

GOD'S
CREATION
PLAN

GOD'S CREATION PLAN

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FOREWORD

Man is a complete being in himself. There are two dimensions of man's being: the physical and the spiritual. The physical dimension of man relates to man's physical or external existence, while the spiritual dimension of man relates to man's inner self. Both dimensions are important in their place, but the status of the two is distinct.

However 'modern civilizational progress', has made available to man an enormous variety of things that cater to the material aspect of his being. There has been much 'progress' as far as material 'development' is concerned, catering to human needs. But, as far as man's inner being—the spiritual dimension—is concerned, the process has been moving in the opposite direction. There has been no noteworthy progress on man's spiritual front. It would be true to say that man's inner character or being is now drowned in a sort of extreme starvation.

It is necessary to understand this contradiction in man's personality and discover its solution. There is an urgent need to save man from this looming crisis.

Along with fulfilling the needs of the material dimension of his being, man must also seek to fulfil the demands of

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the other part of his being—the spiritual dimension. Only then can one develop a truly evolved personality. Only then can one nurture and express his hidden innate potential.

In this book an attempt has been made for man to understand that in this world man has succeeded in building a material civilization by discovering and exploiting the laws of nature. However, it is only in the next world after death that man can build a spiritual civilization in which he will achieve lasting success on a much vaster scale. It is important to understand that he can do this only after striving earnestly to comprehend the creation plan of God for humanity and then adhering unflinchingly to its edicts.

The idea of God is embedded in every person's nature. Man, by nature, seeks God. By birth itself, every human being aspires to find God. However, in history, it has always happened that people have made the mistake of attributing the status of God to someone other than God.

The first responsibility, therefore, of every person is to find the true God and establish a connection with Him. Therefore, discovering the true God should be a person's most significant aim and purpose of his efforts. It is this that makes human life meaningful. The person whose life is bereft of this discovery is the poorest, even if he owns enormous material wealth.

An issue that one needs to bear concerning the discovery of God is that a person gets this opportunity only in the pre-death phase of his life. In the post-death period, those who

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had not discovered God in their life before death will be deprived of this chance. Then it would be too late.

Man's life is divided into the pre-death and post-death phases. A tiny portion of man's life is kept for the first phase, while the rest—which carries on for eternity—is in the post-death phase. If man's story is seen only in the pre-death phase, it will appear as a meaningless tragedy. However, if man's story is seen in the light of the period after death, it will seem meaningful.

In line with this creation plan of God, man stands at a very critical juncture. He has to choose between two alternatives. One option is to use the available opportunities in the present world according to God's creation plan and then become eligible to enjoy eternally in Paradise. The other option is to lead a life of heedlessness in this world and be eternally deprived of pleasure in the next phase of life.

For life after death, God has made a perfect world—Paradise. This Paradise is, in every sense, an ideal world. Those who qualify themselves according to the Divine standards will be settled in the ideal world of Paradise.

Now, who are these qualified people? These are the ones who, using their intellectual capacities, attain the realization of God. Coming out of intellectual confusion, they discover the Truth. They devote themselves to God alone by worshipping none but God. Despite possessing complete freedom, they are willing to be regulated by divine discipline. Faced with adverse conditions, they build

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in themselves a positive character. They relate with others in the same ethical way they want others to connect with them.

According to God's creation plan, the temporary world before death is simply for the sake of an examination. As per this plan, living in an ideal world of ultimate joy is possible only in life after death. Given these fundamental realities, man should try to make himself successful in the examination before death so that in the stage of life that comes after death, he may obtain his desired ideal world—eternal Paradise—as a Divine reward. This is the only principle for a successful life.

Wahiduddin Khan

21 February 2021
New Delhi, India.

CHAPTER ONE

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Religion remains the only place where the answers to questions about Truth can be discovered.

Almost everyone who has come into this world asks himself: “Who am I?” This question is present in the mind of almost every person, whether consciously or otherwise. Across the globe, for centuries, great minds have been searching for an answer to this fundamental existential question.

The history of human thought is, directly or indirectly, another name for the search for the answer to this question. In some way or the other, every person seeks to know the answer to this question and other fundamental questions, such as: What is man? How did man come into being? What is the purpose of human life? What is truth, and what is falsehood? Where does a man go after death?

Existential questions like these are called ‘the search for truth’. Moreover, the search for truth has been the biggest concern for man for centuries. Among those who sought answers to these questions was a class of people known as the philosophers. However, despite thousands of years of effort, the philosophers could not arrive at any satisfactory answer to these questions. As a result, philosophy became a discipline of only intellectual debates, dissensions, and conflicts.

Likewise, in the field of spirituality, people tried to reflect on these fundamental questions of life. However, they, too,

met the same fate as that of philosophers. The primary reason for this was that the spiritualists sought truth through meditation in 'the world of the heart'. However, they could obtain no success in this regard. The simple reason behind this is that the heart is just an organ for pumping blood. Therefore, the realisation or consciousness of truth was absent in the heart. If this is the case, how could those searching for it find it there?

The same thing happened with science and its votaries. Knowledge of science acquired great importance with the advent of 'modernity'. In the beginning, people believed that science would finally succeed in answering the questions raised in the search for truth. However, science quickly narrowed down the scope of its investigation. In their research, scientists found that obtaining answers to existential questions of life was as impossible for them as it had proved to be for philosophers. Thus, they set aside these questions and confined themselves only to researching physical or material things. In this way, it became clear that finding the answers to existential questions through science was impossible.

In this regard, the final domain was that of religion. The task of religion is to help man become aware of the truth and to clarify man's position in the universe. Religions came precisely to give man the proper guidance on these matters. However, if we look at the present state of religions, we will realise that they fell prey to distortion later. Hence, there is an urgent need to re-study religions. Beliefs must be rediscovered in their original form.

Philosophy, Science, and Heart-Based Spirituality have failed to find the correct answers to existential questions in the search for Truth. After this, religion remains the only place where the answers to questions about truth can be discovered. In this matter, those who do not believe in religion and those who do are both standing on the same platform. For both, it is necessary to rediscover truth through religion. The only difference is that this would be a discovery for deniers of religion, while it would be a rediscovery for believers.

'Religion', here, is not used in its conventional meaning, which is a significantly reduced version. The present versions of religion developed in later generations when 'religious' people became victims of degeneration. These days, when a person is 'born into' a particular religious community, he knows only this reduced form of religion. He becomes familiar with this reduced form of religion to a prejudicial extent. To know the original version of religion, people must come out of the veils of their prejudices. Going beyond the degenerated forms of religion, we need to discover the true form and face of religion. It can be called the 'Rediscovery of Religion'. Without this 'rediscovery', understanding religion's true importance and meaning will be impossible.

TRUTH: A STUDY

If a man does not discover the truth in its absolute sense, by his very nature, he will continuously pursue his search until he finds the absolute truth.

Some people argue that there is nothing like Absolute Truth. Everything is relative, they say. Every claim to truth is socially constructed. They claim that truth is subjective, i.e., each person has his own truth. Something that appears true to one person need not be accurate for someone else. In other words, they argue that truth is something relative; it is not something real. One can put it thus: 'There is no full stop in truth, only commas.'

This way of thinking is entirely erroneous. There are no logical or rational grounds for this sort of hypothesis. In this world, everything that man accepts, he does so in an absolute sense. It is the way human nature is. If man does not discover something in its absolute sense, he continuously pursues his search until he finds it. For example, in ancient times, man knew little about the sun and the solar system. Nevertheless, he sought to investigate these phenomena for thousands of years until he finally discovered their reality. He remained continuously engaged in this search until he arrived at this discovery.

The same happens in all other fields of knowledge, too. For thousands of years, man was engrossed in research in different areas and is still thus engaged. He keeps up his research as long as he does not discover the reality

of something that he seeks to know. In other words, everything has a final form for man—from the stars to the atom, nothing is an exception to this rule.

In man's mind, it is as if everything has an absolute character. This certainty is based on curiosity and research that has continued for thousands of years. Therefore, if man starts to believe that things do not have a final form, all scientific activities will halt, and the journey of knowledge will permanently end.

The very same principle is at work in our personal affairs as well. Man considers himself an absolute being. He cannot remain alive even for a single day if he does not think so. Similarly, a person considers his mother, wife, and children absolute. The system of family life is based on this conception. If this were not so, the whole of human life would disintegrate. Likewise, man also considers his property—his house, business, and bank balance—absolute. He could not manage his economic affairs if he did not regard them this way.

In this situation, to believe that truth is not absolute is to think that truth is an exception to what is a general rule. It would be as if, in an absolute world, the status of truth is that of an exceptional non-absolute! There is no logical basis for this utterly absurd belief. It would be incomprehensible that every other thing has an absolute reality in this vast world, but truth alone is non-absolute, being the sole exception. It is a logical inconsistency that any intelligent person cannot accept.

It is no minor matter. If one reflects deeply, one will find that man is a dual being—consisting of body and soul. Other than truth, all things that are a part of human life are connected with man's bodily needs. Truth is what is desirable at the level of man's spiritual needs. It would be incomprehensible if one were to say, that the things needed to fulfill man's physical requirements are all absolute, but the truth, which meets man's spiritual needs, is non-absolute in character.

To accept this sort of division, one would have to believe that a vast contradiction is present in this world—that here, the things we require for our physical needs are present in an absolute sense, but what we need for the satisfaction of our spiritual needs—The Truth—is the only thing that does not have an absolute character.

Truth is man's greatest need. Without truth, man is incomplete. Truth is such a basic need for man that even if truth was not absolute, we would have to pretend that it was so. The fact of the matter is that not accepting the truth as an absolute is intellectual suicide.

To not believe in absolute truth is like someone saying that he does not accept his mother as his mother in the absolute sense. In other words, he might say, "It may be that she is my mother, but it may also be that she is not." No serious person can tolerate this concept of non-absolutism. In the same way, a serious person cannot accept to say that to him; the truth is not absolute but merely relative. That is to say, that A can be confirmed and B, too, and C as well,

all the way up to Z! It may be equally true that from A to Z, everything is utterly false and that there is no such thing as truth! No serious person can accept this absurd intellectual jugglery.

A serious person searching for the truth can honestly admit, "I have not yet found the truth. I am presently only a seeker." However, no serious and sane person can say that truth is not something absolute and that there is nothing like Absolute Truth.

Every single thing in the universe in which man lives is absolute. So, a star is a star; it is not an elephant. An elephant is an elephant, not a star. Likewise, everything is, in a known sense, an absolute thing. Moreover, if anything has not been known in an absolute sense, then man continuously tries to discover it in the absolute sense.

The same thing applies to man's personality. By his very nature, man desires the absolute. He wants to live in certainty. He wants that when he knows a woman is his mother, he should know this fact as certainty. In the same way, when he knows a house is his house, he wants to feel sure that it is indeed his. If this were not the case, man would be uncertain about everything in life. Moreover, it is a fact that man cannot live very long and be at peace in the face of uncertainty.

These facts clearly show that the concept of the absolute is entirely in accordance with man's nature. Contrary to this, thinking that nothing in this world has an absolute

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character or reality goes against the basic demands of man's nature.

To believe the truth to be non-absolute or relative is like saying that one does not believe anything to be true. Such a belief can only make someone a sceptic, but that is not the recipe for a successful life.

NATURE AND MAN

Acknowledging the blessings of the Benefactor alone is the price one must pay to get the right to use these blessings for oneself.

In this world, man finds himself amidst nature: the sun and the moon, the stars, and the planets, the mountains and the seas, the trees and the desert, the birds, and the animals, etc. When man sees this vast world around him, he is utterly amazed.

History tells us that ancient man began to regard nature as sacred. This led to nature worship. Taking various natural phenomena to be deities, people began to worship them. As a result, man could not use nature to progress beyond a point for thousands of years. He could not engage in research into nature and thereby employ the powers that lay hidden in it. Living amidst nature, he could not make nature useful for himself beyond a fundamental level. Regarding the various natural phenomena as powerful and sacred, people sought to worship them rather than study and investigate them.

Over the centuries, man gradually developed a new understanding of nature. He realised that nature is not a god. Instead, it is a creature, in the same way as man is a creature. With this understanding, nature became an object of study and investigation for man rather than something to be feared, propitiated, and worshipped.

Gradually, a new process began, a process of control over nature. Man's search led him to discover different hidden forces inside nature. Then man started efforts to discover these forces and use them for his benefit.

In this way, a new revolution began. Gradually, it transformed the pattern of human life in the 20th century. The world that had hitherto been hidden in nature appeared ultimately before man. In this way, humankind arrived in the modern civilised world.

On the face of it, there is a big difference between these two worlds. If the first was characterised by nature worship; in the second, man regarded himself as the controller of nature. However, no essential difference exists between the ancient age and the modern age that succeeded it as regards the relationship between man and nature. In both these ages, man failed to discover the proper relationship between nature and himself. In both ancient and contemporary times, man remained unaware and ignorant of this vital matter.

The fundamental error of ancient man was that he took nature as his deity, although nature is, in reality, a creature of God in the same way as man is. As a result of this error,

humankind fell prey to debilitating superstitious beliefs and practices. Man fell so deeply into the pit of these falsehoods that his religion and culture were thoroughly imbued with crass superstition.

In this matter, the case of modern man is just the same as that of ancient man. The difference between the two is only at the superficial level or at the level of mere appearances. In actual reality, there is no difference between them at all. Ancient man's fundamental error was that he had come to regard nature as God. Modern man's mistake is that he believes nature is everything. When he investigated nature, modern man discovered that many powers are hidden: the steam engine is hidden in nature, like the motor car, the airplane, the telephone, the mobile phone, the internet, etc. Inside nature, an entire civilisation is hidden, a civilisation that can make man's life amazingly attractive and alluring.

Modern man's error was not that he began studying nature and establishing a civilisation. Instead, the error lay in a massive blunder that he made—he took full advantage of the blessings of nature, but he completely ignored or forgot the Benefactor, the Giver of all these blessings—that is, God. These blessings were the creation of God, the Creator. When modern man discovered the blessings of nature, he fell upon them hungrily. Breaking all barriers and restraints, man took full advantage of the bounties of nature that modern science led him to.

This was man's primary mistake. The truth is that to partake of the blessings of God is not legitimate until and

unless man acknowledges God, the Benefactor, and the Giver of all these blessings. Acknowledging the blessings of the Benefactor alone is the price one must pay to get the right to use these blessings for oneself.

It is no minor matter to separate the blessings and the Benefactor, make full use of the former and forget the latter altogether. It is nothing but a heinous crime. Moreover, this crime destroys man's life. As a result of this, man becomes rebellious. Instead of discipline, he adopts unlimited freedom as his way. Instead of being duty-conscious, he becomes rights-conscious. Abandoning all responsibility, he hurtles off on the path of anarchy. In other words, instead of accepting God as God, he seeks to put himself in God's place. In this way, the philosophy of Humanism emerges, based on the concept of the transfer of seat from God to man.

In the ancient past, man had superstitious beliefs and customs about nature. It undoubtedly was something very wrong, but it was minor in comparison. The ideology about nature in modern times is even more dangerous in its damaging effects. Its damage was not just that it led to devastating wars such as the two World Wars, which had never happened before, or that in this age, nuclear bombs were invented, which was unthinkable to ancient man. A deadly ill emerged in line with the modern ideology that was much more dangerous than all previous ills—the idea of unlimited or unbridled freedom. Despite all the superstitions he was drowned in, ancient man considered

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himself restrained by certain limits and rules. However, modern man thinks of himself as utterly free from all limitations. As a result, an entire civilisation has emerged based on crass exploitation and immorality, which has made man completely rights-conscious.

CULTURE OF HEEDLESSNESS

Consumerism is making people live in intellectual starvation, leading to their complete heedlessness of God and forgetfulness of the purpose of life. Man must learn to ponder over deeper truths and live at a higher level of humanity.

In the present era, a particular culture has spread worldwide, called by different names— ‘progressive culture’, ‘modern culture’, ‘consumer culture’, ‘entertainment culture’, ‘secular culture’, ‘Western culture’, and so on. However, properly speaking, a more appropriate name for it is just one: the culture of forgetfulness.

On a vast scale, this culture has put human beings into complete heedlessness of God and forgetfulness of the purpose of life. As a result, today’s man is engrossed in different types of engagements. In this way, he does not find the opportunity to even think of The Truth.

In the ancient past, man had many free moments. He used to spend those moments in search of meaning. He used to contemplate the reality of things. He used to try to

understand issues that were beyond the external world. However, the artificial activities of today's world have enticed men so strongly towards them that few people now spare time to contemplate the more meaningful questions of life.

One of the many questions about human life is: How can one fulfill the material needs of life? In previous ages, this question was a straightforward one. Its purpose was to obtain the necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, etc. However, modern culture has dramatically exacerbated the issue. Earlier, the question was how the needs of life could be obtained. Later, another question became the focus of attention—how can one get life's material comforts and luxuries? The issue went even further, and men began to ask: How can life be as enjoyable and pleasurable as possible? How can man's desires be fulfilled to the maximum possible extent? Arriving here, now man began to focus his whole life only on obtaining material objects of comfort. He no longer had time to think about making his life more meaningful. Because of this situation, we have called contemporary culture the culture of heedlessness.

There are two significant aspects of human life. First is the necessities of life, and the second is the purpose of life. An essential part of the 'progress' that the present age has registered is that it has dramatically increased the production and availability of material objects, going far beyond basic human needs. These consumer goods have been made to appear very attractive and alluring. As a

result, man's full attention is now focused on these things. Consequently, the list of one's needs and wants (and many wants came to be considered needs) became so long that it appeared to have no end. Acquiring these objects became the be-all and end-all for people. In previous ages, the satisfaction of one's needs happened through a few simple things. However, people's list of wants (in addition to their needs) is so long that it seems never-ending.

Acquiring material objects to cater to one's ever-increasing desires has now assumed the form of a veritable religion, the religion of consumerism. A deadly result of this is that today, almost no one wants to reflect on questions related to the very purpose of human life. The phrase 'the higher purpose of life' has become unfamiliar. Modern consumerism has led man to live at the level of beasts. As a result, living at a higher level of humanity has become alien for most people.

For this state of affairs, man has had to pay a hefty price—and that is, his intellectual development has stopped in the true sense of the term. Now almost every person's condition is such that if you speak with them about issues related to their profession, they will appear to be 'experts', but if you talk to them on any subject other than their profession, you will feel that you are talking to someone foolish. From the physical point of view, they may appear very smart, but in terms of intellectual standards, they seem to be dwarfs. Perhaps it will not be wrong to term contemporary consumerist culture as 'beast culture'. A deadly result of

the upsurge of this 'beast culture' is that people of today's age have become victims of intellectual dwarfism.

The condition of contemporary man is such that he now has access to a wide variety of material goods, but at the same time, he has become a victim of intellectual starvation. Today, man first needs to extricate himself from this morass of intellectual starvation. He must make himself consciously so capable that he may be able to ponder over deeper truths. He must live for a higher purpose than merely catering to his bodily demands. He must rise from the animal level and truly live at the human level.

There are two significant periods of man's intellectual history: one, before the emergence of the consumerist culture, and the other, the period following the rise of this culture. If you reflect deeply, you will discover that man achieved a great deal in etiquette, refinement, and wisdom before the rise of the consumerist culture. In this period, excellent books on intellect and culture were written. However, after the rise of the consumerist culture, the development of etiquette, refinement, and wisdom came to a halt. In this later period, one can name hardly any book that measures up to the standard of learning and etiquette set by the past.

This difference has also reached even the realm of science. Before the spread of the consumerist culture, theoretical science witnessed remarkable developments. Many great thinkers emerged in different fields of science. However, after the rise and spread of the consumerist culture, the

progress of theoretical science almost wholly came to a halt. Thus, scientists work on topics considered 'marketable' in today's terms. In the past, science was the name of scholarly research. However, now, science has turned into a crass commercial activity.

A deadly result of this situation is that man's intellectual and mental progress has almost completely stopped. Everywhere, you will see people who look very happy and beautiful, but human beings having a sense of fulfillment are almost nowhere to be found. There is an urgent need to change this situation. Otherwise, humanity will turn into a new sort of anarchic jungle.

The bodies of a man and several animals have many similarities. Their bodily activities are, to a great extent, similar. It is as if animals are humans that walk on four feet and humans are animals that walk on two feet. However, the study of psychology presents a different picture. It tells us that man enjoys a special status in the whole universe. The reason for man's position is just one—and that is man's mind. Man's mind distinguishes him from animals and everything else in the universe. Man's mind is a great treasure. This mind gives man a distinguishing status not enjoyed by any other thing or being in the universe.

The culture of consumerism has vastly exacerbated man's physical demands and, at the same time, has almost completely stopped the proper development of man's mind. However, it is the mental component that is man's real being. It is this that makes man. Without this mental component, man would be just a beast.

A movement must be launched to overcome this problem. Once again, man should be brought back to his original or true nature. Man should be made a man once again. Once again, man should be capable of using his intellectual potential for proper development. He should once again become actively engaged in the path of actual intellectual progress.

RELIGION AND HUMAN LIFE

A human personality consists of a body and a soul. To stay healthy, man requires nourishment for both. Religion is man's spiritual nourishment. It is food for man's soul.

What is Religion? The crux of religion is what is generally called 'Spirituality'. Religion is another name for spiritual science. If other scientific disciplines are about external or physical realities, religion is that science that studies the inner man.

A human personality is manifested in two ways—body and soul. For the health and progress of both, man requires continuous nourishment. The nourishment for the body is material stuff: food and drink. If someone were to stay without food and drink for a while, it would affect their physical condition. They would die if they faced hunger and thirst for a long time.

The same is true of the soul. Religion is man's spiritual nourishment. It is food for man's soul. Without authentic

religion, man's soul would wither. Religion gives strength to man's inner being. Religion is the basis for man's spiritual life. Religion is not another name for singing hymns and performing some rituals: it represents the Truth. Every person, rich or poor, powerful or weak, needs religion. Through religion, man obtains what can be called the right starting point of life. Man deprived of religion is also deprived of the right starting point in life.

Religion is the answer to the question, 'Who am I?' It informs man of the purpose of creation. Religion gives man the true philosophy of life. It is a guidebook for life. Religion takes man out of the darkness of ignorance and unawareness and into the light of wisdom and awareness.

Religion makes a person a good member of society. It blesses man with a code of conduct to be able to live with others as a good and trustworthy human being. Religion prepares man to become someone who is not a problem for others. Religion makes man a giver, not just a taker.

Religion is a companion of man in his times of difficulty. It bestows man with the art of crisis management. Religion makes man capable of not becoming a victim of crisis but converting crises into occasions for intellectual nourishment.

Religion is a sign of the intellectual health of a person. Religion makes man capable of converting a negative experience into a positive result. Religion can help man transform an enemy into his friend.

As opposed to conventional belief, religion is not a set of rituals and dogmas. True religion is not that a person is born into a particular family linked to a specific religious tradition. As a result, he becomes connected with some 'religious' groups he identifies with. These are all external things. It is not the reality of religion. The reality of religion is inner realisation, and inner realisation is far above external things.

Religion instills right thinking in man. It shows man those hidden things the ordinary human eye cannot see. Religion makes man capable of drawing lessons from the past and seeing the future in the present. Religion makes a man a superman. Religion is a means for man's spiritual evolution.

Our world has two aspects—one, the visible world, and the other, the world that cannot be seen. The world is like an iceberg. Only the tip of an iceberg is visible. The physical eye cannot see the more significant part. Religion makes the non-visible dimension of the world a visible thing for a man.

In life, one repeatedly faces occasions when one feels helpless when one begins to fear that one has lost control over things. At such times, religion appears as a hope, a means for salvation. At this time, religion saves man's drowning ship. Religion is a source of certainty and confidence in all sorts of challenges.

Religion is the source of all virtue. Religion gives man the strength to forgive those who get angry with him, rise above greed, overcome jealousy, accept others, relate

respectfully with all, save oneself from injustice, always behave well even with enemies, be a giver, and not just a taker. Religion makes man someone who lives for a higher purpose. It creates within man a principled character. It nurtures self-control and self-discipline in a person.

A religious person is a person who is serious about life. A religious person is an honest person. A religious person is constantly engaged in introspection. He has within himself a self-correcting mechanism.

How does religion generate these virtues in a person? Religion is connected with God, the epitome of all virtues. God is the source of all good inspiration.

Religion makes a person God-oriented. Religion engenders God-oriented thinking in a person. It is God-oriented thinking that makes a religious person unconquerable. A religious person acquires a close personal connection and relationship with God. Moreover, someone who comes to be blessed with this gift becomes more powerful than the sun, the moon, the mountains, and the seas.

Here, it is appropriate to relate a story that symbolically expresses how a genuinely religious person possesses an indomitable spirit and how even a fierce storm at sea is not a problem for a genuinely religious person.

It is said that a ship set sail from America for Africa. It was passing through the Atlantic Ocean when a massive storm suddenly occurred. The vessel began tossing about wildly. All the passengers but one were very nervous and

began running helter-skelter. The ship was tossing and turning almost to the water level, and it seemed it would soon drown.

In this turmoil, a passenger was rushing about when suddenly he saw a girl sitting calmly in a corner and playing with her doll. The passenger called, "Child, don't you know what is happening?"

"What?" the girl asked.

"Our ship is in the midst of a fierce storm, and very soon, we will drown!" the man shouted.

Still busy playing with her doll, the girl replied calmly, "But this will never happen. You must know that my father is the captain of this ship, and he will not let it sink."

This little girl is the image of a genuinely religious person. A truly spiritual person never falls prey to despair. He retains his senses and balances even during a major crisis. He never loses faith and courage. He always lives in hope. He can always say, "God Almighty is the Captain of my ship, and He will not let it sink."

MAN'S POSITION IN THE UNIVERSE

The principle underlying the proper relationship between God and man is this: Man's freedom ends where God's domain begins.

Social reformers and thinkers have concerned themselves with the relationship between one man and another. This relation is this: Every man is free as long as his freedom does not impinge on or interferes with the freedom of others. This concept can be conveyed through the following story:

It is said that when America won political independence from Britain, a man came out of his house, wanting to celebrate his 'freedom'. So he went out into the streets, waving his hands in glee. Then, suddenly, his hand hit another man's nose. The second man got angry and said, "What foolishness is this? Why did you hit my nose?" The first man replied, "Today, America is free, and now I can do anything I like!" The second man retorted, "Brother, America may be free now, but your freedom ends where my nose begins."

This story clarifies the moral principle regulating the relationship between one person and another. However, as far as the issue of the relationship between man and God is concerned, man has not been able to properly discover it through his efforts.

This is no complex matter. The principle of the proper relationship between one man and another tells us something about the appropriate relationship between man

and God. In light of the principle mentioned above, it can be said that the principle underlying the proper relationship between God and man is this: Man's freedom ends at the point where God's domain begins.

In this world, all the things man has received are God's gifts. All items are obtained by man only because they have been given to him by God. The same is true of freedom as well. In this world, man's freedom is a blessing or gift from God. It is known that a gift brings a corresponding responsibility with it. In line with this general principle, man's freedom is tied to a necessary obligation, which is that man should use his freedom responsibly and correctly. He should not misuse it.

The improper use of this freedom is to believe that this freedom is man's right, that he is the master of this freedom. He begins to think, "I will use this freedom as I please, following my desires. I do not have to ask anyone how I should use my freedom."

Contrary to this, the right way to use this freedom is that man should try to discover whom he has obtained this freedom from. And then, man should find out what the Giver of this freedom intends by giving it to him and how he should use this freedom, and act accordingly. This discovery makes man aware of the proper use of the freedom he enjoys.

The right and wrong use of human freedom is not a mystery. Any person, if he is sincere, can discover this fact. But, to discover any truth, the seriousness of purpose is necessary.

Therefore, seriousness is also required to find out this law of freedom.

The person who reflects on this question with seriousness will discover a criterion inside every person for distinguishing between right and wrong present in him by birth. With his natural awareness, every person can know which action is right and which is not. This criterion is called 'the conscience'. Another name for it is 'common sense'.

In this way, man can learn what to do and what not to do by listening to the voice of his conscience. It is as if every person's conscience is his guide for him. Inside every person, this warner is present. Experience tells us that this element is never inactive. It never allows man to be heedless. It never makes a mistake in carrying out its duties.

By birth itself, within every person, a specific, powerful emotion is present. It is the emotion of acknowledgement. Every person can personally experience this. Through his conscience or common sense, every person knows that he ought to acknowledge people's kindness. Man's internal guide recognises this acknowledgement as a lofty ethical virtue. Acknowledgement is a high level of righteousness, while a lack of acknowledgement indicates insincerity. In this sense, a person who acknowledges others, maintains his status as a human, while someone who does not falls from that status.

In the same way, the decision of the conscience or common sense is also accurate about the Creator. In line with his

nature's voice, every person should acknowledge his Creator. He should acknowledge the manifold blessings of his Creator—all that he owes to Him. He should consciously recognise and be grateful for all that His Creator has given him. He should feel this in his heart and openly announce it through his tongue. Acknowledging God is in accordance with human nature, while non-acknowledgement deviates from it.

In the same way, every person experiences that his conscience is a moral criterion that, at every opportunity, is bearing witness. When a person lies, his conscience scolds him. On the contrary, if he speaks the truth, it becomes a means for him to feel at ease. The conscience knows injustice to be always evil and justice to be always good. The conscience expresses its displeasure with dishonesty and its satisfaction with honesty. The conscience knows violence to be inhumane and peace to be good. The conscience knows hate to be wrong and love to be a blessing. The conscience rebuts anger and hails forgiveness.

In the same way, when man surveys the world around him, he finds that besides him, all creatures are firmly bound by the law of their Creator. From the seas and the lands to the vast skies, all creatures are, in perfect discipline, doing just what they have been made to do by the Creator. No creature, big or small, deviates even a fraction of an inch from this discipline. From the minerals, the plants, and the animals of the Earth to the stars and planets in space, all things are bound by this universal discipline.

The Creator has established this discipline in the universe. Moreover, this discipline is desirable for men, too. Therefore, like the rest of the universe, man should become part of this universal discipline. However, there is one big difference—the rest of the things in the universe are compulsorily bound by this universal discipline, while man should voluntarily choose to abide by it in spite of having freedom of choice.

For example, all the planets in the solar system revolve around the sun. In the same way, man should accept God as his focus or center and establish his life around Him. Nothing in this world is stagnant. Here, everything is in constant motion. The universe is like a vast factory, constantly moving, but we see no sound, smoke, or pollution here. In the same way, man's actions should be such that they do not cause any pollution—moral corruption, strife, hate, and the like.

Likewise, in the universe, everything is established to benefit others. Everything is engaged in beneficial action, from the shining sun to the flowing rivers, from the lush green trees to the cool breeze, from the mountains to the seas, from radiant flowers to busy insects. Every component of this vast universe is a unilateral giver. In the same way, man should plan his life in this world in such a manner that he becomes beneficial to others. Every person should be of benefit to other people and other creatures of God.

In the same way, the study tells us that man always thinks of a particular result and then plans the course of action to

seek to obtain this result. Man's thinking is result-oriented. He wants to engage only in that action that produces his desired result. Man's nature is such that he is reluctant to engage in any activity that does not create the desired result. Human nature demands that man plan the course of his life, in the broader sense, under this principle. In the same way, as in the pre-death phase of his life, man plans his actions based on the results he seeks; in the post-death period too, he should make the result the criterion. He should organise his activities in the pre-death phase of his life in a way that benefit him in the post-death phase of his life.

The system of this world is divided into 'today' and 'tomorrow', the present and the future. Other than man, all the creatures in this world act in the present. They have no concept of life other than 'today' or the present. The word 'tomorrow' is found only in the dictionary of man.

This difference is a sort of message to us from nature. In this difference, nature is exhorting man not to focus on (or remain concerned only with) his 'today' but to keep his 'tomorrow' in front of him and accordingly plan his life. The success of other creatures lies in obtaining only what they need 'today'. However, man's success is that he should be successful not just today (that is, in the life before death) but also tomorrow (that is, in the life after death). Man's success lies in obtaining the best place in the eternal world after death.

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

The critical aspect of the creation plan of God is that man has been created with total freedom. Paradise is the reward for those who use their freedom correctly.

Man is a truth-seeking being. I have personally experienced this myself. From childhood, I have desired to search for the truth somehow or the other. In the year 1942, this desire became particularly intense. At that time, my condition was such that I would go off into the wilderness and, in solitude, would cry out, “O God! When will you come? Till when shall I wait for your arrival?”

Finally, I got the answer to this in a tradition of the Prophet. According to this Hadith, God said: “I was a hidden treasure. I wanted to be known. Therefore, I created man.” (Kashf al-Khafa by al-'Ajluni: 2016) According to this statement, the purpose of man's existence is to attain a realisation (maarifah) of his Creator. Moreover, as a reward for this realisation, he will be rewarded with a place in eternal Paradise in the Hereafter. The period of man's life before his death is the period to acquire this realisation, and the post-death phase of his life is the period to live a life of comfort and peace in eternal Paradise if he proves eligible for this.

How Can We Realize God?

Realisation of God is no easy matter. It is a challenging campaign. This is because an element of doubt is present

in every single component of this world in the pre-death period of life. In this world, nothing is bereft of doubt. In the pre-death phase of life, man's task is to draw apart the curtains of doubt and see the truth. Despite doubts, he should obtain a state of complete certainty.

A veil of doubt is placed over everything that exists in the world. As soon as a person takes birth in this world, he finds himself in a jungle of conflicting thoughts. Man is confronted with all sorts of philosophies of life that can leave him utterly confused. There are dogmas of religions and other worldviews, and each religion or ideology claims it is true. Each person nurses a storm of emotions and desires inside him, which are a hurdle in acting rationally. Everyone is entangled in family attachments and social bonds. Everyone is guided by self-interest. Everyone is so caught in the web of wealth and relationships that he does not know what to do or what not to do.

Only someone who can develop objective thinking can realise the truth in such a situation. He should develop the ability to lift and remove the curtains of doubt and see truth as truth and falsehood as falsehood. He should see things as they indeed are. Along with this, he should be able to accept willingly what he knows to be true. If he realises something is right, he should accept it unhesitatingly. Changing the direction of his life, his aim should be to attain self-discovered truth.

The means to remove the curtain of doubts that man is confronted with is just one: knowing and understanding

God's creation plan. This creation plan explains things so that all doubts are removed, and the truth is made evident, like the sun appearing bright and shining after the dark clouds have moved away.

The Creation Plan of God

What is God's creation plan? God created an ideal world that was perfect in all respects. He ordained that this ultimate world be inhabited by impeccable ideal human beings. To achieve this target, God first settled man on Earth giving him complete freedom. The present world is a selection ground for this grand project. Here, it is being observed who makes proper use of his freedom and who misuses it. At the end of human history, those who have abused their freedom will be rejected, and those who may have exercised their freedom judiciously will be selected by God and settled in Paradise.

What is Paradise?

Paradise is the ultimate answer to the human quest. It is a vast, zero-defect, evil-free universe, complete in itself. Certainty prevails all over the universe, but the human world is marred by uncertainty. Fear is unheard of in the universe, but man continually suffers from fear and apprehension. The rest of the universe is in a state of equilibrium as it receives everything that it needs, while human beings are in a state of imbalance as they are the only creatures in the world to suffer from the painful thought

that they have not received what they wanted. Moreover, the rest of the universe is evil-free, while human beings continually suffer from the problem of evil.

The Problem of Evil

The most debated question concerning man and God in philosophy has been 'the problem of evil'. That is the issue of why there is so much suffering in the human world. If God is All-Good, why did He make such a world where people are forced to face different types of problems and where there is so much suffering?

This question can be answered by understanding the creation plan of God. Unpleasantness has been put into this world for man to learn proper lessons from it. The true lesson taught by unpleasant experiences is that man should remember the next world of Paradise where there will not be any suffering. His approach thus becomes: "Let me not suffer in the Hereafter what I have suffered in this world."

Freedom for Testing Man

All the things in this world are God's subjects. The stars and satellites rotate in space entirely at their Lord's bidding. Trees, rivers, mountains, and all other such natural phenomena function according to the unchangeable ways God laid down for them in advance. Similarly, the animals follow precisely those instincts instilled in their species as a matter of Divine Will.

Unlike all these creatures in the Universe, man is free in this world. God has not placed any curbs on him. As such, the critical aspect of this creation plan is that man has been created with total freedom. But this freedom is to test man and not encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness. The purpose of freedom is that man should lead a morally good life of his own free will, thus demonstrating that he is of the highest moral character.

One who conducts himself in this manner will be reckoned as God's special servant who, without any apparent compulsion, chose to be a man of principle, who submitted to God's Will despite having freedom not to do so. This liberty accorded to man allows him to gain credit for being the most superior of all God's creatures.

The decision regarding a person's eternal future will hinge on his use of freedom—whether he used his freedom correctly or misused it. For those who use their freedom correctly, Paradise is their reward. Those who misused their freedom will live in eternal deprivation.

The Positive Role of Challenges

In some way or other, all the problems in life are the price of the inappropriate use of freedom. When people misuse their freedom it creates problems for others. On its face, this price seems to be a very high one. However, from God, we have this good news: after death, when the Day of Judgement will come, God will hold one to task only when it was proved that he had misused the freedom he had been

given. For whatever other difficulties a person may have faced based on God's creation plan like the problems that he faced due to the misuse of freedom by others or due to the handicaps that he faced, arrangements will be made for their compensation. This will make it clear that whatever difficulties and hardships he had encountered while on Earth were in line with the demand of justice.

A study tells us that a more significant incentive is not ease and comfort for man's progress but challenge and difficulty. One aspect of this freedom is that it produces competition and challenge, without which no progress is possible. Misuse of freedom leads to problems, and problems are, in a sense, a sort of shock treatment because they can become a means for man's inner growth. It is only through challenges that we can progress in life.

People's engagement in different kinds of activities with complete freedom, at times, goes against the interests of others. It is a challenging situation, causing great suffering to people. This is necessary for testing human beings and selecting them for Paradise. Further, this system is not evil in the absolute sense, for there is also an element of goodness. Suffering and challenges are the most powerful teachers of life. All such unpleasant experiences prove to be a kind of 'shock treatment' for individuals, leading them to undergo a tremendous mental activity called 'brainstorming'. As per psychological studies, brainstorming is the source of intellectual development.

With ease and comfort, often, man's abilities are ruined. In contrast, challenges and problems often motivate people to develop virtues and scale new heights. That is why one can say that it is not ease but effort, not facility but difficulty, that makes men.

This point can be understood with the help of a real example. In the materially affluent societies of the West, a new disease has emerged named 'Affluenza'. This is a disease of the materially rich. In 'rich' families, people become intellectual dwarfs instead of intellectual giants. Their IQ is very low. They are lazy and do not do much work. In contrast to them, people who have grown up with difficulty and challenges often go on to do great things.

Is It Possible to Achieve the Ideal?

Another thing to understand is that in every period of human history, thinkers and reformers have tried to establish an ideal society or an ideal state. However, despite all their efforts, they could only make a non-ideal society or a non-ideal state. Why was this so?

This fact of history can be adequately understood only when viewed in light of the Creator's creation plan. God did not make this world for the establishment of an ideal state or society. The limitations of this present world and the presence of different disadvantages are concrete barriers that prevent an ideal state or society from being established here.

Is Man's Life Governed by Destiny or Free Will?

I am often asked this question: "Is man's life governed by destiny, or does he have freedom of choice?" The fact is that God has provided the infrastructure to man in the form of a life support system and the different situations that present themselves to man. This is the destiny part of the matter. However, man can respond to all these situations as he likes. In this aspect, he is entirely free. That is his free will or his freedom of choice.

Therefore, I say that the matter is 50-50. Destiny plays a 50 percent role, as man cannot change the infrastructure and situations provided to him. Free will plays the remaining 50 percent role, as man is entirely free to respond to situations the way he likes.

Freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, he has misused his freedom and failed to pass the test.

But if, on the other hand, he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's Will on all occasions, he will have made the proper use of this God-given freedom: he will, without any compulsion, have bound himself by divine principles. One who chooses this course will succeed in the test of freedom. God will handsomely reward him as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God,

he will remain in an everlasting state of blissfulness and blessedness in the eternal world of Paradise after death.

If Man Has a Free Will, How is God All-Powerful?

Another question I am often asked is, “If God cannot control man’s action, then how is He All-Powerful”? There is no doubt that God is All-Powerful. However, since He has decided to put man to the test, He has given man freedom of choice to do what he likes. As if there was no free will, there would be no test. So, to test man, God has withheld His power when it comes to man and given him the freedom to respond in any way that he wants. God, however, is getting a record of all of man’s thoughts, speech, and deeds maintained, and will hold him accountable for them on the Day of Judgment. On that Day all of humanity will see the power of God.

What is Man’s Trial?

This limited world where man finds himself before death has all the necessary ingredients for the ‘trial’. It has man as the perfection-seeking creature in a less-than-perfect world where he has been given complete ‘freedom’. Man, thus, has a ‘choice’ to misuse his freedom by creating havoc, killing people, living a life of leisure, or using his freedom wisely by submitting to an unseen God and living a disciplined life, to qualify for Paradise.

Man's trial rests on discovering God, Who is in the Unseen. Before seeing Him, man should voluntarily surrender himself before God. He should be so desirous of Paradise that this world appears meaningless. He should adopt divine ethics without any external pressure to do so. He should develop his intellectual and spiritual being to such an extent that he produces in himself the ability to inhabit the refined world of Paradise. Paradise is a heavenly colony where peace, love, and noble character prevail. Of this world's inhabitants, only those who have succeeded in maintaining a high moral character will find a place in Paradise.

The Secret of Eternal Success

In light of this creation plan, the root of all human problems is that the unenlightened want to make their Paradise in this world before death, whereas under the natural laws, the situation here on earth makes this impossible. Therefore, according to God's creation plan, man has to be content in this limited world before death, so as to make himself eligible for Paradise in the eternal world after death.

Therefore, the right and proper thing for a man to do is acknowledge and accept this law of creation, and plan his life accordingly. His sole aim in this world should be to make himself acceptable in the eyes of God so that he may be held eligible for admission into Paradise in the eternal world after death. Successful is one who has realized the eternal world of Paradise in this temporary world, who has

THE DARKNESS SHALL END!

discovered in the failures of the present world, the secret to eternal success in the next eternal world.

God is Selecting Individuals for Paradise

The Creator has given man freedom while managing history so that despite perversion at the collective level, desired individuals continue to be born unhindered. According to God's creation plan, the present world is a selection ground to select the desired individuals out of the whole of human history. Therefore, the purpose of creation is to select those individuals, from every age and every race, who, despite enjoying complete freedom, would commit themselves to the commands of God. If we understand this point, human history becomes meaningful.

THE DARKNESS SHALL END!

Every day, the darkness of night is dispelled by the light of the sun. Likewise, the arrogant and the defiant shall have to bow down, and the Truthful will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

In this world of God, a human being appears to be a contradiction. In such a world where the sun rises at exactly its appointed time, man says something today and then denies it the next day! In a world where water can be squeezed out even from hard, dry stones, man cruelly oppresses his fellow man. In a world where the moon sheds light on all creatures without discrimination, man behaves

in one way with some people and another with somebody else. In a world whose meaningfulness expresses itself in the beauty of a flower, man behaves more cruelly than a thorn. In a world where the wind blows all around, like a selfless servant, man lives in such a way as if there is no other purpose to his life than promoting his interests. In a world where one tree never troubles another, man never ceases to torment another. One person derives malicious pleasure in seeing another being destroyed.

All this happens daily in this world. But God does not interfere in this. He does not end this contradiction. Seen in the universal mirror of His creation, God seems so very beautiful, but in the grief-filled realm of human existence, how different His face seems to appear! Horrific things happen before God, but this does not stir Him. God sees people being slaughtered, but He does not bother about this. He sees the most barbaric things being done to the most sensitive person in the universe, but this does not make Him anxious or uneasy. Why is God seeing everything but does not express His reaction to it all?

This question has troubled the thinking people most in every age. But this question arises only because we do not consider God's wisdom regarding His creatures. In God's creation plan, this world is a testing ground. However, in our foolishness, we want to think of it as a place where rewards and punishments for good and evil actions should be meted out. We want that what is to happen on the coming Day of Judgment should happen today before our very eyes.

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Every day, the darkness of night is dispelled by the spreading light of the sun. So, likewise, the darkness of life will get over one day, oppression will end, the arrogant and the defiant shall have to bow down, and those who remain on the path of the Truth will be rewarded. All this will happen in its fullness, but it will happen after death, in the Hereafter, and not before it.

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This life is a journey to Paradise, not Paradise itself. We should make ourselves deserving of Paradise by developing a divine personality within us in this world.

For seekers of truth, a reason-based understanding of the creation plan of God is the only solution. God, according to His will, created a perfect world called Paradise. A world as per all of our desires as human beings in that it is free of all limitations and disadvantages, free of fear and pain, and free of all imperfections. An eternal world where there is no death or old age. An ideal world where we can achieve complete fulfillment.

As a less-than-perfect being cannot inhabit a perfect Paradise; so, God has created a perfection-seeking being—man. God intended that man must spend a period of trial in this present and imperfect world; and after this, according to man's deeds, he can earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world of Paradise, or live in eternal deprivation.

As part of this test, Paradise is hidden from us. This world, therefore, has all the components necessary for a test. It has perfection-seeking beings in a less-than-perfect world, beings who are free to choose their actions. We, thus, have a choice—we can misuse our freedom to do evil, or we can use our freedom wisely, submit to God, and qualify for Paradise.

The test of man rests on his discovery of God, Who is unseen. Before we can see God, we should voluntarily surrender ourselves to Him. Man's desire for Paradise should make him willingly adopt divine ethics. He should develop his personality intellectually and spiritually to be eligible to inhabit Paradise's refined world. Only those who maintain a high moral character will find a place in a world of peace, love, and goodwill in Paradise.

In this world, everyone suffers from frustration and failure. It is because everyone wants a perfect life in this world itself, which is impossible. After all, this limited and ephemeral world was not created for that purpose. Despite all our efforts, we will fail to make a perfect life in this world of test. The present world is not Paradise; it only introduces the concept of Paradise to us. We can see only glimpses of perfection in this world. This should increase our desire for complete perfection which we can only find in eternal Paradise.

This life is a journey to Paradise, not Paradise itself. Therefore, we should devote our lives to preparing ourselves for Paradise in the next life. During this limited

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life on Earth, what we need to do, first and foremost, is to seek out the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and submit to Him voluntarily. Having seen a glimpse of Paradise on this Earth, we should seek it in the core of our being. Intellectually, spiritually, and morally, we should make ourselves deserving of Paradise by developing a divine personality within ourselves.

CHAPTER TWO

CREATION PLAN OF GOD

GOD'S CREATION PLAN

The present world has been created as a testing ground for man. If he passes his test, he will obtain a place in the ideal world, Paradise, in eternal life after death.

A philosopher once remarked that it appears to be that in this vast universe, man is a strange creature. It seems that man has not been made for this world, nor has this world been made for him. Man and the world seem to be mutually incompatible.

Man is born with immense abilities. However, he uses only a minimal portion of these in this present world. By nature, man wants to live forever. However, death arrives quickly without his permission and whisks him away by a unilateral decision. Man has an ocean of desires in his heart, but not all of these desires are fulfilled. Every man's mind is a world of dreams, but not all dreams come true. In this regard, there is no difference between 'big' and 'small' people. As the philosopher mentioned above seems to assert, all this may be thought to suggest that man has come into a world that has not been made of him.

Why do man and the present world seem so mutually incompatible? To solve this conundrum, we need to understand the creation plan of God. This question of man and the world looking so inconsistent arises because of not knowing the creation plan of God. Therefore, we obtain a satisfactory answer by knowing God's creation plan for man.

God has created man according to His plan. Knowing this plan is necessary for the proper explanation of man. The significance of a machine can be known only when we see the intent of the engineer who created it. Nothing can clarify the machine's importance and purpose besides the engineer's mind. The same is true of man.

God created man for a specific plan. According to this plan, man must spend a period of time in the present, non-ideal world for the purpose of test, and after this, in line with his actions, man will obtain the right to reside in an ideal world, which is called Paradise, or else will be consigned to a place of eternal deprivation forever.

The present world has been created as a testing ground for man. Here, man is engaged in a continuous test. If he passes this test, he will obtain a place in the ideal world, Paradise, in eternal life after death. On the other hand, if he fails this test, he will live in a state of eternal deprivation. To be eligible to enter Paradise, there are two things that man needs to do while on Earth. One is to acknowledge the truth, and the other is to lead a principled life.

In the present world, man finds himself completely free. However, this freedom is not given to him as a right. Instead, it is simply a sort of examination paper for everyone. Man has to acknowledge the truth without any pressure. Without any compulsion, he must bow before the truth. Man has been given freedom of choice to test him. Through his own choice, he should limit or control his freedom. Bowing before the truth is undoubtedly the most

enormous sacrifice for man. Acknowledging the truth may appear to be making oneself small compared to others, but this makes a person arrive at the highest position, leading him to reach the door of Paradise.

In this regard, the second thing man must do is lead a principled life. Generally, a person's character is constructed according to his emotions. Anger, revenge, jealousy, hate, opportunism, etc.—are negative feelings that often indelibly shape a person's character. Any man cannot enter Paradise with a character developed by such emotions. To enter Paradise, he needs to be a person of virtuous character. For this, man should not build his character under external factors; instead, he must build it by adhering to certain moral principles. Only people of honest character can be held eligible to enter and live in Paradise in the life after death. This is the creation plan under which man has been created.

Paradise is that ideal world where man can find perfect peace and satisfaction and be in the company of those who make his life truly meaningful. The desire for this Paradise is enshrined in every person's heart. It is this Paradise where man will find complete fulfilment. With his whole being, man is in search of this very Paradise. Moreover, Paradise is waiting with its entire existence for such people. The time is coming when Paradise and man shall meet each other. Each will find the pair made for them.

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE PERSONALITY

It is a positive personality in which the lofty desire to search for the truth awakens. Only a person of positive character and positive thinking finally arrives at the truth.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a famous French thinker. He was a champion of people's rule over monarchy. He famously remarked: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." (Social Contract, 1762)

However, man has another problem, which perhaps is even more severe than this. It is the problem of conditioning. Every person lives in a particular environment. Therefore, every person's mind is conditioned by his environment, depriving him of right thinking. As a result, people do not remain capable of thinking naturally. Given this conditioning problem, Rousseau's statement can be better stated: "Man was created on divine nature, but I see him psychologically conditioned."

When a child is born from his mother's womb, he looks like the epitome of innocence. It seems as if an angel has assumed human form. At the time of birth, man has a pure mind. His thinking is natural thinking that should be the case in reality. However, man is a social being. He has to spend his entire life in a society made by others. Because of this, his mind receives external influences almost every waking moment. This is called 'conditioning'. This process of being influenced by the external environment keeps increasing until man becomes wholly conditioned.

In the quest for truth, the seeker needs to understand this conditioning, and accordingly, he should set about deconditioning his mind, returning it to its natural state. He should make himself a man of nature rather than remaining an artificial man and a victim of conditioning.

Recently, a view that has gained tremendous popularity in psychology is called behaviourism. In this school of psychology, it is believed that conditioning is man's persistent state. It is as if a man is a prisoner of his conditioning and is simply a passive product of it.

A deeper study of man's personality disproves this theory. Recent discoveries about the genetic code raise serious questions about the above hypothesis. It has been proven that every person's complete personality is present in the genetic code by birth. Moreover, as the child grows, its personality development, it is said, is only an unfolding of this genetic code. If this is true, it would be more proper to say that the conditioning exercised by the environment is like an artificial curtain placed over man's natural being. It is as if a man's character is like an onion. Inside the onion is a marrow-like pea. Over this inner 'pea' are many layers of skin-like curtains. If these layers of skin are removed, the inner kernel of the onion will emerge. The same is true with man. Through conditioning, artificial curtains are placed over man's actual being—curtains created by the external environment. If these curtains are removed, man's true personality will emerge.

Removing these external curtains over a person's personality is called deconditioning. It is binding on the person who seeks the truth to remove the artificial curtains of conditioning that cloud his actual being so that his real nature may emerge again.

Religion tells us that man is a unique creature of God. When a human being is born, he is born with a divine personality. In terms of his inner being, he is a true and perfect being. For a person's lasting success, protecting his natural character is necessary. He must keep himself in the natural state his Creator has created him on. This struggle to remain in this natural state requires removing all that functions as the artificial veils over it. This is what is called deconditioning.

When nurtured in a particular environment, man faces different negative situations and experiences daily. These situations and experiences keep making an undesirable impact on his character. For example, if someone did better than him, he may become jealous. Jealousy now enters his character. If someone misbehaves with him, he reacts with hate. Hate now becomes part of his character. If somebody oppresses him, that creates a violent streak in his character. Violence, thus, becomes a part of his character. And so on.

In this way, a person encounters different experiences to which he reacts negatively. Each time he does so, a harmful component enters his character and shapes it accordingly. Thus, man's true character comes to be concealed by a

curtain over time. As a result, a person now changes from a natural to an artificial person.

Deconditioning is the reformation of this artificial state of affairs. This deconditioning is a pressing need for every person. Without it, man's character will remain deeply flawed. He will never be able to obtain the position of a perfect character.

The primary means for this deconditioning is introspection. Every person must become his own inspector. First, he must closely search within himself and remove every negative item he may find. Next, he must rectify his thinking about these negative items by changing them into positive ones. Then, he must include these now positive items back into his personality. This process is similar to an animal chewing cud, regurgitating it, and chewing it again, making the food capable of being digested. Through deconditioning, every person should similarly reconstruct their character on positive lines.

Man's mind has two major components: conscious and unconscious. For example, when a man faces an unpleasant experience, the thought related to the experience enters the conscious mind as a negative item. This negative item remains in his conscious mind for a few days. After this, gradually, it goes into his unconscious mind, where it becomes a part of his mind forever. Hence, it is necessary that on the very first day itself, or within a few days at the most, one should convert every negative item in one's mind into a positive thing so that when this item, passing through

the conscious mind, enters his unconscious mind or the storehouse of the memory, it is saved there as a positive item.

This process is a decisive factor in building a person's character. This process determines if a person shall have a positive or negative personality. A person should engage in introspection daily to rectify his negative experiences and convert them into positive ones. As a result, the items will be collected as positive items in his unconscious mind or the storehouse of the memory. The character of a person who regularly engages in this process will be an exceedingly positive one. Failure to engage in this rectification process will cause all the negative experiences he has faced to find a place in his unconscious mind as negative items. The result of this will be that his character will become negative.

Whatever action a person does, be it in thought or action or word, happens according to his unconscious mind. The personality of a human being is determined mainly through his unconscious mind rather than his conscious mind. The thoughts, words, and deeds of a person whose unconscious has become a storehouse of negative items will be negative. In contrast, the thoughts, words, and deeds of someone whose unconscious has become a storehouse of positive items will be healthy and positive due to this process that he has made efforts for.

Searching for truth is the action of a positive personality. It is a positive personality in whom the lofty desire to search for the truth awakens. Moreover, only a person of positive character and positive thinking finally arrives at the truth.

SOME ISSUES TO PONDER ON

The right way to plan and lead one's life can only be that which encompasses the eternal life of man in the world after death.

Among the first lessons a chemistry student learns is: 'Nothing dies; it only changes its form.'

There is no reason for man to be an exception to this universal law. Regarding the physical matter, we know it is not extinguished by burning, bursting, or some other accident. Instead of changing its form, it retains its existence. In the same way, we are compelled to understand man as a non-extinguishable creature. That is to say, the death of his body cannot be taken to be the end of his being.

This is no indirect speculation. Instead, it is a reality that is proven through direct experience. For example, the science of Cytology tells us that man's body is a collection of millions of tiny cells. These cells are continuously disintegrating, i.e., dying. The body of a man of average height contains around 26 trillion cells. These cells are not like the bricks of a building that remain there as long as the building exists. Instead, vast numbers of cells die daily, and our food enables new cells to take their place. This continuous dying of the human body cells proves that, on average, a whole human body changes into an entirely new one every ten years. It is as if ten years ago, the hand with which I had signed an agreement is no longer a part of my body, yet the agreement that 'my earlier hand' signed

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remains my agreement! Despite the change in my body, the inner 'me' remains in its actual condition as before. My knowledge, memory, desires, habits, and thoughts remain intact. That is why someone has rightly said, "Personality is changelessness in change." (The Urantia Book)

If the body's death were the final extinguishing of life, the same 'death' happens, in a way, every day with a person who is still considered alive. Consider a 60-year-old man whom we see walking in front of us. In the sense of the cells of his body, he has already 'died' six times! Now, even if undergoing this bodily 'death' six times, a person has not died, how will he die from his seventh 'death' when he leaves the body for good?

The fact is that man is an eternal being. He remains alive and present even after his physical death. Man's conscious existence continues even after his death. Death is not the end of life. It is simply an entrance into the next stage of life. When man dies, his eternal being enters into the world after death. Therefore, the right way to plan and lead one's life in this world can only be that which encompasses the eternal life of man in the world after death.

UNIVERSAL MODEL

Submission to God is the best way for man to lead his life in this world. It also guarantees man's success in the eternal period of life after death.

Man finds himself in a vast universe. This universe is like a vast society. Man is only a tiny part of this society. Therefore, man must adopt that model of living that all other components of the universe have adopted in practice. It is the right and natural way for him. In this method is hidden the secret of man's success.

What is this universal model? Observe the stars and planets spread across vast space. Each star and planet move with extreme precision in its orbit. None of them enters the orbit of another. Because of this discipline, peace prevails throughout the cosmos. God desires that man, too, should adopt this policy of non-interference while living in society and with others. Everyone should know that his freedom ends where another person's freedom begins.

Reflect on the world of the trees. Silently, the trees have adopted a beautiful system based on serving others. To fulfil the needs of other living beings, they supply oxygen while absorbing the non-desirable carbon dioxide emitted by these beings. It is a selfless, benefit-providing system. It is also binding on man to adopt this system in his life.

Similarly, think of the mountain springs, with their water gushing forth and rapidly flowing ahead. They repeatedly face massive boulders that appear to be barriers in their

journey. However, the springs do not try to push the boulders out of their way to advance. Instead, they adopt a non-confrontational course. They swirl around the boulders and surge forward. It is, as it were, a message to man to avoid colliding against obstacles he may meet in life. The right approach is to circumvent them with tact and, in this way, be able to continue to engage in positive action.

In the same way, in the world of animals, we see that issues repeatedly arise among them, which causes them to enter into conflict. However, generally, they roar and growl or move their horns about for a while, and then they forget the issue and quickly return to normalcy as if nothing had happened. Man should live in a society in the same manner. In social life, certain things repeatedly happen that people find upsetting. The proper way to deal with this is to accept such situations as temporary. One should not let them take the form of permanent bitterness.

The study of the world of nature tells us that everything gives to others without demanding anything in return. For example, the sun generously gives us light but does not extract any price. The air continuously supplies oxygen, but it does not take any compensation. Similarly, many creatures and things are involved in serving people without any recompense. None of them presents a bill to the people who benefit from them. One learns that the world around us is a giver world. It is as if the culture of this world is a giver culture. Everything in this world continuously sends out this message—become a giver for others rather than just being a taker.

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Man must adopt this same giver culture in his personal and social life. The universe around man is a model for him to emulate in this regard. The secret of man's success lies in adopting this model in his life. The only difference is that this model of submission is established under the law of nature compulsorily in the rest of the world, while man must consciously establish this universal model of submission through his own free choice.

To bring one's free will under this universal discipline is, as it were, to make oneself 'unfree' while still having freedom. This submission is the best way for man to live. It also guarantees man's success in the eternal period of life after death.

DISCOVERY OF MAN

Man's life is divided into the pre-death period for a trial and the post-death period for reward or punishment. Man's success lies in leading one's life in this light.

Man's brain contains around one hundred billion nerve cells. This astounding phenomenon is an indication of the fact that man's Creator has placed enormous abilities inside him.

With this, man has been given a unique thing that has not been given to any other creature in this vast universe—an acute sense of pleasure. Man is the only creature in the vast universe with a very acute sense of pleasure and the capacity

to enjoy pleasure. For man, everything can potentially be a source of pleasure.

God has created man with unique abilities. God has also made a beautiful world, Paradise. Paradise is a perfect world where every form of pleasure is present in its ideal form. Man and Paradise are counterparts of each other, as it were. Man is for Paradise, and Paradise is for man. Paradise is that place where man will acquire complete fulfilment. Paradise is thus a place where human nature finds its perfection. Without Paradise, man is meaningless; without man, Paradise is also meaningless. Without Paradise, man's life is incomplete; without man, Paradise is also incomplete.

Man is a potential inhabitant of this Paradise, but no one will obtain Paradise as a birthright or as a result of being a member of a particular social group. The condition for entry into Paradise is that man should prove eligible for it, based on the qualities he develops in himself while living in this world of test.

God has made the present world for this purpose. It serves as a selection ground. The conditions of this world have been made so that everything is an examination paper for man. Here, at every moment, man is being tested. God is preparing a record of every person's word and deed here. Based on this record, on the Day of Judgement, it will be decided who will be eligible to be settled in Paradise and who will not.

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In this world, man has been given total freedom. However, this freedom is not a reward. Instead, it is for a test. God is watching how man uses his freedom. Under God's creation plan, the people who use their freedom rightly will be selected to be settled in Paradise. On the other hand, those who misuse their freedom will find themselves rejected on the Day of Judgement.

Man's life is divided into two periods—the pre-death period and the post-death period. The pre-death period is the trial period, and the post-death period is the reward period. The secret of man's success or failure lies in knowing this truth and leading one's life in this light.

“SORRY, THIS NUMBER DOES NOT EXIST”

Establishing a relationship with the true God is the biggest blessing for man. Then one receives guidance and develops a spiritual personality.

If you dial someone's number on your phone and press the wrong button, your call will not be connected to the person you want to speak to. You will not hear a 'Hello' from the other side. Instead, you may listen to a recorded message from the telephone exchange, saying, “Sorry, this number does not exist.”

One day, I experienced this myself when I tried calling someone. In this incident, there was a great spiritual

lesson—and that is if a person seeks to establish a connection with God, but due to wrong thinking, he considers someone other than God to be worthy of worshipping and calls out to him, he will get no reply directly from God. Instead, he will hear another voice telling him that the ‘god’ he called does not exist.

The idea of God is embedded in every person’s nature. Man, by nature, seeks God. By birth itself, every human being aspires to find God. However, in history, it has always happened that people have made the mistake of attributing the status of God to someone other than God.

Establishing a relationship with the true God is the biggest blessing for man. The life of someone who establishes a relationship with God will be suffused with the light of guidance. He will develop a spiritual personality. He will obtain a high level of intellectual evolution. In contrast, someone who gives someone other than God the status of God will wander about in utter darkness.

Nowadays, everyone takes the name of some ‘god’ or the other, including ‘gods’ like money and power. Every person ‘gives’ something or the other the status of God and believes in this. However, a spiritual personality is not present in the true sense at a general level. People have made things or beings other than God, their deity. They call out to some or other ‘non-god’, and in reply, they get this voice: “The number you dialled does not exist. What you call ‘god’ and call upon, that ‘god’ does not even exist!”

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The first responsibility of every person is to discover the true God and find a way to connect with this God. Without this discovery, one is bound to face terrible destruction. Therefore, discovering the true God should be a person's most important aim and purpose and the focus of his efforts. It is this that makes human life meaningful. The person whose life is bereft of this discovery is the poorest, even if he owns enormous material wealth.

The Discovery of God means the discovery of a Higher Truth. Moreover, discovering Higher Truth and establishing a firm connection with God makes man's life meaningful. If you have not had this discovery, your life cannot be said to be meaningful in the true sense.

An issue that one needs to bear in mind concerning the discovery of God is that a person gets this opportunity only in the pre-death phase of his life. In the post-death period, those who had not discovered God in their life before death will be deprived of this chance. Then it would be too late.

EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God can be seen everywhere in His creation. Therefore, we need to acquire the eyes to see God in His creation. Then we will be able to feel the presence of God at every moment.

Among the three people who travelled on the spacecraft Apollo-15 to the moon in 1972 was a man called Col. James Irwin. In an interview, he said that setting foot on the moon was an outstanding experience. He felt God's presence on the moon, he said. He was ecstatic, sensing something deep inside his soul. He felt God very close to Him. He could see God's glory with his own eyes, he said. For him, he explained, that trip to the moon was not just a scientific expedition. It also blessed him with a spiritual life.

Col. Irwin's experience was by no means an unusual one. The fact is that all that God has made is so utterly amazing that one is awe-struck on seeing His creation and thinking how great the Creator of all of this must be. The face of God appears every moment in the perfection of His creation. But we have become so used to seeing the world around us, from our infancy onwards, that we do not feel its uniqueness. The air, the water, the trees and the birds, everything that exists in the world—all of these are incredibly astounding. Every one of these creations is a mirror of the Creator. Because we have become so used

to them that we do not realise how amazing they are. But when someone suddenly steps on the moon and beholds this creation of God for the first time, he cannot remain without feeling the 'presence of God'. He sees the Creator reflected in the workings of His creation.

We can experience God's presence in the world where we live in the same way as Col. Irwin did when he landed on the moon. But people do not see this world in the same awe-struck way as someone who steps on the moon for the first time sees it. If we begin to see our world in this way, we will experience the 'presence of God' at every moment. We will begin to live as if we are in the neighbourhood of God and that He is present before our eyes at every moment.

If we see a high-quality machine for the first time, we immediately feel the presence of an expert engineer there. In the same way, if we can see deep into the world and whatever it contains, we will find the 'presence of God' at that very moment. The Creator will appear to us in such a way that we will not be able to separate the Creator from the creation.

The most outstanding achievement for someone in this world is to begin seeing God, to feel the presence of God near him. If he is indeed alive, he will see God's light in the sun's brilliant rays. He will discern reflections of God in the verdant trees. He will experience the touch of God in the softness of the breeze. Then, while prostrating and touching his palms and forehead on the ground, he will

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experience surrendering his entire existence at the feet of His Lord.

God can be seen everywhere in His creation. Therefore, we need to acquire the eyes to see God in His creation. Then we will be able to feel the presence of God at every moment.

ONENESS OF GOD

We must accord the supreme status to God alone. We must ask Him alone to meet our needs. We must do obeisance before Him; we must trust Him implicitly, above all others.

Belief in the Oneness of God means to believe that all power lies in the hand of one God alone and that He alone deserves to be worshipped. No act in the nature of worship is lawful unless directed towards God. It is God alone who fulfils all our needs. It is God alone who is behind the functioning of the entire universe. Superiority is the prerogative of the one and only God. No one enjoys real superiority in this world. All such concepts are false as associate anyone or anything with any aspects of God's sovereignty.

We must express reverence for the true God, the Creator, a Being who truly deserves to be held in awe. On the contrary, when man bows his head before anyone else, he exalts one who is no better than himself—and, as such, has no right to be worshipped. Adoration of God glorifies

Him while worshipping anything other than God degrades the worshipper. Veneration of God makes a man a realist while prostrating himself before a non-God turns him into a creature of superstition. Bowing to God opens the door to realising the truth, while worshipping something other than God closes this door.

We must accord the supreme status to the one and only God. We must ask Him alone to meet our needs. We must do obeisance before Him; we must trust Him implicitly, and above all others, we must reserve for Him the supreme status in all respects. Worship is the ultimate stage in any relationship: that is why, whatever its form, it must have God as its object. Therefore, any gesture in the nature of adulation is not permissible except when meant for God.

When an individual makes God the object of his worship, he bows before an entity which really exists. On the contrary, one who makes a non-God the object of his worship bows before something which has no actual existence, even though he may have set up some material image of his 'god'. While in the former case, one has found a trustworthy source of power, in the latter case, one has associated himself with crass superstitious notions, which have no basis in logic. God's worshippers are graced with eternal blessings; the worshippers of things other than God can expect nothing but lasting deprivation.

GOD'S PLAN FOR MAN

Man has been placed in the present world to be tested. Based on his record, man will either live blissfully in eternal Paradise or in complete deprivation.

What exists before us in the form of the universe is so great that all other things become insignificant in comparison. Therefore, when a great happening such as the creation of the universe can take place, why cannot matters of smaller import likewise come into existence? In this context, the tidings given by the Quran that man has to be reborn have already been made understandable by known events on a vast scale.

Man's life stretches over two phases—one is the present life in this world, and the other is the life in the Hereafter, which is presently unseen. Therefore, the actual test of a man is for him to prefer the Hereafter to the present world. But this can be achieved only by those who have the courage to control their selfish impulses and desires while living in this world.

Man has been placed in the present world to be tested. This test necessarily requires freedom. That is why man has not been placed under any compulsion like the rest of the universe. He has the option either to conform to the system of God or to indulge in deviations from it. But this freedom applies only to actions during his lifespan in this world; it does not apply to the result of his actions. The unchangeable laws of God will determine man's final lot.

GOD'S CREATION PLAN

Based on his record, man will find himself eternally and blissfully living in eternal Paradise, or he will find himself in a complete state of deprivation.

HERE TO BE TESTED

Man is provided with many essential accessories for the duration of his test. Everything will be taken away once a man's trial has run its course. Man will stand alone before God, awaiting his outcome—either eternal Paradise or eternal deprivation.

While in an examination hall, a student has several objects at his disposal. Over his head, there is the roof of the examination hall itself. Then he has a table to write on, a chair to sit on, pen and paper for his answers, and attendants to see his requirements. He sits in his place and uses these facilities freely, without restriction.

If he did not have an examination hall in which to sit, the examinee would be exposed to heat and cold. If there were no desk and chair at his disposal, he would not be able to sit comfortably. Without pen and paper, there would be no question of his writing answers.

But a student only has these things because of the examination he is taking. They are there only so long as his test lasts. As soon as the exam is over, all its accessories will be removed from him. Due to the freedom given to him within the confines of the examination hall, one would

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have thought they were his by right; now, it will become clear that they were only lent to him for a short while for the purpose of testing him.

It is much the same for man in this world. Here, man has many objects at his disposal. Naturally, he considers himself free to use them as he pleases, to live the life of his own choice. But the truth is that whatever man has in this world is his because of the test he is undergoing. God has put man in this world to be tested. For this test, man is provided with many essential accessories, which will only remain in his possession for the duration of his test. Everything will be taken away as soon as a man's trial has run its course. After that, man will stand alone before God, awaiting his outcome—either eternal Paradise or eternal deprivation. He will be like a traveller stranded in the middle of a desert or a man left to drift in the voids of space.

And only one thing—the invisible wall of death—lies between man and the end of his test on Earth.

THE TRIAL OF MAN

Life is one long trial for man in this world. Everyone is being examined; it is only the conditions under which this examination is being conducted that vary.

Life is one long trial. The great paradox is that while some enjoy life, others suffer continuously. In reality, however, all are the same, for their actions or responses to the situations

they have been placed in are being scrutinised. Everyone is being examined; it is only the conditions under which this examination is being conducted that vary.

Another factor in man's trial is that God has made some weak and others strong. There is always the temptation to succumb to the mighty and to exploit the weak. But to do this is to take the surest road to Hell. Only those who realize what is right, irrespective of circumstances will prove themselves worthy of Paradise, for it is often the underdog who is in the right and the mighty who are in the wrong. Even when others behave in a troublesome way, the best way to react is with mildness and circumspection, and no matter what the provocation, one should endeavour to be just and impartial.

How people respond to the various situations confronting them in life will determine their eternal abode. Those who yield to the mighty and oppress the weak will surely be punished in Hell, and they would do well to remember that there are two paths which open out before them every day, one of which leads to Hell and the other to Paradise.

TESTING MAN'S FITNESS

Everything man experiences is a test to see how he reacts to different situations. Based on this reaction, they will be adjudged fit for Heaven or Hell.

Man has complete freedom of will, but only God can make things happen. Man is just being put to the test on Earth. His reactions to various circumstances are being scrutinised.

Some respond to events in a patient, just and reasonable manner. Their actions earn them credit. Others react quite differently. Their hot-headedness, cruelty, and blindness to the truth earn them nothing but blame. Some profess to be believers. But if they adopt a disparaging, deceptive and malicious attitude towards others, their claim is immediately proved false. God will particularly help those who are wronged unjustly. Some uphold the truth, yet they are left helpless and forlorn. Others are blind to the truth yet have every conceivable worldly luxury at their disposal. This situation may seem paradoxical, but it occurs for a reason: to set apart those who cling to externals and deserve to be classed along with other deniers of the truth.

Everything man experiences, whether wealth or poverty, success or failure, is a test. Worldly triumph is no cause to rejoice, nor should worldly loss cause one grief. The winners and losers are tested to see how they react to their situations. Based on this reaction, they will be adjudged fit for Heaven or Hell.

ONLY ONE CHANCE

We have only one chance to show our worth; we can waste it or put it to good use. We have only one life on Earth; we can grow a Heavenly crop or an infernal one for ourselves.

Man is an immortal being. He spends part of his time on Earth and the rest in the Hereafter. This world is for actions; in the next world, we will reap the consequences of our actions.

The only chance we have to work for the Hereafter is in this world. Afterwards, we shall not be able to act: we shall rather have to bear the consequences of our actions. We have very little time on Earth. Many who were once among us on Earth are now dead and gone. In the same way, we shall be removed one day from the land of the living. Our lives will end, and we shall be brought before the Lord to be judged.

This life is the first and last chance that we shall have to build an eternal future for ourselves. We have only one life on Earth, and it is in this life that we must prove our worth. We are being tried on Earth, and this trial will surely reach a decisive outcome. We shall not be able to escape the consequences of our actions.

Every second that passes is conclusive, for the time that has passed can never return. We have only one chance to show our worth; we can waste it or put it to good use. We have

only one life on Earth; we can grow a Heavenly crop or an infernal one for ourselves.

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

The thoughts that come into man's mind every day build his character. Positive thoughts create a positive personality. Negative thoughts create a negative personality.

Experience tells us that a human being is the epitome of innocence as an infant. However, after growing up for years, different types of corruption creep into his personality and become part of his character. The question thus arises as to how one can develop or purify one's personality or character.

Personality or character development means preserving the same character that one had by birth. A person strives to remove the artificial curtains that later drape his character over time until his real nature, free of admixture, re-emerges. The latter way of character development can be understood with the help of an example. Iron is a pure mineral. However, due to the impact of water, it becomes covered with rust. For iron, this rust is just an outer covering. The rust can be removed if scrubbed, and the iron can emerge in its original form.

This phenomenon symbolically points to a psychological process. An individual does something terrible and then

quickly becomes aware of it. As a result, he repents, and his heart becomes pure. However, if he keeps doing one evil after another and does not introspect and seek forgiveness, the impact of sin on his heart is not removed. Consequently, he will soon become an insensitive person. He will start living in evil, and nothing good will have an uplifting or moderating effect on him.

Modern psychological studies have further clarified this point. Man's mind has three significant components present at birth. These components are the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, and the unconscious mind. Whenever a thought enters the mind, it forever becomes its part. Moreover, as we know, the human mind is but another name for the human personality. It means that whenever a thought enters a person's mind, it becomes a part of his personality forever, so even if he tries to remove it from his personality, he will not be able to do so.

Whenever a thought—positive or negative—enters a person's mind, it first enters the conscious mind, also called the living memory. After this, when the person sleeps at night, by a natural process, the thought automatically travels out of the conscious mind and enters the subconscious mind. In this process, man has only 50% conscious control over that thought. The remaining 50% is out of his conscious control. After that, when he sleeps the next night, this thought travels further and enters his unconscious mind. When this occurs, the thought becomes totally out of the person's conscious control.

The thoughts that come into man's mind every day build his character. As the ideas are, so is the personality. Positive thoughts create a positive personality. Conversely, if one's thoughts are negative, one's character continuously becomes more and more negative.

These days, a great many people are drowned in negative thinking. If a person appears to be talking positively, it may be just superficial talk. However, if you converse with him further and try to understand his personality, you may discover that it is as negative as most others. Most people live in a graveyard of negativity, even though they are unaware of this devastating fact. In this, by and large, there is no difference between 'religious' and 'non-religious' people.

The worst character is a negative character, and the best sort of character is a positive one. Hence, the question is how to develop a positive personality. The proper way is that whenever a negative thought enters our mind, we must finish it at the earliest. Then, we should convert that negative aspect into a positive one through a particular method. For example, if you are angry with someone, you must immediately forgive him so that anger does not take the form of revenge and your character is spared from being tainted with the negative attributes of anger and hate. If you feel upset about someone achieving something, you can try to bless the person instead. In this way, jealousy will not enter your character.

What we should do is to immediately convert a negative thought into a positive one. If there is a delay in this,

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the negative thinking will very quickly enter the subconscious mind and, after some time, the unconscious mind. Moreover, when that happens, it will become such an inseparable part of one's personality that even if one tries, one will not be able to remove it.

However, few people convert negative thoughts into positive ones. Because of this, they pay the frightening price of being dragged down by a corpse-like negative personality. A negative personality is a hellish personality, and a positive personality is a paradisiacal personality. If you want to save yourself from this self-destructive and devastating situation, practice the above internal reform and cleansing method and make it a part of your daily life. Only then can you continue to develop a positive personality. There is no solution to the problem other than this.

FLOWERS AND THORNS

The mind of a person who builds his character positively will be a treasury of positivity. Such a positive personality will find a place in the eternal world after death in Paradise, where they will forever lead a life of comfort and joy.

Man is an eternal being. However, his life is divided into two periods or phases: the period before death (generally, a maximum of 100 years) and the period after death (which carries on eternally). The life in the first phase is spent in

this world, and the life in the second phase is spent in the world of the Hereafter.

Today's world—the present world—is like a thick jungle. Here, there are flowers and, along with them, thorns. In the world of tomorrow—that is the Hereafter—the 'flowers' and the 'thorns' will be separated from each other. After this, an eternal world will emerge, one part of which will have, as it were, only 'thorns' (Hell), and in the other part, only 'flowers' (Paradise). In today's world, everyone has the opportunity to make his eternal fortune. The record of their life in this world will determine whether they will be settled in the world full of thorns or the eternal garden of flowers.

Dividing people into these two groups continuously happens in this world. Through the record of their life (or, in other words, based on the character that they are building in this world), each person is declaring, as it were, which of the two groups he is eligible to be included in after his death—the group that will be settled amidst the thorns or the group that will be placed among the flowers. The conditions of this present world are the means for this personality development. Every person is passing through this process. Someone is developing a thorny personality for himself, while someone else is developing a flower-like character. These two groups of people do not appear to be distinct and separate in today's world. However, in the world of tomorrow, they will be separated from each other.

One group will be admitted into eternal Paradise, and the other group will be consigned to eternal Hell.

In the present world, every person faces negative experiences. If someone habitually takes an unpleasant experience as something negative, he will develop a negative personality. In contrast, if someone can convert a negative experience into a positive one, it is the best way to create a positive character.

For example, someone is rude to you, oppresses you, gets angry with you, and causes you harm. Now, you have two options to respond to this. First, you can try to do with this person just as he did with you. So, if he has abused you, you can abuse him back. If he has troubled you, you can also trouble him. If he has harmed you, you can also choose to hurt him. If he has shouted at you, you can shout back.

The person who reacts like this will develop a negative personality. He has sown a harvest of thorns in his heart, so his personality will be thorny. After death, in the next world, he will be resurrected as a thorny personality, and he will be put into the jungle full of thorns—Hell—where he will stay for all eternity, in a state of regret and sorrow.

In contrast is the person who positively responds to other people's negative behaviour. If someone abuses him he does not abuse him in return. Instead, he forgives him. If someone oppresses him, he refuses to behave in the same way. This sort of person has lived like a flower among the thorns. He developed in himself a flower-like character in

this world. In the next world, in the life after death, he will be allowed to live in a garden of flowers—Paradise.

The human mind has two primary compartments—the conscious and the unconscious. Whenever a thought enters our mind, it first enters the conscious mind. After that, it gradually advances and enters the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is that part of the mind where every thought is preserved forever, although it is not in our conscious control. If you want to have a flower-like character, at the very moment when a negative thought enters your conscious mind, you should activate your thinking process and convert it into a positive thought so that this item is stored in the storehouse of the unconscious mind as a positive, not a negative, item. For example, if a hate-filled thought enters your mind, you should diffuse it and convert it into a loving thought. If a vengeful thought enters your conscious mind, you should convert it into a thought of gratitude. If a thought that enters our mind provokes our ego and makes us feel proud, we should change it into a thought that engenders humility. If you entertain a selfish thought, you should convert it into a thought of selflessness. And so on.

The mind of a person who builds his character in this way will be a treasury of positivity. Such a person will be free of negativity. Only such a positive personality will find a place in the eternal world after death in Paradise, where they will forever lead a life of comfort and joy.

WHY THIS CONTRADICTION?

Man has to use the opportunities available in the present world per God's creation plan and then become eligible to live amidst eternal joy in Paradise.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was an English poet. He once remarked, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." It is a matter of everyday experience. Many people love to hear tragic stories. Popular novels are more often than not tragedies rather than comedies. Likewise, very often, those singers become popular who sing sad songs.

Why is this so? Why is it that sad poems or sad stories succeed in striking the chords of people's hearts?

It is because every person, in practice, lives in a psyche of deprivation or frustration. In such a situation, a happy story seems somehow unreal to them. In contrast to this, a sorrowful tale seems more natural to them.

If you study the issue in greater depth, you will realise that man is a pleasure-seeking being. In the vast universe, man is a remarkable creature. He is the only creature who has an acute sense of pleasure. It is a uniquely human attribute that man can enjoy pleasure. In the vast universe, there are many creatures, but man's unique ability is the quality of enjoying pleasure in this way.

For man, thinking can be a pleasure, as can seeing, hearing, speaking, eating, drinking, smelling, touching, and even

WHY THIS CONTRADICTION?

walking barefoot on the grass. However, here there is a strange contradiction. Man has a great capacity to enjoy pleasure, but enjoyment is impossible for man in this world.

Once, I went to Kashmir, where, near Pahalgam, a mountain river flowed down from a stream up in the mountains. Its water was pure. When I reached Pahalgam and saw the clean, clear water, I desired to drink it. So I had a glass of water. It was wonderful—better than any other drink. I drank a second glass, then another, until I had drunk six glasses! Even after the sixth glass, I still wanted to drink but could not. Then, I developed a splitting headache. The pain was so severe that I had to return at once. I got back to Srinagar. I was to have dinner at somebody's house, and several people had been invited. When I reached the venue, my head hurt so badly that I could not attend the dinner.

The same predicament arises with all other pleasures. Man earns wealth, obtains power, marries according to his choice, builds a grand house, accumulates many luxuries, etc. However, after having achieved all this, he realizes that there is a decisive obstacle in deriving complete and continuous satisfaction from any pleasurable thing. Even if he has all the comforts and luxuries, and material things he desires, he still fails to obtain complete and long-lasting joy and peace.

Man's desire for material comforts and luxuries is unlimited. However, to use these comforts, he has only a limited capacity. This limitation is always a barrier between man and the objects of pleasure. Even after obtaining

everything that he desires, man remains frustrated. Man's bodily weakness, the decline in vitality with advancing age, sickness, accidents, and eventually death continuously negate his desires. Man obtains objects of pleasure when he desires to use them. However, he soon reaches the limits of his strength and becomes exhausted to the extent of becoming a spent force. Finally, death buries all his desires and dreams.

This contradiction is not a fundamental one. It arises out of a difference in the order of things. It has been decreed that in the pre-death phase of his life, man should obtain only an introduction, in a limited sense, to his desired pleasures and that in the post-death stage of his life, he may fully receive the pleasures that he seeks. This arrangement is not accidental or coincidental. Instead, it is part of nature. It is found in the whole system of nature. In this world, whatever success man earns, he gets in line with this principle. In this world, no success is an exception to this principle. For instance, a farmer must sow and reap only after that; one must plant a sapling in a nursery and obtain its fruits only after that. An ironsmith must first smelt iron, and only then can he produce steel. In other words, in this world, everything must go through different stages. Everything first passes through its initial period and then reaches its climax. There is no exception to this principle of nature.

The same issue holds for man. Man has been given an unlimited sense of enjoyment, but the objects from which he can derive endless pleasure have been kept in the second

WHY THIS CONTRADICTION?

stage of his life—in the world that comes after death. In the first stage of his life—in the present world—man discovers his ability to pursue pleasure. In the life after death, if he had led a righteous life in this world, he could obtain all the objects of pleasure. That is to say, in the pre-death phase of life in this world, he will experience the desire for pleasure, and in the post-death stage, he can experience the full experience of pleasure in Paradise.

In line with His creation plan, the Creator of the world has given man an initial introduction in this present world to the pleasures one will enjoy in Paradise. In this way, He conveys to man that if he wants to experience pleasure for all eternity and in the most total sense, he should create a strong desire for this and perform such actions as will hold him deserving of Paradise.

What should one do to become deserving of Paradise in the Hereafter? To put it briefly, man should make himself a purified soul. He must purify himself of every negative emotion. He should save himself from becoming a victim of greed, selfishness, jealousy, dishonesty, falsehood, anger, revenge, hate, and other negative feelings. He should develop a lofty, entirely positive character that makes him worthy of living in the neighbourhood of God in Paradise. He must be transformed into an angelic person or a divine personality.

Man's life is divided into the pre-death and post-death phases. A tiny portion of man's life is kept for the first phase, while the rest—which carries on for all eternity—

is in the post-death phase. If man's story is seen only in the pre-death phase, it will appear as a meaningless tragedy. However, if a man's story is seen in the light of the period after death, it will seem meaningful.

In line with this creation plan of God, man stands at a very critical juncture. He has to choose between two alternatives. One option is to use the available opportunities in the present world according to God's creation plan and then become eligible to live amidst eternal joy in Paradise. The other option is to lead a life of heedlessness in this world and be eternally deprived of pleasure in the next phase of life.

AS YOU SOW, SO SHALL YOU REAP

An eternal principle is: As we sow, so shall we reap. The pre-death period of life is the period for sowing seeds, while the post-death period is like harvesting the crop.

Man's life is divided into the pre-death and post-death periods. The limited period before death is for the test, while the eternal period after death is for obtaining the results of one's performance in the test. Those who pass the test will be blessed with Paradise, and those who fail the test will be consigned to Hell.

This is the creation plan of the Creator for this world. However, the status of Paradise and Hell are not the same. The actual purpose of creation is to select the people of

Paradise. As far as the people of Hell are concerned, they are just relative components of creation; they do not form any real part of the creation plan.

The world before death is made following the demands of the test. After the period of this test, there will be no need for this world, nor will there be a need for those who fail the test. After this period, only Paradise and those people selected to be settled in the ideal world of heaven will remain in the universe.

To make people aware of this creation plan, the Creator has made various arrangements. One such arrangement is that He has placed a deep awareness of the creation plan in the nature of man itself. Every person experiences that he does not obtain complete peace and satisfaction in this world. It applies to almost everyone, rich or poor, powerful or weak. Almost everyone lives in a state of dissatisfaction and dies in this condition. This general condition of dissatisfaction and frustration should remind us that our destination is somewhere else, that our desirable world is not the present world where we spend the pre-death period of life. This desirable or ideal world is somewhere else—in the Hereafter—and so, we should be motivated to make efforts to obtain it in the post-death period of life.

To make people aware of this creation plan, the Creator made this present world so that no one could acquire a life of complete comfort here. There are many problems—sickness, accidents, boredom, suffering, loss, etc. And then, after a short time, one dies. In this way, the unfavourable

conditions of the world repeatedly remind man that he cannot make his desired or ideal world here. This world is insufficient to satisfy all his desires. This unfavourable situation continuously compels man to search for the truth.

In the same way, in this present world, many people undergo suffering, which serves as a warning lesson for others. For instance, a person becomes paralysed and is confined to a wheelchair. Alternatively, he falls victim to a disease without a cure and loses passion for life. People like them do the work of 'signposts' from God. They tell us how unreal life in this present world is. Such people silently convey that man cannot make an ideal world here according to his desires.

Some people have to face various unpleasant situations in life's training course. On the face of it, those who get the chance to play the role of such a 'signpost' appear to be in difficulty, but there is excellent news for them. On the Day of Judgement after death, even their small actions will be accepted by God. Because of the difficulties they faced in this world, they were not physically capable of doing anything significant, and because of this, just accepting the role of 'signposts' destined for them will suffice. Therefore, while they remain in this world, they should adopt patience with all their difficulties. Then, based on observing patience and complying with God's command, they will get admission into Paradise without any additional action. That is to say, simply by patiently surrendering to God's will, without having to do anything else, they will get admission into Paradise after death.

This news is not something strange or novel for man. Through various means, man has been informed that he cannot construct the ideal world of his desires in the pre-death phase. Instead, whoever leads a righteous life here can obtain the ideal world of his desires in the post-death period. Paradise will be inhabited in the next world, but the paradisiacal man is being made in today's world.

What is Paradise? One can understand what Paradise is like by looking at the present world. The present world is, in a sense, an introduction to Paradise. It is a miniature model of Paradise. Paradise is the complete and perfect edition of the present world. All the blessings available in the present world are present in Paradise. The difference is that the present world is imperfect, while Paradise is perfect. The present world is not ideal, while the world of Paradise is ideal. The present world is temporary, while the world of Paradise is eternal. There is fear and sorrow, noise and din, and other challenges in the present world, but it is not so in Paradise. The present world has limitations and disadvantages, while Paradise is free from these. In Paradise, man will obtain eternal fulfilment, unlike in the present world, where no one gets lasting satisfaction.

Hell is a place that is totally opposite of Paradise. In Hell, all those hardships will be gathered together, much more than we experience in the present world.

The pre-death and post-death periods of man's life are intimately connected. Their relationship is like that of sowing seeds and harvesting a crop. The pre-death period

GOD'S CREATION PLAN

of life is the period for sowing seeds, as it were, while the post-death period is like harvesting the crop. It is an eternal principle: As we sow, so shall we reap.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD AND
THE LIFE HEREAFTER

CONCEPT OF TOMORROW

Man's life has two stages—the temporary pre-death and the eternal post-death periods. Death is to move from temporary life to eternal life. This division is so that whatever man could not obtain 'today' in the present world, he may be able to obtain 'tomorrow', in the world of the Hereafter.

In the known universe, man is the only creature who possesses intelligence. As far as we know, no other creature shares this quality with man. Animals, too, are living creatures, but instincts determine all their actions. In ordinary language, we can call instincts the unconscious mind. The conscious mind is a quality only of man and no other species.

According to modern research, the human brain contains some 100 billion particles! In terms of his capacities, man is born with vast possibilities, but experience tells us that almost every person dies with the regret that he could not obtain all he had wanted to achieve in this world. Fulfilment is a deep desire of man. However, almost every person dies without attaining the stage of fulfilment. This tragedy is the fate of nearly every person in this world.

There are different sorts of animals on earth. They are born and die like humans, but the above sense of lack of fulfilment is not a problem for animals.

There is a reason for this fundamental difference between man and animals. Among all creatures, man is unique in

possessing the concept of ‘tomorrow’ or the future. It is as if an indelible part of man’s nature is to want to extend his ‘today’ to ‘tomorrow’. He seeks to get in his ‘tomorrow’ what he failed to get in his ‘today’.

The case of animals is different. Animals have no concept of ‘tomorrow’. They live only in the present moment. They live only in ‘today’ and die in this same ‘today’. So even though some actions of certain animals may appear to be based on a concept of ‘tomorrow’—for example, ants collecting food for the next season—this happens due to their instinctual demands and not out of the consciousness of ‘tomorrow’ or the future.

Man’s life has two stages—the pre-death and post-death periods. The former is temporary, and the latter is eternal. This division is so that whatever man could not obtain ‘today’ in the present world, he may be able to obtain in ‘tomorrow’, in the world of the Hereafter.

As pointed out above, some 100 billion particles exist in the human brain. In other words, the human brain has enormous potential. This potential is so great that man’s natural lifespan here on earth is insufficient to use it. Even if man’s life here was much longer than it generally is, the conditions of this world are so limited that in a finite world, man would still not be able to use all of the potential of his mind.

Man needs a very long life and a much bigger world for fulfilment. However, in the present conditions, the potentials of his mind always remain grossly underutilized.

Keeping this fact in mind, man's life on earth seems like the tiny tip of a giant iceberg. A small portion of this 'iceberg' is visible in the pre-death period of his life, and the remaining, much more extensive part of it is hidden in the eternal post-death phase of life. Without accepting this fact, man's life cannot be adequately explained. Human life can be understood only when this fact is taken into consideration. Moreover, when something becomes the only possible explanation for a phenomenon, it is intellectual evidence that this explanation is correct.

If you keep this reality in mind and analyse life, you will realize that the present world is only a temporary place for man. It is not his permanent or eternal destination.

Every person must necessarily face death. Death is like a bridge between the two phases of man's life. Death is to move from temporary life to eternal life. The present world is that world where man is training himself, as it were. The pre-death period is a training period. Here, man prepares himself for the Hereafter during his temporary stay. Then, after death, he goes to the next, eternal world. If he is eligible for Paradise, there he will get the opportunity to use all the potentials of his mind and acquire the joy of complete fulfilment. In this second period, only those who properly trained themselves in the first period of life will get a place in Paradise. Those who arrive in the Hereafter in a non-trained state will be unable to use the opportunities available there. They will be wholly deprived of fulfilment. No harsher recompense could be conceived of than this.

PARADISE: MAN'S DESTINATION

If a man lives only in his 'today'—wallowing in the pleasures of this world—and dies in his 'today' as well, he leads an animal-like life and dies an animal-like death. But, on the other hand, a truly successful man leads the life of 'today' in such a way that his 'tomorrow'—the eternal phase of life after death, is full of joy. Only such a man can be called a truly successful man.

PARADISE: MAN'S DESTINATION

Those who develop themselves according to the divine standards in the present world will be settled in the ideal world of Paradise in the Hereafter.

Dr Alexis Carrel was born in France in 1873. After his higher studies, he spent most of his career in the USA. In 1912, he won the Nobel Prize for Medicine. In 1935, he published a book titled *Man, The Unknown*. This book became very popular and was translated into different languages. A commentator remarked about it thus: "This book sums up much of his experience of man and his life seen from the purely scientific aspect."

In this 312-page book, Dr Carrel failed to discover the truth about human life. Thus, he titled the book *Man, The Unknown*. As far as man as a scientific being is concerned, Dr Carrel had discovered him to a great extent. However, why did he give the book the title that he did? Because of confusion. Dr Carrel found 'man', but his study could

not tell him what man's destination was. Therefore, he felt that a known man was moving towards an unknown destination. This was why he did not know the truth about man. In this sense, a more appropriate title for the book would have been *Man's Goal Unknown*.

It is not the problem of Dr Carrel alone. It is a problem of all philosophers and thinkers. It may have appeared that man was, for them, something known. However, the destination of that 'known' man has remained unknown to them till the very end. This intellectual vacuum regarding man and man's destination has afflicted human beings for thousands of years. Speculation about man's final destination only led people to be drowned in confusion. However, this is a life-defining question, and its immense importance demands a satisfying answer.

The fact is that philosophers and thinkers were (and still are) seeking man's destination in this very world of today; while in reality, this destination does not exist here. Thus, they have been searching for this destination in the wrong place. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that they failed to find it. This world is incomplete, while man's nature leads him to seek a perfect world. Man desires eternal life, while eternal life is not possible for anyone in the world before death. Man wants a world of unsullied joy, but in this world, different types of challenging conditions act as a barrier to making this world joyful. Man seeks an ideal world but is fated to live in a non-ideal world. By birth, man is a perfectionist. He seeks a perfect world.

However, after all the efforts, he finds that achieving an ideal world is simply impossible here.

The fact is that, unlike what Dr Carrel suggests, the unknown thing is not man. On the contrary, what is unknown is man's destination—the ideal world that embodies man's dreams, free of all contradictions, and where man can live with complete fulfilment forever.

The insoluble problem of man's reality becomes solved when we study man in the light of God's scheme. That is to say, along with understanding man, the creature, one must also understand the purpose of man's Creator in creating him. This is the proper method and approach to this matter. When the issue is seen in this way, one discovers that the confusion or lack of clarity about man was only because people tried to understand man without considering God's creation plan.

A machine is a created thing, not its own maker. Similarly, man is a creature, not the Creator. Therefore, knowing the Creator's creation plan is necessary to understand man's reality. Without understanding the engineer's plan, one cannot explain the machine. Similarly, explaining man without knowing the Creator's plan for him is impossible. Without this creation plan, man's life and significance remain incomprehensible. However, after understanding God's creation plan, everything becomes comprehensible. Everything falls into place.

The Maker of this world has made a pair to this world. One member of this pair is the world where we live after

birth—the planet earth. The other pair is the world where we go after death. These two worlds form a pair. In this way, man's life has two parts: the pre-death and post-death periods. Man's Creator blessed him with life, dividing it into the pre-death and post-death phases.

The world before death has been made as a testing ground, and the world after death has been made for receiving reward or punishment. Because the present world is designed for the purpose of test, everyone has been given freedom here. Here, everything has defects and limitations. It is as if this present world is a sort of examination hall. Here, all those 'things' needed to 'write' the 'examination' are available, but the higher 'things' are absent. If a student wants to build an ideal world in the examination hall, he will surely face only despair and frustration. Similarly, those who seek to build a perfect world in this limited and temporary world of test will face sorrow and disappointment.

While we are in this examination hall—this life of ours on planet Earth—what must each person do to obtain the perfect world they desire after death? The answer to this question is that we must use our freedom according to the Creator's Will.

For life after death, God has made a perfect world, Paradise. This Paradise is, in every sense, an ideal world. God will lodge such people as prove themselves to be eligible to be settled there. In the present world, those who qualify themselves according to the divine standards will be settled in the ideal world of Paradise.

Now, who are those people who will qualify for Paradise? These are the ones who, using their intellectual capacities, attain the realization of God. Coming out of intellectual confusion, they discover the truth. They devote themselves to God alone and worship none but Him. Despite possessing freedom, they let themselves willingly be regulated by divine discipline. Faced with adverse conditions, they build in themselves a positive personality. They deal with others in the same ethical way they want others to deal with them.

All these qualities are the criteria set according to God's creation plan for an individual to be eligible for being settled in eternal Paradise after death. Those who fail to meet this standard will face eternal deprivation and frustration.

It is said that an opportunity knocks on your door only once. This saying is also perfectly true concerning the issue of lasting success because no one will get this opportunity again. Therefore, those who lead their life on Earth the right way will have won lasting success by finding entry into Paradise—man's destination, while those who live their lives in this world in the wrong way, will live in eternal frustration and failure in the Hereafter.

PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The fact that the universe is not repeatable proves that a conscious Being made this universe according to His will and decision.

In 1966, I wrote a book in Urdu titled *Mazhab aur Jadeed Challenge* (translated into English as *God Arises*). In this book, it is shown that the universe is very meaningful. Such a meaningful universe cannot have been made without a Maker. One of the points made in the book is that a solar eclipse would occur on the 11th of August 1999 that would be completely visible in Cornwall. I had written this around thirty-five years before this event. Thirty-five years after I wrote this, the date arrived. Per this advance announcement, a solar eclipse did indeed occur at the exact appointed time. There was not a minute difference in the occurrence of this event.

I had not come up with this point myself; instead, it was based on the calculations of expert astronomers. These experts successfully made such an accurate claim well in advance because the universe runs according to extremely well-established laws. Even after millions of years, there has not been the slightest change. Based on this discovery, the scientist Sir James Jeans suggested in his book *The Mysterious Universe* that the study of the universe seems to indicate that its creator is a Mathematical Mind.

A significant aspect of something being meaningful is that it is also predictable. This quality is present completely

throughout the universe, one proof of which is evident in the above-cited example of the solar eclipse.

Some people who deny the existence of God claim that the present universe came into being through chance or accident, not by the decision of any Creator. However, this is not correct. If it is accepted that the present meaningful universe emerged as a result of an accident, the necessary consequence would be that we should also have to accept that the numerous accidents that occur in this world are also phenomena that can bring into existence meaningful things. In such a situation, the 'accident' that supposedly brought the universe must be repeatable. The universe should come into existence repeatedly because accidents happen frequently. If an unconscious accident has supposedly created a meaningful universe once, in the same way, it should happen a second time that a meaningful universe should come into being through an accident. However, as is known, never again has a universe other than the one that exists come into being after the existing universe did.

According to scientific estimates, the universe's age is around 15 billion years. Why has a meaningful universe come into being in this long period just once and never again after that, not even partially? For example, as far as we know, it has never happened that a new solar system has been created once again or that a planet like Earth has come into being, a planet with water, air and greenery and where humans and animals live and move about. It is clear evidence of creation resulting from a conscious decision by a Creator, and not as an accident.

The present world is an exceptional phenomenon. The universe is an exception that rebuts the view of the deniers of God. If the universe were only the result of an accident, it would be repeatable through another such 'accident'. However, when it is not repeatable, seeking to explain it due to a supposed accident is entirely baseless. Therefore, this sort of explanation is not intellectually acceptable.

The fact is that for a person, the existence of God is as certain as his own existence. Every person accepts his existence. Through the same evidence and proof, he will also have to accept the existence of God. To accept one's existence and not to accept God's existence is an intellectual contradiction. No serious person can accept this.

The famous 17th century French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) said, "I think, therefore I exist." This principle is undoubtedly a firm one. According to this principle, a person who is aware of himself reaches the stage of realizing God. According to this principle, it would be right to say, "I exist. Therefore God exists."

The universe is not repeatable; it proves that a conscious Being made this universe according to His will and decision. God is a proven Being. To know that God is a reality is to accept something proven, while to deny God is to deny something proven.

GOD AND MAN

Whoever seeks to build his life in the right way should study the Quran and discover the One God, without whom no person can genuinely build his future.

Anthropologists have found that the concept of God is deeply embedded in man's very nature. Every person by birth comes into this world with the concept of God. Consciously or unconsciously, he must spend his entire life with this conception.

Further study reveals that God is a compulsory necessity for man. Man is an explanation-seeking being. He wants to explain himself, his existence, and the environment around him. Moreover, it is a fact that without accepting God, their explanation is simply impossible.

Similarly, because of his limitations, man sometimes feels that he is simply helpless. This feeling can be overcome only by faith in an all-powerful being—that is, God.

Experience tells us that every person lives with unfulfilled desires. It is only God through whom man can hope for complete and lasting satisfaction. Because of his spiritual nature, man wants to live with firm conviction. The source of this conviction, too, is none other than God. For his activities, man requires a target to continue his journey towards it confidently. This target, too, he can obtain only through belief in God.

Studies tell us that every person in this world believes in God somehow or the other, even those who seem to

be atheists. Many atheists cry out in utter helplessness to God when they face a major crisis. No person is an exception to this.

Now, the question is that when every person believes in God in some way or another, why do they not all get the result one should get if one genuinely believes in God? Even while believing in God, most people's condition is that they are without divine inspiration and lack peace of mind. Even many who claim they trust God are deprived of the blessings of trust in God. People accept God but feel that they do not have communion with God. Despite believing in God, the evidence of the blessings of God is often not visible in people's lives.

This is because many people worship some 'non-god' in the name of God. They may verbally claim that they believe in God but are tied to some 'non-god' or the other in actual practice. For example, someone has seated some living or dead person in God's place. Someone worships a 'sun god' or a 'moon god'. Someone else worships money and fame. In the name of Humanism, some seek to transfer the seat from God to man. Some people regard the laws of Nature as a substitute for God. Similarly, some people believe in a monistic concept of God, where God is viewed as a vague spirit, not a Being with whom one can be in communion and relationship.

If you tried to call someone on your phone and, by chance, you dialled the wrong number, from the other end, you might hear a voice that says, "Sorry, this number does not

exist.” Unfortunately, it is precisely the case with many people today. In the name of God, they are calling out to some or the other non-God, including the things and beings that, in reality, have no existence at all. Their reply is, as it were, “Sorry, this god does not exist.”

If we are serious about the issue, we need to discover that system of thought or ideology where the concept of God is present in its pure form. This is important for every person. In their belief, every person has made some or the other ‘deity’ as their ‘god’. However, he does not obtain the results that follow from believing in the real God. From their experience, every person feels that the problem for them is not lack of belief in God but lack of the results of faith in God. It is an almost universal fact that nearly every person can know through personal experience.

The cause of this difference between belief and the hoped-for results of belief can be just one. That is, in God’s name, a person has faith in some non-god. In this situation, naturally, he will not obtain the results of belief in God.

Many scholars have researched this issue and have found the answer to it. One of them was a highly educated Bengali, Dr Nishikant Chattopadhyaya. In 1904, in a lecture in Hyderabad, he spoke about how he found the answer to his questions. He pointed out that although all the religions that had come into the world before the 7th century CE had a concept of God, in later times, their original texts did not remain intact. He said that the concept of God had been changed in all of these religions, as their original text was not preserved.

Islam emerged in the first quarter of the 7th century CE. A unique quality of Islam is that its original text is fully intact and preserved. That is why now, for later generations, the reliable source to know the correct concept of God is Islam alone. Therefore, one who seriously wants to know the right concept of God has no other choice but Islam.

The Quran is the only scripture that has been preserved in its original form. According to the Quran, God is One. He alone is the Creator and the Lord of the universe. He is the Sustainer of all the worlds. God is a living Being. He sees, and He hears. Therefore, it is possible for man to directly connect with Him at every moment and in every place. With His unlimited powers, God can make up for every limitation of man. God is the Helper of man in both his pre-death and post-death periods. God is the limitless treasure of peace and security for man. Throughout human history, God has guided man through His prophets.

God is man's Creator and Sustainer. On account of this, God fully knows man's reality. God knows our every need. Because of this, God alone is capable of fully understanding man and providing him all that he needs. It is only such a Being who can be man's God. Other than Him, no being has the power to fulfil man's needs.

The Quran is a reliable and authentic introduction to this same God. The Quran is the only source for anyone to obtain a reliable introduction to God.

Based on their personal experience, millions of people have testified that they have studied the Quran and obtained an

introduction to God that their very nature was searching for. They have acknowledged that other conceptions of God did not prove to be the answer to their inner quest. However, when they learnt about the concept of God in the Quran, their heart called out that this was the God they were seeking all along and in whom they secured complete fulfilment.

There have been seekers of God among people of every age. Their very nature set them out to search for God. Religions of every age kept providing men knowledge of God through their search. However, no foolproof system of writing scriptures down and preserving them had been developed in ancient times. As a result, these religious books did not remain preserved in their original form. Finally, in the early 7th century CE, the Quran was revealed. On account of special arrangements, it was made possible to fully preserve the Quran in its original form. Whoever now seeks to build his life in the right way should study the Quran and discover that God without whom no person can genuinely build his future.

GOD AND THE HEREAFTER

The consciousness of God is deeply embedded in human nature. What is needed is to remove the veil that has been placed over human nature. When this veil is removed, man will begin to 'see' God.

The creation is evidence of the Creator, that is, God. The creation is such a meaningful phenomenon that it is simply unthinkable to have come into being without someone having created it. In this matter, the choice before us is not a universe with God and a universe without God. Instead, the option is between the universe with God and no universe at all! If we say God does not exist, we are also compelled to say that the universe does not exist. However, the universe is too obvious a fact; therefore, we are not in a position to deny the existence of the universe. Hence, we cannot deny the existence of God.

The world's meaningfulness is proof that its Creator has absolute awareness of meaningfulness. Such a Creator cannot make an imperfect world regarding its results. It is impossible that a meaningful Creator will create a meaningless world. However, despite all its meaningfulness, this world is defective in its present state. For its completion and perfection, it seeks another world. It is this world that the prophets have called the world of the Hereafter.

The world of the Hereafter is not just an article of faith. Instead, it is an entirely intellectual phenomenon. The existence of the world of the Hereafter can be proved on the very same intellectual basis as all other issues of science.

Scientific Evidence

In this regard, we should first know what 'scientific evidence' actually is. According to contemporary science, scientific evidence of something is not that one must arrive at a position of complete certainty about it. This sort of irrefutable certainty is not possible concerning anything at all. According to modern science, to prove something intellectually means proving its probability. The theories generally accepted in modern science are accepted thus only because their probability is established, rather than at the level of observation. Accepting the structure of the atom as truth is an example of this.

To accept the existence of the world of the Hereafter, too, one will have to use this same accepted scientific method. The use of other methods will, in principle, not be appropriate. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the use of the same scientific method concerning the world of the Hereafter that we regard as valid in other matters.

Developing a scientific theory requires that one begins with a hypothesis, engages in observation, and then seeks to verify the theory in the light of the knowledge one gains from observation. If this three-point formula is employed concerning the existence of the world of the Hereafter, we can obtain supportive evidence or probability, another name for which is certainty in scientific terms.

While studying this issue, one fact that emerges is the distinction of man from other creatures. A unique feature

of man is that he has the concept of 'tomorrow'—the future. The minerals, plants and animals do not have this concept of 'tomorrow'. From this observation, we learn that other than man, the destination of all creatures is only 'today'—the present. In contrast, man's destination relates to the forthcoming 'tomorrow'.

Man's body is made up of innumerable cells. Every moment, vast numbers of these cells break down. In this way, man's body is continuously renewed after getting old. From this, we learn that man's personality has a being that is separate from his body. Death happens only to the body, while man's spiritual being remains as intact as before, even after the final extinction of the body.

In the same way, inside every man, particular desires exist. Therefore, it is right to say that man is a desire-pursuing being. However, along with this, experience also tells us that in the case of almost all people, all their desires are never fulfilled. Driven by desires, nearly every person wants an ideal world for himself. However, they die before they can obtain this.

Ray of Hope

The American missionary Billy Graham wrote that he got an urgent message from a billionaire who asked him to meet him at once. So Graham changed his programme and arrived at the man's house. The man said, "You see, I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am going to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you

give me a ray of hope?" (*The Secret of Happiness*, by Billy Graham, p. 2)

This question is not the question of a confident wealthy, old American man alone. Every person who takes birth in this world is confronted with a similar question. The appropriate reply to this can be obtained only in the belief in the Hereafter. If one does not accept the existence of another world after death, this universal question will have no answer.

End of Contradiction

By birth, every person possesses two contradictory qualities. On the one hand, everyone desires to build a dream world, a world per their ideals, where they can spend their 'tomorrow'—their future—in joy and peace. However, on the other hand, even if he acquires all sorts of objects of pleasure, every person cannot obtain this desired ideal world of his. Boredom, loss, illness, accidents, and old age are the story of many people in this world. Moreover, finally, every single person has to face the event of death.

Every person is born with the conception of an ideal world deeply embedded in his mind. However, almost everyone dies, taking with him many seemingly beautiful desires unfulfilled before he can obtain his desired world.

In this world, a particular principle prevails. It is the principle of pairs. Here, everything exists in the form of pairs. Everything becomes complete when two of a pair join together. For instance, there are negative and positive

particles in the atom. In the world of plants, there are male plants and female plants. Likewise, there are males and females in the world of animals and humans.

This global natural principle can be called the 'pair principle'. This principle tells us that everything makes itself complete on joining with its pair in this world.

In this universal principle lies the answer to the issue of the nature of this world referred to above. There must be a pair-world that complements this present world in the universe. Along with this world, another world must exist; only by getting this other world will the present world complete its being.

In light of the above observation, the reality of the world of the Hereafter can be recognized as true. The world of the Hereafter is that pair-world joining which the present world completes its being. Without joining this pair world, our present world would be as incomplete as all other things in this universe would be without their pairs.

Our world is part of a pair. This world and the world Hereafter form a pair. After accepting this other world in the Hereafter, man's existence becomes complete. The significance and meaningfulness of everything can now be seen. Everything now falls into place.

The Right Framework

This concept gives us a framework to explain everything in this universe satisfactorily. From this understanding, it also

becomes clear what Paradise and Hell are. Paradise is the home of the eternal joy and peace of serious and righteous people, while Hell is the place to punish rebellious people who were addicted to falsehood.

The understanding that emerges in line with this is that the present world has been made as a testing ground, and the next world as a place for acquiring the results of one's actions performed on Earth. Each person has been bestowed with a being that shall never die. However, man's life is like an iceberg, a tiny portion visible above the water while the rest is sunk deep in the sea. Man's lifespan is divided into two portions—one, a small part, which has been kept in this world, and the remaining portion of his lifespan, which has been kept in the world of the Hereafter and will last forever.

There is an 'examination paper' for every person that he must 'answer' in this present world. Everything in this world exists so that man can seek to perfect his personality. For example, this present world is full of bitter experiences. It is so that man, passing through these experiences, can prove that he can live with positive feelings even in negative conditions. Only people with such a positive personality will be admitted into the ideal world of Paradise in the life after death.

In contrast, people who become victims of reactions when faced with negative experiences become negative. Such negative people will be considered non-eligible for Paradise.

Satisfactory Explanation

When we accept the existence of the world of the Hereafter, we reach a satisfactory understanding of life. On the other hand, the refusal to accept the reality of the world of the Hereafter leads to many existential questions remaining seemingly inexplicable.

In the event of not accepting the world of the Hereafter, the present world seems incomplete and meaningless. On the other hand, when one recognizes the fact of the world of the Hereafter, the present world begins to appear complete and meaningful. For someone who does not recognize the reality of the world of the Hereafter, the question of many good people leaving this world without receiving any reward for their goodness remains a mystery. However, if one recognizes the reality of the world of the Hereafter, this seemingly absurd mystery is fully solved.

Similarly, in the event of not accepting the world of the Hereafter, one may not be able to understand why many people who do evil do not seem to receive punishment for their deeds. However, in the event of accepting the world of the Hereafter, we get a satisfactory answer to this question. Likewise, if one does not accept the world of the Hereafter, one cannot understand why man takes birth with the idea of an ideal world and why every person leaves this world without obtaining it. In the event of accepting the world of the Hereafter, this seeming difficulty is fully solved. One can now live in this world with the firm conviction that

what he desired but could not obtain before death, he might be able to get in the world after death.

Nothing has been created in vain in this world, without a purpose. The sun and the moon or the insects of the earth, everything has been created for a purpose, which they are engaged in fulfilling. There is only one thing that may appear to be without purpose. Inside every person by birth is embedded a concept of beautiful desires. No person is bereft of this. Now, when all the other things in the world have been created for a definite purpose, it is also necessary that man's desires and dreams, too, should have a purpose, a true destination. Man's desires and dreams cannot be purposeless in a universe where everything seems meaningful.

These dreams, desires, and hopes, too, are intelligently planned parts of creation. There is a clear purpose for them to exist, although this purpose cannot be wholly fulfilled in the present world. These desires and dreams are unlimited, so they can only be fulfilled in an eternal world. The name of this unlimited world is the Hereafter.

In this unlimited world of the Hereafter, good people will get eternal Paradise, full of joy, comfort, and peace. In contrast, those people who in the present world prove themselves to be evil will be eternally deprived of all the good things.

The Reality of Paradise

What is Paradise? Paradise is the answer to man's search. Man finds himself in a world where he has the status of a strange and unique exception. Every component of the vast universe is complete in itself. Here, it is only man who lives in contradiction. Other than man, the whole of the universe is a zero-defect universe. It is only man whose life seems defective.

All around the rest of the universe, there is a certainty. However, in the world of man, there is tremendous uncertainty. No fear exists in the rest of the universe, but man is always afflicted by fear and apprehension. In the rest of the universe, satisfaction prevails, while in man's life, dissatisfaction abounds. In the rest of the universe, all things get what they require, but man is the only creature in the world who does not always get what he wants. The rest of the universe is evil-free, but man, exceptionally, is afflicted with the 'problem of evil'.

Paradise is the answer to this seeming conundrum. The concept of Paradise tells us that all those good things that are there for the rest of the creation are fully available for man too, with the only difference that the rest of the universe gets what it desires in the world of 'today', while man will get all that he wishes in the world of 'tomorrow' (the Hereafter).

Part of Human Nature

The issue of God and the Hereafter relates to the unseen world. However, the fact is that this is also a necessary part of human nature. Therefore, human nature knows God and the Hereafter as indisputable truths.

Believing in or accepting God at the level of the mind is only the introductory stage of knowing or realizing God. To have absolute faith in the existence of God and the Hereafter is its highest stage. The purpose of using intellectual proof concerning the existence of God and the Hereafter is only so that the veils of doubt are lifted from man's eyes and that man is brought to the position where he accepts God and the Hereafter as, at least, possible truths.

The purpose of using logic and evidence concerning God and the Hereafter is that man be brought to that intellectual level where he becomes ready to accept the existence of God and the Hereafter as the basis of a complete worldview. When a person reaches this stage, the doors of his nature open up. Recognizing the existence of God and the Hereafter as fundamental truths, he accepts them.

Every man has the 'eye' to 'see' God and the Hereafter, but the veil of conditioning lies over this 'eye'. Logical evidence destroys this conditioning or mental block and removes the artificial curtains covering this 'eye'. After this, man begins to clearly 'see' God and the Hereafter. Man now obtains perfect certainty about God Who is not visible, just as a child has complete certainty about his mother even though he has never seen himself emerging from her womb.

GOD'S CREATION PLAN

The issue of God and the Hereafter remains a topic for logical debate until the artificial curtain that veils man's mind is not lifted. Through contemplation, reflection, or logical reasoning, man recognizes God through his inner realization when this curtain is lifted. God now becomes for him the most known of all known things. The work of logical evidence is that it takes man to his nature's door. As soon as his nature's door is opened, he discovers God in such a way as if he knew Him from before. If there is a blindfold tied around a person's eyes, it is necessary to provide him with relevant arguments or proof to prove to him the sun's existence. However, when the blind over the eyes is removed, there is no longer any need for arguments or proof for him to accept the reality of the sun. The same is true concerning God. The consciousness of God is deeply embedded in human nature. What is needed is to remove the veil that has been placed over human nature. When this veil is removed, man will begin to 'see' God with even more certainty than when man sees the sun with his eyes open.

TWO WORLDS

Man's greatest omission is to remain engrossed with the ephemeral world. But the day he leaves for the next world, and his veil is removed, he will regret his negligence.

Sir Arthur Eddington, a well-known scientist, writes in his book, *The Nature of the Physical World*: "I have drawn up my chairs to my two tables. There are duplicates of every object. One of these tables is comparatively permanent. It is substantial. Table no 2 is my scientific table. My scientific table is mostly empty. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed."

This description could be applied equally to the entire universe. However, it is especially true of our world, which has two aspects: appearance and reality.

What we see around us, we call the world. But there is also the other invisible world of the Hereafter. So when death comes, it means leaving the visible or apparent world to enter into the invisible, concealed, but the real world of the Hereafter.

While our present world is visible to everyone, the next world lies behind a veil and is unobservable. That is why man makes the mistake of regarding only the present world as accurate and the other world as imaginary. Therefore, even those who believe in the Hereafter consider it an abstract concept irrelevant to their current life. That is why

they do not allow it to influence their material existence despite believing in it as an article of faith.

This is man's greatest omission. Engrossed with this ephemeral world, he fails to realize that the day he leaves for the next eternal world, it will be as if a veil has been removed. And on that day, he will regret his negligence. But regret will serve no useful purpose. He will have lost his 'tomorrow' for his 'today'.

Just as the true scientist can see 'two tables', the faithful servant of God can discover the 'two worlds.' And it is he and he alone who, by the grace of God, will enter victoriously into the divine Paradise of the Almighty.

SEEK THE ETERNAL WORLD

Death reminds a person to rise beyond 'today' and think of 'tomorrow'—the eternal world after death. A truly successful person draws this lesson from death.

Turtles live up to 500 years. Some trees can remain standing for a thousand years. Mountains and rivers can retain their glory for millions of years. But human life is not more than 60-100 years. Man, who appears to be the noblest and superior of all creatures, lives a comparatively short life.

Stranger still is that this short human life is a continuous story of failure. An individual's life is so full of sorrow that the few moments of joy he experiences seem to be nothing

more than an aberration or even a delusion. Sickness, accidents, and old age continuously shatter our dreams, and hopes. And in the end, after spending his days on Earth in sorrow, a person accepts defeat in the face of death.

A poor man is unhappy that he does not have a house and enough money to meet his needs. But, on the other hand, the conditions of rich people are not significantly different. Having money creates even more significant problems for a rich man than a poor man with no money appears to face. A famous man, whom people constantly surround, is so troubled and miserable within that he cannot get a wink of sleep at night without consuming sleeping pills. In short, every person in this world is unhappy—each in different ways.

Even if you save yourself from unfavourable conditions and acquire joy and peace, how long will that state last? Even if you garner, by some means or the other, an enormous treasury of joys, it will keep you happy only for a few days, at the very most. And then the Angel of Death will suddenly come to take you, and all your wealth or the army you mustered to protect you will not be able to save you. Death overtakes everyone—rich and poor alike. It enters triumphantly into both the palace and hovel. Death is a person's greatest compulsion.

Death reminds a person to rise beyond 'today' and think of 'tomorrow'—the eternal world after death. It tells an individual to search for success on the other side of life—in the world to come. A truly successful person draws this

lesson from death. If you remain deprived of this lesson, your joys, which you wallow in this world, will soon be snuffed out, and after death, you will find yourself in utter darkness.

MIND-BASED SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is about being a devoted servant of God. It is to lead a God-oriented life, to make God one's central concern.

A mother is generally thought of as the symbol of love. However, perhaps it is more accurate to say that a mother symbolises pampering. Pampering is just the name of an emotional relationship, whereas love is a lofty human virtue. However, because of not distinguishing between pampering and love, the mother has been considered the symbol of love for thousands of years. It is because of this that a mother intensely loves only her children. She does not have the same intense feeling for other people's children or human beings.

The same is valid for spirituality. Man has been engaged in spiritual activities for more than five thousand years. Despite this, knowledge of spirituality could not advance through man's efforts. The reason for this was a vague concept of spirituality. Generally, spirituality is thought of as heart-based, whereas, like other sciences, spirituality is a mind-based science or discipline. In this situation, the science

of spirituality could not advance because its advocates did not know the appropriate reference point for spirituality. It is like someone trying to study the phenomenon of light, considering moonlight to be the source of light. Despite the hard work of even a lifetime, this person will not be able to understand the reality of light as he wrongly thought the source of light to be the moon, whereas the sun was the source of light.

Spiritual development is but another name for intellectual development. There are two things in this world of ours—consciousness and matter. Development in the realm of matter may be called ‘material development’ or ‘worldly development’, while the development of consciousness is called ‘intellectual development’ or ‘spiritual development’.

The Creator has created two worlds. One inanimate world, the material or physical world, and the conscious world of man. The Creator created both worlds in raw form. It is man’s task to develop both these ‘raw worlds’. He should actualize the potential for progress hidden inside the ‘raw worlds’ of both the material world and the conscious world of man’s inner existence.

Man engaged in this process on a vast scale in the physical or material world, leading to the creation of a ‘modern’ civilization or the ‘developed’ world. However, as far as the world of consciousness (or man’s inner being) is concerned, it is not progressing.

What can be called the progress of man’s consciousness or inner being? The Creator of man created him as a conscious

being but in a raw or natural state. The task that man has to perform while living in this world is to transform that 'raw' conscious existence into a highly developed conscious existence. The reality is that the same process is required in both the physical world and the world of consciousness. It is the process of conversion. It means converting a material world into a developed one. As far as the conscious existence of man is concerned, it means transforming one's raw personality into a truly developed personality.

By birth, man possesses what can be called a raw personality. A raw personality means accepting influences from every external thing. For example, you get angry when someone says something harsh to you. Someone insults you, and so you are filled with hatred. You saw someone you thought was 'bigger' than you, so you felt inferior. Somewhere you think your interests are in danger, and so you lie. And so on. All such emotions are, to put it simply, negative thoughts.

Every person is born in a particular society. In many cases, their whole life is spent mainly inside this society. Challenging experiences in social life often create negativity in a person, so much so that his whole personality may become negative. This process can be called the process of conditioning. It happens with everybody. No person is exempt from it. Thus, every person is Mr Conditioned. This conditioning makes almost every person live in jealousy, revenge, and other negative emotions to a lesser or greater degree. Practically every person becomes a case of negative conditioning. There may be a difference in degree among individuals, but the primary condition is the same.

The true purpose of man's personality development is that he should decondition his mind. He should find his every weakness and negativity, remove them from himself, and purify himself to convert his negative personality into a positive one. Every negative trait can be converted into its opposite, positive form. For example, one should transform anger into forgiveness, hatred into love, greed into selflessness, pride into humility, non-acknowledgement into acknowledgement, violence into gentleness, egoism into modesty, and so on.

Spirituality is the name for this conscious process of inner purification. In other words, spirituality is a process of deconditioning. The purpose of spirituality is that man should engage in the process of self-construction and, in this way, decondition himself. He should make himself a person free from every conditioning. He should, once again, regain the natural state that he was born with.

This aim of spirituality has always been there before people. Those who made spirituality their purpose have always stressed that their aim is purification and reform. They want to transform their inner personality into a purified personality. They seek to lift themselves from being someone who may be filled with base emotions into a being that lives in noble feelings.

However, history tells us that man could never attain this spiritual goal through mystical practices, that these practices could not produce a spiritual man. In fact, what is commonly thought of as spiritual 'attainment' from the

mystical perspective is mere ecstasy: It is not spiritual evolution in the real sense.

The cause for this failure is that people could not obtain the very point of reference of spirituality. Before the scientific revolution, man erroneously believed that his heart was the centre of his thinking and feelings. Thus, since the ancient past, the human heart has remained the centre of all spiritual practices.

Meditation and such spiritual exercises originated in the ancient past and were based on the heart. However, as we know today, the heart is only a means of blood circulation. It is not the centre of thought and feeling. Because of this, all of man's spiritual exercises became useless exercises. They could not become a means for the development of man's spiritual personality.

Man's nature is that if he continuously focuses his attention on something, he experiences a strange joy, called 'ecstasy'. It is, as it were, a sort of thrill. When engaged in heart-based spiritual exercises, a state of ecstasy is produced. Because of their unawareness, people believed this sort of ecstasy to be the goal of spirituality, so 'spirituality' and 'ecstasy' became synonymous terms. Because of this, knowledge of spirituality stopped at a low level of ecstasy. It could not reach the stage of higher intellectual development.

In the pre-scientific age, man developed wrong concepts about many things. After the scientific revolution, man acquired a better knowledge of these. He began to live in a new intellectual age. For example, the moon was considered

a source of light in the pre-scientific era. However, with the progress of scientific knowledge, people accepted the moon as a satellite of the earth that reflects the light from the sun and is without any light of its own.

The same issue is true regarding the way man understood the heart. In the pre-scientific age, the heart was regarded as the centre of thought and feeling. Because of this, everywhere, spirituality based on the heart became the norm. However, in the age of modern science, it came to be known that man's heart is only a means of blood circulation. It being the case, it is necessary to change our understanding of spirituality.

There is now a need to redevelop and redefine the knowledge of spirituality. It is necessary to connect spiritual understanding with the mind and acquire spiritual progress through intellectual processes. It is because the source of intellectual or spiritual progress is the mind, not some heart-based exercises. It is time to understand that true spirituality is mind-based, not heart-based.

For this purpose, every person should do two things continuously. One is that he should convert the negative items accumulated in his memory into positive ones. It is akin to the process that some animals engage in, in the form of regurgitation or rumination. Moreover, the other is that every day, an individual must convert negative experiences into positive items so that when they go out of the conscious mind and enter the unconscious mind or memory, they should be stored there as positive items.

For example, suppose you have formed a negative image of a person. In this matter, the spiritual process would be to remove the negative thoughts that you have built up regarding the person. If you had a negative image of the person, you must convert it into a positive image.

Similarly, a spiritual person must examine every negative thought that has entered his mind. He should critique himself thoroughly and unbiasedly and accordingly change his views. In this matter, an individual must be so sensitive that even if he considers somebody wrong, he should search for an explanation that would end his negative feelings for the person concerned.

It is necessary to do this for our own protection. It does not mean you should start thinking that all other people are right. Instead, the issue is that you should be able to make your personality a positive personality in the complete sense. There should not be a single negative item in your memory or consciousness. Your memory should become a storehouse of only positive things.

Spiritual development is another name for intellectual development. This process of intellectual development starts with the re-engineering of the mind. Every person is born into a particular environment. He is continuously conditioned to his environment. Therefore, man's first task is to decondition his conditioned mind. In this regard, this is the starting point of one's spiritual journey.

The fact is that every person is, by nature, a spiritual being. He is born with a divine personality, which has been

given to him by God. Because of this, the way to nurture his spirituality is to remove the artificial veils that have fallen over his true nature. After removing these artificial curtains, what is left is called the 'spiritual personality' or positive personality.

Intellectual development aims to develop the mind's capabilities that flow from God's realisation. It is this awakening of God-consciousness which is called spirituality. Spirituality is not any secret or mysterious thing. It is another name for the unfolding of God-consciousness hidden in human nature. It is an issue of conscious awakening in a complete sense and not some sort of vague experience of mysterious ecstasy.

Spirituality is about being a devoted servant of God. It is to lead a God-oriented life, to make God one's central concern. Spirituality is the state when a person's thinking, emotions, and actions all get coloured in God's hue.

The fact is that spirituality is a conscious discovery, not some vague sort of ecstatic experience. Man's highest quality is the attribute of consciousness. Therefore, only that thing can become the most important which man discovers at the level of his mind or consciousness.

The difference between consciousness and ecstasy is that the former is the name for a known intellectual condition, while the latter is the name of a vague state of the heart. To consider spirituality to be an ecstatic experience is to belittle spirituality. Higher spirituality is that which is a known experience at the level of the human mind. There

is no such thing as the experience of ecstasy or heart-based spirituality. True spirituality is obtained by activating one's consciousness, another name for this is mind-based spirituality. This journey takes place at the intellectual level within man. It helps to develop man into a completely positive personality by purifying one's mind of all negative items. It is such a personality that will be settled in eternal Paradise.

PARADISE FOR POSITIVE PERSONALITIES

Paradise is only for the individual who develops a positive personality by abandoning a life of unawareness and leading a conscious life in this world of test.

According to the Quran, Paradise is for one who purifies his soul in this present world and reaches the world hereafter with a refined, positive personality. (20:76) It has been called purification of the self (tazkiyah) in the Quran. Through such purification, an individual develops a spiritual and intellectual personality in this world. Only a person who has developed such a spiritual personality in this world of test will be held deserving of entry into Paradise in the world Hereafter. It means abandoning a life of unawareness and leading a life ruled by one's consciousness. When he faces any hurdles, he must not resort to expediency. When desires arise within him, he must crush them, and when he is overtaken by arrogance, he should be able to overcome his overweening pride.

Purification of the self is a continuous process that goes on day in and day out. According to a tradition, when a person does not allow this process of purification to continue within oneself the heart becomes covered with rust, just like iron when it comes in contact with water. A question was asked to the prophet as to the way to purify one's personality. The Prophet replied, 'Remembering death often and studying the Quran.' (Al-Qudhai's Musnad al-Shihab, Hadith No. 1178)

This tradition of the Prophet tells us of psychological reality. In the context of the society he lives in, man repeatedly has to undergo such experiences as produce negative feelings within him, such as anger, hatred, violence, revenge, etc. Therefore, a man ought to bury these negative feelings instantly, for if he fails to do so, they will become a permanent part of the human mind, and a time will come when it will be almost impossible to eliminate them.

There are two significant parts of the human mind, the conscious and the unconscious. It is quite natural for negative feelings to, first of all, enter the conscious part of the mind. If such feelings are not immediately removed from the mind, they gradually reach the unconscious part of the mind, from where it becomes difficult to eradicate them. Therefore, man should always remain vigilant about this. At all times, he should keep converting his negativity into positivity. He must de-condition his conditioned mind to purify and keep it free from pollution. The only way of purification, or de-conditioning, is to repeatedly remind

himself of death and reflect on the purpose of life in the light of the Quran.

The present world has been created to prepare individuals who have developed intellectually positive personalities. Such personalities are developed through mind-based spirituality, through reflection, and introspection. It is such purified personalities who will be deserving of entry into Paradise. Without this, one can never gain access to the eternal heavenly abode.

THIS WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

If you take this world to be your destination, you will finally arrive at frustration. But if you have made the Hereafter your destination, this belief will open the doors for eternal peace.

What is an individual's greatest longing? It is to lead a life full of happiness. This is the most incredible dream that people have dreamt of in every age. Every person lives with this dream. But everyone dies without this dream of his being fulfilled. All philosophies, ideologies, and human efforts revolve around this one thing. But till today, human beings have failed to realize this dream at the intellectual and the practical level.

There is just one cause for this failure. And that is, everyone wants their dreams fulfilled in this world. But the experience of tens of thousands of years has proved

a single point—that the present world is insufficient for this desire to be fulfilled. The limitations of the present world and the improper use of God-given human freedom are decisive barriers to the present world becoming a place where human dreams can be fulfilled.

We are still on the journey towards making our life successful when death overtakes us. We invent new machines, but new industrial problems emerge. We make great sacrifices and usher in new political systems, but the degeneration of those who come to occupy the seats of power, do not allow these new systems to function effectively. We want to craft a life of our dreams for ourselves, but other people's envy, jealousy, pride, oppression and revenge come to the fore, and we get entangled in all of this, so much so that we see the little nest that we had hoped we could find safety and shelter in crumbling before our eyes, and then we depart from this world.

All these continuous experiences prove that the world of our dreams cannot come into being in the present world and under the present conditions. For this, another world, and other conditions, are needed. Our hopes and dreams are in themselves a real human quest. But the place where our longings will be fulfilled is the next world, the world after death, and not the present world, the world before death.

This understanding makes our life in this world meaningful. Once we are aware of this reality, this world becomes an arena for making efforts to determine our future in the

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eternal life after death. The next world is where we will face the results of our actions. Once we realise this, we know our destination, towards which we can move confidently, that is, the world Hereafter.

If you take this world to be your destination, you will finally arrive at nowhere but frustration, despondency and mental disturbance. But if you have made the Hereafter your destination, this belief will open the doors for eternal peace.

In a world where one incurs losses all too often, only such an understanding of life can be proper that conveys to us the secret of gaining through these losses.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARADISE:
THE DESTINATION OF MAN

ADVANCED INTRODUCTION TO PARADISE

If man's desires are taken positively, they can be the decisive factors for actions that help a person become eligible for Paradise.

Man is born with innumerable desires. He considers these desires among the most precious treasures of his life. He spends his whole life trying to fulfill them. Finally, every man discovers that he has failed to fulfill all his desires. Almost every person's fate is that he is dissatisfied both before fulfilling his desires and after apparently fulfilling them. It is the condition of nearly every person.

It is because man's desires are unlimited while this world is limited. This difference makes it impossible for a person to construct the world of his dreams. In this world, the fate of every person, who seeks to fulfill his desires, finally becomes a case of unfulfilled dreams. At the same time, human desires can also play a positive role. These desires are an initial introduction to Paradise. They inform us how joyful the world of Paradise will be, where all beautiful wishes will be fulfilled completely.

In the present world, the secret of success is desire management rather than the futile effort to fulfill all one's desires. The present world does not exist so man can build Paradise here. It exists only so that, through righteous living, man can prove himself eligible for entry into Paradise in the Hereafter. If man's desires are taken

positively, they can be the decisive factors for actions that help a person become eligible for Paradise.

The story of almost every person's life is the same—and that is, chasing after one's desires and dying without fulfilling them. For the fulfillment of one's desires, so many factors are needed, that to put them together is not within the power of man, even if he lives a very long life and all the wealth and power of the world come under his control. For example, a man can build a house but cannot stop an earthquake from happening and destroying it within seconds. A man can take great care of his body to make it physically strong, but he cannot change the compulsory law of death. Man can accumulate all sorts of pleasures and luxuries, but he cannot put an end to their limitations when deriving pleasure from them. Man can collect all kinds of objects of comfort, but he cannot change the law according to which man is susceptible to illness and accidents.

This experience proves that what is in man's control is only action, not the results of his actions. Man has the freedom to act but he cannot perform the actions needed to build a new, ideal world. Only God, the Creator, can create a world. In such a situation, a person who engages in actions in the hope of thereby building an ideal world for himself in this world is only giving evidence of being unrealistic, and it is a fact that no positive result can be produced through unrealistic thinking.

If we keep this before us and reflect, we may realise that man should be willing to accept a fundamental division

between himself and the Creator. He should recognise that engaging in action is man's domain while producing its results is the Creator's domain. In line with this, the period before man's death is, for him, the period for action, while the period after death is the period of obtaining the result of his actions from God.

If man acknowledges this reality, he will simultaneously obtain two benefits. Firstly, his tension will get over forever. Tension is the name of the difference between action and its result. When this difference is eliminated, tension is automatically relieved. The second benefit of this would be that man would find a definite guarantee that if he leads a genuinely righteous life, after death, he will receive the desired result of his action in that he will become the owner of an ever-verdant garden of joy—eternal Paradise.

INTRODUCING PARADISE

To enter Paradise in the Hereafter, man in his life before death must realise his Creator while He is in the unseen, submit to Him, and develop a Paradisiacal personality in himself.

On a trip to Switzerland, I had a chance to experience a unique ride on a yacht that had two floors. The yacht moved gently on the lake's waters, the pace suitable for people to view the beautiful scenery. I took this opportunity to prepare some portions of my travelogue.

INTRODUCING PARADISE

It is said that on witnessing the beauty of Kashmir, Babur (who was the first Mughal emperor) had exclaimed:

“If there is Paradise on Earth,
It is this; it is this, it is this!”

However, when I witnessed the lovely natural scenes in Switzerland, my heart said that God had placed these beautiful sights in the world, so that man could obtain an initial introduction to Paradise through them. These world sights engender an intense desire for eternal Paradise in man. Their purpose is not that we should consider them to be Paradise itself and then try to build a dream world of happiness amidst them.

During the trip, a person in our group met with a young Swiss man, a 24-year-old student of engineering. He was a Christian. When he mentioned the concept of another world after death in the Christian religion, he was asked what he thought might happen to him after he died, the young man replied, “Jesus Christ has taken all our sins. So, Paradise is assured for all of us. Then why should we worry about it?”

I explained that Paradise is the name of the ideal world, where man will attain complete fulfilment and the company of those people who make his life highly meaningful. Man is a seeker of Paradise. He seeks Paradise in this world. However, this world is only an introduction to Paradise. Efforts to make a Paradise on Earth are futile. Paradise has been kept in the Hereafter after death. According to the Creation Plan, God created an eternal, perfect world called

Paradise. Then God created man as an eternal creature and divided his life into two periods. During the temporary phase of man's life, he has been placed in this imperfect world to be tested. Paradise is not assured for any group. It has to be earned individually. To be found eligible for entry into eternal Paradise, man in his life before death must realise his Creator while He is the unseen, submit to Him, and develop a Paradisiacal personality in himself. Only then will he be found eligible for inhabiting the perfect world of Paradise.

PARADISE: THE IDEAL WORLD OF THE HEREAFTER

The time and energy of every human being should be used to discover the divine criterion to enter eternal Paradise and plan their life in line with this discovery so that when death comes to them, they are declared qualified candidates for God's eternal Paradise.

Some years ago, a magazine published an article titled 'The Road to Paradise'. In the article, the authors related that they had traveled to a mountainous region situated amidst abundant beauty. However, traveling in that area, they also repeatedly faced bitter experiences. This area seemed very beautiful from afar, but one faced many challenges traveling on the roads there. The author explained it thus: 'Every Paradise has its serpent'.

This symbol is based on a story from the Bible. According to this story, a serpent was also present in Paradise, where Adam had been placed. However, this story is not true. There is no 'serpent' in the eternal Paradise made by God. However, in all the temporary 'paradises' that man seeks to make on his own in this world, 'serpents' do exist. No 'paradise' made by man is free of 'serpents'. Difficulties and challenges beset the human world.

The eternal Paradise made by God is an ideal abode. There is no sorrow, regret of the past, fear, or apprehension about the future. There are neither disadvantages nor limitations nor any pollution, strife, or violence. It is, in the total sense, an ideal realm.

This ideal Paradise has been made so that selected people can be settled there. Those who measure up to the high divine standards will be given this Paradise after death as a reward. They will live there forever and will never want to come out.

Man is a seeker of Paradise by birth. Every person, impelled by his Nature, seeks this Paradise. He is restless to obtain it. In the world before death, everyone is occupied with building the 'paradise' of his dreams here on Earth. The biggest concern of every person is to build the 'paradise' that exists in his dreams.

However, what every person gets in actual practice are only struggle and wasted effort. No one obtains the result that they had so desperately hankered after. People put in all their efforts to get the 'paradise' of their dreams here

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on Earth, but very soon, they suddenly die and head off towards the next world, taking along with them all their unfulfilled dreams!

The biggest secret of success is knowing that our life has two stages—the pre-death and the post-death stages. No one can obtain in the pre-death stage of life what the Creator has placed in the post-death stage. One can get Paradise only in life after death. For every person, the highest form of intelligence is to know these two stages and lead their lives accordingly. The world of 'today' is the place to make oneself eligible for Paradise, and the world of 'tomorrow' is the place to find the result of one's life based on how we fare in the world of 'today'. Every person's task is to regard the life of 'today' as an opportunity to prepare for the eternal Hereafter. Their time and energy should be used to discover the divine criterion to enter eternal Paradise and plan their life in line with this discovery so that they are declared qualified candidates for God's eternal Paradise when death comes to them.

THE DESTINY OF MAN

Man's life has been structured based on the principle of action and reward. The world before death is the period for a man to sow seeds, while the world after death is the period to obtain the results of this sowing.

Every person builds for himself a world of desires. He spends all his time on this project, so much so that the last

moment of his short life arrives, and he departs from this world in utter frustration because he failed to acquire all he had wanted.

Why is this so? In this vast Universe, man is the only creature who possesses innumerable desires. Will these desires never be fulfilled, and will every person be buried in the graveyard of their desires? Every person harbours dreams of a beautiful world. Does this world of dreams exist only to remain a mere dream and never come true? Every person nurtures a garden of hope in his breast, but no one is able to enter that beautiful garden. Why is there this contradiction in Nature?

Besides man, nowhere is this contradiction present in the vast Universe. Minerals, plants, and animals—their worlds are entirely free of such a contradiction. So then, why is this contradiction found only in man's life?

This is because there is an essential difference between man and the rest of the Universe. The difference is that man's life is marked by the pre-death and post-death stages. In contrast, all other things in the Universe have only one stage—i.e., they come into existence, and then one day, they get extinguished. So first, they take birth, then, after some time, they die and are eliminated forever.

The fact is that the ideal things that man wants to obtain in the first stage of his life can be obtained only in the second stage. What has been destined for him in the second stage of life, no one can find in the first stage. In this case, a special law for man does not apply to other things and

beings in the Universe. Man's life has been structured based on the principle of action and reward. That is to say; he must engage in activity in the pre-death stage of his life, the result of which will be received in the post-death stage.

Knowledge of this law is crucial in understanding the true nature of human life. An understanding of this law makes man's life meaningful. This law provides perfect answers to all existential questions. After knowing this law, one gets a satisfactory explanation of human life. According to this law, the world before death is the period for man to sow seeds, while the world after death is the period to obtain the results of this sowing: a rich harvest of flowers and fruits or a jungle of thorns, as the case might be. Man should refrain from making a useless effort to obtain in the present world itself the flowers and fruits—i.e., Paradise—that can be had only in the Hereafter. Instead, he should focus all his attention on sowing good seeds—through righteous actions in the best possible way. If he does this, in this world of test, he will obtain all that he could not get in the world before death in the form of Paradise in the Hereafter.

MIRAGE OF MATERIAL PROGRESS

You can lead a truly successful life in this world only if your efforts and direction are according to God's creation plan.

Material 'failure' is as meaningless as material 'success' in the present world. Examples of this continuously come to

the fore in different forms. For instance, some years ago, a young woman put a noose around her neck and committed suicide, even though she had become a very successful model. The following words apply to her: “Being famous is like living in a bubble that can burst at any moment.” In another case, some years ago, an interview with one of India’s ‘biggest’ industrialists was published in a newspaper. Although he was one of India’s ‘richest’ persons, wealth did not give him joy. Despite possessing much material wealth, he was leading an utterly non-peaceful life.

Many other people have money, fame, and power but are unhappy. Unfortunately, these things cannot give you lasting happiness.

In their mind, every person has a beautiful image of a joy-filled world—Paradise. So, spending all their energies and time, they try to accumulate as much money as possible to construct the world of their dreams. However, after attaining all the material things they hankered after while living in this world, they realise their failure to find real peace in the ‘paradise’ they made for themselves.

It is the condition of almost every person. Nearly every man is buried in the beautiful graveyard that he has built. Their desired ideal world is a world of unlimited comforts, and such a world cannot be made in the present limited world. It can be built only in the world that comes after death. This next world is unlimited, as well as eternal.

In this world, if any person wants to build a successful life for himself, the first thing that he ought to know is God’s

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creation plan. You can lead a truly successful life in this world only if your efforts and direction are according to God's creation plan. If one ignores God's creation plan, no one can lead a truly successful life.

According to God's creation plan, the temporary world before death is simply for an examination. According to this plan, living in an ideal world of ultimate joy is possible only in life after death. Given these fundamental realities, man should try to make himself successful in the examination before death so that in the stage of life that comes after death, he may obtain his desired ideal world—eternal Paradise—as a divine reward. This is the only principle for a successful life.

WORLD OF 'TODAY', WORLD OF 'TOMORROW'

Every person nurses an ocean of desires in his heart.
The place for fulfilling these desires is the world of
'tomorrow', not 'today'.

If a farmer wants to harvest a crop the day he plants the seeds, he will lose the seeds and be deprived of a harvest. The same is true of both the world of 'today' (this world) and the world of 'tomorrow' (the Hereafter). The world of 'today' is the place for engaging in action, while the world of 'tomorrow' is the place for receiving the results of one's actions. Therefore, if a person wants to obtain his

'reward' in this world, he will not be able to do the needed activities for a happy life in the world of 'tomorrow'. Thus, he will not only lose this world, but he will also lose his only opportunity to build his next world.

Few people realise this, however. In this world itself, they want to obtain things—such as complete fulfillment or ideal justice and peace—that can be had only in the next world. Because of this, they lose both. Wise is he who earns the world of 'tomorrow' through the world of 'today'. He knows that if he gets stuck in the allurements and entanglements of the world of 'today', he will deprive himself of true success in the next world, the world of 'tomorrow'.

Suppose you are on a journey and want to enjoy all the comforts that a person can enjoy only at home during that time; you will naturally not be able to fulfill this desire. From this, one can understand the issue of the world of 'today' and the world of 'tomorrow'. This world is a place for a temporary halt, and the next world is your eternal home. The world of 'today' is the path on the journey, and the world of 'tomorrow' is the final destination of this journey. God has made this world the place for engaging in action and the Hereafter for obtaining the results of our efforts.

If, while on a journey, you want to obtain the comforts you can enjoy only when you are at your destination, you are bound to deviate from your path. In the same way, if you desire that in the world of 'today' itself, you should obtain

the results of your actions, which is possible only in the world of 'tomorrow', your planning will go haywire.

Wise is he who understands this difference between the world of 'today' and the world of 'tomorrow'. Therefore, he does not desire those things before death that one can find only in life after death.

It is imperative to recognise this fact. One must be realistic. One must not run after desires because desires will not take one to any destination other than destruction. Every person nurses an ocean of desires; these desires in themselves are not wrong. However, the place for fulfilling these desires is the world of 'tomorrow', not the world of 'today'.

PLACE FOR ACTION, PLACE FOR RESULTS

Spirituality means building a divine personality in this world, so one can be truly successful in the world to come, by obtaining a place in Paradise in the period of life after death.

This world is where an individual engages in actions, and the Hereafter is the place where he will receive the fruits of his actions. A concise and initial portion of a person's life is spent in this world. And then, he is taken to the next world, where, according to his actions, he will get a place either in Paradise or live in eternal deprivation.

In this scheme of things, the present world is a place for the test. An examination hall is always for tests, not for

enjoying the results. A student who seeks to build an ideal world for himself in the examination hall will fail to do so. The person who wants to make an eternal palace of joy in this world will not obtain his goal—because the present world has not been made for this purpose.

Wise is he who understands this difference and performs righteous actions in this world, hoping for God's blessings in the Hereafter.

In this matter, an intelligent person adopts the same principle as a student. When a student sits in an examination hall, he focuses all his attention on answering his test paper correctly. He does not attempt to build the palace of his dreams there.

Building a Divine Personality

An understanding of God's creation plan should govern man's relation to this world and the Hereafter. According to this, man has to spend a brief life before death preparing for the Hereafter in order to obtain a world of eternal joy in the period of life after death. One who discovers God and builds a divine personality while living in this world of tests will find himself in eternal Paradise. When a heedless person enters the next world, he will find that this heedlessness cannot be compensated for. He will face eternal deprivation as he will not be able to return to the present world and be given a chance to live again.

Spirituality is about training oneself for the world that will come after death. Spirituality is about building a divine

personality. Through spirituality, a person makes himself so capable of developing a divine personality within oneself that he can genuinely succeed in the world that comes after death. Spirituality is the crux or gist of religion. Spirituality is the training ground where people develop a divine personality to obtain a place in Paradise in the period of life after death.

Spiritual Progress

What is spiritual progress? Spiritual progress is another name for bringing about divine awakening in one's inner personality. For example, physical food makes a man's physical body healthy. Similarly, through spiritual 'food', in the form of specific sublime experiences, called *Rizq-e-rab* (Provision of the Lord) in the Quran, man's spiritual being is made healthy.

It was July 16, 2004. There was a power cut, and the ceiling fan had stopped. I was sitting in my room in severe heat. I stayed in that condition for a long time, till finally the electricity resumed and the fan started moving.

This was a moment of sudden experience for me. The fan began to move, and my body felt cool. I felt as if suddenly the period of trouble had ended, and the period of comfort had arrived. At that time, I remembered a tradition of the Prophet in which it is said that the world is like a prison for the believer. When a believer's death comes, he will suddenly find himself in the gardens of Paradise. The trouble-filled stage of life in this world will suddenly

get over, and the age of comfortable life will begin at that moment.

The divine feelings hidden in my nature arose when the above incident happened. A material occurrence got converted into a spiritual experience. My heart prayed that God might bless me in just the same way. When I depart from the world, may it be like moving from a period of trouble and entering a period of comfort and peace!

Spirituality is an intellectual journey that lifts man from a material world and transports him to a world of meaningfulness. This journey happens at the inner level. Other people do not visibly see this journey happening, but the spiritual traveller himself experiences it deeply.

Spirituality makes a person an actual human being. If a person's life is bereft of spirituality, there is no difference between him and a beast.

LIFE OF PARADISE

Paradise is where all pleasures will be given to man abundantly and in complete form, and where man's limitations about the capacity to enjoy those pleasures will be done away with. As a result, Paradise will become a place of eternal joy for man.

Some years ago, I met a person. I told him that the present world is temporary, while the Hereafter is man's eternal abode. Therefore, a man should build his 'paradise' in the

eternal world. That person remarked that man gets bored after some time with a thing that gives him comfort or pleasure. Thus, there is a significant boredom problem in the 'developed' world. In such a situation, what is the use of eternal Paradise?

Those who do not believe in the Hereafter often talk like this. However, such talk is based on a misunderstanding. The Truth is that boredom happens because of the cessation of the capacity to enjoy rather than the desire to enjoy.

People who argue against the existence of the Hereafter using the above argument assume that after enjoying something, they get bored of that, which is why the thing no longer remains a pleasure for them. However, this suggestion is wrong. The reality is that man has an insatiable nature. Therefore, he wants to enjoy the things that he likes forever.

However, man is a victim of innumerable limitations in the present world. Thus, whenever a man wants to enjoy something he likes, his limitations become a hurdle in his path after a short time. Therefore, despite their desire, he loses the strength to derive joy from these things. For example, we relish the good taste of a dish we take. However, soon our stomachs become full, so we have to stop eating. Similarly, people often stop eating many things despite desiring them because they fear they will become obese and fall prey to various diseases. The same is the case with all other objects of pleasure. Boredom or lack of

interest limits our capacity to enjoy rather than limit our desires.

Paradise is where not only will all pleasures be given to man in greater quantity and a complete form but also where his limitations about the capacity to enjoy those pleasures will be done away with. In Paradise, it will no longer be that man wants to enjoy something, but he cannot do so because of his limitations. As a result, Paradise will become a place of eternal joy for man.

The boredom that man experiences in the world results from a contradiction. Man is an idealist by birth. He wants to obtain things in their ideal form. However, in this world, everything is non-ideal. It is the actual cause of boredom with things.

A man runs after something or the other in line with his desires. He thinks that this is the very thing that he has been seeking. However, after obtaining and experiencing it, he feels the same thing is much below his desirable ideal. This is why a man experiences the joy of searching for something in this world, but after obtaining that, he experiences no lasting pleasure.

There is a deceptive joy for man in the present world. There will be true joy in the Hereafter, but only for those who have proven eligible for it. Everything in the Paradise of the Hereafter will be ideal. The inhabitants of Paradise will experience true and unlimited joy. In Paradise, they will get whatever they want, and more will be added. There will be no question of boredom in that perfect world.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF PARADISE

According to the evolutionary law, the Earth is heading towards a superior stage. This will be the Earth's last evolutionary stage, which we can call the perfect world—Paradise.

What is Paradise? There is no mystery about Paradise. It is an accepted scientific fact, just like any other scientific fact. In reality, Paradise is a transformation of the Earth. The Earth was initially an inchoate, molten mass; then, it cooled down to its present state, taking the form of our world as we know it today. Similarly, another transformation will take place in the future, but to a far greater degree: at that time, our non-paradisiacal Earth will turn into Paradise.

In this world, many things are brought into existence due to conversion—for example, water results from converting two gases. A tree represents the conversion of the soil's nutrients. Machines are a conversion of iron from its crude state into complex mechanisms. The industrial world ensures the conversion of inert materials into socially valuable commodities.

In the same way, the conversion will take place on a far grander scale in the future. From the ideal world, this will change into a perfect world at that time. This instance of conversion is referred to in the Quran in the following verse: "When the earth shall be changed into another earth..." (14:48)

This process of conversion has repeatedly taken place on Earth. On our planet, conversion is a known and natural process. That is, it is a regular occurrence. Believing in Paradise is like believing in the continuance of a predictable series of events. It is just like saying about a factory that has produced 999 items, and now it is going to produce the thousandth item.

Paradise is not just a matter of religious belief or dogma. According to the eternal laws of Nature, Paradise is a state that is bound to come into existence. A study of the law governing earthly systems shows that the present world is undergoing a continuous evolutionary process, of which Paradise, logically, is the ultimate phase. Paradise is the natural culmination of creation with a definite beginning at a particular time.

Astronomical studies show that the Universe is so vast and expanding at such a rate that its total dimensions are yet to be estimated, even with the use of very powerful telescopes. In this immeasurably vast Universe, the Earth is a highly tiny planet. Our world is smaller than a grain of sand compared to this Universe.

Our Earth is a rare exception throughout the entire Universe because it is the only place where extraordinary things like water, greenery, air and oxygen are present. If life can prevail on this Earth, it is because, side by side with it, there are life support systems. All those valuable elements exist on Earth by utilising which man can if he

wills, build a civilisation. It is the task of human beings to convert this potential into reality.

It is evident that civilisation, passing continuously from one stage of its history to another, is moving from its initial stage of development to a higher plateau altogether. (For details, see the United Nations publication: “*The History of Mankind*”)

The Journey of Civilisation

This journey of human civilisation has been mentioned in the Quran regarding the changes that occur on Earth every day in the alternation of day and night. Similarly, a much bigger event shall take place on Earth. As the Quran puts it: “You will progress from stage to stage.” (84:19)

The evolution of history makes it clear that human civilisation is continuously advancing along the path of progress and development. The final model of this progress and development will be called “spiritual civilisation” or Paradise.

The history of civilisation shows that it has passed through three major phases, and now all the indications are that it is in the fourth and final stage of its journey. The three significant civilisation phases are as follows: 1. The Stone Age; 2. The Agricultural Age; 3. The Industrial Age.

It is a matter of common knowledge that these three phases of civilisation have already taken place. However, Alvin Toffler, author of the bestseller, *Future Shock*, says that the

fourth phase, probably the last period of civilisation, will occur in the future. This author calls this fourth phase the Super-Industrial Age, which will be less materialistic than the previous stages. Therefore, equating this fourth phase with spiritual civilisation would be more appropriate.

Let us take the first period of civilisation. It was a time when a man could only use whatever material was present in its original form on the Earth. The stone was the most readily available and useful of all the materials. Although many other things existed on the planet apart from stone, like wood and animals, and even a simple form of agriculture, stone took pride of place as the most widely used material; this phase came to be called the Stone Age. So far as early homo sapiens were concerned, he possessed the same natural qualities as the people of the present day. For example, the latest research has shown that the human brain contained one hundred billion particles during the Stone Age, no less than what is contained in the human brain today. It was only because of a lack of education and knowledge that man could not utilise his hidden potential at that time.

Then came the dawn of the agricultural period, during which man discovered more and more ways of harnessing Nature. This period saw the development of irrigation, ploughing, the rearing and breeding of animals, iron and carts with wheels. This way, leading a better life than the previous age became possible.

The industrial period began when man moved away from animal power and invented mechanical power. Now man converted water into steam power and made steam engines. There was a further leap forward when petrol was discovered and used for propulsion. Similarly, modern methods of communication were developed, which converted the whole world into a global village.

In the Industrial Age, by using mechanical power, man engaged in new enterprises such as the production of fast-moving vehicles, the rapid communication of news, the setting up of paper mills and the building of cities along modern lines.

In this way, a whole new world, beautiful and meaningful, came into existence, with a fresh viewpoint on education and learning, called industrial civilisation.

Alvin Toffler called the Super-industrial Age the fourth phase of civilisation. In his view, the most distinctive aspect of this age will be complete automation, i.e., the use of electronics will be on such a large scale that most jobs will be performed with the absolute minimum human control or intervention. In a normal situation, a man would, ideally, be able to fulfil all his requirements single-handedly.

The advent of automation is an advance intimation of the joys of Paradise. Indeed, of Paradise, the Quran says: "We are your companions in this life and the Hereafter. Therein you shall have all that your souls desire, and therein you shall have all you ask for as a rich provision from One who is ever forgiving and most merciful." (41:31)

From the scientific and academic standpoint, the facts mentioned above make the ideal age of the future—the “spiritual civilisation”—understandable in terms of being a super-industrial age.

This fourth phase of civilisation is yet to be completed, but in this phase, that ideal world—in religious terms, Paradise—will most probably take shape in the world Hereafter.

Paradise: Final Phase of Man’s Journey

Paradise is the final period of the journey of civilisation. By the law of Nature, such a world will exist in due course. All limitations and disadvantages will end: there will be no fear or grief, nor will there be any noise or pain. All those potentialities which have been apparent to a man from the very first day will be fulfilled in the world of Paradise.

Moreover, the human personality will also attain new heights of development. It will be the culmination point for man: he will become the perfect man. He will find an eternal life in which old age, accidents, disease, and death are absent. This will be the ideal world where a man can utilise the full potential of his personality, thus experiencing complete fulfilment.

Paradise will be the culminating point of the evolutionary process of human civilisation. Paradise will be the dawning of the perfect and ideal world man has always dreamt of. On reaching Paradise, man will be eternally free from all

sorrows and hardships. Paradise will be the perfect realm of joy, peace, and eternal happiness.

It should be borne in mind that Paradise is not a place of stagnation. In Paradise, man will make discoveries, and this series of findings will be unending. For this reason, there will be no boredom in Paradise because boredom prevails only where discoveries do not occur. To man, fresh experience is the most significant source of happiness, and in Paradise, the doors of eternal Truth will continue to open every day. Therefore, the pure bliss of Paradise will not be fleeting but genuinely eternal.

Paradise is just as possible as the making of the Earth and the development of different civilisations. In the ancient Stone Age, a developed agricultural period lay hidden, which emerged later. Similarly, the far more developed industrial period was hidden in the agrarian period and appeared at the proper time. So we can say that there lies hidden in this industrial period, a far more developed, refined, and spiritual period, which will appear in time for all to see. In practical terms, the emergence of this spiritual or heavenly period is as possible as that of previous periods of history.

In the industrial period, the Earth has once again been beautified. Its construction has been meticulously planned. Developments in science and technology have made the world a far better place to live in. Similarly, with the dawn of the final period, the spiritual age, the Earth will improve, becoming an ideal world. There are several verses in the Quran that give clear indications of this.

For instance, verse three of the 84th chapter of the Quran speaks of the Earth expanding, while another verse (39:74) says: “Praise be to God Who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us the inheritors of this land, letting us settle in the Garden wherever we want.” Furthermore, verse 21 of the 57th chapter of the Quran describes Paradise as “. . . vast as heaven and earth, which has been made ready for those who believe in God and His messengers.”

According to the Islamic tradition, the Earth was in charge of the Jinns in its beginning. Then it was handed over to human beings. Later, a period will ensue when the Earth will be entirely under the domination of the Angels. At that time, tremendous changes will be made to the planet, an ideal and perfect world in the most total sense of expression. This evolutionary period of the Earth has been referred to in the Quran:

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

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

Events have shown that the present state of the Earth is not ideal, even though Nature’s life support system exists in its perfect form on the planet earth. This system may be at its best on the planet, but one thing is far from ideal. Here, good and bad people exist alongside each other. The presence of seriously flawed individuals everywhere is the source of evil. However, when the final phase of civilisation

approaches, all the bad people will be separated from the good. The bad people will be deprived of all the Earth's resources, and the Earth will be entrusted solely to the good people. This is the Truth that has been mentioned in the following verse: "And indeed We have written in Az-Zabur, (Psalms) that My righteous servants shall inherit the land" (i.e. the land of Paradise). (21:105) This statement made in the Quran is recorded in detail in the Book of Psalms in the Bible: "The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell in it forever." (*Psalms*, 37:29)

Studies show that our Earth is a rare exception in this vast Universe. In the vastness of space, massive stars in multitudes outnumber the grains of sand on the seashore. However, many of these stars are only balls of fire. It is a known fact that these stars have remained in the same condition for the last thirteen billion years. Only our Earth is constantly changing and renewing itself in this stagnant Universe. Exceptionally, an evolutionary process is at work, for the Earth continues to witness one stage after another. Ten billion years ago, the Earth was just a fireball. Then it cooled down to become a temperate planet. Subsequently, a phase of heavy rains led to vegetation growth. Then came the animals. Lastly, the humans appeared. After the appearance of human beings, the process of civilisation set in on Earth. In the first phase, man could only build a primitive world. However, he became increasingly successful at constructing a highly developed world later. This human success goes hand in hand with a continuous

evolutionary process. Moreover, it is natural to believe that one more stage is in the offing of a perfect world—eternal Paradise in the Hereafter.

Paradise is not something mysterious; it is the final stage of the known evolutionary process. So far as animals are concerned, organic evolution is a baseless assumption. However, the periodic evolution of the non-living world is generally accepted. According to this natural law, the advent of Paradise is entirely understandable. Studies show that our Earth was a ball of fire approximately ten billion years ago before it became the fantastic planet we live on today. Then, when man first came to inhabit the Earth, there was a period of what we would now call under-development. After this came another evolutionary phase in the wake of the industrial revolution—a development period.

According to the evolutionary law, the Earth is heading towards a superior stage. This will be the last evolutionary stage of the planet, which we call the perfect world. In this ideal world, all types of limitations will end. By divine arrangement, justice will prevail in its most perfect form. The wicked will be removed from the Earth, and only the virtuous will enter this ideal world without pollution. Calamities will cease, and all disadvantages such as disease, accidents, old age and death will be eradicated forever.

All tasks are performed by hard work in the present world: hardship and success are inseparable. Such a state of affairs will no longer prevail in Paradise, for such refined changes

will occur that each activity will be enjoyable. As it is said in the Quran: "The people of Paradise shall be happily occupied on that Day." (36:55)

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

In response to his natural urges, the world that man has been searching for thousands of years will find in a state of perfection. He will find a life of joy, peace, and happiness forever. There will be no necessity for physical labour; pleasant intellectual activities will suffice to achieve all desired goals. Paradise is the final phase of the journey of human civilisation. Today we stand on the threshold of Paradise. In the world Hereafter, Paradise will be a reality.

DISCOVERY OF PARADISE

The present world is for engaging in actions that can make a person eligible for Paradise: It is not the place for building a 'paradise'. The right place for Paradise is in the Hereafter.

It was probably in 1983. There was an Englishman living in Delhi. He had read my books and had become quite familiar with my thinking. Once I mentioned to him that I was fond of pens. I said I had used many pens but had not found a pen I liked. He said he would soon go to London and fetch me a nice pen.

After some time, the gentleman met me and gave me a fountain pen. He mentioned that he had bought the pen in a market in Oxford after quite a search. He said that he knew I was a perfectionist and because in the world, no pen is a perfect pen, I would not like any pen!

The truth is that by birth, every person is a perfectionist. Therefore, it is right to say that man is a perfection-seeking being. It is this feature of human nature because of which almost every person is drowned in frustration, so much so that even those who have obtained all the things of the world are not exempt from this feeling. Therefore, by Nature, man is a perfectionist, but nothing is perfect in his world. In this way, there is a contradiction between man's desires and the things of the world. This incompatibility between the two is the real reason for man's frustration.

Man makes every effort, seeking to fulfil his desires. Finally, the time may come when he obtains wealth, power, and everything he desires. However, he feels as frustrated as before, even after getting the things he had hankered after. Even then, he is not able to feel contented.

Before obtaining something he desires, man thinks it is that particular thing whose desire he nurses in his heart. However, after receiving it, he does not find the peace and satisfaction that one should have in obtaining something one desires. This is because his desire was for something perfect, while everything in this world is imperfect, and a perfectionist cannot find peace and satisfaction in something imperfect.

There is only one solution to this problem: that man should make the perfect world of Paradise his goal or target. In the most total sense, Paradise is an ideal world, while the present world is only an imperfect place compared to it. Paradise is the perfect world that man has been seeking since his birth. However, because of their unawareness of Paradise, a man tries to fulfil his desires in this present world itself, and because of the incompatibility between his nature and the nature of this world, he becomes a victim of frustration.

The solution to this problem is just one—man should undergo a conscious inner revolution and obtain awareness of Paradise. After receiving this awareness, his frustration will end because he will come to know that the things he is searching for to satisfy his desires do not possess the ability to give him complete satisfaction and contentment. Following this discovery, his focus will be on Paradise of the Hereafter. After this, he will use the things of the world only at the level of his needs, not his desires. Moreover, when this transformation happens in a person, he will begin to live with a feeling of discovery and finding, rather than deprivation and frustration.

The present world is more a place of losing than of gaining. Here, every person repeatedly feels that he has lost something or some opportunity, that someone has caused him loss or harm, that he has been wronged, and so on. A person cannot save himself from such situations. Every person faces them. Now, the question is: What is the way

to make up for these losses? There is only one way, and that is firm and sure faith in Paradise. After facing every harm and loss in this world, the person who has faith in God's Paradise can say that worldly damage is very petty compared to the priceless Paradise. After every material loss, an individual will lean towards God more. He will become even more desirous of eternal Paradise.

The Quran mentions that the inhabitants of Paradise will 'have no fear, nor will they grieve' (2:38). It means that no one is bereft of fear and grief in the present world. The present world's system has been made so that attaining a life free of anxiety and grief is impossible. Given this, the only proper attitude for man is that he should not make this world his goal. He should give the world only the status of a road that leads to his true destination—Paradise.

This fact is expressed in a *Hadith* in the following words: "O God! There is no comfort, but the comfort of the Hereafter." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2961) To search for comfort and happiness in the present world is like a passenger trying to construct a mansion on a railway platform. An individual stays on a railway platform for only a brief period, so it is not the right place to build a mansion where he can live for a long time. The present world is a place for engaging in actions that can make a person eligible for Paradise: It is not the place for building a 'paradise'. The right place for Paradise is in the Hereafter.

To set Paradise as one's goal is not just a matter of religious belief. Instead, it is the very purpose of human life.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD

Accountability instills the fact in people's minds that their freedom is not absolute and that God will take account of everyone's words and deeds on the Day of Judgement.

In the present age, the most significant industry is the 'loophole industry'—finding ways to evade rules and laws. No matter how comprehensive it may be, any law is, after all, expressed in human language, which undoubtedly is a limited means of expression. It cannot encompass all aspects in an unlimited way. This is why loopholes exist or can be found in all the laws made in human language.

Some people can manage to find loopholes in almost every law. For example, a trader acts against a tax law. As a result, he does not pay as much tax as he legally should. The tax authorities, citing a clause in the tax laws, institute a case against him. The trader then employs a legal expert in exchange for a considerable fee. This legal expert studies the tax laws and discovers a legal point in which he finds that the particular tax law cannot apply to the trader.

This issue is not just of one trader and one legal expert. Instead, it is almost every person's case. People are often on the lookout to find a way to escape from some responsibility, thinking that others will not be able to do anything against them for this evasion or will not notice their dereliction of duty. It removes fear from their life, although it is impossible for a person to lead a disciplined life without an element of fear.

Belief in God is the only solution to this problem. It entails believing in a Being that is bigger than all humans and has ultimate control over every individual. He knows everything, and everyone is answerable to Him. He can punish everyone for their sins; no one is out of His grasp. In this way, belief in God introduces in man a particular aspect of fear, the presence of which is essential for human life.

God knows all things. He knows all the things that people reveal and all they conceal. He knows the condition of every heart. He knows what we think and how we feel. Wherever we may be, we are in God's sight. In no condition are we out of His reach.

Accountability comes from this concept of God. This belief instills the fact in people's minds that their freedom is not absolute and that God will take account of everyone's words and deeds on the Day of Judgement. God is continuously watching every person. God watches all of us constantly.

It is this understanding that makes a person God-fearing. When an aggregate of such people come together, they form a righteous society. Conversely, a society without accountability to God will fall prey to total anarchy.

Belief in God is necessary for the proper conduct of human life. Man repeatedly falls prey to temptations that cause him to give in to injustice and oppression. Only a living belief in God's omniscience can be a firm check on that tendency. It is only belief in God that can genuinely discipline him.

GOD'S CREATION PLAN

The necessity of belief in God for an individual and society is definite proof of God's existence. The fact that the proper conduct of human life is impossible without belief in God itself proves that God exists and that each person is accountable to Him.

Belief in God gives man certainty. It disciplines his life. It gives him the confidence and assurance that if he abstains from evil in his daily life and follows the path of virtue, he will simultaneously obtain benefits. First, he will be saved from God's chastisement. Second, he will earn an eternal reward for righteous living in eternal Paradise from God.

The belief in accountability to God is a belief in human progress. It acts as a powerful incentive for the perfection of humanity. This belief puts human life on the path of Truth so that it will never stop until the journey ends.

ELIGIBILITY FOR PARADISE

Paradise is for one who attains the realisation of His Creator at the level of *maarifah* while God is unseen and bows down before God while possessing the freedom to disobey Him.

Paradise is a blessing without limits. One will find it only by paying a high price for it. Very few fortunate people will be declared eligible to be settled in the world of Paradise.

The first test for admission into Paradise is that man attains the realisation of His Creator at the level of *maarifah*.

He should discover the Truth amidst a jungle of thoughts, views, beliefs, and ideologies. He should develop the insight to see those not visible to the physical eye. He should feel those things that cannot be supposed at the physical level. Passing by the tumult of the external world, he should become a traveller of the inner world.

Likewise, a condition for admission to Paradise is that man bows down before God while retaining the freedom to disobey. Ignoring all incentives of becoming self-centred, he becomes God-centred in the complete sense. He becomes genuinely devoted to God and God alone. Turning his face from innumerable centres of glitter and attraction, he devotes his full attention to God.

Admission to Paradise will be possible only for the person who, amid adverse conditions, always remains established in positive thinking. This person overcomes jealousy, pride, revenge, and other negative feelings. He unilaterally becomes the epitome of compassion and seeks the well-being of others. Even though he can resort to oppression and injustice, he never does so. In every condition and circumstance, he makes himself bound by justice.

Paradise is a beautiful divine colony. Therefore, only those souls who had subjected themselves to the process of purification in the present world will be admitted.

The present world is a world of tests. Here, every person becomes polluted in some way or the other. So now, every person should engage in a continuous process of

self-purification until his polluted personality is transformed into a purified personality.

A person of Paradise lives as a flower amidst thorns, who can become a tower of light amidst the darkness, who can obtain the secret of peace amidst earthquakes and storms, who gives proof of love amidst hatred, who, despite people's oppression, unilaterally forgives them, who experiences gain even in loss.

A person of Paradise is he who has become close to God, who sees the light of God in the rays of the sun, who experiences the divine touch in the gushing of the wind, who obtains an introduction to God's greatness in the heights of the mountains, who witnesses God's mercy in the flow of the rivers, who in the mirror of creation begins to see the glowing radiance of the Creator.

God has, through His prophets, explained the attributes of a person fit for Paradise. Therefore, while living in this world, a person who produces in himself paradisiacal attributes will, after death, be declared eligible for entry into Paradise.

Entry into Paradise will happen neither on any recommendation nor is it based on a connection to any revered personality. Neither will it happen based on any mysterious spiritual solutions. Instead, admission into Paradise is entirely based on a known reality—and that is, that the person who in the present world becomes and lives like a paradisiacal person will find admission in Paradise in the Hereafter.

THIS WORLD: A SELECTION GROUND FOR PARADISE

Paradise is for those who have purified themselves. Purification means that man should abandon a life of heedlessness and adopt a life of awareness. He should be strong enough to overcome desires which come in the way of achieving this goal. He should save himself from the things that can deviate him from the Truth. If a matter of expediency comes before him, he should ignore it. If pride or resentment arise, he should bury them inside himself.

THIS WORLD: A SELECTION GROUND FOR PARADISE

The Creator's aim is to select those who are fit to inhabit the world of Paradise. To test man, God has given him complete freedom to choose his actions. Only if he uses his freedom wisely, submits to God, will he qualify for Paradise.

Man has sought Paradise on Earth for thousands of years due to his natural urges. With the coming of the industrial revolution and the age of consumerism, the man thought that he could build a Paradise on Earth, that the industrial age would culminate into the perfect world—Paradise—that he longed for. However, the hopes that man could make a Paradise on Earth were dashed to pieces with the coming of pollution, acid rain, and global warming. Moreover, now the Covid-19 pandemic has made man realise to the last extent that he cannot build a Paradise on Earth.

Paradise will only be found in a state of perfection hereafter. In Paradise, man will find a life of joy, peace, and happiness forever. There will be no necessity for physical labour; pleasant intellectual activities will suffice to achieve all the desired goals. Man must realise that he stands on the threshold of Paradise. The present Earth is a Paradise-in-the-making, not Paradise itself. How can man achieve the Paradise of his dreams?

To find an answer to this question, one must become aware of the Creation Plan of God. God has created man according to His Plan. To become acquainted with this plan, a man must thoroughly understand himself. Just as the workings of a machine can only be understood when we study the engineer's drawings who made it. Besides the engineer's mind, there is no other thing to clarify what the machine is meant for. The case of man is the same. Only by understanding the Creation Plan of the Creator can we know the purpose of man's life.

Man's existence is such a unique phenomenon that no other such example can be found throughout the vastness of the cosmos. Man is rightly called the 'best of all creations,' which means the best and most meaningful 'being' among all the things created. Such a 'meaningful being' cannot have been created without a purpose. The Creator of man has created him according to a unique plan. The Quran, the only preserved religious scripture, sheds light on this plan. The Quran states:

“He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct.” (67: 2)

According to this verse of the Quran, the man was created as an eternal being, and ‘death and life’ represent both the pre-death and post-death periods of human life. So, death and life cover the entire eternal lifespan of human beings. The Creator of man has created him according to a unique plan. His intention is that man must spend a period of trial in this present, imperfect world, and after this, according to his deeds, he will earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world, another name for which is Paradise.

According to His will, God created a perfect world called Paradise: a world as per all of our desires as human beings, in that it is free of all limitations and disadvantages, free of fear and pain, and free of all imperfections. It would be an eternal world with neither death nor old age, an ideal world where we could achieve fulfilment.

Less-than-perfect beings cannot inhabit a perfect Paradise. So, God created perfection-seeking creatures—human beings. He intended us to spend a period of trial here on Earth. After this, we will earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world according to our deeds.

The essence of God’s creation plan is to give a person complete freedom—not simply as a gift, but as a test. This test would enable God to judge who misused his freedom and who put his freedom to the best use. This is the divine scheme of things for man. In the pre-death period of life, an individual has the chance to qualify himself for Paradise

so that in the post-death period of life, he may be settled as a deserving candidate in this perfect world.

This world, therefore, has all the components necessary for a test. However, it has perfection-seeking beings in a less-than-perfect world who have been given complete freedom to choose their actions. Thus, we have a choice—we can misuse our freedom to do evil or use our freedom wisely, submit to God, and qualify for Paradise. Those who misuse their God-given freedom are chastised thus in the Quran:

“This is the Truth from your Lord. Let him who will believe in it and who will deny it.’ For the wrongdoers, we have prepared a Fire that will cover them like a canopy, and if they beg for water, they will be given water as hot as molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a resting place!” (18: 29)

The Creator of the world has created this world as one half of a pair—the present world, in which we pass our lives after birth, is the first half; and the next eternal world, where we live after death, is the other half. The Creator of man has further created him as an eternal creature and has divided his life into the pre-death period, the life in this world, the post-death period, or the life after death. The limited period before death is meant to be a test for man, while the eternal period after his death will be the period for his reward or punishment, based on his performance in the test in this life.

According to this Creation Plan of God, human beings are placed in situations where they face hardships from time to

THIS WORLD: A SELECTION GROUND FOR PARADISE

time throughout their lives as part of their test. Difficulty and sadness are an integral part of the creation plan of the Creator. No man has the power to extricate himself from this life of trial and tribulation. This arrangement reminds man that the present world has not been made as a place of luxury and comfort but as a period of trial and will help determine whether he is eligible for eternal life in Paradise. It is the scheme of existence for this world devised by its Creator. The Creator's aim is to select those who are fit to inhabit the world of Paradise.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIVING IN GOD'S
NEIGHBOURHOOD

ALL PRAISE IS DUE TO GOD

Discovering God's greatness in the signs visible everywhere, one is compelled to say: 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds.'

One of the essential teachings of Islam is that on receiving anything, we should be grateful to God in acknowledgement of His bounty and utter these words 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds.' Praise of God, in its true spirit, is the essence of the Quran. After accepting Islam, a believer's inmost feelings find expression in these words of praise.

Man's existence is a blessing from God. Man's extremely balanced body is a blessing from God. The entire world created so favourably for man is a blessing from God.

When this reality dawns on man, and he realizes God's immeasurable blessings upon him, his soul is filled with gratefulness to God. His greatness overawes his heart and mind. At that moment, words of acknowledgement of God—'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds' spontaneously come to his lips.

God is All-Powerful. God is the Giver, man is the taker. The only thing man can offer Him is acknowledge His blessings. The moment of man's greatest worship of God is when God's glory and greatness pervade his soul; when he recognizes God's divinity as compared to man's servitude; when, in full awareness of his helplessness, he comes to acknowledge God's bounties in the true sense of the word.

DISCOVERY OF GOD

When man discovers God with all His attributes, his soul lies prostrate before Him. His whole being turns towards God. The feelings inspired in him by God's bounties surge within him like ocean waves. When all these feelings find verbal form, they are called praise and gratefulness to God.

God is the greatest Being, yet in the universe, God remains invisible. But His supreme glory is visible in His creation. Therefore, the realisation of God can be attained through discovering His greatness in the signs visible everywhere. This realisation finds expression in words such as 'praise be to God—Lord of the worlds'.

DISCOVERY OF GOD

Man's trial rests on his discovery of God Who is in the unseen. Realisation of God means that man begins to feel the presence of God.

What is the test of man in this world? It is to discover and realize God Who is in the unseen. Discovery of God means that man begins to have psychological experiences of the presence of God. Everything has a price. And the price for the discovery of God is to tear down the element of doubt and see the higher reality. Only those who apply themselves with total dedication to discovering God can succeed. Man's mind has been given unlimited potential. The number of particles in the human mind is believed to equal all particles in the universe. Man has been granted

this extraordinary capacity to use it to discover the Highest Reality—that is, God.

Man's trial rests on discovering God, Who is in the Unseen. Before seeing Him, man should voluntarily surrender himself before God. He should be so desirous of Paradise that this world appears meaningless to him. He should adopt divine ethics without any external pressure on him to do so. He should develop his intellectual and spiritual being to such an extent that he produces in himself the ability to inhabit the refined world of Paradise. Paradise is a heavenly colony where peace, love, and noble character prevail. Of this world's inhabitants, only those who have succeeded in maintaining a high moral character will find a place in Paradise.

According to the creation plan of God, this limited world in which man finds himself before death has all the necessary ingredients for the 'trial'. It has man as the perfection-seeking creature in a less-than-perfect world where he has been given complete freedom. Man, thus, has a choice to misuse his freedom by creating havoc, killing people, living a life of leisure, or using his freedom wisely by submitting to an unseen God and qualifying for Paradise.

LOVE OF GOD

The Quran says: "Remembrance of God gives one's heart peace of mind". (13:28) This means that it is only the love of God which can give man peace of mind in the real sense.

The strongest human feeling or emotion is that of love. When man makes something his foremost concern, it naturally happens that a feeling of love becomes associated with that thing. In religious terminology, this is called "deification". The thing one loves the most is one's deity or the object of one's worship, whether or not one utters this word.

Faith in God is for man to discover God to the extent of loving Him more than anything else. The Quran says that "those who believe love God most." (2:165) This means that one who loves God the most has made God his object of worship.

Genuine love for God will find expression in many ways. Even uttering such words as praise, thanksgiving, and remembrance, as we find in the Quran, also expresses our love for God. It would be right to say that Alhamdulillah, Praise be to God, signifies love for God. Praising God means loving God. Gratitude to God also means loving God. Remembering God also indicates a strong love and affection for God.

The Quran says: "Remembrance of God gives one's heart peace of mind". (13:28) This means, moreover, that it is

only the love of God which can give man peace of mind in the real sense.

Belief in God begins with the discovery of God. In the Quran, this discovery is called *maarifah*, or the realization of God. When the realization of God becomes part and parcel of one's existence in the real sense, all those high and noble manifestations expressed in such words as love, gratitude, and remembrance of God come into evidence.

Love of God is a part of faith. This has been a part of the teachings of many revealed religions. For example, in the Bible, it is stated in both the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament that:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.' (Matthew, 22:37; Deuteronomy, 6:5)

Love of God is not something mysterious. On the contrary, it is the highest degree of acknowledgement of God. When a person discovers God, becomes aware of God's blessings, and realizes that his existence and entire life are replete with God's blessings, a strong affection wells up within his heart. This strong affection is called the love of God.

To love God is to love the Sustainer of the Universe. Such love is an emotional relationship and brings about a revolution within the human personality. Love of God produces many elevated human qualities, for example, positive thinking, well-wishing for others, trust, courage, and so on.

PURPOSE OF MAN'S CREATION

In relation to God, love is the highest degree of discovery; with reference to man, it means developing human-friendly behaviour. Calling people to God with well-wishing is also a manifestation of the love of God.

When anyone establishes a relationship with God which is imbued with love, he naturally has a strong urge to convey the message of God to the people so that none of God's servants is deprived of the eternal mercy of their Lord.

PURPOSE OF MAN'S CREATION

As per the divine plan, man must develop his personality in the pre-death period, so that he is selected as a deserving candidate for Paradise—his habitat—in the post-death period.

The well-known American evangelist Billy Graham (born 1918) narrates one of his life's experiences. Once, he received an urgent message from an American statesman who wanted to meet him at the earliest. On receiving this message, Billy Graham cancelled his appointments and immediately set out to meet this man. When he arrived at the statesman's palatial home, he was immediately taken to a room, where Billy Graham and the statesman sat on chairs facing one another. Then, in a serious tone, the statesman said to Billy Graham:

“You see, I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man,

can you give me a ray of hope?" (The Secret of Happiness, Billy Graham, 1955, p.2)

This is a common question. Every man and woman—consciously or unconsciously—has this question in his or her mind. This is the first concern of every human being. To find the real answer we have to try to understand the Creation Plan of God. God is the Creator of this world. And only by gaining an understanding of the Creator's Plan can we get the right answer to the question.

The Reason for the Mismatch of Man and the Present World

The Quran, the preserved book of God, gives an answer to this question. According to the Quran, man is born as an eternal being, but his life span is divided into two parts: the pre-death period and the post-death period. The pre-death period is very short, and the post-death period is eternal.

Everyone feels that they have enormous desires, but they are not able to fulfil them. The reason is that the present world is an imperfect world with many kinds of limitations.

This means that there is a contradiction between man's nature, which seeks fulfilment of his desires, and the world, which is incapable of fulfilling man's desires. Man, by nature, wants a world where his personality can find total fulfilment, but the present world fails to provide such fulfilment.

Sir James Jeans in his book, *The Mysterious Universe*, has rightly pointed out this fact in these words: 'It appears that man has strayed into a world that was not made for him'.

According to the Quran, the present earth is not a habitat for man forever. Man's eternal habitat lies in the world Hereafter. In accordance with this divine plan, man must develop his personality in the pre-death period, so that he is selected as a deserving candidate for this habitat, or Paradise in the post-death period.

How Can One Gain Entry Into Paradise?

Man is born with total freedom. The only requirement for finding entry into Paradise is that he should use his freedom responsibly and avoid any kind of misuse of this freedom. It is the divine criterion that will decide whose case was one of proper use of freedom and whose was that of misuse. As the Quran tells us:

"We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds—theirs shall be an unending reward! What then after this, can make you deny the Last Judgement? Is not God the greatest of the judges?"
(The Quran, 4-8)

It means that while man is born as a complete personality, his present abode, planet Earth, is incomplete. Because of this disparity, man's condition on Earth becomes like that of a fish out of water. The disparity between man's nature and the inability of the present-world to fulfil all his desires

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arouses the need in man to find his real habitat. This habitat is Paradise. Only those men and women will find entry into Paradise who qualify as deserving candidates for it. The planet Earth is a selection-ground for this purpose.

The Quran tells us about Paradise in these words:

“Therein you shall have all that your souls desire, and therein you shall have all that you ask for.” (The Quran, 41:31)

The Quran mentions all aspects of Paradise in detail and then guides man in these words: “For the like of this, that all should strive.” (The Quran, 37:61)

MAN'S QUEST

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in this world.

Much as we long for a perfect world, we are compelled to live in an imperfect one. Our happiness is always short-lived, and our every success is, in some way, eventually a failure. The aspirations that we cherish in the early days of our lives are shattered as we begin to age. Human life in this world is marred by disaster, sickness, old age, and eventually death.

How beautiful the flowers are, but they blossom only to wither. How delicate the sun's radiance, but it shines for only

a short while before being covered in darkness. Miraculous though man's existence is, no miracle can save him from death. Everything in this world shall perish. Although this world is inexpressibly beautiful and meaningful, all its virtues are bound to fade. All mundane things have a dark side to them. How, one may ask, could a God Who is perfect be satisfied with the creation of an intrinsically imperfect world? This world is imperfect. Another world must follow to compensate for the inadequacies of the present one.

There is no doubt about the transitory nature of this world. It came into existence at a specific time, some 13 billion years ago. Therefore, its Creator must have existed eternally, for only an infinite Creator could have fashioned a finite universe. If God had not always existed, this transitory world could never have come into being. Therefore, the very existence of an ephemeral universe shows that there must be an eternal Creator. If the Creator had not existed eternally, He could never have existed at all, and if there had been no Creator, there would have been no creation either.

If we assert that the world was created on a specific date, a Creator must have existed before that date. If we argue that this Creator was Himself created on some previous date, however, our claim can have no meaning. The Creator cannot Himself have been created; He always was. In His infiniteness, He has created a finite world. His existence and that of all mortal creatures depend on His immortality.

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Since God is immortal, He must also be absolute, for absoluteness is the greatest attribute of immortality. One cannot be found without the other.

This world manifests God's attributes, but its shortcomings and limitations show the manifestation to be incomplete. A complete manifestation of a perfect and infinite God would be perfect and infinite. Therefore, another world must be awaiting us. This incomplete manifestation of God's attributes requires a sequel for its fulfilment.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us. Paradise is evidence of God's absolute power to make beauty perpetual and joy boundless in a world of everlasting peace and contentment.

MAN'S TEST

Man is a masterpiece of divine creation. Therefore, the proper attitude for man is to remain subservient to God and build his life according to His Creation Plan.

Man is God's servant. God has created man with a plan, that is, to place him temporarily on Earth to test him. Then those who pass this test will be rewarded with eternal Paradise, while those who fail will be rejected outright.

For this test, man has been granted freedom in this world. Whatever man receives in this world is not a matter of right

MAN'S TEST

but only a matter of trial. Every situation here is a test; man must perform adequately in all conditions, as God requires.

The proper attitude for man is not to take to the path of his desires but to try to understand the divine plan of creation, and then after being convinced of its ineluctability, build his life accordingly.

Man may deviate from the divine plan by misusing the freedom given to him by God, but he cannot save himself from the consequences of this deviation.

In such a state of affairs, it is in man's interest that he remains highly cautious in determining the course of his life. Instead of being guided by his will and desires, he should make God's will his guide. Instead of pursuing his desires, he should lead a life in conformance with God's commands.

Man may be a masterpiece of divine creation, but he must remain subservient to God's plan. Making a full acknowledgement of these two aspects of the existence of humanity is the key to human progress.

Man succeeded in building a modern industrial civilization by discovering and exploiting the laws of nature. Similarly, in the next world, man will achieve lasting success on a much vaster scale, but only after striving earnestly to comprehend the creation plan of God for humanity and then adhering unflinchingly to its edicts.

THE CHALLENGE OF MAN

In the world before death, we should be content with what we have and patiently persevere in the face of challenges so that in the world after death, we may be eligible for Paradise, where there is complete fulfilment of desires.

In line with the law of nature, man is born in such conditions that his entire life passes in toil. Accordingly, arduous struggle and sorrow are a necessary part of the Creator's creation plan. No person has the power to save himself from this course of toil in this world of test.

In the life of this world, sorrow and toil are part of the Creator's creation plan. This system exists so that man can be reminded that the present world has not been made for him as a place to make merry but as a sort of examination hall. The present world exists so that man can pass through different situations. Amidst these situations, it is decided whether a person is worthy of being settled in the eternal world of Paradise or not. Those people who, passing through these situations, give the desired response will be lodged in eternal Paradise in the Hereafter, while those who do not provide the proper and desirable response will live in eternal deprivation.

This state of toil remains intact in this world. However, people do not understand its reality because of unawareness of God's creation plan. By wrongly reacting against it, they fail in the examination of life.

These days, big companies claim to be engaged in the work of 'de-stressing'. They try to provide peace of mind to people by asking them to stop thinking. However, stopping the mind's thought process is only a form of temporary anaesthesia. It is not the real solution to the problem. The only real solution to it is just one—and that is stress management.

It is common to observe that victims of problems often get engaged in social services. It is just a way of diverting one's mind to get over grief, but this is not necessarily a proper response to the issue of 'toil'. Social service is a service to humanity; in this sense, it is undoubtedly a praiseworthy activity. However, if seen in relation to the creation plan of nature, an unwanted element might be present in it. The psyche of a person who experiences misfortune or problems in life is: "Let no one suffer what I have suffered." This seems to be the motivation for people who engage in social service.

This psyche tells us that man considers all issues simply as worldly issues. To him, all problems relate only to this world. The most significant act, he thinks, is to make the world a problem-free place. However, this thinking is against nature's creation plan, so it will never fructify here. Whenever someone faces an unpleasant experience, it is so that he should derive a lesson from it. He should remember that the present world is a world of test. Here, no one will ever obtain a life of total comfort. Therefore, man should learn lessons from the negative experiences of the world.

He should awaken within himself the consciousness that he will never attain the ideal life of his dreams in this limited world. He should search for the perfect life he desires in the unlimited world of the next period of life, that is, in the Hereafter.

In this situation, the true lesson one should derive from unpleasant experiences is that man should remember Paradise of the next world. He should awaken this thought: "Let me not suffer in the Hereafter that I have suffered in this world."

Prosperous is he who, while in the temporary world, has recognized the eternal world, who, in the failures of the present world, has discovered the secret of the lasting success of the next period of life.

God made the present world according to a plan that every person should be engaged in 'toil'. But, Paradise in the next eternal world will be totally free from sorrow, and only those with whom God is pleased will get a place there. Not understanding this fundamental point about life creates the problems mentioned above.

If you view the issue in the light of God's creation plan, you will discover that the root of all human problems is that people want to make their 'paradise' in the world before death; whereas here, the conditions needed for this purpose are not present. Just as on sand or quicksand, no building can stand; in the same way, in the present world, no one can build his 'dream palace', his ideal world. When man fails to create a perfect world for himself here in line with

LAWLESSNESS IN THE HUMAN WORLD

natural law, he often becomes a victim of negative reaction, leading to further devastation. The right thing for man to do in this regard is to acknowledge the law of creation and develop a plan for his life in line with it. Moreover, this plan is just one—while still here, in this present world, he should strive to make himself the sort of desirable person who in the world, after death, will be deemed eligible for entry in Paradise.

Thus, according to God's creation plan, in the world before death, we should be content with what we have and patiently persevere in the face of challenges, no matter how harsh they might seem, so that in the world after death, we may be held eligible to find a place in Paradise, where there is complete fulfilment of desires.

LAWLESSNESS IN THE HUMAN WORLD

God has given man freedom to test him. So, some people use their freedom correctly, while others misuse it. But after the Day of Judgment, only those who used their freedom correctly will be admitted into the ideal world of heaven.

The strangest thing in the world is how people love to boss others around, how cunningness seems to be the rule rather than the exception, how good-hearted people seem to count for nothing, and how sycophants rule the roost, while honest people, who do not hesitate to call the truth

as the truth and falsehood as falsehood, have no respect or popularity here.

All this is happening in a world that, in its essence, is flawless—where a single tree stands as a stunningly beautiful model of perfection, where birds know of no other song but of beauty and peace, where the sun and the moon cannot help but pour out their light, where no star trespasses into the orbit of another to plant its flag forcibly!

Observing this contradiction between man and the rest of the cosmos, some people claim that there are two gods: one, the God of light, and the other, the God of darkness. Some others argue that there is no God at all. They maintain that if there were indeed a God, why is there such lawlessness in the human world?

But the reality is that this world is a testing ground where we are constantly being examined. The ideal world will come after death. The whole of creation other than man is a preliminary glimpse, as it were, of that perfect world. Just as the rest of creation fully obeys God, human beings will do the same in the world to come. As of now, in the present world, they enjoy God-given freedom. They can choose to obey God, like the rest of creation, but they can also choose to disobey Him—the test they are constantly given concerns their choice to use this freedom.

To be tested in this world, it is necessary that human beings should have complete freedom of action. So, some people use their freedom correctly, while others misuse it. But after the Day of Judgment, only those who used their

QUALIFICATION FOR THE IDEAL WORLD

freedom correctly will be admitted into the ideal world of heaven. Everyone else will be gathered together and dumped in a universal litterbin, just as rubbish is collected and thrown away.

QUALIFICATION FOR THE IDEAL WORLD

One needs to have two qualifications to be eligible for Paradise in the Hereafter: one is to acknowledge the truth of the one God, and the other is to lead a principled life.

In the present world of trial, to be eligible for Paradise, any man or woman needs to have two qualifications: one is to acknowledge the truth of one God, and the other is to lead a principled life. Those men and women who qualify for this test will be given a place in Paradise where all their desires will be fulfilled. Those who fail this test shall spend their lives in eternal deprivation.

In the present world, man finds himself free. However, this freedom does not belong to him as a matter of right but is a test paper. Man must acknowledge the truth of One God and surrender to Him—not by compulsion but by his own choice. This surrendering before the One God is, without doubt, the greatest sacrifice that any man can make. Acknowledging the truth of One God is like making oneself smaller, not only to God but to others as well. But this is the virtue that will raise man to the highest position. It will take him to the very entrance to Paradise.

The second important thing in this set of requirements is to lead a principled life. Generally, man's character is moulded by his emotions—anger, revenge, jealousy, hatred, rivalry, etc. These are the negative feelings that shape man's personality. But what man ought to do is to become disciplined in such matters. He should not build his character under the influence of external incentives but by his own decisions; he should establish it based on higher principles. This is what is called a divine character.

GOD-FEARING PEOPLE

The whole life of one who is convinced of the Truth changes. He shuns irresponsible behaviour, egoism, and arrogance. He becomes an obedient servant of God.

Prophet Muhammad was asked what counted as more important for a person to find a place in Paradise. The Prophet replied: "Fearing God and having the best moral character." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 2004)

The greatest success for a person is that he should lead such a life in this world that when he dies, he finds a place in Paradise where he will have a life of eternal happiness. The secret of this successful life has been explained in this tradition.

The most essential things in this connection are the acceptance of the greatness of God, remaining ever mindful of Him and regarding oneself as accountable to

TWO TYPES OF SOULS

Him, believing that one cannot save oneself from God's chastisement. All one's deeds, open or hidden, are in the knowledge of God, and that no strategy can save oneself from standing before God after death.

The whole life of one who is convinced of this truth changes. The permissiveness of his life is replaced with restraint. He avoids irresponsible behaviour, and shuns egoism, arrogance, and other such negative feelings. On all issues, he becomes an obedient servant of God.

Another quality of a God-fearing person is that his character becomes heavenly. He starts leading his life in this world just as the people Paradise will live in the Hereafter. In his heart, he cherishes feelings of well-wishing for others. He speaks good words and refrains from harshness. He meets other people as if he were meeting with his brothers and sisters. While dealing with others, he always adheres to what is just. He adheres to moral principles in his dealings. These are some of the characteristics of the people of Paradise.

TWO TYPES OF SOULS

In the present world, man is free to choose between two courses: he can accept God's greatness and surrender before Him or he can live in his own glory.

The Quran says: "He who purifies it (his soul) will indeed be successful, and he who corrupts it is sure to fail."
(91: 9-10)

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The present world is a testing ground for us before the life of the Hereafter dawns. It is an opportunity for us to prepare for the Hereafter. If you leave this world and enter the world of the Hereafter as a noble and pure soul, you will be settled in the delightful environs of heaven. And if you depart from this world for the world of the Hereafter as a soul laden with evil, you will be hurled into the universal dustbin for all eternity.

The present world is, as it were, God's nursery. Different types of plants are grown in a nursery. The gardener inspects all of them. Those that he does not want, he plucks out and throws away. And the ones he finds desirable, he carefully lifts from their beds so they can grow and flourish in a garden.

In the present world, you are free to choose between two courses. You can choose to purify your soul or to pollute it. You can accept God's greatness and surrender before Him or you can live in your own glory. When you are faced with the truth, you can choose to acknowledge it unhesitatingly. You can be concerned about the welfare of others and be just in your dealings with others. Whether in friendship or enmity, you can willingly choose to obey God's will instead of your whims or the prodding of your ego. If this is how you choose to be and opt to lead your life, you have cleansed your soul. And you will then be settled in the beautiful world of God's Heaven.

But, on the other hand, you can choose to be immersed in your self-perceived greatness. When confronted with the

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH

Truth, you can choose not to accept it. In your dealings, you can choose to be unjust and cruel. You can choose to follow your own will, not God's will. If you behave in this way, you have polluted your soul. The Lord of this universe will not accept you in His neighbourhood.

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH

The temporary period of man's life before death is a preparation ground and the eternal period of life after death, is where one reaps the reward for one's actions.

The dictionary defines death as the permanent cessation of life. Unfortunately, this dictionary definition of death presents a negative picture of death. It reminds us that man may have been born as a complete man, but his life ended after a very limited period. That is why his desires remained unfulfilled.

Compared to this definition, Islam presents a positive concept of life, according to which death marks the second phase of human life. According to Islam, man has been created as an eternal being. Then his lifespan has been divided into two phases—life before death and life after death. The period of life before death is a preparation ground, while the period after death is when one reaps the reward for one's actions. According to this creation plan, man ought to regard the period of life before death as a preparatory period and must spend all of it in preparation

for the second phase. On the other hand, the stage of life after death is only for reaping the reward for one's actions and not for further action.

The event of death is indeed a message for life. The message is: what you have to do, do today itself in the life before death as no one will be given time for preparation in the afterlife. Successful is one who prepares for eternal Paradise in his life before death.

REMEMBERING DEATH

Remembering death is the best means of self-correction. Everyone will face death, after which one can no longer act but only face the consequences of one's actions.

Man is an intensely sensitive being. He cannot easily tolerate any difficulty, no matter how small. Therefore, people must reflect on how they will live amidst very difficult conditions after they die if that happens to them. If we ponder over this issue thoughtfully, it can create a revolution in our lives.

The Quran says that when the inhabitants enter Paradise, they will say: "Praise be to God Who has taken away all sorrow from us." (35:34). A life of pain is the most intolerable thing for a human being. A life free of pain is the most desirable thing for a person. If we reflect on this matter with the attention it deserves, death will become our most significant concern. We will think more about death than about life.

Realizing that we all must die can be a ‘masterstroke’. In the game of caroms, a ‘masterstroke’ is a stroke that causes all the coins on the board to shift from their present position. In the same way, if we develop an awareness of our eventual death, our whole life will be completely transformed.

Ignoring the reality of our death makes us unaware of our reality. In contrast, remembrance of our death makes us fully aware and alert.

Awareness of death makes a person very serious about life. The most significant concern for such a person is to realize who he is and what his future is. “What is my life?” he asks. “What is my death? What do I need to do in the phase of life before death? What is going to happen to me in the phase after death?”

Remembrance of death makes a person serious about the affairs of life. He begins to take stock of his life at every moment. If a person seriously thinks about death, it would change the entire focus of his life. His life would become Hereafter-oriented from being solely present-world-oriented.

Someone who has adopted the path of worldliness, of worship of the world, is busy, at every moment, trying to earn worldly wealth. This is made possible for him because he derives pleasure through his busyness. He thinks he will construct a magnificent worldly future for himself. But if he knew that one day he would have to leave all his material acquisitions behind and depart from this world, he would no longer have any interest left in his occupation.

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This realization would become a means for new thinking to develop in him. He will now think: "If nothing of the worldly wealth I have earned will accompany me, I need to change the direction of my activities."

If you get angry with someone and want revenge on him, the thought of death can change your life's direction. You will think: "When my taking revenge cannot harm anyone in the eternal sense, why should I waste my time doing that?"

Awareness of death serves as a reminder for us. It helps us reform our behaviour. It can take us away from negative actions and make us busy doing good actions. This thinking is a powerful means of self-correction. Awareness of death makes us serious about life and realistic in our approach. Death reminds us that one day we will have to depart from this world of humans and enter the world of God.

Every person will have to face death someday or the other. After death, one can no longer act but only face the consequences of one's actions.

FULFILMENT IN PARADISE

The present world is just an introduction to Paradise. Those who discover God and mould their life according to His Creation Plan will attain Paradise in the Hereafter.

Paradise is the name of the ideal world, the desire for which is lodged in the hearts of all human beings. In Paradise,

man's personality shall achieve fulfilment in the complete sense. Man desires Paradise with every fibre of his being, and Paradise in all its entirety awaits him.

Paradise is a world where man attains his complete fulfilment, where he thinks the way he wants to think; where he sees what he desires to see; where he listens to the sounds that give pleasure to his ears in the real sense; where he touches those things which give him the highest degree of pleasure; where he has the company of those people who make his life highly meaningful, where the winds are life-giving zephyrs for him, where he eats such food as he eternally craved for and he sips such drinks as are only beautiful figments of his imagination today.

Paradise, hidden from our eyes due to the exigencies of man's trial, has been created for man alone. However, entry to this world of Paradise has been restricted. Entry will be given only to those pure souls who have brought with them the necessary qualification.

Paradise has been brought into existence in the world after death. The stage before death is one of preparation, and the stage after death is to receive the reward commensurate with this preparation.

The present world is just an introduction to Paradise. It is not Paradise in itself. The present world is a passageway and not a destination. It is the place for preparation and not for reaping the harvest. The present world is full of limitations. It does not have the means to fulfil the unlimited desires of man. It has all the necessary components for man to

prepare himself for Paradise, but it is not a place to achieve fulfilment of his desires.

A paradisiacal person, one fit to inhabit Paradise, is such an ardent seeker of Paradise that he begins to feel like he is living in Paradise while remaining physically in this world. If he has found Paradise in terms of such a feeling in this world; in the next world, he will physically become a resident of Paradise.

We can say that to be held eligible for entry into the perfect world of Paradise in the Hereafter, we must discover God's Creation Plan. According to this Plan, we must spend a period of trial in this imperfect world, and according to our deeds, we will earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world—Paradise. We are, therefore, placed in situations where we face hardships from time to time throughout our lives as part of our test. Our desire for Paradise should make this world seem insignificant to us. We should discover and submit to our Creator while He is unseen and willingly adopt divine ethics. We should develop ourselves intellectually and spiritually so we will be found eligible for the citizenship of the refined world of Paradise by God Almighty.

A BUD THAT WILL BLOOM IN HEAVEN

If you willingly surrender before the Truth, and respond positively in the face of trials and tribulations you prove yourself deserving of Paradise.

Quran says: ‘He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them.’ (47:6)

Elsewhere, it says about the people of Paradise: “Whenever they are given fruit to eat, they will say, ‘This is what we were provided with before,’ because they were given similar things.” (2:25)

A tradition of the Prophet of Islam relates that Heaven and Hell result from the actions of people returned to them. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2577)

From the above, we learn that entry into heaven begins in this very world itself. A heavenly person obtains his heaven in this world itself. It is as if a replica of heaven exists in this world and that only he will enter Heaven in the Hereafter who had attained this replica of Heaven while living in this world. This worldly replica of heaven is, as it were, a cash award granted to someone before the real reward, as a preliminary indication or symbol of the heavenly reward after death.

Who are these heavenly people? They are those who experience the psychological states that make them eligible for heaven in the Hereafter. In the words of the Quran, “True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe

at the mention of God, and whose faith grows stronger as they listen to His revelations.” (The Quran, 8:2)

They are acutely aware of being accountable to God. Expelling all feelings of envy, malice and revenge from their hearts, they experience divine forgiveness. In their tears of repentance, they have seen the mercy of a beneficent Master who forgives His servants for their mistakes. They forgive others so their Lord will forgive them. They willingly surrender themselves before the Truth.

People of Paradise are like flowers of the garden of heaven. In this world, they are, as it were, buds that will bloom in heaven in the world to come. Everyone's Heaven and Hell is hidden in the different types of conditions one faces in life. In the face of such situations, if you react negatively, you prove yourself eligible for eternal deprivation. If you respond positively, you establish yourself as qualified for Heaven.

ETERNAL BLISS OR ETERNAL DEPRIVATION

Death means eternal bliss for some and eternal deprivation for others. Fortunate are those who find themselves on the threshold of Heaven at the time of death.

The greatest calamity afflicting our world is that one million people die every day. No one knows, of those

who are alive today, who will be dead tomorrow. Every one of us shall taste death, but no one knows when death will come. We do not know which of our fellow men will leave this world tomorrow, and who will remain to receive this message.

Every man born in this world has to enter another world after death. In this world, man has been granted all the opportunities as a matter of test. Whatever man receives in the next world will be purely based on his deeds in this world. This means that before death, man has been given many things and opportunities, whether or not he deserves them. After death, one will receive in the Hereafter only what he deserved on the basis of his performance in this life.

Death is not the end of our lives; it is the beginning of our real life. After death man will be brought before the Lord for final judgement. The angel who is to announce the Last Day is ready and waiting with the trumpet in his hand for God to give the order to sound it. This will be a most terrifying time for man. He will want to speak, but will be struck dumb. He will want to walk, but his legs will not carry him. All disparity between men will disappear on the Day of Judgement. Fear of God will seal everybody's tongue. Injustice will benefit no one; truth will be inescapable. Man will stand alone, answerable for his actions.

Man has many concerns in this world, but after death he will be concerned with one thing alone: saving oneself

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from being deprived of God's blessings. If one has ample time at one's disposal, one engages in many tasks. But if time is short then one concentrates on the most important task.

No time is fixed for death. It can come at any moment. This fact makes death an even more delicate issue. Everyone is on the move and everyone's journey ends in death. Death means eternal bliss for some and eternal deprivation for others. Fortunate are those who find themselves on the threshold of Heaven at the time of death; they will dwell in eternal bliss; they will know neither grief nor apprehension.

SALVATION

Salvation in Paradise is for those who, despite having done every kind of good deed, attach no value to it and realize that only God's mercy can gain them entry into Paradise.

What is the most outstanding issue facing man in this world? It is how to secure salvation in the life after death so that he may find his true abode and share in God's eternal blessings.

God has created this world as a place of trial for man. Salvation is for those who prove themselves eligible for settling in the ideal world of Paradise in the Hereafter. God seeks those who manage to see God despite His invisibility, who obey God and devote their lives to Him; who tremble

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on remembering death; and realize that the present world is the place for action, while the next world is the place for reaping the reward for one's deeds. Those who display such character will be welcomed in Paradise in the Hereafter.

God's blessings will be given to those who earned it; who prepared themselves in this world so they may be held deserving of Paradise. But those who have done nothing to earn God's blessings will not have anything in store for them in the Hereafter. They will be compelled to live in a state of utter deprivation. To ensure that one is not deprived of God's blessings, one must work hard for one's life in the next world while living in this world. Salvation would elude the one who fails in this matter.

The next world is the perfect and eternal world where all kinds of pleasure and happiness are in store for man. Man should earnestly aspire for this. But the time for action to secure a place in that blessed world is not the world after death but the world before death. Salvation in the life Hereafter is only for those who prove themselves deserving.

We should understand that Paradise will not be given to anyone purely based on the quantum of his good deeds. It will be provided, instead, by the mercy of God Almighty. The preferred ones are those unique people who, despite having done every kind of good deed, have attached no value to their actions. They realize that they will gain entry into Paradise only when God's mercy envelopes them.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

On Judgement Day, God will appear before mankind. Those who had been considered worthless and rejected in the world will be raised in value and accepted in God's sight.

The Day of Judgment is sure to come—God has decreed it. No one can delay it, nor can anyone save himself from it. What an awe-inspiring day it will be when God sits in judgement. No one will be able to be defiant or proud. Those who were loquacious in the world will be rejected by God. Those who were thought of as mighty and powerful in the world will be reduced to powerlessness. Those who feigned piety in the world will be exposed for the impious beings they really were.

People eat, drink and make merry in this world. They establish themselves in comfortable homes. They seek to win promotion in life. They believe or reject matters at will. They feel that they are free to do and say what they like. They strive to excel in whatever department of life they choose. Man has been deluded by his worldly position. He thinks that what he owns in this world will always be his. He forgets that he is being put to the test by means of all the power which he wields in this ephemeral world. Nothing that he has will last. Everything will be taken away from him. He will be stripped of even the most basic of the worldly amenities he used to enjoy. He will be brought before the Lord of the Universe on the Day of Judgement.

WITHOUT AN IDENTITY CARD

On Judgement Day, God will appear before mankind. On that Day, those who had been considered worthless and rejected in the world will be raised in value and accepted in God's sight. Those who had been considered weakest among men will, by the grace of God, be given great importance: it will be their testimony that will determine people's eternal destiny. Only the faithful will be honoured; those who acknowledge God's greatness and bow before Him, who abide by the truth and do good to others. They will inherit a new, complete and everlasting world in which they will enjoy the eternal delights of Paradise, while those who defied God in the world will be thrown into the eternal dustbin.

We must foresee the coming of that Day before its arrival. Those who fail to see it coming before it is upon them will have to pay dearly for their shortsightedness. Successful is one who has proved himself deserving of Paradise in this world itself.

WITHOUT AN IDENTITY CARD

On the Day of Judgment, rewards will be distributed to those who made themselves eligible for such a reward before the arrival of that day.

Once, a boy from a village came to the city. Walking down a street, he passed by a school building. It so happened that the school was celebrating a function that day.

The schoolboys had formed a queue outside a window. The village boy went closer to see what the matter was. He noticed that the students were being given sweets. And so, he also joined the queue. As the line moved ahead, he advanced, too, dreaming of the sweets that he thought he would soon be eating, like the other boys.

Soon, the boy reached the head of the queue. With great joy, he stretched his hand towards the window. Just then, he heard a voice from behind the window say, 'Your identity card?' The boy had no such card. And so, he was asked to go away. It then struck him that the sweets were being given to only those boys who had spent a whole year as students in the school and not to just any passerby.

Something like this is going to happen in the Hereafter. The Day of Judgment will be the day of Divine decision. On that day, everyone will be gathered together. Rewards will be distributed, but those who receive them will be the ones who made themselves eligible for such a reward before the arrival of that day. These are the people who will appear there with their 'identity card'.

That day is bound to come when one can see the most beautiful scene one can ever witness of the Lord; when a head can experience the greatest honour of prostrating before the Lord. But all this will be only for those who, before the advent of that day, had proved themselves eligible for the Lord's favour. If they fail to prove themselves eligible for this in the present world, they will not be able to see God in the Hereafter. On that day, when others are rewarded, they will experience eternal deprivation.

THE COURT OF JUSTICE

How fortunate will be those who are included among God's faithful servants, for they will be honoured in Heaven on that Day. How unfortunate will be those whom God rejects, for they will have nothing to look forward to except eternal torment and disgrace.

THE COURT OF JUSTICE

What an awesome event God's court of justice will be!
People's real natures will be revealed in that world.
God's Power and Justice will be seen in all Magnanimity.

Prophet Mohammad once asked his companion, Abdullah Ibn Masood, to read him a part of the Quran. "Me, read the Quran to you when it has been revealed unto you?" Ibn Masood asked in astonishment. "Yes," the Prophet answered, "I like to hear it read by someone else." So Abdullah Ibn Masood started reciting chapter Al-Nisa. When he reached this verse, the Prophet asked him to stop: 'What will they do when We bring a witness from each community and bring you as a witness against these people?' (The Quran, 4: 41) Abdullah Ibn Masood looked at the Prophet and saw tears flowing from his eyes. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 5050)

What an awesome event the setting up of God's court of justice will be! There will be no occasion for contumacy or denial. On the contrary, those whom people disregarded in this world will be the ones to be brought forward as God's

witnesses; for they were God's witnesses on earth, warning humanity of the impending Day of Judgment. They were considered the most insignificant people on earth, but their testimony will decide people's eternal fate.

Think of the state of those loquacious in the world but find themselves without words on that Day; and those who wield power and prestige, only to be divested of all traces of power on that Day. Superficial veils will be rent asunder, and those who feigned false piety will be exposed for the hypocrites they were. The tables will turn on that day when many who are last in the world will be the first in the sight of God.

People are hidden behind artificial appearances in this world. Some hide themselves behind seductive words; others conceal their true natures behind material grandeur and splendour. But they will be denied these things in the life to come. Everyone will appear in his true garb. One who realizes the awe-inspiring nature of that day will suddenly be reduced to silence; worldly honour will seem to him as meaningless as worldly disgrace.

What a calamitous day that will be. If one were to gauge the severity of that day, one would cease to talk so loquaciously or be so allured by worldly things; worldly honour would seem just as meaningless as worldly disgrace. On that Day, God's Power and Justice will be seen in all magnanimity.

WHEN ONLY TRUTH WILL CARRY WEIGHT

In this world, even falsehood can appear weighty to certain people. But in the Hereafter, nothing will carry weight except for the truth.

The time will come to pass when the whole of creation will be gathered before the Lord. All voices will be silenced except for the voice of God. Only the truth will have any weight on that day. Nothing else will be of any consequence. On that day man will be judged. Referring to this Day, the Quran states:

“The Clatterer! What is the Clatterer? Would that you knew what the Clatterer is! [It is] a Day when humanity shall be like scattered moths and the mountains like tufts of carded wool. Then, the one whose good deeds weigh heavy on the scales will have a most satisfying life. But as for him whose deeds are light on the scales, the Abyss shall be his home. What will convey to you what this is like? It is a blazing fire.” (101:1-11)

The turmoil of Doomsday will smash everything. People will completely lose their bearings. After that, a new world will exist where only truth will carry weight. All falsity will be set at nought. In the present world, the approval of the people prevails. Here things carry weight according to the likes and dislikes of the people. The world of the Hereafter is the world of God, where everything will be subservient to His will.

In the present world, any deeds performed are judged according to their appearances. In the Hereafter, deeds will be judged according to their inner reality. The more sincere a person's deeds, the more important they will be. The deed devoid of sincerity will carry no weight in the Hereafter, however significant it might have seemed to the superficial people of the present world.

In the present world, that action becomes weighty, which is marked by concession to worldly situations, following the traditions of the times and has become important because of long social customs. Those who have such deeds to their credit attain the status of greatness and honour in the eyes of the people.

What happens in the Hereafter will be different. There, only a principled life will carry any weight. Only those actions performed according to a high standard of ethics will be given any importance. There, all the importance will be given to those actions which possess eternal values rather than just meeting the exigencies of the time.

In this world, even falsehood can appear weighty to certain people. But in the Hereafter, nothing will carry weight except for the truth.

CONCLUSION

The selected people of Paradise are the ones who have realized God while He is unseen, who adhere to the social and moral ethics set by God and are giver members of society.

Paradise is another name for eternal life in the neighbourhood of God (66:11). Paradise is the eternal ideal world, which is the ultimate objective of every human. Paradise is called the 'Home of Peace' (10: 25). We learn from the Quran that the people of Paradise will wish peace for one another, which indicates the importance of peace in the ideal society. In the world before death, those who live in the neighbourhood of God at the psychological level and feeling will, in the world Hereafter, live in the eternal neighbourhood of God—Paradise—in reality.

The good fortune of finding a place in God's neighbourhood in the eternal life of the Hereafter will be based totally on merit. God's neighbourhood is like a universal garden. Only those will find a place in this universal garden that measure up to the divine criterion. Anything short of this will not guarantee a place in this universal garden.

Who will be eligible for entry into God's Paradise? God will allow only those people to live in His neighbourhood who adhere to divine ethics at two levels: one stands in relation to man versus man, and another stands in relation to man versus God. These two codes of ethics are different

CONCLUSION

in their dimensions. In relation to other human beings, one must follow social ethics like love, respect, well-wishing, and peace. Adherence to such social ethics makes one a giver member of society.

But no one can be held deserving of entry into Paradise just by adhering to social ethics. To be deserving of entry into the neighbourhood of God, man has to live up to the divine code related to God. This begins with the realization of God. When an individual discovers his Creator, this transforms his mind. His divine nature is awakened, and, as a result, all those qualities have been produced that measure up to the standard of elevated human ethics.

Everything has a price, and the price of Paradise is the realization of God. Nothing less than that can open the gates of Paradise. The truth is that if anything less than the realization of God is regarded as the price of Paradise that would constitute the belittling of Paradise. Those selected for Paradise are the ones who have made God their foremost concern in the life of this world. Their thinking and feelings have all been devoted to God. Their mornings and evenings have been filled with the remembrance of God. These are the fortunate souls who will be selected to live in the neighbourhood of God for all eternity.

God's angels will welcome those men and women who reach the Hereafter with all the above qualities. The angels will come forward and say: "Congratulations, O Blessed

CONCLUSION

Souls! Enter God's Heaven by divine decree. Here, there is no death and no parting from this joyous world. The eternal life has been given to you for all eternity." The Quran says: "O Soul at peace! Come to your Lord well pleased, and He will be well pleased with you. So enter among My chosen servants. And enter My Garden." (The Quran, 89:27-30)

