only through the concept of God presented in Islam. A person who is looking for a car that he can travel in will never be satisfied with a toy car. His needs will only be met if he is provided with a real one. Thus man's heart can be set at rest only when it is filled with thoughts of the true God. In the words of the Quran, "In the remembrance of God all hearts are comforted." (Quran, 13:28)

Though we cannot behold the Creator in this world, the vast and magnificent universe that He has created is spread out before our eyes. We can see it and experience it. So the human mind can be satisfied only with a God who is worthy of the present universe; a God who is great enough to be the creator of the magnificent universe that meets our eyes. A God who does not come up to these standards can hold no attraction for man.

An American scientist, Walter Oscar Lundberg, has explained this very clearly. He writes that a scientist has a special advantage over others in that he is able to understand God's truth. The basic principles on which he works are in fact an expression of God's existence. If this is the case, then why is it that so many scientists deny the very existence of God? This American scientist is of the opinion that one of the reasons is as follows:

In organized Christianity there is instilled deeply in young people a concept of God created in the image of man rather than of man created in the image of God. When such minds are later trained in science, this reversed and limited anthropomorphic concept gradually becomes more and more incompatible with the rational, inductive attitude of science. Ultimately, when all attempts at reconciliation fail, the concept of God may be abandoned entirely. (*The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, p. 56)

Islam is not a new religion. Originally other religions and Islam were one and the same. But other religions underwent changes and failed to preserve an accurate image of God, whereas in Islam the concept of God has ideally been preserved: it is a picture of God in His most perfect form. The God of Islam is one

God; He is Omnipotent; He always was and always will be; He has no partner; He alone has created the universe and He alone sustains it; He sees, hears and speaks; He is always near to answer the supplication of His servant; at no time or place is He parted from man; He helps man through every difficulty of this world and the next. The Quran introduces us to this perfect God. Whoever wishes to know God can do so only through the Quran.

## Society

All the nations in present times, be they developed or underdeveloped, are faced with social problems. Human society everywhere is marked by tyranny and injustice, and people are faced with the question of how to reorganize society in order to establish a better human existence.

In the study of the human predicament, what strikes us time and again is that man is still confronted with the necessity to solve his problems in a world where all other things have had their problems definitively solved from day one. This goes to prove that man has gone astray in the thoroughfare of the universe. If he had followed the same thoroughfare as the rest

of God's creation, his problems too would have been solved in like manner.

All the things in existence in the universe are governed by the same universal law. But man wants to adopt a separate path for himself. All the things of the universe survive by being of benefit to others, whereas man wants to build his future on the exploitation of others. The tall objects in the universe cast their shadow on the ground in acknowledgement of their modesty, while any form of greatness achieved by man makes him arrogant. Everything in the universe is busy in its own tasks, and does not interfere in others' spheres, while man clashes with others, attempting to construct himself out of the destruction of others. In the universe, floods occur which if given their freedom would wreak havoc, but the system of the universe diverts their course to the rivers and the seas. On the contrary, when man experiences such tempests in the form of negative feelings, he does not divert them to a positive course. Man wants others to suffer on his behalf.

If the ills of society are to be remedied, an end should be put to this contradiction. That is, human society should be made to follow the same universal system that is strictly adhered to by the universe.

The day this happens, all the problems of human life will be solved. When the observance of God's law has solved the problems of the universe, why should the observance of that same law by man not succeed in solving human problems?

## Social Problems

What is society? It is in actual fact another name of a group of individuals. The behaviour of society is an aggregate of the behaviour of its individuals. If individuals are good, society likewise will be good. If individuals are not good, society will reflect their shortcomings.

The concept of God gives each member of society the most morally correct viewpoint. Its perception engenders in each individual such seriousness as enable him or her to do what is beneficial for the whole of mankind, and to refrain from acting to its disadvantage.

Belief in God is the greatest of discoveries. It galvanizes one's entire personality. This can be illustrated by the example of the game of carrom-board, which is played with 19 pieces arranged at the middle of a square board with holes at each corner.

If a player can hit these pieces with a striker in such a way that they are all thrown into all the four holes at one stroke, he is said to have played a Master Stroke. Belief in God too is a kind of masterstroke.

Belief in God affects a man's whole being, bringing into play all of his forces. Although apparently just one aspect of human thinking, such belief reforms the entire human being, so that regardless of how he gives expression to his personality, he will always bow to the norms of rectitude. Indeed, the conviction that man's whole existence is in the grip of God, has a through-going influence on all of the individual's thoughts, words and deeds. The true believer will never deviate from the straight path of nature.

Paying attention to the body alone, while abandoning the soul, does not produce an integrated personality. The consciousness of this lack keeps the individual constantly dissatisfied, with the feeling that he has failed to find something that he really wanted.

It is this feeling of deprivation which in most cases is the cause of social evils. All tyranny and injustice in society are traceable to this discontent of some being vented on others. People continue to exploit others in order to satisfy their unfulfilled wishes. But, when belief in God takes root in the mind, it turns the man into a complex-free soul, (called a peaceful or

serene soul in the Quran) no longer suffering from an inferiority complex about having fewer worldly things than others or from a superiority complex at being granted more. Under all circumstances, with his new, well integrated personality, he remains a moderate person and that is what makes a man a better member of a society.

A new element in his mental make up is the feeling of responsibility This feeling is always produced when he is aware of a power above him, which can take him to task. Over and above God, there is no such superior power as will induce a sense of accountability on man, forcing him to abide by the truth.

Belief in Almighty God produces an awareness in man that he is answerable to Him, which in turn makes him extremely cautious in his words and deeds. The possession of the new awareness is like having a guardian angel, which organizes his whole life. It turns him away from the perpetration of tyranny and expectation, and forces him to stick to the path of goodness and justice. The well-known English judge, Sir Matthew Hale, (1609-1676) had very aptly observed: “To say that religion is a cheat

is to dissolve all those obligations whereby civil societies are preserved.” (Quoted by Julian Huxley, in *Religion Without Revelation*, p. 155)

## Religion Without Revelation

When the majority of the members of a society come to accept the Islamic concept of God in their lives, a tremendous change takes place in social matters. This awareness that God is watching puts an end to double standards and hypocritical stance that inside a man is different from what he is outside. Believers do not exploit others as they know that they will have to account for their deeds in God’s court. Their lives, instead of remaining self-oriented, become God-oriented. To believe in God is to believe in an Almighty being who has access to the innermost recesses of the human mind, and who will take an account of all acts done openly or covertly. In this way belief in God takes away a person’s ego and haughtiness. The believer is totally sincere and is a realist in the true sense. This is the secret of all kinds of reform. If a man is sincere and realistic, he will perform all tasks in the most proper way, but if he lacks these qualities, he will mar everything that he undertakes. The Islamic concept of God produces this sincerity and realism in man.



All human beings in our world are not equal. Here some are weak, others strong; this difference is the cause of all the injustice prevalent in the world, for those who feel themselves powerful tend to exploit those who appear weaker than themselves.

Belief in God roots out this evil from man. Belief in God tells man that the actual issue is not between man and man, but between God and man. Here, on the one hand is God, the all-powerful, and, on the other is man who has no power as compared to God. It is as if the division here is not between the less powerful and the more powerful, but between power and powerlessness. (35:15)

Belief in God transforms man's thinking. He begins to look at things not in relation to human beings but in relation to God. This is because, ultimately he knows he has to face his Maker. This is an attitude, which cause the disappearance of whatever tyrannical mentality had artificially surfaced as a result of seeing everything, not in relation to God but in relation to man. The believer thus comes down to his actual level. He becomes a man cut to size.

In a controversy arising between two persons or two nations, both in most cases, are at fault. In such a state of affairs, if one party admits its mistakes the

other party too follows suit. On the contrary if one party remains adamant, the other party becomes equally unwilling to admit its own faults. This leads to an escalation of the strife, until it reaches a point of no return.

In all such cases, the actual problem is that no sooner does a quarrel start than both the parties turn it into a prestige issue. Each party knows that it shares the blame, yet it refrains from saying so, for any such outright admission would be humiliating in the extreme.

But if one of them were to take the initiative in admitting its mistakes, the state of affairs would change drastically. That prestige issue would now turn into an issue of balance. Now, with the admission of a mistake by one party, the other party, in admitting its errors would not be eating humble pie but simply following what the other party had already done. That is to say such an admission by one of the parties would induce its rival to adopt a balanced approach in advance.

Such realism, the mainspring of a reformed life, is attainable only through sincere worship of God, self-effacement before His greatness and avowal of one's own insignificance and lack of perfection. This realism is the mark of the true believer, one

who believes in God when God in fact is not visible before us, how could a person of such faith and practice deign to occupy himself with matters of worldly prestige?

The system of nature follows the principle of balance. One of the strategies resorted to by nature to maintain this balance is diversion, or the redistribution of excessive amounts of force or energy. For instance, if all the water that comes down to earth in the form of rains were stored in the fields and settlements, an immeasurable strain would be placed on the environment. What nature does in this case is to divert all the spare accumulated water to the rivers and seas.

It is this principle of diversion, which has been followed in the building of dams. Designed mainly for storage purposes, dams have a regulatory role in the environment, controlling floodwaters and diverting them to useful ends. Such as irrigation and the production of hydro-electricity. The same principle is followed in machines, like the steam engine. When the quantity of steam exceeds the required amount and too much pressure builds up, the steam is in a sense diverted by being allowed to escape through a safety valve.

In social life, there is a somewhat similar build-up of stresses and strains. When a number of people

live together, it is but natural for complaints and grudges to surface between them. If these negative sentiments are allowed to escalate, discord and enmity are bound to develop. When that stage is reached, it becomes almost impossible to reform a human group or society.

In such a state of affairs some such thing is required towards which these harmful feelings may be diverted. Belief in God and the Life hereafter serves this very purpose in life. It diverts those feelings, which are harmful to society, to God.

In the early history of Israelites, there is the story of Joseph, who was separated from his father by his stepbrothers. Later, the same happened with Yamin, another real brother of Joseph. He too, without his father's knowledge, was separated from him. These were terrible losses for Yaqub, the father, and it was but natural that he should be intensely miserable. Had he vented his negative feelings on his stepsons, there would have been great dissension and discord in his family. Instead, he diverted all this flood of feelings to God saying: 'I express my grief and sorrow to God.'

There was a similar diversion of negative feeling when caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab dismissed the Islamic General Khalid ibn al-Walid. It was a rude

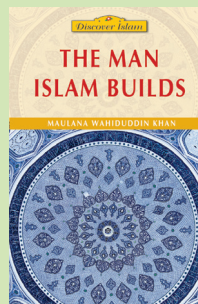
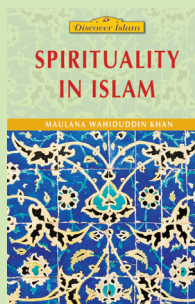
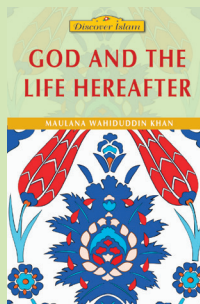
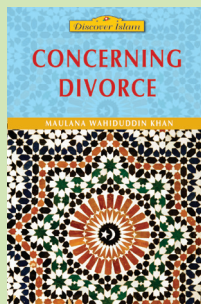
shock to Khalid, but he redirected his hurt feelings to God, saying: ‘I fight not for the cause of Umar, but for the cause of God.’

Belief in the life Hereafter is the greatest gift to human society. It enables man to turn to God to seek compensation for the wrong done to him. Whatever he has failed to find in man he can expect to find that in God. In this way a God-worshipper’s negative feelings keep getting diverted to God instead of to man. The flood superabundance of water that would have caused great harm in the form of a flood is canalized into a diversion pool. I should like to conclude this with an observation made by George Bernard Shaw: “If a man like Muhammad were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would solve its problems in a way that would bring it much-needed peace and happiness.”

The life of Prophet Muhammad was a perfect example of what a true believer’s life should be. But we need to go further than Bernard Shaw and say that “If true believers were born in this world, peace would certainly prevail—which should be our first priority.”

# Discover Islam

In this series, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan presents the fundamental teachings of Islam in a simple way. The series provides the general reader with an accurate and comprehensive picture of Islam—the true religion of submission to God.



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