

Discover Islam

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN



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Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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The Concept of God

In 1965 in Lucknow I met a university Professor, a Doctor of Philosophy, who had turned atheist. The subject of our conversation was the existence of God, during which he asked: “What criterion do you have to prove the existence of God.” I replied that I had a valid criterion and that it was exactly the same as is employed in science to prove any natural fact. Bertrand Russell has aptly said there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of things and knowledge of truths. So far as the “things” are concerned it is possible to apply direct argument to them. But inferential arguments alone can be applied to prove “truths,” as relating to the laws of nature. Inferential arguments are held to be valid in science, that is, to admit the existence of some “reality” on the basis of the existence of things. On the basis of this reality, Bertrand Russell has acknowledged that the “argument from design” brought forward by religious people is a valid argument, according to science. The argument from design sets out to prove the existence of a designer from the existence of design.

By the first half of the twentieth century people used to debate over the existence of God. But by the end of the twentieth century this is no longer considered a debatable topic. Now in academic circles the existence of God is held to be a fact. Particularly after the Big Bang theory, this matter has been almost settled.

Now we are right, scientifically, in saying that the choice for us is not between the universe with God and the universe without God. Rather the real choice is between the universe with God or no universe at all. Since, from the scientific viewpoint, we are not in a position to opt for no universe at all, we are compelled to choose the universe with God.

As regards the scientific evidence on the existence of God, perhaps the first notable account was that prepared by Sir James Jeans, titled *The Mysterious Universe*, published in 1930. Many important books have subsequently come out on this topic, which describe how all the fields of the science of the universe point to the existence of God. Here I would like to refer to a very valuable book on this subject, consisting of forty articles written by qualified western scientists. It is titled *The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, and is edited by John Clover Monsma.¹

The truth is that both revealed and scientific knowledge equally prove that there is a God of this

universe. And that God is only one. Not believing in God is as illogical as believing in many gods. In this present world man is given freedom for the purpose of being tested. Everyone is free to say what he wants to and to believe in anything of his own free will. But so far as reason is concerned the only rational concept is that of one God. Everything else is irrational. No valid argument exists in its favour.

Once a group of young men in an Indian town were discussing whether God existed or not. Even after a long debate the matter could not be settled. Finally, they agreed to refer the matter to a certain pious Muslim scholar of the same town, who came there at their invitation. He stood among the youth and simply recited this verse from the Qur'an:

“Is there any doubt about God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?” (14:10)

The result was miraculous. The youths were left speechless. They found this argument from the Qur'an so convincing that they needed no further arguments to believe in God. How did it happen that assertion alone was sufficient to bring them to belief? It is because God is self-subsisting. He needs no proofs for His existence. The reason for God being self-evident is twofold. Firstly, the existence of the universe itself is a proof of the existence of God. Secondly, man's existence in itself is a proof of God's

existence. Therefore, man believes in God, because he is bound to believe in Him. His inner nature speaks for God. Hence, most often, a simple assertion about the existence of God suffices for a man with an unbiased mentality to believe in God. One cannot afford to deny God, as that would be tantamount to a denial of one's own nature. At the same time, in the external world man sees clear evidence of God in nature all around him, day in and day out. God is so evident that any denial of God becomes artificial. That is why those who apparently reject God, also come to believe in God, when confronted with their own utter helplessness. (31:32;10:22)

The concept of God handed down to man by the Prophet is one of pure monotheism, that is "There is no god but one God." This Prophetic concept has been briefly set forth in a short chapter of the Qur'an:

Say: He is God, the One God. The Eternal, Absolute. He does not beget nor was He begotten. And there is none equal to Him (Chapter 112)

However, in every age all sorts of concepts have been prevalent. These may be divided into two categories.

One God versus many gods

A Personal God versus an impersonal God

There are again several kinds of beliefs about God. Some believe in two gods, one of good and the

other of evil. Some believe in three, as in the form of the trinity, a construct of the Christians. There are others who believe in multitudes of gods, as in Hinduism.

Now, of these concepts which should be held right and which wrong? The Qur'an gives us a clear assertion on this subject: There are only two forms of credible knowledge, that is, revealed knowledge and scientific knowledge. (46:4)

Let us first take revealed knowledge. When we make a survey of revealed scriptures, the first question that arises is which one of them is to be regarded as authentic? Apparently, in the world of today, there are many religious books which are said by their adherents to enshrine God's revelations. But when these books are judged on the basis of history, we find that none of them can sustain their credibility on purely historical grounds. We have no way of knowing, as a matter of historical record, precisely when and how these books came into existence, what their original language was, how they were preserved after the First Giver, how they reached later generations of followers —all these questions remain unanswered. These books are thus believed by their adherents to be holy scriptures, without their having any historical proof of this.

In this non-historical museum of “revealed” scriptures, the Qur’an is the only divine book which comes up to the standard of history in every respect. The Qur’an has every kind of historical credibility and authenticity, so that one may believe in it with full confidence.

This means that if an individual wants to find out the concept of God according to revealed knowledge, he can trust only the Qur’an to be the authentic source. It is a fact that, the Qur’an is the only existing divine scripture which provides a reliable source of learning the true concept of God.

When we refer to the Qur’an on this subject, we find that, according to revealed knowledge, there is only one true concept of God, and that is pure monotheism. That is, God is only one. He has no partner, no equal. He is eternal and beyond time and space. He alone is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. (2:255)

So far as the concept of three gods, or the trinity, is concerned, it is highly illogical in every respect. It is not proved by any revealed source. Even today it is merely a creed of the Christian Church. In neither the Old Testament, or the New Testament, held sacred by Christians, is there any clear mention of the concept of the trinity. In their own sacred scriptures the trinity is an alien creed.

So far as reason then is concerned, the concept of the trinity is not rationally understandable. In terms of the trinity, God is at the same time three in one and one in three. This is an inconceivable mathematical riddle, which none of the greatest of mathematicians can solve. That is why when a Christian professor of an Indian university was once asked by a student to explain the trinity, he had this to say:

If you ask me I do not know, if you do not ask
me I know.

The truth is that the concept of the trinity is wholly unproved so far religious scriptures are concerned. It is likewise entirely baseless judging by the criteria of knowledge and reason. Keeping this reality in view, it will not be wrong to say that this concept is so unfounded that, *prima facie*, it stands rejected.

Now let us talk of scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge provides an academic verification of this concept of the one God. It affirms that God cannot be more than one, the concept of many gods not being understandable to a scientist.

The world discovered by science is a wholly unified world. All the parts of the present world are so interlinked with each other that it is impossible to separate them from one another. In such a world the concept of more than one God is quite alien. For instance, if the sun, the air, water, human beings

and the earth had not been governed by one and the same Creator, a world of the present kind would never have come into existence. For instance, if the sunshine reached the earth unhampered, without there being the atmosphere to neutralize its harmful rays, the sun would be a killer instead of a source of life. If the gases in water were not in their present proportions, no living organisms could ever have come into being on the earth. If the size of the earth were half or double the present size, in either case civilization on earth would have been well nigh impossible.

There are countless things in the world. But everything exists in such proportions as will give the maximum benefit to life on earth. None of the things on this earth are out of proportion. This shows that there is only one God—the Creator and Sustainer of this world. If there were different gods for different things, then, this perfect balance could never have been possible. In ancient times people believed that there were numerous forces controlling the universe. Newton reduced these forces to the following four: gravitational force, electromagnetic force, strong nuclear force, weak nuclear force.

However, the extraordinary unity that scientists found in the world was incompatible with the notion that it was being controlled by four forces.

That is why the scientists have been trying to reduce the four forces to one. Their efforts were crowned with success in the second half of the twentieth century. It is now generally believed that there cannot be four forces controlling nature, but only one. This has led to the formulation of the Single String Theory by scientists.

This goes to prove that the concept called tawheed (oneness of God) in revealed knowledge is fully borne out by scientific knowledge as well—that there is only one God, not many gods controlling this world.

Notes

1. First Indian edition (1968) printed by M.E. Eapen, at GLS Press, Bombay-75, Distributed in India by Pocket Books Distributing Co. II, Oak Lane, Fort, Bombay-1.

Religion

Let us now come to religion. Scholars have generally believed that in the search for truth, the most reliable source is religion. That is why in every age the majority of human beings have been associated with one religion or the other. And today, this is still the case.

Why is it that people take religion to be a reliable source of truth? The reason is that the teachings of religion are based on a special source such as no other discipline enjoys. This special source is that of divine revelation. God created the universe. He knows best its creation plan. He has full knowledge of which path in this world leads to success and which path leads to failure. Therefore, God-given guidance is entirely trustworthy.

After the creation of the universe, when man first inhabited the earth, God decreed that in every age and in every nation, there would be certain individuals who would be raised as prophets to guide mankind to the path of God. God, Who has absolute knowledge, sent His guidance to man. He did this by means of revelations which he bade the angels

convey to the prophets in the form of divine books. These are the sacred books on which the religions of the world are based.

These religious books have guided man in all ages. In every era a large number of people have found in them light for their minds and solace for their hearts. The goal of religions has always been to give man a proper knowledge of His Creator, so that he may properly understand the universe and the purpose of human life in it.

Religion informs man of his beginning and his ultimate end. It enables man to lead his life in this world according to the creation plan of God, so that he may be entitled to the divine rewards.

About two dozen Prophets have been mentioned in the Qur'an by name. In a hadith, the number of these Prophets and messengers has been put at 1,24,000. However, with the exception of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, no authentic historical record is available of any other prophet. But, in principle, we have to believe that God's prophets came to every nation and in every age, whether or not we have any record of them.

A religious system generally includes beliefs, worship, ethics, social behaviour, etc. One of the important contributions of a religious system is that,

it provides man with a life-long centre around which his intellectual and emotional being may revolve.

Religion offers man an ideology in which he may believe with all his heart and all his soul. It gives man the conviction that he is in communion with Almighty God. On finding a religion, man feels that he has become a co-traveller with the rest of the universe. He has become a member of the universal brotherhood.

Religion gives man a practicable system of life. He finds a course which he may properly pursue day and night. Having found a religion, man feels as if he now understands the purpose of his life; he undergoes the same experience—but with greater intensity—as a traveller does on reaching his destination.

Religion, the science of life, is an eternal source of inspiration and guidance to man. As such it acts as a spur to spiritual and intellectual growth. Its absence from human life, would eliminate all possibility of man's following a course that would lead him towards a total and meaningful development of his personality.

Religions Other than Islam

The Qur'an and the Bible both tell us that, ever since the advent of man on earth, God has sent His Prophets to convey His message to mankind.

According to a *hadith*, from Adam to Jesus Christ, more than one hundred thousand prophets have come to the world. Every prophet brought God's religion and communicated it to his people. This divine scheme has continued in every age and in all places.

All these religions brought by God's messengers were one and the same. Originally there was no basic difference between one religion and the other. But it happened that none of the concerned peoples were able to preserve the teachings of their prophets. Either these religions survived in a distorted form, or they vanished without leaving any trace. Moreover, contemporary historians failed to attach any importance to these prophets or their teachings. For this reason few of these prophets found their place in the annals of history. The only exception is that of the final prophet, Muhammad, peace be upon him.

This blackout of history was so complete that even the prophets of later periods of history received scant mention in contemporary records. For instance, Jesus Christ came to the world two thousand years ago, and so little is known about his life that a western scholar was once constrained to remark: "Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all."

Due to the paucity of reliable documentation, all the previous religious scriptures, except that of Islam,

have lost their historical credibility. By rational standards all other religions have assumed the status of a set of dogmas rather than that of a chronicled event. One can believe in them only as a matter of faith and not as a fact of history. However, the position of Islam in this regard is totally different. Muhammad, the Messenger of Islam, as acknowledged by all well-known historians of the world, was born in the full light of history, and whatever he said or did in his life-time has been recorded in considerable detail.

The Qur'an, the last word of God, has been preserved just as it was first revealed to the Messenger of Islam. The textual originality and purity of the Qur'an is incomparable and unquestionable. Islam, as a whole, passes the strictest criteria of higher criticism and historical verification. So, when one opts for Islam, one does so as a matter of history, not simply as a matter of faith.

One can safely say, therefore, that for a seeker after the truth, there is no whole range of options. He has only one choice to make. And that is the choice of Islam: the only religion having true historical credibility.

For instance, according to our belief, Abraham and Moses were Prophets of God. Abraham was born in Iraq and Moses in Egypt. Yet the annals of the respective countries are devoid of any mention of these great prophets. We find no reference in

the ancient history of Iraq to Abraham. Similarly, Egyptian history makes no mention of Moses.

In a similar way, as testified to by the Qur'an, Jesus was a prophet. Even Gautam Buddh is considered a prophet by his followers. But neither Jesus Christ nor Gautam Buddh come up to the strict standards of history. For example, there are long periods of Jesus's life about which nothing is known, and the stories of the New Testament were not written until more than a century after his death. Three languages—Syriac, Greek and Hebrew—were prevalent during the time of Christ, yet we have no way of knowing, with certainty, about the language in which he communicated his message to his people.

In the times of Gautam Buddh, Pali and Sanskrit were in vogue. But there is no historical evidence as to which language he spoke. The actual words spoken by Gautam Buddh are not on record. There are some who claim to have proofs that Gautam Buddh spoke in Pali, but it has not been established by the scholars of Buddhism.

The reason is that, in ancient times, before the age of the press, the concept of historiography was very limited. At that period it was only a record of kings and generals; only events relating to victory and defeat were considered worth recording. All other incidents remained unrepresented and since the

prophets or the reformers were not associated with events of a political nature, the historians did not consider their lives worthy of being immortalized.

The case of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was exceptional in that it was quite different from that of the other prophets. Circumstances were such that he became involved in all kinds of political events, and he and his companions were able to usher in a revolution bringing about sweeping changes in the political and the social order of the time. Naturally the events of his life came to be recorded in the contemporary history and thus he became an essential part of history. In this way, by historical standards, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ became a historical personality, in the full sense of the word.

Because of non-existent documentation, all the other religions and their founders have come to be considered lacking in credence. One who examines these religions objectively feels that he is studying beliefs rather than history, for the personalities associated with these religions, their religious scriptures and their teachings have been demonstrated to be scientifically and historically unreliable.

An Encyclopaedia of the Hindu religion, published under the title *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, drew the comment from a scholar that it would be more aptly

titled *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Mythology*. This is the case with all religions. All the faiths save Islam may be classified as mythologies rather than religions in the scientific and historical sense.

The subject matter of ancient alchemy and modern chemistry is one and the same. Yet we all know that there is a basic difference between the two. Alchemy was based on unproved speculations, while modern chemistry is based on facts proved by strictly scientific methods. This same difference is found between Islam and other religions, the latter being like ancient alchemy, whereas the former is like modern chemistry.

This difference is so evident that no one can fail to notice it. One who sincerely makes a comparative study of religions of both kinds will inevitably discover it. Hence Islam is the only choice for those who seek a religion with a credible historical base.

Islam in Brief

What is Islam? This is a vast subject. In this chapter we shall give a brief account of some of its basic aspects in the light of the Qur'an and *hadith*.

True Guidance

The Qur'an leads us to the true guidance. In this connection, we quote a passage from the Qur'an:

Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is His; who can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before men and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He wills. His knowledge encompasses the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both does not tire Him, and He is the Most High, the Great. There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever disbelieves in Satan and believes in God, shall indeed lay hold of the firmest handle, which shall not break off. God is All-Hearing and all-Knowing.

God is the guardian of those who believe. He leads them from darkness to the light. As for those who disbelieve, their guardians are false gods who lead

them from light to darkness; they are the inmates of the fire and in it they shall abide forever. (2:255-257)

Now, let us try to visualize the above quoted Qur'anic passage, in its applied form, so that we may have an idea of what kind of individual, what kind of society and what kind of State would respectively emerge, if Islam were consciously accepted and practised in letter and spirit.

A. Individual

Islam is the religion of the universe. The Qur'an says:

Are they seeking a religion other than God's when every soul in heaven and on earth have, willingly or by compulsion, bowed to His will? (3:83)

This means that submission to God is the only true religion for both man and the universe. All the things on the earth or in space are following God's commands to the letter. The revolution of the stars, the flowing of water, the growing of trees, in short, all things following the same course which was determined for them by God. Nothing is allowed to deviate from the divine path. The Qur'an says:

The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each swims along in its own orbit. (36:40)

The same is required of all human beings. Everyone should strictly obey the commands of God

without any deviation or alteration. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has declared:

A believer with his faith is like a horse with its tether. The movement of the horse is restricted to the length of its tether. So is the case with the believer. His words and deeds are all restricted by the limitations set by his faith. (Mishkat al-Masabih, vol. 2/1226)

The true Muslim leads a highly disciplined life, always adhering to the set of do's and don'ts ordained by God Almighty. He is entirely pure in speech, and even subordinates his intention and thinking to the will of God. He always feels himself to be a servant of his Lord. The Qur'an depicts the true Muslim thus:

And the servants of the Beneficent God are they who walk on the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant address them, they say: "Peace." And they who pass the night standing and prostrating themselves before their Lord. And they who say: O our Lord! ward off from us the punishment of hell, for surely its punishment is everlasting. Surely it is an evil abode and (evil) place to stay. And they who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, but keep the golden mean. And they who do not call upon any other god besides Allah and do not kill, which Allah has forbidden, except in the requirements of justice, and (who) do not commit fornication and he who does this shall meet with evil; his punishment shall be doubled on the Day of Resurrection, and he shall abide in abasement forever; unless he repents

and believes and does good deeds; for them Allah will change his evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And whoever repents and does good shall surely return to Allah. And they who do not bear witness to what is false, and when they hear what is profane they maintain their dignity. And they who, when reminded of the signs of their Lord, do not fall down thereat deaf and blind. And they who say: 'O our Lord! grant us in our wives and our offspring the joy of our eyes, and make us examples to those who fear you.' These shall be rewarded with lofty places in paradise because they were patient, and shall be met therein with greetings and salutations. There they shall abide forever: a blessed dwelling and blessed resting place. Say (to the unbelievers): Little cares my Lord for you if you do not invoke Him. But Now that you have indeed rejected (the truth), His punishment is bound to overtake you. (25:63-77)

B. Society

The foundation of society in Islam is based on mutual well wishing. In chapter *Al-Asr* (The Time) the Qur'an says:

By the time, verily Man is in loss, except for those who believe and do good works and exhort one another to truth and to patience (103:1-3)

How should a Muslim live in a society? The answer is given in one of the *hadith*: "If any one of you sees an evil in society, he must rectify it by his own hand. And if he has no capacity to do so, he should do it by his tongue.

And if he is unable even to discourage it, then, let him condemn the same in his own heart.” (*Bukhari*)

A society based on these principles will naturally be a place in which good will flourish as a result of mutual reminding, and the roots of evil, if not totally eradicated, will dry up due to public discouragement. As the truth is openly propagated and the virtue of patience is highly recommended in this society, there will definitely prevail a peaceful atmosphere which is a prerequisite for the healthy growth and development of both the individual personality and the social system at large. It is only in an atmosphere of such peaceful social order that the rights of individuals and communal harmony are ensured, and the higher values of brotherhood, cooperation and altruism are sincerely observed; and, finally, the projects of common welfare, progress and prosperity are successfully achieved.

To sum up, when the ideals of Islam are consciously put into practice by its adherents, there will emerge a society that will be appreciably more secure, free of violence and naturally cooperative, progressive, prosperous, good enhancing and evil-resisting.

C. State

What is a state? It is an organised political community under one government. Islam does not

prescribe any particular form or structure of the State. Nevertheless, Islamic teachings seem to be so comprehensive that they embrace all essential issues of life including the State and its related national or international problems as well.

What is an Islamic State? A State governed by Muslims is not necessarily an Islamic state. Apart from its monotheistic doctrinal basis, an Islamic State would, in practice, be identified with the sumum bonum principle of 'no-compulsion.' No compulsion should be exercised, either before or after the gaining of power. For power gained through compulsion or power used for compulsion in any sphere whatsoever, particularly in religious matters, is strictly prohibited and condemned in Islam. That is why the coercive forms of States, though governed by Muslim dictators, have never been considered ideal Islamic States by the scholars of Islam. Islam, moreover, does not allow its followers to rebel against any established State, even though it may not seem to be in accordance with the Islamic Ideal. Compulsion on the part of the State should never be resisted by means of counter-compulsion, i.e. it has to be countered through negotiation, backed up by conviction. This ensures such stability of law and order as will subsequently help promote Islamic values, and

this may gradually prepare a firm ground for a real Islamic State to stand on.

To establish an ideal Islamic State is not the main target of Islam, as is wrongly projected by some groups of Muslims. An Islamic State is something that may ultimately emerge from a society consisting of sincere, practising Muslims, and its government may take any workable form,—this being neither predictable nor pre-determinable. Such a State, according to the Qur'an (24:55), is a worldly reward of Allah granted to His righteous servants, when He wills, and not a direct target towards which the Muslim community must struggle.

To conclude, Islam begins when one discovers God as the ultimate truth. This results in a spiritual transformation which leads to new thinking and new sentiments—indeed to the emergence of a whole new personality. A new man is born: he is quite different from what he was before. He now becomes a combination of spirituality, compassion and tranquillity. This is like an intellectual and spiritual revolution. This inner transformation finds expression in his external behaviour, in worship, in character, in social relations, etc. To produce a person like this is the main target of Islam. All other aspects of Islam hinge on the fact that man lives in a society, and the greater the number of such individuals in a

society, the greater the changes brought about at the social level. This process leads to what may be called the social system of Islam.

This revolution among individuals and society goes on developing until, conditions being favourable, it culminates in what is termed the Islamic State. This process is mentioned in the Qur'an:

God has promised to those of you who believe and do good works that He shall make them masters in the land as He made their ancestors before them, and that He shall certainly strengthen the religion which He has approved for them, and that He shall certainly change their fears to a feeling of security and peace. Provided they worship Me. (24:55)

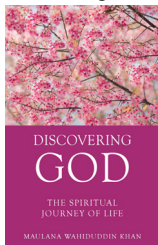
In a garden it is the individual tree which has the real existence. The garden is only a collective manifestation of a number of trees. This is true also of man. In the Islamic scheme, it is the individual—who is a real part of the body of Islam while society and the State are only its relative part.

Those individuals who have undergone spiritual transformation are called “rabbani” in the Qur'an. Where there are “rabbani” individuals in considerable numbers, the “orchard,” that is, Islamic society, and the state, will come into existence on their own.

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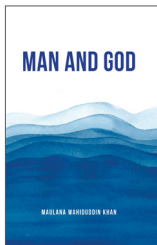
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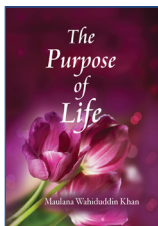


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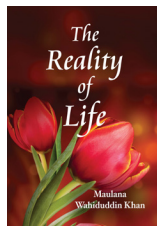
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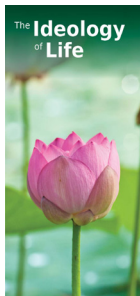


The book explains that man harbours unlimited desires in his heart, but these desires remain unfulfilled. Desires can only be fulfilled in eternal Paradise if one lives one's life as per the creation plan of God in this world.

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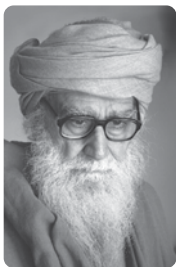
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Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual guide and an Ambassador of Peace. Having received international recognition for his work, the Maulana authored over 200 books and recorded thousands of lectures giving the rational interpretation of Islamic concepts, prophetic wisdom and the spiritual meaning of Quran and Islam in the contemporary style. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and in contemporary style. He founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International* in 2001 to re-engineer

the minds of people towards God-oriented living and present Islam in the modern idiom based as it is on peace, non-violence and spirituality.

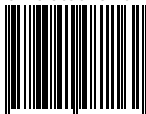
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