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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



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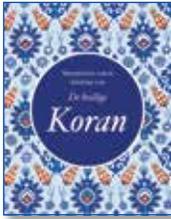
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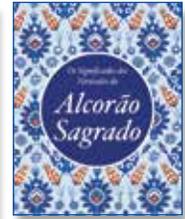
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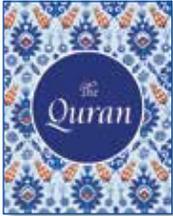
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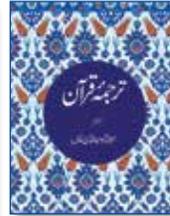
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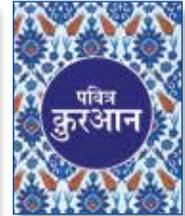
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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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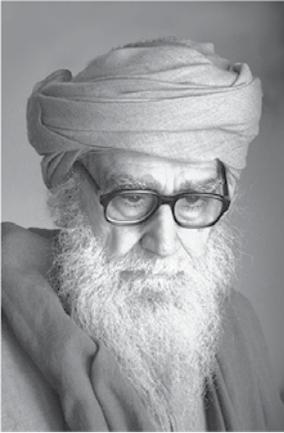
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

INSTANT TRIPLE TALAQ IS UN-ISLAMIC

AS an Islamic scholar, I would say that the Supreme Court's judgement delivered on August 22—striking down instant triple *talaq* (divorce) as being unconstitutional—is totally right. Triple *talaq* is not a principle of Islam, but is rather a ruling of certain Muslim jurists, adopted in the later period of Islam. In this matter, Muslim jurists need to correct themselves instead of wrongly justifying triple *talaq*.

In Islam, *talaq* is seen as an undesirable practice. But in rare cases, a couple may feel that their marriage is not working, and in this situation, divorce is allowed. However, there is a prescribed method laid down by the Quran (2: 229). That is, a divorce is finalised over a period of time. In the first month, the husband tells his wife that he has pronounced *talaq* once. Both then wait for a month during which they could reconcile. After the first month, he may either revoke the *talaq* or pronounce it a second time. Both wait for another month, at the end of which, if he pronounces a third *talaq*, the divorce becomes final.

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2012, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

This pattern was adhered to during the time of the Prophet and the first Caliph Abu Bakr. There were rare cases, when a man would come to the Prophet or Abu Bakr, saying that he had divorced his wife by saying *talaq* three times in one go. Then the Prophet and Abu Bakr would consider this an instance of *talaq* being said in anger and so did not finalise the divorce. Rather, they told him that his uttering '*talaq*' three times in one instance would be regarded as only one pronouncement of *talaq*.

Triple talaq is not a principle of Islam, but is rather a ruling of certain Muslim jurists, adopted in the later period of Islam. In this matter, Muslim jurists need to correct themselves instead of wrongly justifying triple talaq.

During the time of the second Caliph Umar, the number of people who began to pronounce *talaq* in one sitting increased. Umar, in a case, ruled the saying of *talaq* three times in one go as final and annulled the marriage. But he also flogged that man as deterrent punishment. This helped in curbing instances of saying *talaq* at one go. Certainly, Umar's practice was not a *Shariah* law. His step was rather an example of *hukm al-hakim*, or an executive order. His annulment of marriage in the case where the man said *talaq* three times in one go was an exercise of the discretionary power of a ruler. Such executive orders are applicable to particular cases and do not have the status of *Shariah* law.

In the British period, men again began to divorce their wives in one sitting. Now Muslim jurists belonging to the *Hanafi* school of law revived Umar's order and made instant triple *talaq* valid. The *Hanafi* jurists cited Umar's precedent, but this reference was unwarranted, because Umar had done so by way of an executive order while, in the later period, *Hanafi* jurists did so by issuing a *fatwa*. Moreover, Umar had also punished the person, while *Hanafi* jurists were not in a position to do so.

In such a scenario, my advice to *Hanafi* Muslims is to take the Supreme Court's verdict as a reminder and review their practice. They should consider triple *talaq* in one go as a case of a decision having been taken in anger and take it as only one *talaq*—as had been done during the time of the Prophet. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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THE END OF HISTORY IS NEAR

Final Warning

THE twenty-first century is an alarming era. Almost every day there is some news in the media that the planet earth is becoming more and more uninhabitable. A recent news in this regard appeared in *The Times of India August 2, 2017*, the gist of which is noted below:

According to a new study the world will almost certainly reach a tipping point and there will be an unstoppable, destructive climate change. By the end of the century the world's temperature will rise from 2° Celsius to 4.9° Celsius. It is at the point that scientists think the world will suffer disastrous effects like widespread drought, extreme weather and dangerous increases in sea levels. Experts have suggested that 2°C of warming is the point at which change becomes irreversible. There is a 99% chance that climate change will break through that limit. Dargan Frierson from the University of Washington said, "Damage from heat extremes, drought, extreme weather and sea level rise will be much more severe if a 2°C or higher temperature rise is allowed."

The celebrated British physicist Stephen Hawking has even gone to the extent of saying that we shall have to find another planet because we cannot survive for more than 100 years on this planet. Hawking's is not a lone voice in this regard. The whole scientific community is in agreement with him. Scientists have repeatedly issued the warning that we have no option but to find another planet on which to survive.

In ancient Egypt, the Prophet Moses gave this message on behalf of God to the Egyptian Pharaoh:

The Hour is coming. But I choose to keep it hidden, so that every human being may be recompensed in accordance with his deeds. (QURAN 20: 15)

***All human beings
will face the
consequences of the
deeds performed in
the world they left
behind. Every person
shall have to face
divine judgement for
their former life.***

In ancient times many prophets came to deliver this message to mankind. We learn from the *Hadith* that they were more than 100,000 in number. All these prophets spoke in the same vein. All the prophets gave this same alarming news. The Quran calls them *Nazeer*—those

who give warning. This was the principal message of all the prophets who came to the world.

In previous ages, this warning was given by the prophets. The message was that the day will come when the history of mankind will reach its end. And the next phase of human life will begin, that is, the world Hereafter (*Akhirat*). In this second phase of life, man will be presented before the Creator. All human beings will face the consequences of the deeds performed in the world they left behind. Every person shall have to face divine judgement for their former life.

Now, the scientific community has taken on this task of warning mankind. There is consensus among the Muslims and the scientific community that the end of the world is so near that it is knocking at our door. Previous warnings were given on the basis of divine revelation (*Wahy*). The scientific community is giving the same warning on the basis of scientific data. The time for introspection has come. Every man has to face this and prepare himself accordingly.

On that Day man will ask, 'Where can I escape?' But there is nowhere to take refuge: on that Day, to your Lord alone is the recourse. On the Day, man will be told of all that he has sent before and what he has left behind.

(THE QURAN 75: 11-13) □



Sense of Repentance

A positive aspect of repentance is that it engenders a strong determination in a person to reform himself, and after having done something wrong, to firmly walk on the path of goodness thereafter. It is this positive enthusiasm that follows from repentance that, in line with the law of nature, changes an evil deed into a good one.

THE VISION OF ISLAM

God Worshipping, Man's Well-wishing

GOD has created man in freedom, but this freedom is not unlimited. The freedom of the individual is taken away at death. And, the freedom of the whole human race will be taken away on Doomsday. After the cessation of life in this world, a new life will begin in the Hereafter. There, people will be divided into two groups; one who, having made proper use of their freedom making it subservient to the will of God, will enter into Paradise; the other group will be of those who, having been fearless of God in using the freedom granted to them, will have to face punishment. This division will be eternal.

About a hundred years of life in this world is going to end in an eternal fate for man. And the end will either be a terrible punishment or the greatest of rewards. This state of affairs makes the matter of life extremely grave. Despite this extraordinary gravity, all realities remain hidden from human eyes. God, the angels, Paradise, Hell; nothing is visible. As such, it was expected of man that when these realities were revealed, he would say, "God, I did not know that this was going to be the end of life. Why did You not tell us before?"

This would be a futile excuse as God has made plentiful arrangements for His message to be conveyed to mankind. With the very creation of man, God began sending prophets to the world. In fact, the very first man was also the first prophet. The prophets were sent revelations so that they could convey the divine message to mankind. This series of prophets continued from Adam to Jesus Christ. Finally God decided to send the final Prophet to whom He would send the last divine book which would be preserved with the message of God for all time so that no further prophets were required anymore.

For the conveyance of God's message to people after the last Prophet, the true followers of the Prophet were assigned the role. This is the task referred to in the Quran as 'calling people to God'. This duty involves conveying the message with beauty and wisdom and without any compulsion as per the Quranic commandments. Those who take up this divine task must bear in mind that:

Calling people to God involves conveying the divine message with beauty and wisdom and without any compulsion as per the Quranic commandments.

- God has no special relationship with any particular community.
- As this work is the task of representing God, it has to be performed with meticulous care and accorded the highest moral standards which it demands.
- Well-wishing and complete goodness is expected of an earnest undertaker of this task.
- The traits of the one who conveys the message to others should be of a completely peaceful and non-materialistic person. Such a person should be completely positive and one who contributes to the constructive activities of the world.

The fundamental mission of the Prophet was to convey the message of God to man and Muslims as followers of the Prophet cannot afford to ignore this mission.

However, on observing the history of the entire Muslim world over the last 200 years, we find that this work has not happened. Most of the movements undertaken by the Muslims have been political in one way or another. What is actually desired of them is to work for a Hereafter-oriented movement, in which the goal is to make people aware of what they will have to face in the next world. Instead, Muslim political activities are directed at acquiring worldly rights through protests and demands.

Muslims should now shun all such activities and if they claim to be the true followers of the Prophet, they must emulate the Prophet in their lives. The fundamental mission of the Prophet was to convey the message of God to man and Muslims as followers of the Prophet cannot afford to ignore this mission. Their activities must centre on the task of conveying the peaceful message of the Quran to mankind. Like the Prophet, they must live a noble life which involves being God's worshipper and man's well-wisher. This is the vision and the mission of Islam. □



Petty Issues

A person who is inspired by an exalted purpose in life will always ignore petty issues.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The Existence of Man is Proof of the Existence of God.

*God created man in His Own image.
(Prophet Muhammad, Sahih al-Bukhari)*

IF man discovers himself, at the same time he can discover the existence of God. It may be said that if God is a great God, man is mini-god as compared to Him. When the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) tried to prove his existence, he said, "I think, therefore I am". This logic is certainly right, but the same logic applies to the question about the existence of God as well. By using this logic one can say, "I am, therefore God is".

The British philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was an atheist. In his *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, he narrates a story with reference to his father. He writes: "The question, 'Who made me?' cannot be answered, because we have no experience or authentic information from which to answer it; and that any answer only throws the difficulty a step further back, since the question presents itself, 'who made God?'"

This premise itself is wrong. For the question here is about explaining a real phenomenon, and not to evade it by producing irrelevant logic of the kind stated above. Here, we are facing a phenomenon whose existence we cannot deny. Denying it is like denying our very own existence and the existence of the universe. The choice for us is not between a universe with God and a universe without God. Instead, the choice before us is a universe with God, or no universe at all. Since there exists a universe, to explain it, we have to take recourse to a Creator. If we deny the Creator, we will have to also deny the existence of the universe, which is not viable. We cannot deny the existence of the universe; therefore, we have to accept the existence of a Creator as irrefutable logic.

Belief in God is strange, but not to believe in God is even stranger. So when we say that there is a God, we give preference to the strange over the stranger.

Belief in God is strange, but not to believe in God is even stranger. So when we say that there is a God, we give preference to the strange over the stranger.

The river of knowledge is flowing in favour of the afore-mentioned logic. In the ancient age, philosophy was the reigning discipline of the world, and almost all the philosophers were believers and not atheists.

Without referring to the word 'God', they were believers in some higher power.

For example, the German philosopher, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) called it the "world spirit". So was the case of other philosophers, although they gave it different names. For the philosophers, it was difficult to believe in a personal God. They were believers of God as a pervading spirit, and not as an independent being. This philosophical theology is called idealism in history.

It was this philosophical theory that was accepted by theologians in the name of Monism. These theologians believed in God, but not in terms of a personal God. Instead, they believed in God in terms of a spirit pervading throughout the cosmos.

If we deny the Creator, we will have to also deny the existence of the universe, which is not viable. We cannot deny the existence of the universe; therefore, we have to accept the existence of a Creator as irrefutable logic.

Scientific studies of the modern era were not related directly to the question of God, but they influenced the belief system indirectly. In fact, modern science started a new intellectual process in the divine field. Now this process has reached the extent where science and theology seem like a single discipline although with two different names.

In the realm of the physical sciences, we have had three major paradigm shifts in the last four centuries. The first is attributed to Isaac Newton (1643-1727). Here we have the Newtonian hypothesis that matter was the basic building block of the universe. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) developed the Einsteinian paradigm of energy being the basic building block. Currently, research in quantum physics has shown a relationship between quantum mechanics and consciousness with scientists like David Bohm (1917-1992) and many others accepting consciousness to be the basic building block of the universe.

These shifts have had inevitable consequences for the new age philosophy, which has moved away from the philosophy of crass materialism to that of spirituality.

Perhaps this is the final word of science, but the final word of science has only opened the door to another realm or discipline, and that is religion or theology. If the building block of the world is consciousness then what is the difference between consciousness and God? God is

nothing but an embodiment of consciousness, so if the existence of consciousness is proved, the existence of God is also proved.

British scientist Paul Charles William Davies (born 1946), currently a professor at Arizona State University as well as the Director of *BEYOND: Centre for Fundamental Concepts in Science*, summarizes the latest scientific stand on the subject:

Scientists are slowly waking up to an inconvenient truth—the universe looks suspiciously like a fix. The issue concerns the very laws of nature themselves. For 40 years, physicists and cosmologists have been quietly collecting examples of all too convenient “coincidences” and special features in the underlying laws of the universe that seem to be necessary in order for life, and hence conscious beings, to exist. Change anyone of them and the result would be lethal.

To see the problem, imagine playing God with the cosmos. Before you is a designer machine that lets you tinker with the basics of physics. Twiddle this knob and you make all electrons a bit lighter, twiddle that one and you make gravity a bit stronger. It happens that you need to set 30-something knobs to fully describe the world about us. The point is that some of those metaphorical knobs must be tuned precisely, or the universe would be sterile.

Example: neutrons are just a little heavier than protons. If it were the other way around, atoms could not exist, because all the protons in the universe would have decayed into neutrons shortly after Big Bang. No protons, then no atomic nuclei, and no atoms. No atoms, no chemistry, no life.

This is the final logic to which scientific discoveries have reached in the twenty-first century. Now the problem is only one of idiom. If you use the scientific idiom, you will speak the above kind of language. But if you speak in the religious idiom, you would say that the river of knowledge has reached its final stage, that is, the realization of God. □



WHEN THE LION SPEAKS

Truth Will Prevail

WHY do hunters think it's cool to kill lions? Why are some lions confined to a cage? People justify these acts by saying they want the lions' head as a trophy or by citing the argument that the lion is a savage and bloodthirsty beast. However, this is only a one-sided statement—the stand of the lion, in this respect, is not known to us. This phenomenon is because the lion, in spite of its bravery and majesty, does not possess the ability to speak.

In this regard, there is a maxim famous among the African people. Africa is a country of lions, as a great number of the world's lion population inhabits the African jungles. For this reason, lions find mention in many African proverbs. One such saying is:

Until lions can speak, the only history will be that of the hunters.

This proverb is applicable, in a greater sense, to human life. In the present world, due to various reasons, truth is speechless like the lion. All realities lay hidden. Everyday false statements appear in newspapers. Books and magazines consist of thoughts of a person's own liking. In conferences and seminars, the one who has the power of rhetoric is raised to the lofty position of a hero.

In the midst of this verbal uproar, truth remains concealed—truth does not speak of itself. However, this situation will prevail only so long as truth does not express itself. Soon, the time is about to come when the “lion” of the truth will roar out. It will make reality known to people, while they sought to present a version of it suited to their own interests. It will disclose what a person really was from within while pretending all along to be something else. It will reveal a person's real intentions and motives when he tried to impress others from the stage.

The state of affairs existing in this world is wholly temporary—it is certainly not everlasting. A time is sure to come when the lion speaks. A time when the curtain shall be raised from falsehood and truth shall become evident for all to see. □



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.



AVOIDING CONFRONTATION

THE year after the Siege of the Trench, in 628 AD, the Prophet Muhammad had a dream. At this time, he was in Madinah. In the dream, he saw himself and his Companions visiting the House of God in Makkah. His Companions were very pleased to hear this, for it meant that, after a lapse of six years, they would soon be going to Makkah and visiting the Kabah.

In accordance with this dream, the Prophet set out for Makkah with 1400 of his Companions. When they reached a place called Ghadir Ashtat, they heard that the news of their journey had reached the Quraysh. The Quraysh were a powerful tribe that controlled Makkah. The Prophet was born into the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh. When the Prophet began preaching Islam in Makkah in 610 AD, many members of the Quraysh turned his staunch opponents. This is why he left Makkah in 622 AD and migrated to Madinah.

Indignant at the idea of the Muslims visiting the Kabah, the Quraysh had amassed an army and vowed to prevent the Prophet and his Companions from entering Makkah, although it was contrary to Arab tradition to prevent anyone from visiting the Kabah. The Prophet was acting under divine inspiration; perhaps that is why he remained calm when he heard of the Quraysh's reaction. He learnt from informers that Khalid ibn al-Walid, intent on blocking the Muslim's path, had advanced with two hundred cavalymen to Ghamim. On hearing this, the Prophet changed route, deviating from a well-frequented path to a little known and arduous route, which led him to Hdaybiya. In this way, he avoided clashing with Khalid's army.

This is how the historian Ibn Hisham, in his biography of the Prophet describes these events:

“Who can show us a path not occupied by the Quraysh?” the Prophet asked. One of them volunteered to do so and then proceeded to guide the Muslims by a route which led through arduous, rocky and mountainous passes, but when they had done so and emerged upon an open plain, the Prophet called on them to seek forgiveness of God and turn to Him. This they did. This was obviously a trying time for the Muslims, but they had to face their trial with patience and forbearance. This was the path laid down for them by God. Even the slightest hesitation to follow that path was to be considered a transgression, for which forgiveness had to be sought. That is why the Prophet urged his followers to repent and seek forgiveness for any weakness or irritability they may have shown at that taxing time. Difficulties were to be faced with fortitude. No impulse was to cause one to deviate from the path of God.

In order to survey the situation, the Prophet made a halt at Hudaibiya, situated nine miles from Makkah. From Hudaibiya he sent one Kharash ibn Umayyah on camel back to inform the Makkans that the Muslims had come to visit the House of God, not to do battle. On reaching Makkah, Kharash's camel was slaughtered, and attempts were made

If someone conspires against you, you should render the conspiracy ineffective through wisdom and silent positive action.

to murder him as well, but somehow he managed to escape and return to Hudaibiya. The Prophet then set Uthman to appeal to the Makkans to refrain from hostilities and tell them that the Muslims would return quietly to Madinah after performing the rites of *Umrah*. The Makkans paid no heed and took him prisoner. Later Mikraz ibn Hafs, along with fifty men, attacked the Muslims at night, raining stones and arrows. Mikraz was captured, but no action was taken against him; he was released unconditionally. Then,

as the Muslims were praying in the early morning, eighty men from Tanim attacked them. They were also taken captive and then allowed to go free unconditionally.

Lengthy negotiations with the Quraysh ensued. Finally a truce was agreed upon between the two sides under which the Muslims were to return without visiting the Kabah. At first sight, this truce appeared to amount to an outright victory for the Quraysh and defeat for the

Muslims. The Prophet's followers could not understand how, when God had given them tidings of a visit to the House of God, the Prophet could have agreed to return to Madinah without performing the visit. They would be allowed to come the following year but would have to leave Makkah after a stay of only three days. Humiliating clauses such as this and exacerbating as they were for the Muslims, were all accepted unquestioningly by the Prophet. It seemed to be an acceptance of defeat.

The Quraysh deliberately acted in an aggressive manner in order to offend the Prophet. They wanted to provoke him into initiating hostilities so that they could find an excuse for fighting him. To prevent a visit to the Kabah was in itself quite contrary to Arab tradition. Moreover, it was the month of *Dhul Qadah*, which is one of the four months considered sacred in Arab lore, in which fighting was prohibited. The Quraysh wanted to fight the Muslims, but they did not want to be accused of having desecrated the holy month. They wanted to be able to lay the blame at the door of the Muslims, who were few in number at that time and not even equipped for battle. There the Muslims were, stranded some 250 miles from home, right on the border of the territory of their opponents. It was a perfect opportunity for the Quraysh to unleash a savage onslaught on the Muslims and give full vent to their antagonism.

To fight one's enemies is no way to succeed in life. Only by avoiding conflict can one consolidate one's strength.

The Quraysh did everything they could to provoke the Muslims into starting a fight, but the Prophet ignored every provocation; he scrupulously avoided falling into their trap. The situation was so grave that Abu Bakr was the only one amongst the Companions not to feel that in accepting the seemingly humiliating peace terms they had bowed before the aggressor. The Companions were even more astonished when a verse of the Quran was revealed which referred to the agreement as a 'clear victory'. "What kind of victory is this?" one of them protested. "We have been prevented from visiting the House of God. Our camels for sacrifice have not been allowed to proceed. God's Prophet has been forced to turn back from Hudaybiya. Two of our persecuted brethren, Abu Jandal and Abu Basir, have been handed over to their persecutors."

Yet, it was this humiliating treaty that paved the way for a great Muslim victory.

The Treaty of Hudaibiya appeared to be a capitulation before the opponents of the Muslims but in fact, it gave the Muslims an opportunity to consolidate their position. The Prophet accepted all the Quraysh's demands in return for a single assurance from them—namely, that they would cease all hostilities against the Muslims for ten years. Continual raids and threats of warfare had prevented the Muslims from pursuing constructive missionary work.

As soon as the Prophet returned from Hudaibiya, he intensified missionary work in and around Arabia, the ground work having been done beforehand. Now that peace prevailed, the message of Islam started spreading rapidly. The Prophet also turned his attention to building up the influence of Islam in Madinah. The culmination came within only two years of the Treaty of Hudaibiya; the Quraysh surrendered without even putting up a fight. There was no further barrier now to the Prophet's triumphant entry into Makkah.

People nowadays tend to resort to violence on the slightest provocation from their opponents. When the losses of meaningless war are pointed out to them, they seek to justify themselves by saying that, they were not the aggressors and that their opponents had forced them to take to fighting. "We didn't fight!" they retort. "It was those people who did it! They conspired against us to make us fight."

Such people do not know that 'not to fight' is not simply that if no one fights you, you do not fight with anyone. Rather, 'not to fight' means that if someone comes to fight you, still you should not fight with them. Non-violence does not mean remaining peaceful so long as no one is acting violently towards you. Rather, it means to refrain from violence even in the face of violence. If someone seeks to provoke you, you should not allow yourself to get provoked. If someone conspires against you, you should render the conspiracy ineffective through wisdom and silent positive action.

To fight one's enemies is no way to succeed in life. Only by avoiding conflict can one consolidate one's strength. Only then, will one be able to overcome one's foes. To fight at the slightest provocation and ignore the need to quietly build up one's own strength is to condemn oneself to destruction. Such conduct can never lead to success in this world of God. The Prophet achieved success by pursuing a policy of non-confrontation; how, then, can his followers succeed by pursuing a policy of confrontation? How can they be called his followers when they are blind to his example? □

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUPER-ACHIEVERS

Stepping Stones to Success

THE American writer, Charles Garfield, who has made a thorough study of the psychology of peak achievement, says that, “in a study of 90 leaders in business, politics, sports and arts, many spoke of ‘false starts’ but never of ‘failure’. Disappointment spawns greater resolve, growth or change. Moreover, no matter how rough things get, super-achievers always feel there are other avenues they can explore. They always have another idea to test.”

The writer emphasizes the fact however, that these high achievers are neither super human, charismatic nor even singularly talented. What they do have in common is an “uncanny knack for increasing the odds in their favour through simple techniques that almost anyone can cultivate.” He delineates three major areas of concern.

First and foremost, one must have a great sense of mission, and a strong desire to turn everything that comes one’s way to good account. Secondly, one must be result-oriented, so that one is not just preoccupied with unceasing activities, but with a definite outcome of one’s efforts. Thirdly, one has to take stock of whatever knowledge and skills one has and bring out whatever is latent and waiting to be used, so that it can be tuned up to a peak of perfection. Very often, it is not so much a question of adding to one’s knowledge and skills as of developing what is already there—capacities of which we are sometimes barely aware. Frequently, it is one’s initial sense of mission which taps these hidden resources.

No one sails through life without bumping into obstacles and suffering a variety of setbacks. This is when one must beware of lapsing into passivity.

Sometimes it is impossible to achieve distant goals without the aid of one’s fellow men, in which case, one has to develop the capacity to inspire the team spirit in others. Particularly in highly competitive situations, it is essential to be able to encourage other competent people to make a significant contribution to one’s own performance.

But no one sails through life without bumping into obstacles and suffering a variety of setbacks. This is when one must beware of lapsing into passivity. Then one has to take oneself firmly in hand and decide

to look upon such things not as great gulfs from which one will never emerge, but simply as hurdles which have to be surmounted if one is to finish the race. The initial feeling of disappointments should quickly transform itself into a great determination to try harder, to alter one's approach, to seek different and better ways of achieving one's goal, and to channel one's energies more effectively towards the ultimate target. □



For every closed door, there is always another which is open—but only to those who have the eyes to see it, and the courage to march through it.

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN


Prayer is not simply a set of rituals; it is rather a way of acknowledging God's greatness.



The history of progress tells us that no individual or nation has ever made progress in favourable conditions.

MAULANA KHAN

**A LIFE
BASED ON
REASON IS
INVARIABLY
MARKED BY
SUCCESS**

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

NO END TO POSSIBILITIES

Just Don't Lose Hope

THE sun was setting in the west over the mountains. Half of the orb had already dipped beneath the ridge. In a few minutes, the whole sun disappeared behind the still-glowing mountain range. Then darkness began to set in on all sides. The light of the sun was gradually receding, and it seemed as if the whole area would be plunged in pitch darkness. But just then, another light began to ascend. It was the full moon, ascending in the east as the sun set in the west.

In a short while the whole scene was lit up again. Not long after the eclipse of the sunlight, the earth was illuminated anew. This is a sign of nature. When one possibility ends, another begins. With the setting sun, the rise of the moon gives light to the world.

So it is, for individuals and nations—there is always hope. If one falls victim to the hand of fate, there is no need to be discouraged. There is no cause for despair in this world of God. By grasping fresh opportunities and utilizing them, one can arise again. All one has to do is go about one's task in an intelligent manner without ever giving up trying.

God has created this world full of wonderful opportunities. Here, when matter perishes, it becomes energy; when darkness comes, a new light emerges from its depths; when one building falls, it leaves a place for the construction of another. So it is, with events in the life of man. From every failure emerges the chance of new success. The same applies to nations too. The suffering resulting from backwardness can give rise to a new spirit of struggle and endeavour and lead them on to greater heights.

*From every failure
emerges the chance
of new success.*

No one need lose heart in this world of God. However uncompromising circumstances may seem, they contain somewhere, the possibility of triumph for man. What one should do is seek out these possibilities and use them to turn one's defeat into victory. Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending. Remember that every dark cloud has a silver lining. The obstacles of your past can become the gateways that lead to new beginnings. □



AVOIDING THE USELESS

To Achieve the Useful

THE Quran advocates a purposeful life. It exhorts people not to indulge in useless talk or useless activity. On this subject there is a particularly apt verse in the Chapter *Al-Muminun* (The Believers) of the Quran. Its translation is as follows:

Successful indeed are the believers, those who are humble in their prayer; and those who turn away from everything vain. (23: 1-3)

Human pursuits fall into two categories—worthy and unworthy. A worthy pursuit is one which leads to positive results and an unworthy pursuit is one which leads to no result at all. A true believer is one who has before him a specific target, which makes him selective. He therefore makes a point of always selecting that kind of activity which is worthy and avoids that which is unworthy. It is this kind of person who will be rewarded with success by God Almighty.

Before taking any action, the believer must assess its possible result. He must anticipate its consequences. His response to any situation must be rational and well-considered and not just an emotional outburst. This principle includes all kinds of human expressions and activities like thinking, discussions, reading, dealing, association, shopping, travelling etc. A believer must adopt this kind of behaviour in every aspect of his life, both in word and deed.

A wise man always differentiates between a positive response and a negative reaction; between a realistic approach and an emotional approach. He invariably adopts a result-oriented policy.

It is a fact that we are on this planet earth for a limited time. Our life span being so very short, we cannot afford the luxury of wasting time and energy; we have to be very prudent. We have to select only such targets about which we can say with certainty that in the end they will yield the required result. No excuse in this regard is acceptable.

When you use your mind, use it on healthy subjects; when you speak, say whatever is good for you and good for others; when you are going to take a step, examine all the relative aspects. If there is any possibility that your step will prove to be counter-productive, then refrain from taking it.

A wise man always differentiates between a positive response and a negative reaction; between a realistic approach and an emotional approach. He invariably adopts a result-oriented policy. Jumping into things without assessing the result is a habit that only fools can afford, for fools rush in where angels fear to tread. A wise man cannot afford this kind of involvement.

'Useless' means 'without any result' and whatever has no result is pointless and liable to be thrown into the litterbin. Even animals follow a result-oriented path. How much more so must human beings then be conscious of doing result-oriented things?

If an honest person indulges in useless activities, his conscience will go against him. Before facing others, he has to face up to his own conscience and there are very few who can do that. Conscience, working as an internal check, is a moral keeper for every person. Conscience never fails and if you pay heed to it, you will save yourself from going astray. Follow your conscience and you will surely develop into a divine personality. □



Law of Nature

No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunnelled. No life ever grows until it is focused, dedicated, and disciplined. There is but one law of nature, which applies to both animate and inanimate objects. It is that there is a price to be paid for every end in life; without paying that price, nothing can be achieved.

GARDEN OF SPIRITUALITY

Seek its Nectar

JUST visit a place of natural beauty, any place where there are mountains, flowing rivers, tall, lush green trees, birds on the wing, small white clouds floating in the sky and the sun shining. In such a place, you will feel like exclaiming: "How wonderful is nature!" But nature is not just a wonderful world. It is rather an amazing garden of spirituality. Indeed, everything in nature gives you a taste of spirituality. For example, when you see a honey bee hovering over a flower, you suddenly realize that it has a lesson to impart, for every part of nature is like a flower for you. In each part resides the nectar of spirituality. Take out this spiritual nectar and you will be motivated to turn yourself into a spiritual personality.

It should be borne in mind that spirituality is not a state of ecstasy. Ecstasy is a trance-like state, a state of bliss or a semi-conscious condition. It is like a kind of stupor which causes blurriness in the conscious mind. But spirituality is very different from this, being marked by a high level of acute intellectual awakening, rather than a semi-somnolent state of mind.

For an awakened mind, the whole world is a world of spirituality. It extracts spiritual content from everything. The awakened person thus enhances his spirituality until he grows to be a spiritual giant.

During the pre-scientific age, the notion had become prevalent that the heart was the source of spirituality. This was taken for granted and led to spirituality becoming a subject for meditation, that is, heart-based spirituality. Since the heart is devoid of any thinking capacity, spirituality could not therefore, become an advanced discipline. It was reduced rather to being an array of ill-defined assumptions.

Now that we live in the age of science, it is possible to place spirituality within the framework of a mind-based discipline. Being a science just like other sciences, spirituality should be associated not with meditation but rather with contemplation. Since the

domain of the physical sciences encompasses the exploration of the quantitative aspects of nature, what is discovered therein is necessarily of a material nature. The domain of spiritual science on the other hand, encompasses the contemplation of the qualitative aspects of nature, so

that within its scope, it is things of a spiritual nature which are brought to light.

Flowers are the greatest concern of the honey bee. For a honey bee, its whole world is a world of flowers. It never wastes time on other things. It concentrates on flowers, takes the nectar from them and returns to its hive. The same is true of an awakened mind. For an awakened mind, the whole world is a world of spirituality. It extracts spiritual content from everything. The awakened person thus enhances his spirituality until he grows to be a spiritual giant.

Spiritual science, in developing the mind, enables one to analyze matters in an objective manner. In complex issues, it is an aid to right judgement. It helps one to view things in such a way that mental confusion is dispelled and one can think with total clarity. If heart-based spirituality was no more than thoughtless ecstasy, mind-based spirituality has emerged as a fine-tuned form of high thinking.

Spiritual science has evolved in the same way as the science of the solar system. In the early centuries man had given credence to the geocentric theory. As a result, no development in this science was possible. In modern times, however, man's thinking altered sufficiently for the heliocentric theory to be formulated, as a result of which solar science became a developed discipline. The same change in thinking took place in the case of spiritual science. In the pre-scientific period, people believed in heart-based spirituality, so that there could be no furtherance of the imparting of spiritual discipline. The scientific age being an age of mind-based spirituality, endless scope for spiritual advancement has opened up.

Our world is like a garden of all good things, and spirituality enables the individual to live in and benefit from this garden. □



Together

*God has placed pleasant things
alongside the unpleasant things in life.*

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



LOVE OF GOD

GOD has created man so that man may discover God. For this man is bestowed with the faculty of thinking. By using this faculty one can develop one's intellectuality and thereby discover God. This discovery gives one the greatest joy and happiness. Discovering God in this manner will develop in us a strong bond with God. The result will be the emergence of a new personality.

We will live in the glory of God and our days and nights will be spent in thoughts of God. Our soul will find sustenance in the remembrance of God. Since the last few days, I was not able to remember God at a deep level. This had troubled me. Today when I woke up in the morning before dawn, I prayed to God with tears welling up in my eyes. I cried: "O God, will You abandon me?" Then, once again I was able to feel connected to God. Love of God means to begin to live in thoughts of God. When you develop true love for God, you will see blessings of God everywhere.

An ordinary person from a village was made a member of parliament by the help of a political leader. After becoming an MP, he moved to a new well-furnished house. To whoever came to meet him, he would keep repeating that whatever he had was a gift given by his political

leader. But who among us says that whatever he possesses has been bestowed by God? When a person sees the sun, moon, birds, skies and the trees, he should be able to exclaim that all of these bounties have been bestowed by God. People are aware of the gifts given to them by others, but nobody truly acknowledges God for the innumerable blessings which He has endowed man with. Breathing, seeing, eating, drinking and walking—all these experiences should inspire us to become deeply thankful to God and thus develop closeness to Him.

The Quran says:

There are some who set up equals with God and adore them with the adoration due to God, but those who believe, love God most. (2: 165)

People are generally busy in love for their children, families or businesses. Nobody can be truly said to have love for God. Having strong affection for something or person other than God is like setting up partners with God.

The verses of the Quran and sayings of the Prophet are filled with God-realization, but nobody has written any significant book on this topic. Generally, people write stories and legends about others. Very few write about discovering their ultimate Benefactor. This is due to a lack of deep thinking, without which there is no discovery. Everything depends on how much one reflects and contemplates. Without such thinking, there is no finding and no realization of God. □

People are generally busy in love for their children, families or businesses.

Nobody can be truly said to have love for God. Having strong affection for something or person other than God is like setting up partners with God.



Save Time

If you can save your minutes, your hours of themselves will be saved.

TRUE PROGRESS FOR WOMEN

Real Empowerment

TRUE progress for women cannot be achieved by encouraging them to make their entry into every field of life. A better approach would be to increase their knowledge, skills, alertness and awareness in their own sphere of activity. The more a woman is endowed with these qualities, the more effective will be the part she plays in the activities of daily life. An intellectual woman can perform the greatest of services, whereas, if she is left ignorant and untutored, she will never—even if she is brought to the forefront of things—be able to play a role of any significance.

There have been many women in history who never emerged from their homes, but who exerted a great influence upon the outside world. The allegation that women cannot perform great services when confined to the home is refuted by Islamic history. Home management is also undoubtedly great work, but the work which concerns the outside world can also certainly be performed by women, without putting themselves into uncongenial surroundings, or forcing themselves to play unfamiliar roles for which neither training nor biology has fitted them.

It is a little understood fact that the role a woman plays does not depend upon her physical environment, but rather on the degree to which her intellect has been cultivated. In order to progress, it is not binding that she has to put herself into all kinds of unsafe situations in the outside world. We can understand this from the following argument. If it were put to a writer that he could serve humanity better by stepping out of his study and jumping into the boxing ring, he would surely retort that there is more to solving the problems of the world than just punching people on the nose. He would, indeed, point out that the intellectual can best operate in his own chosen sphere and that it is not physical brashness which counts in this life, but the sharpening of the intellect.

Imagine a reversal of the social structure which entails a surgeon working in a butcher's shop, a teacher selling vegetables etc. In each case, the change of workplace and role would render useless and irrelevant the innate and acquired skills, the knowledge and the moral excellence of these highly qualified and experienced professionals. Their competence and effectiveness would moreover, be eroded by the sense of frustration and discrimination engendered by surroundings which clearly were unsuitable for them.

Studies in biology and psychology have shown that the two genders are different in nature, each being designed for a different purpose. They are endowed by nature with different capacities so that they may play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness. Difference of biological function does not imply inequality. In fact differences are meant to make both genders play complementary roles and endure the challenges of life by supporting each other with their constructive capacities for which each is best suited. It should not be looked upon as a matter of superiority or inferiority. Looked at with the right perspective, these differences are a blessing of God.

What the world perceives as a problem of inequality when it comes to oppression and degradation of women is actually a phenomenon of evil perpetrated by humans upon other humans due to the misuse of freedom. It has nothing to do with the role accorded to each gender by nature. Such evil is a part of every society.

The phenomena of oppression exists between the rich and the poor, men and women, an adult and a child, people in power and the common man, the educated and the illiterate etc. The solution to this problem of backwardness of women due to lack of opportunity for progress lies in helping people to change their mindset. To this effect there should be wide efforts to raise the thinking levels of the individual to overcome such negative behaviour in society. □

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TRUSTING HUMAN NATURE

Assured Results

DURING his 23-year movement, Prophet Muhammad brought about a revolution which took place at the level of human thought. Monotheism replaced polytheism, people who had been insolent became dutiful, those whose thinking had been parochial became upholders of the international message, those who had known nothing but fighting and aggression became champions of peace and humanitarianism spreading their message all over the world; those who had no history of their own, rose to fashion a history of the nations of the world.

Now the question arises as to how did the Prophet succeed in bringing about this unique revolution? The answer is that a huge amount of sacrifice was needed to bring it about. This sacrifice is what we call in today's jargon as 'taking risks'. The world is governed by the principle: *The greater the risks the greater the success*. Changing the minds of the people is the most difficult task in this world. Therefore, one who aspires to do so cannot but imperil his own interests. As far as this world of cause and effect is concerned, Prophet Muhammad took the greatest of risks, and hence the success he achieved was also the greatest.

Two examples will bring out the magnitude of risks undertaken by the Prophet. The first example concerns the takeover of Makkah. After the acquisition of Makkah, the Prophet declared a general amnesty for all those people who had displayed the greatest antagonism towards him and his Companions. They had expelled him and his Companions from their homes, waged offensive battles against him and killed a large number of his Companions.

The past crimes could be forgiven, but another danger lurked which was even greater. It was the danger of those people re-organizing themselves to plot against the Prophet and his Companions again. In the face of all this, the Prophet took a great risk and set them free and he benefitted equally as a result. This was an example of trust in human nature, although it was fraught with dangers.

When these people came to Prophet Muhammad, after the acquisition of Makkah, they were in a psychological state when death seemed certain; they felt sure that they were to be consigned to their graves. The moment the Prophet granted them pardon, it seemed as if they had been given a new lease of life. It was such a great favour to them that after this they could no longer remain obdurate. Psychologically,

it was no longer possible for them to remain insolent after such noble behaviour on the part of the Prophet. The very people who had been his greatest of enemies now became his greatest companions and supporters. This unique event in history could come about only because the Prophet dared to take a most unique risk.

Another noteworthy incident concerning the Hawazin tribe took place after the occupation of Makkah. When the Prophet and his Companions headed for Taif by a route bordered by Hawazin territory, the tribesmen rained down arrows upon them from the hill tops. At this sudden onslaught, the Muslims were stricken with panic. Many precious lives were lost. However after an initial defeat, the Muslims won the battle. About 6,000 people were taken captive. Again the Prophet took the risk and liberated the prisoners with mounts and provisions so that they might comfortably return to their homes. Again the same miracle happened. The extraordinary magnanimity of the Prophet rid them entirely of their haughtiness. Old enemies now turned into friends.

At the level of the real inner personality, every human being is predisposed to truth. No one is averse to it as far as his nature is concerned.

What emerges from the above examples is an important part of the *Sunnah* (practice and teaching) of the Prophet of Islam—*trust in human nature*. We find examples of this principle throughout his life. Man is not a statue made of stones. Rather he has a precious gift within him in the form of human nature. This nature is the most important part of a human personality. This is what is referred to in the Quran in the following verse:

By the soul and how He formed it, then inspired it to understand what was right and wrong for it. (91: 7-8)

This shows that everyone by birth knows what is good and what is bad; what is wrong and what is right. The Prophet's life is replete with examples of such conviction and confidence. In spite of apparent antagonism, his conviction was never shaken, that one day or the other the hearts of his opponents would be opened and their good human nature would prevail. This was the reason why, in spite of the worst opposition, he never cursed people who were apparently his enemies. Instead he always prayed for them. It was a result of this policy that the Prophet never felt the need to resort to violence against opponents. He treated his enemies as if they were his friends. That is why for the first time in human history he was able to bring about an almost bloodless revolution throughout the nation.

The Quran tells us that God created all human beings with the same nature:

And follow the nature as made by God—the nature in which He has created mankind. There is no altering the creation of God. (30: 30)

There is a *Hadith* to this effect: "God has created human beings with an upright nature." This shows that all human beings are born with the same nature. Trusting the nature man is born with, one must think along the lines that some people are his direct supporters, but others are his potential supporters. He nurtures in his heart the same well-wishing for his opponents as he feels towards his friends. He is able to address his apparent opponents with a cool-mind and without losing his balance, until the time comes when his enemies turn into his friends. This is the reality pointed out in the Quran in these words:

Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend. (41: 34)

An enemy becoming a friend does not mean that earlier a person was fire, then he became water. The truth is that the person already was a friend, only some superficial layers had obscured his true personality. One's unilateral good behaviour helps in removing these superficial layers and brings out the real person. At the level of the real inner personality, every human being is predisposed to truth. No one is averse to it as far as his nature is concerned.

A study of the life of the Prophet shows that trusting human nature is a permanent principle of Islam. Dividing people into friends and enemies is against Islam as well as nature.

A study of the life of the Prophet shows that trusting human nature is a permanent principle of Islam. Dividing people into friends and enemies is against Islam as well as nature. While dealing with people, the actual factor worth considering is human nature. Man is basically subordinated to the temperament he is born with. All other things are only of a temporary nature. They do not enjoy the position of a decisive element in the matter of human behaviour.

Taking into consideration the above factor, if we are able to give concessions to human nature by avoiding provocation and not letting imaginary fears overwhelm us, we can solve many problems of the world in the most sensible manner. □

THE LEARNER—TEACHER

One Man Two Missions

WITHIN a few days of landing in Bombay, a young Spanish priest by the name of Henry Heras found himself in the presence of St. Xavier's College, Bombay. He met the principal of the college. The young priest was a historian, and had a degree in Spanish history. "Which branch would you like to teach?" the principal asked him. "Indian History", Father Heras replied. "What do you know about Indian history?" the principal asked. Father Heras said he knew nothing. "Then how are you going to teach it?" "I shall study it", Father Heras answered.

To those who knew that he had a degree in history from Spain, it might have seemed strange that he did not just choose a branch of the subject with which he was thoroughly familiar, then settle into a comfortable teaching routine which would bring him his salary with the minimum of effort. Strange indeed, until one discovered that his purpose in doing so was to bring him into contact with the widest possible range of young people in order that he might more effectively pursue his mission. It was essential that he should have a permanent base from which to work, and this kind of teaching assignment was ideal in that it gave him the opportunity to function both as a teacher and a missionary.

So intent was he upon carrying out his mission that he did not once baulk at the enormity of the task that lay ahead. It meant learning the history of a whole subcontinent—and that too, which dated back to the most ancient of times, and into which were interwoven the histories of many peoples. The complexity of the task was intensified by the lack of documentary evidence for certain important periods of Indian history and the fact that much had to be pieced together on the basis of archaeological discoveries. But he set about his task with such thoroughness and determination that he became not only an accomplished teacher of history, but a historian of repute of the same class as Sir Jadunath Sarkar and Dr. Surendra Nath Sen. He died in 1956, but his work is still commemorated by an institute in Mumbai which is named after him: *The Heras Institute*.

It is when one has a great and over-riding mission in life that no task seems too difficult, no hardship too great. That is when temporary gain loses its attractiveness and loss seems of little importance. There are many Muslims in the world today who let it be known that they are 'interested' in doing missionary work. But are they ready to make the enormous sacrifices and engage in the unremitting toil which true missionary work demands? □

VALUE OF EDUCATION

Love, Despite Hatred

EDUCATION should not be only a means for obtaining a certificate that can fetch one a job. Its real aim is to make people conscious or aware. Making people aware is the first step in the path of progress. The journey of a person always starts from this point. Just as a farmer cultivates a seed, which later transforms into a tree, an educational institution should make a person so intellectually capable that he can complete his evolutionary journey.

What does it mean for someone to become aware? It means that a person can relate the past with the present and plan for the future. He can view the problems of life against the background of the eternal cosmic plan. It means to become aware of who one is and who one is not. To know that only by harmonizing one's will with God's will can one be truly successful in this world. An aware person alone is a sensitive human being, in the true sense.

A person who is aware is able to develop a correct opinion about himself and others. He is able to evaluate and determine which of his opinions are prejudiced and which are not.

A person who is aware is able to develop a correct opinion about himself and others. He is able to evaluate and determine which of his opinions are prejudiced and which are not. Whenever any situation arises, he recognizes what action would be a reaction and what other action would be a positive response. He distinguishes right from wrong. Separating the false, he recognizes the truth.

The following quote from Sir Thomas Carlyle, a well-known British writer, is very helpful in making us understand the meaning of being truly sensitive towards others—it is to have a loving heart which is the key to gaining knowledge. He said, *'A loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge'*.

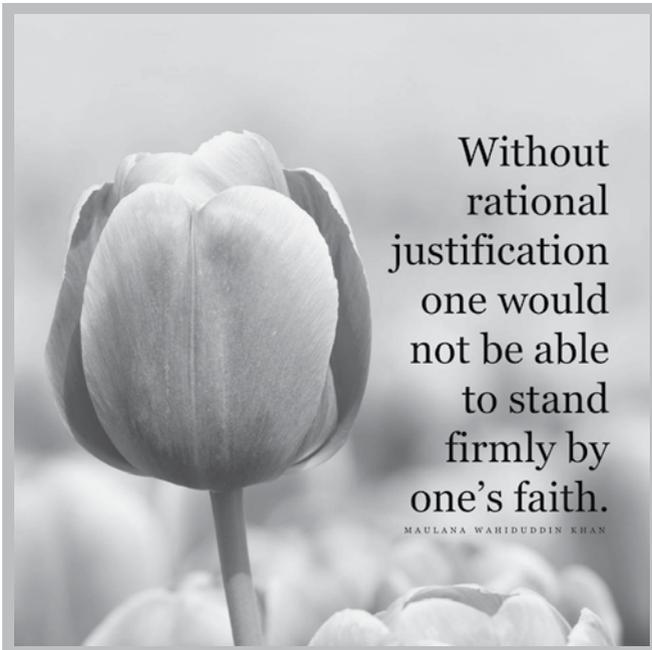
The above saying is extremely meaningful but its meaningfulness cannot be properly understood unless we add these words to it, *'loving, despite there being a cause for hatred'*. For in this world the factors of hatred are always present. No one can love other human beings without demonstrating that they are broad minded enough to love people despite experiencing their hatred and ill-will.

Thomas Carlyle's life itself serves as an example. The Crusades had resulted in hatred between Muslims and Western nations, with the

result that for centuries they held the Prophet to be an evil person. But Thomas Carlyle rose above the cloud of hatred in the wake of the Crusades and studied the life of the Prophet objectively. He became so impressed that he held him to be the hero of all the prophets and acknowledged the worth of his personality with the highest of praise in his book *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and The Heroic in History*.

To develop a heart within one, which may love despite hatred amounts to taking oneself to the height of morality. This high morality is the only ground on which the plant of knowledge grows and develops into a lush green tree. □

To develop a heart within one, which may love despite hatred amounts to taking oneself to the height of morality. This high morality is the only ground on which the plant of knowledge grows and develops into a lush green tree.



Without
rational
justification
one would
not be able
to stand
firmly by
one's faith.

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

THE IMPORTANCE OF PATIENCE IN ISLAM

Highest Virtue

PATIENCE or *Sabr* is a central Islamic value and teaching. It is repeatedly stressed in the Quran. There are other words with a similar meaning in the Quran—for instance, *eraaz*, which means avoidance of conflict. These two words, *sabr* and *eraaz*, appear in the Quran more than 100 times. This indicates the great importance that the Quran gives to patience and avoidance.

There are two aspects of *sabr* (patience) and *eraaz* (avoidance). One is related to this worldly life—that is, the pre-death period of our life. The second is related to the world Hereafter, that is, the post-death period of our life.

Our worldly life is beset with challenges. The reason being the world we are living in presently is a world where everyone is free. This freedom creates competition and challenges which in turn creates problems constantly. We very well know that we cannot abolish the freedom given to man by God Himself. So, no human being has the power to abolish that situation which leads to competition and challenges.

Hence, we are compelled to live in a situation of problems. Given this scenario what do we need to face the challenges successfully?

Patience is a culture of prophets; a method of prophets; a way of prophets. It is a very lofty quality. It is a culture of a man of mission. All the prophets adopted the culture of patience and avoidance of confrontation.

The solution lies in adopting the concept and teaching of *sabr*. It tells us that we simply have to learn the art of problem management, rather than seeking to eliminate problems, which in any case is impossible. Problems arise because of the differences in nature amongst people. *Sabr* is only another name for the management of these differences. *Sabr* is thus the basic condition for success in this world. The Prophet of Islam said: "God's help is for those who keep patience." (*Musnad Ahmed*)

Sabr is not a passive attitude. It is not cowardice. The Quran says: "Have patience, then, as had the steadfast Messengers before you." (46: 35). Keep patience, just like the prophets. Patience is a culture of prophets; a method of prophets; a way of prophets. It is a very lofty quality. It is

a culture of a man of mission. All the prophets adopted the culture of patience and avoidance of confrontation.

Without patience, without avoidance, one cannot gain any valuable achievement. This is a law of nature, and “there is no altering the creation of God.” (30:30). One of the teachings of the Prophet talks about a believer (a person of deep faith in God) relying on patience. He makes patience or *sabr* his divine shield. To further explain how *sabr* can be a divine shield one needs to just look at nature to find an illustration of avoidance and patience.

In nature, you can perceive a validation of the benefits of avoidance and exercising patience. Consider a mountainous stream. When it flows, it encounters many boulders in its way. What does the stream do? What is its way? It isn't the method of the stream to seek to remove the obstacles that lie in its path. Instead, it adopts the method of avoidance of confrontation. It flows on, swirling around the boulders, instead of clashing against them. This is what the Prophet of Islam meant when he said that patience is what a believer relies on. Patience is a divine shield for the believer. Like the stream the believer moves on with his mission without clashing with others.

There is another illustration given to us in nature—the rose plant. On every branch of it you will find both flowers as well as thorns. Although they live side by side, the flowers never try to eliminate the thorns or vice versa. They live in total compatibility together. So, the rose plant has adopted what may be called the principle of peaceful coexistence.

We need to adopt this same principle in our lives, too. Otherwise, there is no gain, no success, and no achievement. The only other option is destruction. So, when achievement in the world depends on patience, one cannot underestimate its importance in every aspect of life—personal, social, national and international.

A verse in the Quran says: *As-sulh khair*, meaning, “reconciliation is best” (4: 128). It means if there is some controversy between two parties, one must adopt a conciliatory course of action, rather than a confrontational course of action. This is *as-sulh khair*.

The same principle is applicable to the other aspect of our life—our spiritual life. The Quran says: “That [Paradise] is the recompense for those who purify themselves.” (20: 76). Only those people will find entry

This positive response of forgiveness in the face of provocation is a main source of cultivating a positive personality.

into Paradise who are purified souls. And who are purified souls? Those who are able to convert negativity into positivity.

In this world, we experience many negative situations. Every now and then we face provocations. How can one live amidst these negative experiences with positive thinking? How is it possible? There is a verse in the Quran which says that those who believe “forgive when they are angry.” (42: 37). This positive response of forgiveness in the face of provocation is a main source of cultivating a positive personality.

Once, a man came to the Prophet and asked him for a master-advice by which he could manage all the affairs of his life. The Prophet replied: “Don’t be angry.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). What does this mean? It means that when one is provoked, one should be able to keep control over anger.

When one discovers Truth, one becomes cautious and avoids all distractions. One is able to save oneself from all negative thoughts thereby becoming a positive person.

If you become angry and react it will become a distraction for you. Patience and avoidance save you from this distraction.

Another verse in the Quran says: “Truly, those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure.” (39: 10). People of patience will be awarded unlimited reward. According to the Quran, only *sabr* has this special quality. It is very important to know that one cannot find entry into Paradise simply by reciting some words like the Islamic creed declaring belief in God and the prophethood of Muhammad or

by performing some rituals. All these things are not enough for entry into Paradise. In addition, one has to be a totally positive personality. However, we must know that it requires a continuous process to build a positive personality. It begins from the discovery of Truth.

Discovery means awakening. The discovery of Truth creates a storm in the soul. It gives one the art of positive thinking and the art of positively managing challenges. Without this discovery, there is no revolution in the personality. This discovery makes one a truly living person; a positive person. Faith can become stagnant, hence, discovery is important for faith to be a living faith. When one discovers Truth, one becomes cautious and avoids all distractions. One is able to save oneself from all negative thoughts thereby becoming a positive person. The Quran uses the word purified to describe positivity and says that it is the purified soul which will be successful in the Hereafter. In other words it is the purified soul which is deserving of Paradise, a place of unlimited reward. □

HOW TO BECOME BEAUTIFUL

Sincerity in Character

There are two kinds of human behaviour: the sincere and the insincere. Sincere behaviour is the result of adherence to principles, while insincere behaviour shows a lack of principle.

HERBERT W ARMSTRONG, the founder of Plain Truth, a magazine published in the US, observed in an article that in his long professional life, he had occasion to meet hundreds and thousands of people from different denominations. But he said that if he were asked what the scarcest quality in human beings was, he would say that it was sincerity. Sincerity is the noblest of all human qualities. But very few people would measure up to this high ideal.

Insincere behaviour or unprincipled behaviour is very easy to indulge in. When you are faced with a situation, it doesn't require much thought to take a spontaneous decision. Without applying your mind, you can follow the advice of the situation. You can easily understand what is in your interest and what is against it. So in following the dictates of the situation, you don't need any ideal yardstick to guide you. This kind of behaviour is like that of flowing water. The contours of the surface of the earth determine its path. The one who is insincere is always ready to accede to the demands of a given situation.

In comparison sincerity is a difficult option. When you are a sincere person, you cannot afford to go against your conscience or moral norms. It is this difference between the two that makes one a difficult option and the other a very easy option. Sincerity invites you to ponder over the situation, to try to choose the best course of action, even if it is against your desires.

Sincerity is the noblest of all human qualities. But very few people would measure up to this high ideal.

In terms of social requirements, principled behaviour is very important. It makes you predictable to others, who can then anticipate your behaviour before dealing with you. On the other hand, insincerity makes you an unpredictable person. It becomes difficult to understand what kind of attitude you are going to adopt in the future.

Principled behaviour makes you a true human being, while unprincipled behaviour makes you an unpredictable character, one capable of inhuman behaviour.

Unprincipled behaviour can give you some benefits, but these are of a temporary nature. Permanent benefits can be achieved only through principled behaviour. Sincere people are able to receive divine inspiration. Sincerity develops one's spirituality, while insincerity ruins one's personality. The insincere person fails to have spiritual experiences in his life.

One who opts for the insincere path first kills his conscience, for without suppressing one's conscience one cannot be insincere in their behaviour.

The greatest drawback of unprincipled behaviour is that it is like a form of psychological suicide. One who opts for the insincere path first kills his conscience, for without suppressing one's conscience one cannot be insincere in their behaviour. Conscience is a moral watchdog in life. It is the finest gift of nature. One who goes against conscience is making a self-destructive choice. One should keep conscience alive by listening to the inner voice. This inner voice is the voice of conscience.

Going against one's conscience is not easy. It is this behaviour that creates what is called tension or stress. If one wants to live with a tension free mind, one should listen to the voice of their conscience and follow it without any reservation.

Sincerity is not a single value. Sincerity combines all good human values. Where there is sincerity, there are all kinds of moral beauty. In contrast, insincerity makes one ugly. □

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DEATH

Compulsory Eviction

OF all the stages through which a person will have to pass, death is the most certain. Everyone who is alive now will be dead sometime in the future. One day the eyes of those who see will fade and their tongues freeze into silence. Every human being will one day be leaving this world, never to return, and entering a world which he will never leave.

No one can be sure when death will come; it might strike at any instant. The gravity of the situation lies in death not being the end of life, but rather the beginning of a new, eternal life, a world of everlasting reward or retribution.

Everyone is on a journey from life to death. Some have set their sights on the world, others on the Hereafter. Some strive to satisfy their own desires and egos, others are restless in the love and fear of God.

Both types of people appear the same in this world. But in relation to the life after death, there is a world of difference between the two: those who live in God and the Hereafter are redeeming themselves, while those who live in worldly pleasures and selfish desires are condemning themselves to doom.

Death will overtake everybody; no one can escape from it. But death is not the same for everyone. Some have made God their goal in life; they speak and keep silence for His sake alone; their attention is focused entirely on the after-life. Death is for them the end of a long terrestrial journey towards their Lord.

Others have forgotten their Lord; they do not do things for God's sake; they are travelling away from their Lord. They are like rebels who roam at large for a few days, and then death seizes them and brings them to justice.

Righteous people have a different attitude to death from the disobedient. They are concerned with what comes in the wake of death; they focus their attention on gaining an honourable position in the life after death. Those who disregard the existence of God and the

We are obsessed with the world, which meets our eyes. We fail to pay attention to the call of truth. If we were to see the next life with our worldly vision, we would immediately submit to God.

Hereafter, on the other hand, are caught up in worldly affairs. Their ultimate ambition is worldly honour and prestige.

Under present circumstances, those who have consolidated their position on earth seem to be successful, but death will shatter this facade. It will become clear that those who seemed to have no base in the world were in fact standing on the most solid of foundations, while the position of those who had reached a high status in the world will be exposed as false. Death will obliterate everything; afterwards only that which has some worth in the after-life will remain.

We are obsessed with the world, which meets our eyes. We fail to pay attention to the call of truth. If we were to see the next life with our worldly vision, we would immediately submit to God. We would realize that if we do not submit to Him today, we will have to do so in the future world, when submission will profit no one. □

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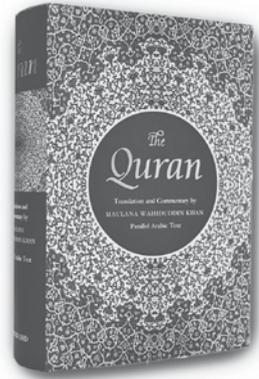
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THE WORD OF GOD

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

O men! It is you who stand in need of God—God is self-sufficient, and praise worthy—if He so wished, He could take you away and replace you with a new creation; that is not difficult for God. No burden-bearer shall bear another's burden, and if some over-laden soul should call out for someone else to carry his load, not the least portion of it will be borne for him, even though he were a near relative. You can only warn those who fear their Lord in the unseen, and pray regularly. Anyone who purifies himself will benefit greatly from doing so. To God all shall return. (35: 15-18)

Man is an extremely vulnerable creation. His whole existence depends on a particular balance of natural factors. If this balance were to be disturbed, the very existence of man would be threatened.

If, for instance, the sun reduced its distance from the earth and came near it, then all human beings would be burnt and reduced to ashes. Also, a large part of the inside of the earth consists of an extremely hot, semi-liquid material. If this hot matter moved upwards, the surface of the earth would experience terrible earthquakes which would reduce all human settlements to ruins. Moreover, meteors constantly fall upon Earth from outer space, but the atmosphere shields us against their effects. If the present balanced arrangement of this phenomenon were to be disrupted, the shower of meteors might turn into such a terrible barrage of stones that it would be impossible to save humanity from it. Man is surrounded by innumerable deadly possibilities of this kind; being totally dependent explains why man needs God and not vice versa.

The burden of Doomsday will be that of one's sins. Were it only a question of a physical burden, any individual could share another's burden. But, the denigration and pain one suffers due to one's bad deeds are of an extremely personal nature and there is no question of anybody else sharing them.

The Truth is very clear, but it is understood only by one who wants to understand. One who is not serious about knowing what Truth is and what is untruth, cannot be made to understand anything.

The blind and the sighted are not equal, nor are the darkness and the light; shade and heat are not alike, nor are the living and the dead. God causes whom He will to hear Him, but you cannot make those who are in their graves hear you. You are but a warner—We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news and a warner—there is no community to which a warner has not come. If they reject you, so did their predecessors. Messengers came to them with clear signs, with scriptures, and with the enlightening Book, but in the end I seized those who were bent on denying the truth and how terrible was My punishment. (35: 19-26)

It is a fact that the expectations one has of light are not applicable to darkness. What one gets from the shade cannot be derived from sunlight. The same is the case with man. Among human beings, some have vision and some are blind. A man with eyes immediately sees his way and recognizes it. But one who is blind will simply go on groping in the dark.

Similarly, with regard to insight there are two types of people,—one consisting of the living and the other consisting of the dead. The living man is one who sees things in depth—who tears apart the deceptive veil of words and grasps hidden meanings—who goes beyond superficial matters and tries to understand the inner reality—who assesses intrinsic values and not outward appearances—whose eyes are concentrated on real facts and not on irrelevant hair-splitting theories—who, after knowing the Truth, submits to it—he is the one who is alive. He is one who has been fortunate enough in this world to accept the Truth. Those whose behaviour is the very reverse of this are dead. They never come anywhere near accepting the Truth in this world of trial. They remain deaf to the call for Truth, until after death, when they go to God to face the result of their blindness. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Q & A with Maulana on the ulema and inter-faith dialogue.

You are one of the few traditionally-trained Muslim ulema, in India and abroad, to participate in inter-community dialogue initiatives. What do you think are the reasons that few such ulema are engaged in such dialogue?

One major reason is that the Muslim *ulema* are not comfortable with the present concept of dialogue. The present concept of dialogue is based on mutual learning and mutual understanding. But the traditional mind of the Muslim *ulema* is based on debate and heated polemics. So, they have no interest in serious dialogue. Even if they participate in any interfaith dialogue, they often misrepresent Islam because they speak in the language of debate, which is not acceptable to other participants. I don't know of any traditionally-trained Muslim scholar or cleric who is competent enough to participate in the modern kind of interfaith dialogue.

Muslims are devoid of the dialogue spirit. They want to impose their concepts on others. They don't know the concept of dialogue, which is based on sharing and mutual understanding. In the light of my experience, Muslims are debaters and not dialoguers.

Do you think that the fact that in the madrasas where the would-be ulema are trained, students are not trained in various languages other than Arabic (and in India, mainly Urdu) have to do with the fact that few ulema are engaged in dialogue—because such dialogues generally take place in other languages, particularly English?

Many *madrasas* in Africa have adopted English as their medium of instruction. In the Arab world, the medium is Arabic, while in Iran it is Persian. But all the scholars who are taught in these *madrasas* are one and the same. All of them are trained in the concept of debating. They are not aware of the concept of modern dialogue. It is basically a question of the present Muslim mind, and not a question of language. The present Muslim mind is one and the same in every country, from the East to the West, in the Arab world, and among non-Arabs, too.

I'll also say here that where there is a will there is a way. I learnt English on my own and I also studied in a *madrasa*, and so I am sure that others with a *madrasa* background can do so, too, if they have the will. No one is stopping them. If you interact with others, gradually you will

learn their language and will be able to be sensitive to their culture and traditions.

What role does the fact that madrasa students and the ulema who teach in madrasas have very little social interaction with people of other faiths play in there being very few traditionally-trained ulema who are engaged in interfaith dialogue?

All the *madrasas*, not only in India, but everywhere else too, were established on a common idea—that is, the preservation of the identity of Muslims. It is this widespread concept that is mainly responsible for the phenomenon that few Muslims take part in dialogue with other communities. This concept has created a ghetto mentality among Muslims. No Muslim community throughout the world is an exception in this regard. Malaysia, for instance, is said to be a ‘modern’ Muslim country. But recently, there was this news of a Malaysian court issuing a decree that sought to prevent others from using the word “Allah”. How absurd! But this is the case with all other Muslim countries as well today.

What role might feelings of supremacism or Muslim exclusivism or looking down on other people or the fear of being rejected by people of other faiths have in explaining the perceived lack of enthusiasm for interfaith dialogue among the ulema?

As per my experience, the word ‘supremacism’ is the most appropriate term to explain the present Muslims’ mentality. Previously, such communal supremacism was considered to be a Jewish phenomenon, but now Muslims have monopolized this concept. I think that Muslim supremacism is the greatest reason for all kind of problems that are seen in the Muslim world.

May be one reason that the ulema may not be enthusiastic about interfaith dialogue is that some of them might think that interacting with people of other faiths might negatively impact on the Muslims’ identity. Some ideologues refer to a Hadith in this regard which warns Muslims against copying the ways of others. May be they think that if Muslims interact closely with others, including through and for dialogue, it might weaken their commitment to their own faith and identity. How do you see this argument?

There is no single Muslim cultural identity, just as there is no single Hindu cultural identity or Christian cultural identity. This notion of completely separate communal cultural identities has been used as a ploy to keep communities apart from each other and to minimize interaction between them.

One's identity should be determined by one's piety or God-consciousness, and not by the dress one wears or the food one eats or the language one speaks. Some people think that a Muslim's cultural identity is determined by the supposed 'fact' that he uses a pot with long spout for his ablutions and that a Hindu's identity is determined by the fact that he, supposedly, uses a round pot without a spout! This sort of thinking is stupid, to say the least. And it is also a meaningless claim. In south India, for instance, it is often difficult to distinguish a Muslim from a Hindu, because there, many Hindus and Muslims are almost identical in terms of language and dress. Despite not having a clearly and completely separate cultural identity that sets them apart from the local Hindus, many south Indian Muslims, are, I think, perhaps better Muslims than many of their north Indian counterparts. There is a valuable lesson that we need to learn from this.

Now, as for the *Hadith* which you referred to, my argument is that it applies only to copying the religious symbols of other religions, such as the Christian Cross and the Hindu *Janeu* (Holy thread). Other aspects of material culture are not forbidden, provided, of course, they do not violate Islamic teachings.

Another issue is the negative images that many madrasa students and teachers might have of people of other faiths. Perhaps that is a major barrier to interfaith dialogue?

There are negative stereotypes on both sides. I think this is largely due to lack of interaction. Positive interaction is a great killer of negativity. A Hindu who has no Muslim friends but has only read about Muslims in the media will probably have a very negative opinion about them. On the other hand, a Hindu who lives in a mixed or in a Muslim locality will more likely have a more positive appreciation of Muslims. Positive interaction is the basis of the process of removing misconceptions, and for this you do not need any artificial schemes or programmes.

Let me give you an instance of the power of constructive interaction in removing stereotypes. In a village in Himachal Pradesh there was a small Muslim community which had set up a *madrasa*. The Hindu villagers had all sorts of negative feelings about the *madrasa* and the *maulvis* who taught there. One day, some Hindu houses caught fire. Seeing this, the *madrasa* students rushed to the spot and helped put out the flames. After that, the attitude of the Hindu villages towards the *madrasa* changed completely. They became as positive in their appreciation of it as they were negative about it before! This miracle was a result of interaction.

Would you recommend that madrasas also teach their students about other faiths? May be that will also help them become more interested in or open to interfaith dialogue?

Yes, *madrasas* could also consider teaching their students the basics of other religions. This will enable the students, as would-be *ulema*, to relate more comfortably with people of other faiths. The teaching of other religions should aim at providing students an objective understanding of these faiths. The earlier, polemical, approach of denouncing other religions must be given up. You must learn to understand your neighbour even if you do not agree with him. I think polemics are against the ethos of Islam. So, for instance, in my case, when I visit Hindu, Sikh, Christian shrines and other places of worship, I try to empty my mind of prejudices, and I have learnt a lot from this process. My intention in going to such places is to learn, not to debate or to denounce others as inferior. The Quran asks us to be sympathetic well-wishers of others. □



Plan of Nature

Innumerable processes are at work in the world, all in accordance with nature's equilibrium. The earth moves in its orbit and revolves non-stop. The sun continues to shine its light on the world. The winds blow, the rains come, the rivers flow, the plants and trees grow. All processes continue without interruption in a peaceful manner without any violence or confrontation. Human beings should act in a balanced way in this world, without distorting the balanced pattern of nature. If we distort the plan of nature it will lead to chaos.

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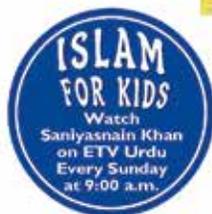
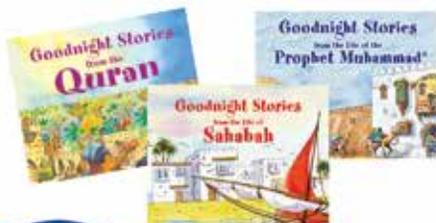
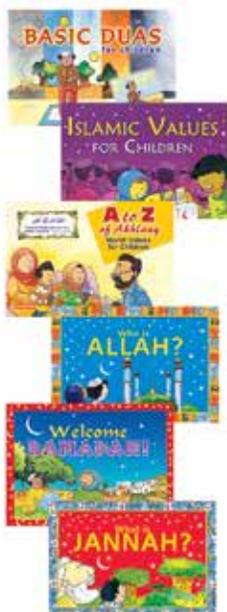
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