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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Fasting inculcates simple living and high thinking.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Spirit of Islam is a monthly magazine which is now in its sixth year of publication. The aim of this journal is to present Islam in the contemporary idiom, while at the same time the contents are of universal appeal and of interest to a wider circle of spiritual seekers. It is our desire to help Muslims rediscover Islam, focusing on its message of peace and spirituality as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, and in general we strive towards religious understanding for bringing about greater harmony.

Another purpose of this magazine is to assist its readers to deal with life's challenges, deriving positivity even from negative occurrences, gaining in spirituality and developing themselves intellectually so that they may contribute constructively to society.

The magazine's regular readers will appreciate that the entire thrust of its articles is directed to the individual—a collection of intellectually prepared individuals being the sole foundation on which a peaceful and harmonious society can be built.

As the subtitle indicates, *Spirit of Islam* is working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The articles on peace based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam offer us an ideology of peace—principles which lay down how peace may be established between conflicting groups, controversies resolved and conflicts defused. We believe that violence begins in the mind and so an effective ideology of peace needs to be presented to counter its influence.

We hope and pray that God helps us in this noble endeavour and grants us His special blessings!



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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 65 MAY 2018

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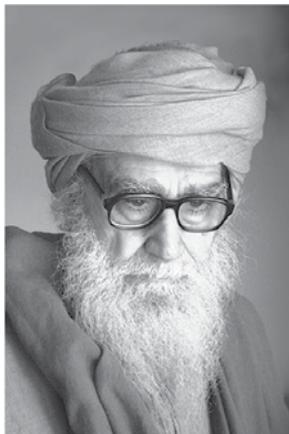
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognized as one of its most influential Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

U-TURN—A PRINCIPLE OF LIFE

ONCE I was travelling in a part of India with which my driver was unfamiliar. He made a wrong turn at one point but drove on for five miles before he realized he was on the wrong road. He had to stop the car then and make a U-turn to get back on the right road and soon, we safely reached our destination.

This kind of U-turn is not only a part of road culture, it is a principle of life. Every person, every community, every nation at some point needs to make a U-turn. Failing this, the result could be unbearable.

For example, the Tatas established a car factory in West Bengal to produce the Nano car in 2007. Very soon they discovered that West Bengal was not favourable for their industry, so they dismantled their factory and re-established it in Gujarat. Now Nano cars are successfully running in every city of India. This success was the direct result of Tatas adopting the U-turn policy.

The same is applicable to nations. One such example is the course adopted by the United Kingdom after the Second World War. The

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2018, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

British leaders, especially those who were associated with the Fabian Society, felt that they were now unable to control India and other British colonies and proceeded to adopt a policy of decolonization. As we know, Churchill emerged as a hero in WWII, but he was defeated in the 1945 elections. The reason for this was a desire for post-war reform amongst the British population and the man who had led Britain in war was not seen as the man to lead the nation in peace.

There are numerous examples in history of the success of those who adopted the policy of U-turn and the failure of those who did not.

In this world, nothing is certain, neither for individuals nor for nations. So, every individual or group of people ought to adopt this policy. When they find that their journey is taking them down a blind alley, they need to revise their policy, they must reassess the whole matter, and if it appears that they were heading in the wrong direction, they should change course without any further ado.

India is also a good example of this kind of policy. After independence, India adopted the socialist model for its economy, but the result was hardly encouraging. Then in 1991, India introduced a new policy in its economic planning. In 2013 Indian authorities brought about such great changes in economic policies as may be described as a paradigm shift.

The U-turn policy is a law of nature. No one is able to see the unseen. No one can foresee all that is going to happen in the future. This makes the journey of life a jump into uncertainty. A wise man is one who can reassess himself, reset his priorities and re-plan his projects, moulding himself according to changing circumstances. Don't try to fight against realities. Simply accept them. When you cannot change reality, change yourself.

Sometimes it appears that the U-turn policy will lead to some loss, but any such loss is the lesser evil, while going against reality is to opt for the greater evil. The U-turn policy is only another name for what may be called acceptance of reality and adjustment to the changing times.

The U-turn policy is the policy of the wise: it ensures success, while not adopting it is risking failure. Success and failure are both in your hands. □

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Dr. Farida Khanam has been a professor at the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. A Study of World's Major Religions, A Simple Guide to Sufism are two of the books amongst many others, of which she is the author. She has also translated many books on Islam authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently, the chairperson of Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS International), an organization founded by her father Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, she is a regular contributor of articles to journals, newspapers and magazines. Dr. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. Under Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Peace Foundation, along with the CPS team, she is designing a series of courses on peace-building, countering extremism and conflict resolution.

THE QURAN

THE Quran, addressed to humankind, tells us of God's scheme for human existence—man is placed on earth for the purpose of being tested. The freedom he is given here is not as a matter of right, but as a matter of trial. On the outcome of this test, rests the eternal fate of man. The Quran asserts that human beings are eternal creatures, yet only an extremely small part of their lifespan has been assigned to this present world, the remainder is ordained for the Hereafter. As we learn from the Quran, all the revealed books were sent by God so that man might be informed of the nature and purpose of his life.

The teachings of the Quran can be summed up under two basic headings:

1. Believing in one God and worshipping Him alone.
2. Regarding all human beings as equal and according them equal rights.

The Quran was revealed as circumstances demanded and not in a purely theoretical way. It enshrines only the basic teachings of Islam. The detailed application of these teachings is to be found in the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad.

The most repeated invocation in the Quran is “In the name of God, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful”. The occurrence of this invocation 114 times in the Quran is in itself an indication of its importance. Every piece of work must have a beginning. It is the Quran’s desire that when one initiates any undertaking one should begin by uttering the name of God. One is thus always reminded of God’s attributes of benevolence and compassion.

The Quran is a medium sized book as far as its volume is concerned. It comprises of 114 chapters or *surahs*. The Quran is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being. It is the actual word of God in human language. The Quran began to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, through the angel Gabriel, in 610 AD, while the Prophet was sitting in seclusion in the cave of Hira at the top of the Mountain of Light, two miles from Makkah. The Quran was not revealed in book form at one point of time. Its various parts were revealed as the occasion demanded. It was later compiled in Madinah during the last days of the Prophet. The entire revelation was completed over a period of 23 years. The last passage was revealed to the Prophet while he was addressing a gathering at Mount Arafat after performing his last Hajj in 622 AD.

The Quran asserts that human beings are eternal creatures, yet only an extremely small part of their lifespan has been assigned to this present world, the remainder is ordained for the Hereafter.

Since the Quran came into existence prior to the era of the press, it could be preserved in only two ways: either by committing the entire text to memory or by writing it on paper or other materials. That is why there have always been a large number of *hafiz* (those who committed the entire Quran to memory), in every age right from the moment of revelation of the Quran to the present day. The earliest written copies of the Quran are still available in different museums, one of these being in Tashkent.

When any part of the Quran was revealed to the Prophet, he used to recite it to his Companions. Since the verses of the Quran were recited during prayer the Companions had to memorize them in order to recite them in their daily prayers.

In this way the memorization and the transcription of the Quran both started from the very first day of revelation. Whenever a revelation was received, the Prophet would call one of his scribe Companions and dictated the verses to him. After dictation the Prophet would ask the

scribe to read out to him what had been put in writing. This was done in order to correct any mistakes committed while writing.

This was the beginning of the compilation of the Quran. The next stage after the transcription was to memorize the text. The Prophet himself asked the Companions to memorize the revealed verses and repeat the same in their prayers. Thus the message of the Quran was transmitted by oral tradition and written medium even during the lifetime of the Prophet. Among his Companions were a select group of about half a dozen *katib-e-wahy*—transcribers of the revelations. A few of these scribes were always present in the Prophet's company, and whenever any part of the Quran was revealed, the Prophet would recite it to them. Thereupon, at the exact moment of revelation, they would not only commit it to memory, but would write it down on any available material, such as paper, bones, leather or animal skin. In former times, when the accepted way of disseminating the subject matter of a book was to memorize it, then recite it, it was quite exceptional that the Quran should have been both memorized and preserved in writing. This was like having a double checking system, whereby memorized words and written words could be constantly checked against each other.

The second point concerns the arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Quran. When the Quran was revealed in parts, at different times according to the demand of circumstances, how did it come to be arranged in its present form? We find the answer in the books of *Hadith*. It has been proved from authentic traditions that the angel Gabriel, who conveyed the revelations of God to the Prophet, had himself arranged these verses.

According to the traditions, each year during the month of Ramazan, the angel Gabriel came to the Prophet and recited before him all the Quranic verses revealed till that time, in the order in which they exist today. And after listening to the recitation by the angel Gabriel, the Prophet repeated the verses in the order in which he had heard them. This dual process has been termed *al-Irza*—mutual presentation—in the books of *Hadith*. (*Fathul Bari*)

It is also established in these books that in the last year of the Prophet's life, when the revelations had been completed, Gabriel came to the Prophet and recited the entire Quran in the existing order twice, and

The Quran is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being. It is the actual word of God in human language.

similarly the Prophet also recited to Gabriel the entire Quran twice. This final presentation is called *al-Arz al-Akhirah* in the books of *Hadith*. (*Fathul Bari*)

In this way, when the Quran was fully arranged by the help of angel Gabriel, the Prophet recited it to his Companions on different occasions in the order with which we are familiar today. The Quran was thus preserved in its present order in the memory of tens of thousands of the Companions during the lifetime of the Prophet himself.

In 632 AD, when the Prophet died at the age of 63 years, the Quran existed in two forms: one, in the memory of the several thousand Companions, since they repeated the Quran daily on different occasions, having learned it by rote in what is now its present order; two, in writing—on pieces of paper and other materials used for writing in those days. These scriptures were preserved by the Companions. Although not in their present order, all the parts of the Quran existed at that time in written form.

It is the Quran's desire that when one initiates any undertaking one should begin by uttering the name of God. One is thus always reminded of God's attributes of benevolence and compassion.

After the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakr Siddiq was appointed the first Caliph. It was during his caliphate that the compilation of the Quran was carried out. Zaid Ibn Thabit, the Prophet's foremost scribe, and an authority on the Quran was entrusted with this task. His work was more a process of collection than of compilation. The scattered bits and pieces of the Quran in written form were collected by him, not so that they could be assembled and bound in one volume, but so that they could be used to verify the authenticity of the Quran as memorized by countless individuals and passed on in oral tradition. Once this exact

correspondence between the oral and written forms of the Quran had been established beyond any doubt, Zaid proceeded to put the verses of the Quran down on paper in their correct order. The volume he produced was then handed over to the Caliph, and this remained in the custody of the Prophet's wife Hafsa. The third Caliph Uthman arranged for several copies of this text to be sent to all the states and placed in central mosques where people could prepare further copies.

In this way, the message of the Quran spread further and further, both through oral tradition and handwritten copies until the age of the press dawned. When printing press was established in Muslim countries,

the beautiful calligraphy of the scriptures was reproduced after its content had been certified by memorizers of the Quran. Thus, once again with the help of memorized versions and written texts, authentic copies were prepared; then with the publication of these copies on a large scale, the Quran spread all over the world. It is an irrefutable fact that any copy of the Quran found in any part of the world at any time will be exactly the same as that handed down to the Muslims by the Prophet in his last days, arranged in the form still extant today. □

The message of the Quran was transmitted by oral tradition and written medium even during the lifetime of the Prophet.

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THE INNER DIAMOND

Unpolished

DIAMONDS are the most expensive mineral in the world. They are made of pure carbon. They contain the same basic elements as coal. It takes a very long time for a natural diamond to form. When a diamond is extracted from the earth, it is in the form of an ore. But after it is cut and polished, it turns into an expensive jewel. In turning a raw diamond into the final product, between 35 to 60 per cent of it is removed.

Like a diamond, a human being is born in the form of a potential. It is for him to convert this potential into actuality.

What holds true for a diamond, holds true for a human being too. Like a diamond, a human being is born in the form of a potential. It is for him to convert this potential into actuality; He who knows this secret and works on trying to convert his potential into actuality; to transform his possibilities into a reality, he alone can be called 'a diamond of a man'. If he does not do this, it's like dumping an unpolished diamond into the dustbin!

All of us have a potential character hidden within us. This is something that has been gifted to us by nature. This character cannot develop by itself, on its own. Instead, we need to work on developing it. It is a task that we have to do ourselves. This is our real test.

We need to discover this inner character that nature has given us. It is like an unpolished diamond. And then, with proper and wise planning, we need to work on turning this unpolished diamond into a shining jewel. If we fail in this, we will have failed in this life—and in the next one, too. □



Reaching the Gates of Truth

Our Creator has interwoven consciousness of truth in our nature. We need to follow simple living and high thinking, shun distraction and we will reach the gates of truth.

THE GOAL OF RAMAZAN

Spirituality and Mission

ACCORDING to Islamic teachings, Ramazan—the ninth month of the lunar calendar—is the month of fasting. In this month, believers refrain from food and drink for a limited period each day—from dawn till sunset. They can eat and drink during the night. This practice continues for one month.

It is very important to know that the Quran began to be revealed during this month. The Quran makes a special mention of this:

The month of Ramazan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. (2: 185)

Therefore the believers are exhorted to read the Quran more in this month so that they may reflect upon it, understand its deeper meaning and make it a guiding force in their lives. Fasting prepares a person for the study of the Quran by making him sincere. When a person studies the Quran with a well-prepared mind, he can understand the teachings of the Quran in greater depth and their call towards spirituality.

Believers are exhorted to read the Quran more in this month so that they may reflect upon it, understand its deeper meaning and make it a guiding force in their lives.

The equivalent of spirituality in the Quran is *Rabbaniyat*, that is, a God-oriented life. This expresses what the Quran means when it refers to spirituality. Spirituality, according to the Quran, is that mental state in which God-oriented thinking develops in the individual. Such thinking reflects in his overall personality; his behaviour with others becomes infused with divine hues. Thus Ramazan provides a framework within which devotees may improve themselves. Ramazan then becomes a month of spiritual activism.

The fasting person repeatedly reads in the Quran that God is the Sustainer, that is, while man is the taker, God is the giver. Everything that a person receives in this world, right from his existence and the oxygen he inhales for respiration to the sunlight necessary for his survival, everything is God's gift. When a person starts to think in this way, he experiences a tremendous change within. He begins living in society as a giver-member. He becomes a creative member of society.

During the month of Ramazan he should become more of a student of the Quran and do serious study and discover those principles by which he may develop his personality and become a positive thinker and a spiritual person in the full sense.

A man of mission is a unique person. He has little time for anything other than his mission. He eschews all such activities as are irrelevant to his mission, and fasting symbolizes this very spirit.

According to Islamic ideology, a believer is a man of mission. A man of mission is a unique person. He has little time for anything other than his mission. He eschews all such activities as are irrelevant to his mission, and fasting symbolizes this very spirit.

The Arabic equivalent of fasting is *sawm*, which means abstinence. Abstinence is the gist of fasting. When one involves himself in a mission he abstains from all diversions. He has no time, except for fulfilling his bare necessities. This is the mission culture. Abstaining from food and water for a limited period is a symbolic training. This practice

prepares one to lead a life of dedication to one's mission. The mission is to be a spiritual person and to share this spirituality with others.

Fasting during the month of Ramazan reminds a faithful person that if the acts of abstinence were to reach the extent of refraining from food and water for a temporary period, then he would be ready to do so for a higher purpose. Although this training is for a temporary period, it enables him to lead his whole life in accordance with this spirit.

For a faithful person, living for the divine cause is his mission. All other things become secondary for him. This kind of focused life is a great source of spirituality. A person, who controls his material life and devotes himself for a higher cause, also inculcates in himself what is called spirituality. In terms of external form, he refrains from material things, but in terms of inner content, he inculcates spirituality in his personality. □



Preparation of the Mind

Preparation means to engage in self-training on positive lines.

SHOCKS AND SHOCK ABSORBERS

Personality Development

HUMAN life is such that one time or another one suffers a shock. Shock, instead of being a negative phenomenon, can be a great educator. If looked at with this perspective, it sets off such a process of brainstorming that a whole new mindset takes shape and as a consequence a new human personality emerges.

But shocks, great or small, generally tend to make people negative and they miss out on the lessons from them. Shock is not an accident; it is the language of nature. If one saves oneself from becoming negative after suffering a shock, one's creativity will surface to face the experience with positivity. It will stimulate the mind and unfold its hidden potential. It will help one to take better decisions by bringing one from a state of total derailment to getting right back on track. In other words, it makes one realistic in one's approach.

Shock is the greatest positive factor in one's life provided one responds positively to it. History is replete with instances of people who received shocks, but were able to face them with a positive mind. These shocks then proved as a booster for their upliftment. According to the law of nature, life is not a smooth journey; it is a journey through shocks. One has no option but to accept this as a reality. Indeed, the course nature takes is determined by shocks and challenges. Anyone who seeks to make himself successful should understand this reality and consider the shocks as stepping stones in life.

One can draw inspiration from a thing like a shock absorber fitted in a vehicle. Vehicles while moving up and down over the bumps on the road surface take the entire brunt of the bumps while the passenger is saved from the rough movement. This is because of the mechanism of the shock absorbers that the rough movement remains confined to the wheels and does not reach the passenger. This is the actual method of how one can remain positive in spite of facing a shock. The human equivalent of a shock absorber in a vehicle is 'spirituality'.

A spiritual person is one who has an in built 'shock absorber'. Such a person will be able to experience any undesirable event he faces

If one saves oneself from becoming negative after suffering a shock, one's creativity will surface to face the experience with positivity.

without any disturbance either to his emotions or to his thinking processes. In a world which is constantly administering shocks of one kind or another, he can live in a state of perfect equanimity.

The course nature takes is determined by shocks and challenges. Anyone who seeks to make himself successful should understand this reality and consider the shocks as stepping stones in life.

Spirituality in simple terms refers to positive thinking and looking at events of life as challenges and opportunities for the development of a noble personality. The greatest enemy of spirituality is the attitude of complaining. Unpleasant experiences which seem shocking are not an evil. They help one to think realistically. They enhance one's ability to make correct judgements and increase one's creativity. They make one sympathetic towards those who have adopted a way of proceeding that is unfavourable from one's point of view. This is the positive outcome of all shocking experiences. □



Our vernacular websites:

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www.peaceandspiritualityinmarathi.com

www.peaceandspiritualityinmalayalam.com

BEING USEFUL TO SOCIETY

Receiving in Giving

IN the chapter *Al-Ra'd* (The Thunder), the Quran narrates a parable illustrating the law of nature, that only those who prove to be 'giver' members of society will be able to establish themselves in life. The following is the translation of the verse:

He sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The torrent carries along swelling foam, akin to what rises from smelted ore from which man makes ornaments and tools. God thus depicts truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use to man remains behind. God thus speaks in parables. (13: 17)

In our world, material events symbolize moral realities. What is required of man, is being demonstrated by the rest of the world at the material level as in the two events of nature which have been described in the above verse of the Quran. One symbol used is that of rainfall, with its water flowing into the rivers and streams. At that time a great deal of foam surfaces on it. Another symbol is that of precious minerals being heated in order to purify them, their impurities appearing in the shape of scum which, being useless for man is discarded. The main point which emerges is that the water and minerals which are useful to man remain intact and the foam and scum is discarded.

Only those who prove useful to others will find a place in society. The individual who has lost his capacity to benefit others has no respectable place in this world.

These are material events through which nature shows symbolically what principles it has laid down for the success or failure of life. One principle is that, in this world, only those who prove useful to others will find a place in society. The individual who has lost his capacity to benefit others has no respectable place in this world. The same is true of communities and groups.

Let us discuss further about what one should refrain from doing in society and what one should consciously do when living in society.

Self-Control: Self-control is integral to social ethics. If you are alone on an island, there is no need for any control as the absence of others,

leaves you free to do whatever you want to do. However, when you are living in society, you have to give leeway to others. Self-control leads to a better society, while lack of self-control leads to the destruction of peace.

Identifying a friend in a stranger: All human beings have common ancestors—Adam and Eve. This makes the whole of humanity a single family. It is only distance that makes a person a stranger. Be a true friend to others and you will realize that they will treat you in the same way. The only condition is that you should be selfless and sincere in extending the hand of friendship. Develop genuine love for others in your heart and then others cannot but love you in return.

Do not provoke: Refrain from hurting the ego of another person and you will also be safe from his retaliation. One who sedulously adheres to this principle will not face violence from others. Violence breeds violence and peace breeds peace.

Build a reputation which is based on your actual deeds. Reputation represents your external personality while a sense of honour is your own inner perception of yourself. The sense of honour is like self-praise, that is, believing certain things about yourself without taking into account what others think about you. For instance, a superiority complex about yourself is living in a sense of honour. Being a modest member of society and considering yourself equal to the others, is the real virtue which builds a reputation of being a good member of society.

The higher aim should be to live as a 'giver' member of society or the least you should aim for is to be a no-problem person in society.

The higher aim should be to live as a 'giver' member of society or the least you should aim for is to be a no-problem person in society. If you do not adopt any of these two ways then you are 'the foam' or 'the scum' in the parable given in the above Quranic verse. □



Spirituality is a State of Mind

Discovery plus contemplation is spirituality. For this one needs to prepare one's mind to be objective and train oneself not to take offence.

BENEFITS OF TOLERANCE

Peaceful Society

Tolerance is a law of nature stamped on the hearts of all men.

NOTHING could be truer than this statement by Voltaire; tolerance is, indeed, a permanent law of nature. But it is not something which has to be externally imposed, for the human desire for tolerance is limitless. Just as truth and honesty are virtues, so is tolerance a virtue. And just as no one ever needs to ask for how long one should remain truthful and honest, so should one think of tolerance as having an eternal value. The way of tolerance should be unquestioningly adopted at all times as possessing superior merit.

A man who is intolerant is not showing high character in the full sense of the expression. To become enraged at dissension is surely a sign of weakness. Of course, there are many who do not want to recognize the principle of tolerance as being eternal, for, in conditions of adversity, the temptation to retaliate becomes too strong. The feelings of anger which accompany negative reaction must somehow be vented, and those who think and act in this way are keen to retain the illusion that, in hitting back, they are not doing anything unlawful.

Such thinking is quite wrong. In reality, when a man is disturbed at anything which goes against his will, tolerance as a priority becomes paramount. Many men strive to become supermen. But the true superman is one who, in really trying situations, can demonstrate his super-tolerance. Situations of disagreements or differences does not give us the licence to be intolerant. Rather, such occasions call for greater tolerance than in normal circumstances. In everyday matters, where there is none of the stress and strain of opposition, no one has difficulty in being tolerant. It is only in extraordinary situations, fraught with conflict, that the truly tolerant man will prove his mettle.

The ability to be tolerant of the actions, beliefs and opinions of others is a major factor in promoting world peace. Racism and religious fanaticism in many countries has led to many forms of discrimination and the intimidation of those who hold contrary views. Violence against and intimidation of authors, journalists and others who exercise their freedom of expression, are also present along with political movements which seek to make particular groups responsible for social ills such as crime and unemployment. Intolerance is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Intolerance is both an ethnic and political problem. It is a rejection of the differences between individuals and between

cultures. When intolerance becomes organized or institutionalized, it destroys democratic principles and poses a threat to world peace.

One of the stark realities of life is that divergence of views does exist between people, and that it impinges at all levels. Be it at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country, differences are bound to exist everywhere. Now the question is how best unity can be forged or harmony brought about in the face of human differences.

Some people hold that the removal of all differences is the *sine qua non* for bringing about unity. But, this view is untenable, for the simple reason that, it is not practicable. You may not like the thorns which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for you to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bulldozer over all rosebushes, new plants will grow in their place bearing roses which are ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be

A man who is intolerant is not showing high character in the full sense of the expression. To become enraged at dissension is surely a sign of weakness.

had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Similarly, a peaceful society can be created only by creating and fostering the spirit of tolerance towards diversities. In this world, unity is achievable only by learning to unite in spite of differences, rather than insisting on unity without differences. Total eradication of differences is an impossibility. The secret of attaining peace in life is tolerance of 'disturbance of the peace'.

There is nothing wrong in diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality which has many advantages. The beauty of the garden of life is actually enhanced if the flower of unity is accompanied by the thorn of diversity.

An advantage flowing from this attitude is that it builds character. If you are well-mannered towards those whose views are similar to yours, you may be said to exhibit a fairly good character. But, if you behave properly with those holding divergent views from you or who criticize you, then you deserve to be credited with having an excellent character.

In the same way, a society whose members hold identical views and never have any controversial discussions, will soon find itself in the doldrums. The intellectual development of the members of this society will be frozen, because personal upliftment takes place only where the interaction of divergent thinking provides the requisite mental stimuli.

It is only after running the intellectual gauntlet that a developed personality emerges. If, in a human society, this process ceases to operate, the development of character will come to a standstill.

Nobody in this world is perfect. If a man is endowed with some good qualities, he may be lacking in others. This is one of the reasons for differences cropping up between people. But, for life as a whole, this disparateness is actually a great blessing: the good points of one man may compensate for the shortcomings of another, just as one set of talents in one man may complement a different set in another. If people could only learn to tolerate others' differences, their very forbearance would become a great enabling factor in collective human development.

Just as no one ever needs to ask for how long one should remain truthful and honest, so should one think of tolerance as having an eternal value.

After 1947, when the first government of independent India was formed, two important leaders were included in it. One was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the other was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Pandit Nehru's westernized ideas were in great contrast to the orientalism of Sardar Patel. And this caused frequent differences of opinion between these two leaders. But this proved to be a boon for the nation, because with Pandit Nehru's abilities compensating for the differences of Sardar Patel, and vice versa, the end result was one of an efficacious complementarity. The above is a good example of the difference between the respective natures and opinions of individuals essential for human development in general.

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. When negatively affected by another's unpalatable behaviour, your mental equilibrium is upset, whereas when emotionally untouched by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment, you will continue to carry out your duties in the normal way. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances your efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it.

Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden. □

THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING

Realize Your Potential

GOD created man with great potential and at the same time, He has given him complete freedom of choice. It is this freedom that divides people into two categories—those who misuse their freedom and the others who use it properly. The potential that man has is bestowed directly by the Creator, but it is the duty of man himself to turn this potential into a reality. Herein lies the destiny of man. People then, are necessarily of two categories: the failures and the successful ones.

Being a failure or being successful is not a matter of destiny. It is in the hands of the individual. The crux of the divine scheme is that man should apply his reason and common sense, and follow his conscience; he should discover the laws of nature and study the divine scriptures revealed to the prophets. He should find out his purpose in life and

God Almighty's design regarding his creation. After taking into account all these facts, he should plan and build his future.

Learning begins with unlearning the wrong things in which he is conditioned by the social environment.

The most important tool in the process of the application of reasoning, discovering laws of nature and finding out one's purpose in life and in persevering in the goals, is learning. Learning begins with unlearning the wrong things in which he is conditioned by the social

environment. It is a known fact that every human being gets conditioned by the society he belongs to. All that is wrong in that particular society becomes a part of the thinking of the person. It becomes a person's duty to examine his mindset when he reaches maturity. They should discover the norms that are in accordance with the good nature they are created with. This process can be called the de-conditioning of conditioned minds. It is this de-conditioning from which one's intellectual journey begins. Without undergoing the process of de-conditioning one is bound to live by one's own suppositions.

In our struggle to find the reality of life, education is of the greatest importance. The first message given by God to the Prophet was about learning. This guidance from the Quran revolutionized the minds of the Prophet and his Companions and they did their best to avail of every opportunity to acquire learning and education. In fact, learning is basic to all our hopes and aspirations; the greater the learning, the greater the progress in life.

Another message from the teachings of the Quran, which is of a major concern, is to inculcate in every human being the art of contemplation so that one can learn a lesson from every event—mentioned in the Quran and also events from human history and our daily lives. In relation to a historical event, the Quran says:

There are certainly signs in that for those who can learn a lesson. (15: 75)

Natural phenomena as well as historical events have great lessons for those who contemplate deeply about them. The Quran, in referring to them, promotes the development of the thinking habit, so that readers may gain from them intellectually. The individual must keep his mind alive whenever he reads a book, when he observes a scene or when he is confronted by a historical or natural event. He must properly activate his mental faculties in order to derive the right lessons from them. He must endeavour to turn his experiences into meaningful lessons.

Man has the capacity for conceptual thought. He can penetrate into the deeper aspect of things, and then learn from them hidden lessons. It is in man's own interest to keep his mind alive, so that he may not lose any opportunity to learn the right lessons from the events of life.

Natural phenomena as well as historical events have great lessons for those who contemplate deeply about them.

The teachings of the Quran further highlight another way of learning, which is by discussion and dialogue. The arena of knowledge and wisdom is so vast that it cannot be encompassed by any single mind. The only thing that can help us increase our knowledge is the development of an insatiable intellectual thirst for learning from different quarters on a continuous basis.

Knowledge is like a great ocean; faced with its immensity, no one can be self-sufficient. The process of seeking knowledge has to be a mutual venture, in the course of which everyone gains something from everyone else. There are several ways of acquiring knowledge, one of them being through discussion or dialogue. This should take the form of an intellectual exchange and not in terms of debating. Discussion to be fruitful, requires objectivity, and should be carried out with the learning spirit.

Books are a great source of knowledge. Simply reading will not be of much benefit. One should read them with the understanding that one is establishing contact and consulting with the other thinkers and

scholars. It is like a global discussion. A library is like a global conference room. Learning thus is a lifelong process. It has a beginning, but no end.

In addition to books from which we can learn from, in the comfort of our home or library or an educational institute; the Quran talks about travel as a great source of learning. This does not mean that one has to travel especially for this purpose. It simply means that one should keep the mind open for learning during one's travel for any purpose. Travelling is a part of life. Whether our journey is for business or for any other purpose one should develop a keenness to see things in the light of experience and draw lessons from observation.

Travel is a great source of universal wisdom. It is a realistic means of broadening our horizons, for after every journey one will have learnt additional lessons and will return with increased knowledge.

When one travels, one goes through different experiences—some pleasant, some unpleasant. One gets to witness the culture of different places, different natural scenes, historical monuments, etc. From all of these one can derive great lessons and understanding of our life on earth. Travel is a

great source of universal wisdom. It is a realistic means of broadening our horizons, for after every journey one will have learnt additional lessons and will return with increased knowledge. The mind will have expanded as never before. The Prophet of Islam said that, wisdom is the lost treasure of a believer and that one should acquire it from wherever possible. This shows the true spirit of learning. Every individual should become imbued with this spirit. □



Difference of Opinion is a Mercy

Intellectual critique engenders analysis, further study and open exchange on the issues. This brings to the fore new dimensions of issues and promotes creative thinking and, thus, leading to the intellectual development of the participants.

MIRACLE OF MEMORY

Reasons to be Grateful

WHEN you want to express an idea, your mind instantly sets in motion a complex intellectual machine. It recalls the desired idea, extracts it from the tangled maze of facts and events in your memory, selects the appropriate words, orders them according to the rules of grammar, and then activates your tongue to speak or your fingers to write. In this way, numerous actions and interactions take place within the mind at an incredibly high speed. Almost all the senses contribute to this process.

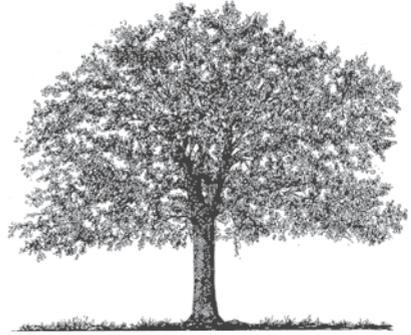
The fact is that your mind is filled with countless ideas, but if you have to express even one of them in the English language, you must first select the appropriate words from the jungle of a quarter of a million words which make up the language, after which you must put things in the correct order with unbelievable speed, and only then are you able to utter or write down a meaningful linguistic sequence. This process is unimaginably complex, with numerous known and unknown processes going on in your mind at lightning speed. It is the interaction of these factors which results in meaningful speech or writing.

How does this take place? Recent research shows that there is an incredibly complex system in our mind, which is dependent upon the memory—a miraculous phenomenon of nature. According to Neal Bernard, an Adjunct Associate Professor of Medicine at the George Washington University of School of Medicine, in Washington D.C, “a memory is made by linking two or more of the 100 billion nerve cells in your brain, called neurons, then solidifying the connection so that you can use it later”. Brianne Bettcher, a neuropsychology fellow at the University of California, San Francisco, Memory and Aging Centre says, “your brain continues to develop neurons and build new connections to strengthen memory as you age, a phenomenon called neuroplasticity.”

We humans remember to talk of great miracles but fail to acknowledge the miracle of memory itself bestowed by God upon each one of us. If one were to recognize this miracle as a personal miracle, we will develop such a thrilling sense of gratitude that we would be ashamed of holding on to complaints and negative thoughts in our memory. We will then want to live with feelings of eternal thankfulness to God which in other words means that we will be peaceful and positive. □

FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

There is a tree beside my house. I call it the 'Spiritual Tree'. I derive spiritual inspiration from it. A tree is an ever-growing being that was initially a seed possessing the potential of becoming a full-grown tree. A seed takes food from the universe around it and then grows into a tree. The same is true with spirituality, the desire for which is intrinsic to, and an integral part of, the very nature of every human being. To realize this spirituality, Man must derive spiritual food from the universe around him. A tree converts carbon-dioxide into oxygen; a spiritual person is one who can take positive lessons from negative situations. From this perspective, a tree is an embodiment of a spiritual personality. —Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



THE PRICE OF REALIZATION

A HIGH level of God-realization is actually the greatest asset a person can have. It is, in fact, high realization which makes it possible for man to be different from other creatures. Achieving a high level of realization is just as possible as achieving anything else. The only condition is that one should pay its price. Without paying the necessary price, no one gets anything in this world and the same applies to realization.

What is the price of a high level of realization? It is simply to make it the primary concern in your life and regard all other things as secondary. Those who are not ready to pay this price will not be able to reach a level of high realization regardless of how many good deeds they do.

Man finds himself torn between two demands; the demands of faith and the demands of the world. On such occasions, if man ignores the demands of faith and bows to worldly pressures, even if he does this only once, such an attitude becomes the cause for his ruin. In this way, Satan gets the chance to stop man's journey of realization and push him backwards. This is the reality which has been mentioned thus in the Quran:

When any evil suggestion from Satan touches those who fear God, they are instantly alerted and become watchful; but the followers of devils are led relentlessly into error by them. They never desist. (7: 201-202)

The reality is that, the journey of realization is a continuous journey. Even if man stops for just a single day, his journey of realization will be retarded for many years. □

Without paying the necessary price, no one gets anything in this world and the same applies to realization.



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TRANSLATING THE QURAN

Understanding Your Creator

SHAIKH SADI SHIRAZI (d. 1291) was a famous Persian poet. In his acclaimed book *Gulistan*, he mentions that once while he was on a journey he met a man. He wanted to talk with him but could not do so. This was because he was a Turk and did not know any language other than Turkish.

'The language of my friend is Turkish,' Shaikh Sadi wrote, 'and I don't know Turkish.'

This story has interesting parallels with the relationship between people and the Quran today. By their very nature, human beings are seekers of Truth. They want to discover their Creator. The language of the book of the Creator is Arabic, but many people do not know Arabic.

This demands that the Quran be translated into every language of the world and in an easily understandable manner, and that it be made

The language of the book of the Creator is Arabic, but many people do not know Arabic. This demands that the Quran be translated into every language of the world and in an easily understandable manner.

available to people who do not know Arabic. Because of the importance of this work, it should be done on a priority basis. In the present-day, this is the first and foremost responsibility of the Muslim community. No other action can be an alternative to this.

Unleashing self-styled *jihad* against so called 'oppression', creating a big hue and cry in the name of 'Islamic rule', community work, enforcement of Islamic law and other such things that present-day Muslims are so busy with, are all as far as this duty is concerned irrelevant. □



Discovery of God

The discovery of super-human activity in the universe makes one realize the handiwork of a Supreme Creator. Everything becomes a reflection of His glory.

THE SPIRIT OF RAMAZAN

Spiritual Training

RAMAZAN is a month of supplication, contemplation, sympathy and training in humility. How does fasting lead us towards these virtues?

Fasting, by its very nature, is an act of patience. Patience and forbearance are what lead a person to the state of the heart which enables him to experience the feeling of nearness to God. It is only then that words worthy of divine acceptance come to one's lips. Patience is the ground on which the blessed tree of supplication or *dua* is grown. It is not just a verbal act. In its essence, it is an act of the heart. This shows the relation between fasting and supplication. Fasting increases the spiritual capability of a man's heart and when this capability increases, the words which ensue are genuine, heartfelt and more precious. Real fasting is that which induces real *dua*.

During Ramazan, a dramatic change comes over the believers. They are seen sitting inside mosques, reciting the Quran, immersed in prayer and the remembrance of God. They become more detached and contemplative. This detachment and staying away from distractions creates a good environment for moral rectification. It paves the way for introspection and self-correction.

Humility refers to man acknowledging his helplessness *vis-à-vis* God's greatness. The feeling of helplessness is not simply a feeling but rather the greatest motivational force in the life of a person. It relates to God, but when this feeling is produced in man in the real sense, it finds expression in human relations. One who becomes truly modest before God finds this same spirit making him modest before human beings.

The height of spirituality is a person's realization of his own helplessness and the supreme power of God. The biggest obstacle to a person's spiritual growth is his own ego and false pride which lead to his being distanced from God. The sole concern of a spiritually pure person is earning God's pleasure.

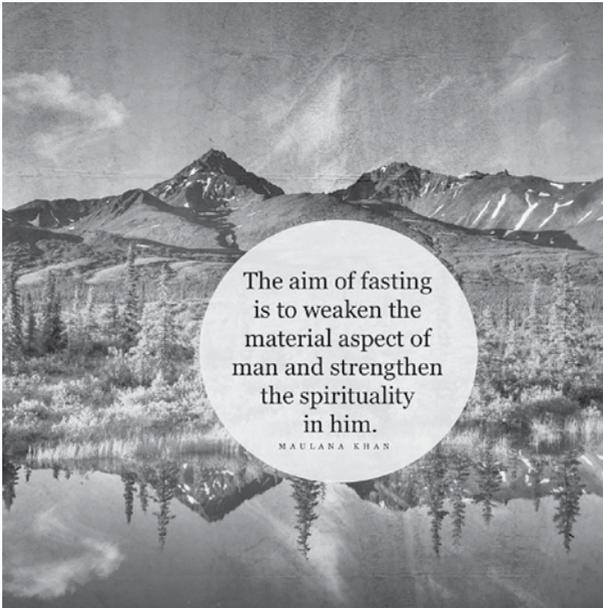
As far as sympathy is concerned, fasting teaches a man what basic human requirements are. It makes him aware of hunger and thirst.

Patience and forbearance are what lead a person to the state of the heart which enables him to experience the feeling of nearness to God.

This understanding makes him aware of the difficulties of his fellow beings and inculcates in him a sense of sympathy thereby making him share his bounties with those who are in need. This sharing will not just be in the form of giving away a portion of what he has but in being sensitive towards safeguarding himself from usurping others rightful share directly or indirectly and in the conservation of natural resources.

The height of spirituality is a person's realization of his own helplessness and the supreme power of God.

Ramazan is thus a process of rejuvenation of a believer. He can look forward to applying the lessons learnt during Ramazan to everyday life. A person who fasts in the true spirit can count on drawing upon the reservoir of fortitude that he has built up and on the power of supplication. He responds with patience and gratefulness, humility and sympathy towards his fellow beings when he is faced with challenging situations. □



TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

We often talk of peace in the context of war. But this is a very narrow and restricted notion of peace. Peace is deeply linked with the entirety of human life. Peace is a complete ideology in itself. Peace is the only religion for both—man and the universe. It is the master-key that opens the doors to every success. Peace creates a favourable atmosphere for success in every endeavour. Without peace, no positive action—small or big—is possible.



THE CULTURE OF RADICALIZATION AND TERRORISM

IN previous ages, the culture of terrorism was not widespread and weapons were produced in limited numbers, generally only for monarchs who deployed them in battle. The terror culture is a recent phenomenon. It has become prevalent only since the major upswing in the armaments industry which has turned weapons into readily available commodities.

A recent survey reveals that those who produce deadly weapons for the purpose of killing people experience deep frustration towards the end of their lives. All of them question themselves as to why they engaged in an evil of such proportions. However, this question remains unanswered. The Russian arms designer, Mikhail Kalashnikov (1919-2013) is a notable example of this. He was best known for having developed the AK-47 assault rifle which was named after him. The Kalashnikov, or AK-47, is one of the world's most familiar and widely used weapons. It is thought that more than 100 million Kalashnikov rifles have been sold worldwide.

Six months before his death, Kalashnikov wrote a letter expressing his anxiety to the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill. It was published by the Russian daily newspaper *Izvestia* in January 2014.

Terrorism is an unnatural act. Neither reason nor conscience can ever sanction it. But often a person, swept away by emotion, ends up perpetrating terrorist acts.

In it, Kalashnikov stated that he was suffering “unbearable spiritual pain” about whether he was responsible for the deaths caused by the weapons he created. “I keep having the same unsolved question: if my rifle claimed people’s lives, then can it be that I, a Christian and an Orthodox believer, was to blame for their deaths?” he asked. “The longer I live” he continued, “the more this question drills itself into my brain and the more I wonder why the Lord allowed man to have the devilish desires of envy, greed and aggression.”

This is true also of terrorists. Terrorism begins with hate and ends with repentance. If the suicide bombers were questioned after carrying out their attacks, they would acknowledge that they had committed a very heinous crime. But, unfortunately, we never have the chance to speak to them.

The terror culture is a recent phenomenon. It has become prevalent only since the major upswing in the armaments industry which has turned weapons into readily available commodities.

However, there are some examples of perpetrators of terrorist acts who were not themselves killed and who suffered pangs of remorse. One such example is that of Lee Boyd Malvo; a Jamaican-American convicted murderer who along with John Allen Muhammad, committed murders in connections with the Beltway sniper attacks in the Washington Metropolitan Area over a three-week period in October 2002. Malvo said in a letter to CNN that he was still ‘grappling with shame, guilt, remorse and

my own healing, if that will ever be possible’. And a social worker who worked extensively with him said he drew self-portraits that often showed him with a tear running down his cheek.

Terrorism always ends in repentance. Terrorism thus has a self-deterrent characteristic—that is, after engaging in a terrorist act, the extremist immediately realizes that he had erred. For this reason, terrorism should have come to an end. But not all would-be terrorists think in this way; very few of them desist from violence in order to lead a peaceful life.

Terrorism is still rife because extremists do not reflect on the act they are about to commit. If they realized beforehand what the result of their violent activities would be, they would never follow this course of action. Rather, they would throw away their guns and bombs and lead a peaceful life.

Terrorism is an unnatural act. Neither reason nor conscience can ever sanction it. But often a person, swept away by emotion, ends up perpetrating terrorist acts. In this regard, education both formal and informal—would serve as a deterrent factor. Even if there are terrorists who are educated, they are so only in the technical or professional sense; they are deficient in learning in the broader sense of the word.

Let us understand the phenomena of radicalization which is nurturing terrorists in Muslim society. Present-day Muslim militancy derives neither from the Quran nor from the *Sunnah*. It is basically a product of the Muslim media that has formed the mindset of present-day Muslims. Muslim militancy and suicide bombing are mainly the consequence of Muslim media. The Muslim press has developed into a kind of protesting type of journalism. Now the electronic media is being used by Muslims towards the same end. Muslim militancy is entirely the upshot of the Muslim community's anger, disillusionment and negative thinking as portrayed and promoted by Muslim media.

It is said that the greatest menace of present times is the radicalization of Muslim youth. But the question is: What is the source of this radicalization? The source of this culture is the use by Muslims of the internet and social networking as an extended form of Muslim media. Muslims have easy access to an international network—the internet and are using it on a vast scale. Thus they have filled their websites on the internet with reports which show that Muslims are an imperiled community. This outreach of the social media is there in everyone's pocket in the form of mobile devices.

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Muslims today have coined a new term, that is, *Islamophobia*. This refers to the danger wrongly perceived by the West that Islam presents to non-Muslims. However, this is not actually the case. Muslims have adopted the culture of violence in the name of Islam. In this sense, the West is right to consider Muslims to be dangerous. The right word would be "*Muslimophobia*". Yet Islam, in itself, is a great blessing from God for the whole of humanity.

In view of the present situation, the question is, is there a silver lining? To save young Muslims from this negative culture, an extensive campaign is required to awaken Muslim minds in such a way that they

may analyze information on websites on their own and develop the ability to differentiate between truth and falsehood.

Muslim reformers should focus on Muslim youth. In the early, formative years, a person is relatively free from conditioning and is thus in a position to view things objectively and examine events in an unbiased manner. Our efforts should begin by trying to inculcate positive thinking in Muslims while they are still very young.

The new generation of Muslims is our hope, especially those who are availing of modern education. Modern education helps in their de-conditioning. They are able to see the world in a more objective way and are developing the ability to understand things in a more realistic manner. It is these Muslim youths who are our hope for the future.

It is important to have greater recourse to education than to guns if present-day terrorism is to be countered. It is a fact that peace in terms of its result is more effective than violence. 'Peace through education' is a solution to this problem. The most effective way of bringing about

peace is only one—and that is, to educate people's minds along peaceful lines. Education refers to both formal and informal and is the need of the hour on a mass scale.

Muslim militancy is entirely the upshot of the Muslim community's anger, disillusionment and negative thinking as portrayed and promoted by Muslim media.

Another solution is to establish a large institution with the name *Universal Peace Centre* on a global level. All the Muslim countries, organizations and Muslim individuals with resources should become members of this centre. The *Universal Peace Centre* should be set up with the common support of all Muslims. It should be structured in accordance with international standards

and should be completely non-political, non-communal and non-commercial. The sole purpose of this centre should be to promote peace and replace the culture of violence with the culture of peace all over the world. At present, Muslims number more than one billion and are spread out all over the world. All kinds of rich natural resources are available in Muslim countries. The best use of these resources would be to utilize them for the cause of peace. □



FASTING-ORIENTED LIFE

Control Your Life

RAMAZAN being a month to be trained in inculcating spirituality, every ritual connected to fasting has a spiritual aspect. Fasting is not just an annual custom. It is a living creative process. It is related to the entire life of a human being, the aim of which is to make man's life a fasting-oriented life.

Fasting puts a curb on desires. In one *Hadith*, this is referred to as 'renouncing one's desires'. Food and water are essential needs of man. Sleep and rest are also needs of man. During the month of fasting there are restrictions to these essential needs by compulsion. This training inculcates in man the capability to restrain his desires willingly so that he consciously leads a disciplined life.

Symbolically speaking, the position of fasting in human life is akin to the brakes in an engine. Brakes keep the engine of a vehicle in control so that the journey can be completed successfully. If there is no brake in the engine, the vehicle will not be able to function effectively.

The same is the case of fasting in the life of a believer. Man should accord the place of brakes to fasting in his life so that he may travel successfully on the path of God. The fasting of that person is true for whom fasting is like applying brakes on the things forbidden by God.

Man should accord the place of brakes to fasting in his life so that he may travel successfully on the path of God. The fasting of that person is true for whom fasting is like applying brakes on the things forbidden by God.

Just like the symbolism of fasting in our worldly life, the breaking of the fast presents a semblance of the life Hereafter. The breaking of the fast brings an end for a few hours to the restrictions placed during the day, and the day of the festival of Eid, brings an end to the prohibitions and restrictions placed during the entire month. *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the day of the festival, also gives us a faint taste and semblance of the life Hereafter. It reminds us of the joys and pleasures of the Hereafter promised to a believer who has successfully passed this worldly test.

A true believer, having undergone the period of fasting in a most sincere manner, gets the feeling of the Hereafter as soon as the month

A true believer, having undergone the period of fasting in a most sincere manner, gets the feeling of the Hereafter as soon as the month of Ramazan is over and the celebrations for Eid are underway.

of Ramazan is over and the celebrations for Eid are underway. He feels as if he is being entertained as a guest by God Himself. From the depths of his being, his heart cries out: 'O God, as You have helped me carry out the injunctions of fasting and at the culmination of the month, have bestowed on me the joys of Eid, accept this life of mine as one spent in fasting and bestow on me the delights of Paradise. Include me amongst the list of persons who have been bestowed the life of Paradise by opening Thy gates of mercy!'

The message of Eid fosters the rekindling of our faith and the opening of new vistas and an entirely fresh and innovative approach to the struggles of life which would culminate by the grace of God with the rewards of everlasting Paradise. □



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LESSONS FROM NATURE

Building a Positive Personality

NATURE is a storehouse of learning for those who wish to learn. If we do not take it for granted and learn to look at it consciously as our teacher we will benefit tremendously from the silent language that it speaks.

What does a tree's eloquent silence tell us? It conveys to us that after autumn, there is spring. The tree creates no noise, no problems, and no unwanted situations. It gives shade, a pleasant sight, oxygen, beautiful flowers and fruits. It provides a place for birds which adds to the beauty of the world. The tree is a message to man to adopt the same culture and to become a fitting ornament of the garden of the universe.

What does a river convey? In the river, fresh water is being added to the existing water at every moment. This everyday phenomenon is responsible for the freshness of the river water. In the absence of this continuous flow of newly-added water, the river will lose its freshness; it will not be able to maintain its health-giving, nay life-giving properties. Man should adopt the same culture in terms of adding knowledge and wisdom at every moment of his life. This will prevent him from continuing to follow the wrong ways generation after generation which are obstacles to development and progress.

If we learn to look at nature consciously as a teacher, we will benefit tremendously from the silent language that it speaks.

Ants coming up on a heap of sugar and a heap of salt would take the sugar and ignore the salt. For the human who observes this, the silent message is to ignore what is undesirable and adopt what is desirable. It is the honeybee's culture to fly out from its hive every day and reach places where flowers are available for it. It extracts nectar from the flower and returns to its abode. It pays no heed to anything else. Where there are flowers, there are also thorns; but the honeybee does not waste its time by complaining about the thorns. It simply concentrates on the flower and extracts what it wants. The symbolic lesson for man from this is, "Live like a honeybee". Extract what is good for you and leave what is unwanted. Do not waste your time in complaints and protests.

We have to develop in our personality what may be called the capacity for conversion; and who could be a better example of it than a cow.

Man feeds grass to the cows and the cows convert it into milk returning it to man. Similarly, man should develop this culture of conversion—converting anger into forgiveness, problems into challenges, feeling of deprivation into a feeling of motivation, and the list can be endless.

When there is a severe storm, large birds with strong wings fly upwards and save themselves from becoming victims of the storm. On the basis of this behaviour of the birds there is a common phrase, 'big birds of the storm'. During negative situations, the behaviour of high thinking people will be akin to the behaviour of the 'big birds of the storm'. They are those who will fly high above the situation and remain positive. They will stay peaceful and think of creative ideas to tackle their challenges.

Convert your anger into forgiveness, problems into challenges, deprivation into motivation, feeling of not being born with a 'silver spoon' into the feeling of being born with an 'incentive spoon'.

While we understand that there is a lot of learning that can be acquired from observing nature, we also need to understand that the behaviour of nature is by instinct, but man has to consciously, and of his own free will adopt these lessons. What is there to stop him from doing so? He is richly endowed with

intelligence and power of reasoning. Value these gifts bestowed by God and make use of them fully. □



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LAILATUL QADR (THE NIGHT OF DESTINY)

A Long Arduous Search

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

We sent it [Quran] down on the Night of Destiny. And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; on that night, the angels and the Spirit come down by the permission of their Lord with His decrees for all matters; it is all peace till the break of dawn. (QURAN 97: 1-5)

THE 'Night of Destiny' falls towards the end of the month of Ramazan. The Prophet's wife Aisha, asked Prophet Muhammad what she should do if she finds the Night. Prophet Muhammad said she should pray:

O God! Certainly You are the One who grants forgiveness for sins. You love to forgive, so forgive me. (*Al Bukhari*)

The act of seeking forgiveness is so significant because by doing so, a believer realizes the smallness of his being and the greatness of God. He realizes that God alone has the power to forgive, and none else.

Common belief is that the Night of Destiny can be found in the final phase of Ramazan. This is wishful thinking! Similar to scientific discoveries, finding is the result of a long and arduous process of seeking.

To belittle scientific discoveries, some say these are serendipitous occurrences. But such accidents happen only to scientists! 'Finding' is an outcome of long preparation and search. A scientist spends years studying the subject and researching it, and after a long, gruelling effort, he makes that one discovery! Similarly, in order to find the Night of Destiny one must prepare the mind. This involves years of effort and *dua* (supplication), at the end of which a believer is able to realize his insignificance and the supreme greatness of God.

The prayer that Prophet Muhammad advised *Aisha* represents the gist of life. Muslims think that staying awake an entire night would ensure finding the Night of Destiny. This is a far-fetched idea. A believer has to spend a lifetime to attain a prepared mind and then hope his prayer will be accepted by God.

According to another Hadith report, Prophet was in *etkaaf* (seclusion practiced in the final phase of Ramazan), then he came out of Masjid *an-Nabawi* (Prophet's mosque in Madinah) but went back again. He later told his companions that an angel had come to pass on the knowledge about the Night of Destiny. When the Prophet came out to inform the believers, he saw two of his people fighting amongst each other. Instantly, the knowledge of the Night was taken away from the Prophet's mind. This incident has a great lesson for the believers! The fight was not an armed battle; the two believers were merely arguing, but even fighting with words is enough to have the divine knowledge taken away. Those who adopt the path of suicide bombing and violence can never become the recipients of divine blessings.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word. Else the blessings may be showered, but not on him! Positivity is the most important trait that makes a man worthy of receiving God's blessings.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word. Else the blessings may be showered, but not on him! Positivity is the most important trait that makes a man worthy of receiving God's blessings. A positive mind will not engage in conflicts and would remain free of revenge, hatred, lust and negative thoughts. (Al Bukhari) □



A DOOR, NOT A GRAVE

Look Beyond

THERE is a great lesson in a scene at the graveyard for those who contemplate. At the death of a young man, the *Imam* (prayer leader) led the funeral prayer. He conducted the whole prayer very quickly and thereafter people put on their shoes immediately as though in a great hurry to finish the formality of attending the funeral prayer and getting back to their activities. After the funeral prayers were said, the body was taken for burial to the adjacent graveyard. A few people accompanied the body to the grave.

The graveyard was close by and the grave was still being dug. People stood around in groups. Some were relating stories of oppression. Some complained about the severity of the weather. Someone offered his knowledge about the prices of things. Others were discussing the political leadership in the country. In other words, people were talking about different topics of interest.

The above behaviour was so opposite to the way as taught by the Prophet. At such times, the Prophet used to say the following supplication:

“Peace be upon you, O dwellers of these graves! May God forgive you and us. You have preceded us, and we are following your trail.” (*At-Tirmidhi*)

A grave actually should remind us of the verses from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet that talk about death, the Day of Judgement, Heaven and Hell. It should make us aware that it is an open door that we are standing in front of, and that, through it, we are witnessing sights of the other world with our own eyes. It should make our hearts restless. But unfortunately these feelings are not aroused in people. They are beset by their own problems.

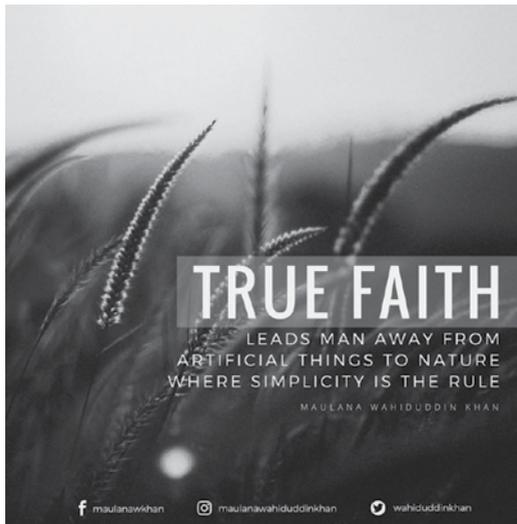
A grave actually should remind us of the verses from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet that talk about death, the Day of Judgement, Heaven and Hell.

However, the real problems are not the ones in which people are entangled. Rather, the real problem is the one that will appear after death. If only people gave a thought to what they might have to face after their death! A person leaves this temporary world and heads

towards his eternal home. The grave therefore is not really a grave, but rather, a door that has been opened for the deceased to enter the other world. Passing through this door, one has to cross over to the other side.

The grave therefore is not really a grave, but rather, a door that has been opened for the deceased to enter the other world. Passing through this door, one has to cross over to the other side.

Whenever someone dies, it is a very special moment. It is as if at that moment, the door leading out to the other world, which is hidden from us, is opened for a short while. If one possesses eyes that can truly see, one can clearly view through this door the other world where all of us, one day or the other, have to go. But the sights of the present world have so bedazzled people that even when they stand before this open door they see nothing of what is on the other side. Even though they stand so close to reality, they remain totally unaware. □



EID-UL-FITR

Bringing People Together

ACCORDING to the Islamic tradition, there are two festivals observed by Muslims every year—*Eid-ul-Fitr* just after Ramazan and *Eid-ul-Azha* in the month of Haj. *Eid-ul-Fitr* literally means ‘festival of breaking the fast’. Like other festivals, *Eid-ul-Fitr* is a symbol of an important article of faith. It reminds one of an Islamic belief in the form of social practice.

Eid-ul-Fitr may be a Muslim festival, but Muslims, like other communities, live in a society, in a neighbourhood. This makes *Eid-ul-Fitr* automatically a social festival. Therefore, Muslims meet not only with their religious brothers, but also with neighbours of other denominations and with their colleagues at work or in business. It is this social aspect of *Eid-ul-Fitr* that has led to the practice of *Eid Milan*. Muslims observe *Eid Milan* (get together on *Eid* day) by inviting their neighbours and others to spend some time with them. In this sense *Eid-ul-Fitr* promotes social harmony.

Like other festivals, *Eid-ul-Fitr* cannot be observed in isolation. It is but natural that the festival begins as a Muslim tradition but, in practice, it turns into a social festival. During their preparation of *Eid*, they are bound to meet their fellow brethren. Then when they leave their homes to go to mosques, they again meet other members of society. Thus, every activity of *Eid-ul-Fitr* automatically turns into a social activity. In this sense the observation turns into a human festival rather than a Muslim festival, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly.

Eid-ul-Fitr has a form, but at the same time there is a spirit inherent in all the festivity. In terms of form it may seem to be a limited festival, but in terms of spirit it is a universal festival. If *Eid-ul-Fitr* is observed in its true spirit, it will energize the whole community, bringing people together in harmony and gratitude. *Eid-ul-Fitr* therefore truly means *Eid-ul-Insaan* or a festival of humankind. □

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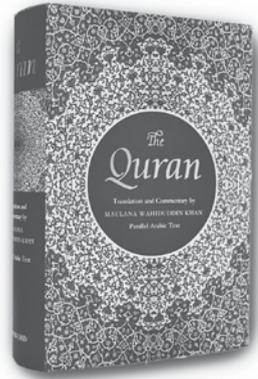


THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

The Quran is the book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety since its revelation to the Prophet of Islam between 610 and 632 AD. It is a book that brings glad tidings to mankind, along with divine admonition, and stresses the importance of man's discovery of the Truth on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



THE HYPOCRITES

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

When the hypocrites come to you, they say, 'We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of God.' God knows that you are indeed His Messenger, but God bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars, they use their oaths as a cover and thus they bar others from God's way: what they have been doing is truly evil that is because they believed and then rejected their faith: their hearts are sealed up, so that they are devoid of understanding. (63: 1-3)

It is a sign of hypocrisy in an individual if he indulges in tall talk and resorts to swearing oaths to reassure others of the truth of his words. A sincere man is subdued out of fear of God. He speaks more from his heart than from his tongue. A hypocrite is eager for men to hear his voice, while a sincere man is eager for God to hear his voice.

When a man embraces the faith, he makes a sincere vow. Thereafter, different practical occasions arise in life when he is required to act according to his vow. Now, one who, on such occasions, hears the voice of his heart and fulfils the requirements of his vow, has in effect revived and confirmed his vow of faith. On the contrary, one who hears his inner voice, ignores it and acts in breach of his vow, will gradually become less and less conscious of his vow and will eventually become completely insensitive about his vow of faith. This, in fact, is the meaning of 'their hearts are sealed up'.

When you see them, their outward appearance pleases you; when they speak, you listen to what they say. But they are like propped up blocks

of timber. They think that every shout is directed against them. They are the [real] enemies, so beware of them. The curse of God be upon them! How they turn away! When they are told, 'Come! The Messenger of God will ask forgiveness for you!' they turn their heads away and you see them walking away arrogantly.

It makes no difference whether you ask forgiveness for them or not. God will not forgive them: God does not guide such rebellious people.

(63: 4-6)

A hypocrite protects his interests by his compromising and self-interested approach. He does not involve himself in considerations of right or wrong. However, he maintains good relations with everybody, and when he speaks, he dwells upon the interests of his hearers. Therefore, everybody finds something agreeable in his conversation. But these apparently 'fresh green trees' consist in reality of 'dry sticks.' In the hypocrite's eyes, worldly interest is much more important than any religious interest. Such people, in spite of being vociferous claimants of Faith, are totally deprived of God's guidance.

They are the ones who say, 'Give nothing to those who follow God's Messenger, until they abandon him;' but the treasures of the heavens and the earth belong to God, though the hypocrites do not understand this [and] they say, 'Indeed, when we return to Madinah, [we] the ones most worthy of honour, will surely drive out from there the contemptible ones!' [referring to poor Muslims]. However, all honour belongs to God, and to His Messenger and those who believe [in God]: but of this the hypocrites are not aware. (63: 7-8)

In old Madinah, there were two groups of Muslims—one, the Migrants (*al-Muhajirun*) and the other, the Helpers (*al-Ansar*)—the local hosts at Madinah. The former had come to Madinah on being displaced from their native place, Makkah. Their best apparent supports were the local Muslims of Madinah, the Helpers. In the eyes of world-loving people, the Migrants seemed, therefore, to be people without honour in comparison with the Helpers who were respectable people. This was felt so keenly that on one occasion, 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy clearly stated, 'What is the status of these Migrants? If we expel them from our place, they will not find refuge anywhere in the world.'

Such words are uttered by those who are unaware of the reality that whatever is there in this world, belongs to God. He gives to whomever He wishes and takes away from whomever He wishes.

O believers! Do not let your wealth or your children distract you from remembrance of God. Those who do so will be the losers. And spend out of what We have provided you with before death comes to one of you and he says, 'My Lord! If only You would grant me respite for a little while, then I would give alms and be among the righteous.' But God will not grant a reprieve to a soul when its appointed time has come; God is well-aware of what you do. (63: 9-11)

The biggest problem for a man is the inevitability of the Hereafter. But the consideration of riches and children make a man unmindful of it. Man should know that riches and children are not the final goal but the blessings which are given to him so that he may utilize them for God's work. He should therefore use them to improve his life in the Hereafter. But man, in his stupidity, takes them to be his goal. When such people come face to face with their eventual final fate, they will experience only frustration and regret. □



*When people fast,
they assiduously
abstain from food
and drink, but they
do not bother to
refrain from lying,
deceit, and injustice.*



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Is it possible for a person to fast in the month of Ramazan in the best of form but miss out on its spirit totally?

Roza (fasting) has a spirit and a form. Both are equally necessary, but without the inner spirit there is no value of fasting. A teaching of the Prophet clearly tells us that a person who keeps fasts without observing its spirit, his fasting will be considered insignificant in God's eyes, as it will be merely hunger and thirst. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

Apart from God's rewards in the Hereafter, what are the immediate benefits of fasting in this world?

The immediate benefit is that by keeping fasts a person is enlisted by angels as a grateful servant of God. According to a teaching of the Prophet God says: "O people, all of you are hungry except the one whom I feed." (*Sahih Muslim*). This is indeed a reality because if the food we eat does not grow and be nourished by soil, we humans cannot gain it for consumption by any other means. This is why if a person keeps fasts in the month of Ramazan, he proves himself deserving of receiving the food grown in the soil for the rest of the year as well. Otherwise he will be deemed a usurper.

What are the things I should do to ensure that the benefits of fasting continue throughout the year?

The way to this is that one must fast in the month of Ramazan in terms of form, but must adhere to its spirit through the whole of the year. The spirit of fasting is to be grateful to God (QURAN 2: 185). That is, a person must continuously acknowledge the food, drink and other life-sustaining commodities that one draws from nature created by God. One must discover this fact and sincerely acknowledge the Creator for His innumerable bounties not only for the year but also for the whole of his life. This is the way to keeping alive the benefits and training gained during the month of Ramazan.

In what way does a believer who fasts in the month of Ramazan—in both the best of form and spirit—contribute positively to society?

Contributing to society is possible for a believer by universalization of the spirit of fasting. Every person in this world who eats and drinks should acknowledge the act of eating and drinking as exceptional—as if God Almighty were directly sending down these blessings to him.

One must make the spirit of fasting a universal realization for oneself. That is, the profound feeling of God being the Giver and one's own self being the 'taker' should incite one to become a 'giver' member of society. That is, one should strive to give to others what one is receiving from the Creator. □



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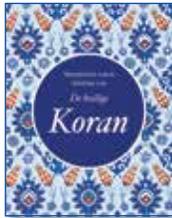
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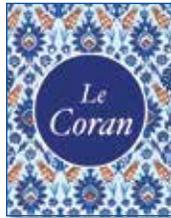
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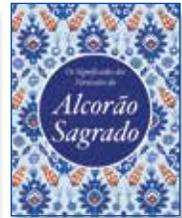
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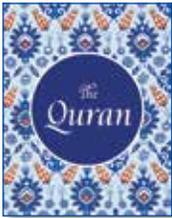
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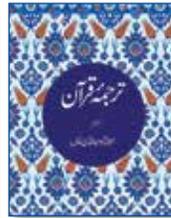
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