



Paradise

The Destination
of Man

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

PARADISE:
THE DESTINATION OF MAN

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CONTENTS

Advance Introduction to Paradise	4
Introducing Paradise	8
Paradise: The Ideal World of The Hereafter	10
The Destiny of Man	14
Mirage Of Material Progress	17
World Of 'Today', World Of 'Tomorrow'	19
Place For Action, Place for Results	22
Life of Paradise	27
On the Threshold of Paradise	30
Discovery of Paradise	45
Accountability to God	50
Eligibility for Paradise	54
Conclusion	58

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. 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 fulfillment 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 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 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.

WORLD OF 'TODAY', WORLD OF 'TOMORROW'

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.

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,

DISCOVERY OF PARADISE

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 instils 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.

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.

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.

CONCLUSION

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

CONCLUSION

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,

CONCLUSION

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:

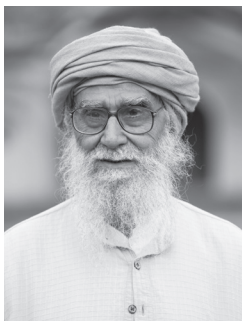
“This is the Truth from your Lord. Let him who will believe in it and who will deny it.’ For the wrongdoers, we have prepared a Fire that will cover them like a canopy, and if they beg for water, they will be given water as hot as molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how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

CONCLUSION

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 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.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. His work has received international recognition for his seminal contributions toward world peace. The Maulana authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, Islam's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and easily understandable. He founded Centre for Peace and Spirituality International in 2001 to popularize the culture of peace and share the spiritual message of Islam with people.

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PARADISE

THE DESTINATION OF MAN

God created a perfect world called Paradise: an ideal world where man could achieve complete fulfilment. As an imperfect being cannot inhabit a perfect Paradise, God created perfection-seeking beings—human beings. As per God's plan, we have to spend a period of trial here on Earth. This world, therefore, has all the components necessary for a test. We have been given complete freedom to choose our actions. Thus, we have a choice—we can misuse our freedom to do evil and live in eternal deprivation, or we can use our freedom wisely, discover and submit to our Creator, and willingly adopt divine ethics to find entry into eternal Paradise.

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