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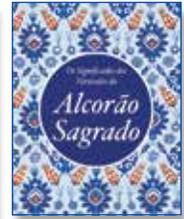
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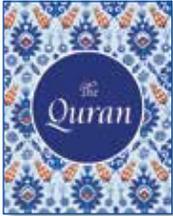
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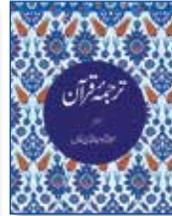
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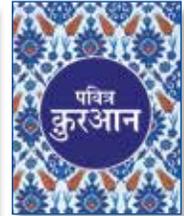
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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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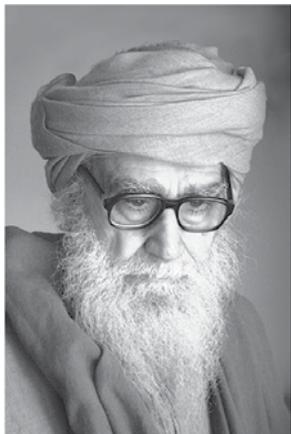
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

THE GREATNESS OF HUMILITY

I ONCE happened to meet a gentleman who had neither a proper education nor a sound economic position. His greatest asset as he saw it, was the fact that his grandfather, who lived in a palatial house, had been one of the Nawab's close associates and had had an honourable title bestowed upon him. He went on at some length, and with great pride, about his grandfather's exalted state.

I got the impression that the cause of his own destitution was his pride in his ancestry. The psychology which went with being one of a noble lineage had prevented him from either acquiring a good education or engaging himself in some profitable business. Out of sympathy for his down-at-heel condition, I tried to make him understand the importance of adopting a humble and realistic attitude, as opposed to that of continuing pride in his forefather's achievements. To support my arguments, I narrated many telling incidents, but it was all to no avail. He was beyond understanding. It was as if I were conversing with him in a totally alien language.

The same is true of present-day Muslims who draw their emotional sustenance from the religion of pride. If this is happening on an ever-

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

expanding scale, it is because they fail to understand the religion of humility.

Islam, for the believers of the early stages, was just such a religion—a religion of humility. This psychology of humility, which marked their thoughts and deeds, was produced by their keen awareness of the greatness of God. For them God's law became a reality, for God elevates all those who adopt the posture of humility. From there, by the grace of God, they went on to emblazon their deeds and their virtues on the pages of human history for all time to come.

Islam, for the believers of the early stages, was a religion of humility. This psychology of humility, which marked their thoughts and deeds, was produced by their keen awareness of the greatness of God.

The Muslims of the present day are the successors of the Muslims of those early stages. It is unfortunate, however, that they have inherited from them not their humility, but only the recollection of the great heights to which their remote ancestors rose. Devoid of humility and its resultant virtues, they are carried through life on a flood of grandiloquence.

The need of the hour is to awaken in them the true spirit of their faith so that they may be brought closer to the religion based on humility. God elevates the humble: the proud and the vain are cast by Him into oblivion. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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Reform of Society

To bring about real change in society we will have to first change individual life.

RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

Nature & Needs

PROGRESS and evolution of society depends upon two basic factors: proper human relationship and the inter-connection of rights and duties. Oppression, exploitation and injustice are detrimental to a progressive society which then begins to degenerate and tumble headlong towards destruction. In a just and balanced society, it is necessary that both men and women work together for the betterment and upliftment of society; that they work in coherence, completing and complementing each other. It is as much necessary that all members of the society are granted their due share of rights, that their duties too are well defined. In a just society, the weaker sections are looked after properly and compassionately while full care is taken to ensure that they are not deprived of their rights or oppressed in any way.

Women have all along belonged to the category of the weaker section of humanity. As such, a society that tries to uplift the status of women and installs them on the pedestal of dignity, looking after their welfare and making provisions for their protection can be considered a just society. Let us examine, in short, whether we have tried to grant women the rights that may lead them to a better future and to a more peaceful, just and dignified coexistence.

In a just and balanced society, it is necessary that both men and women work together for the betterment and upliftment of society; that they work in coherence, completing and complementing each other.

The modern world may apparently be much concerned about women and make very fair promises to them. It promises them freedom from slavery, from male-domination, even from the established institution of marriage, from the boredom of being a housewife to a much more glamorous world. It promises them freedom from the burden of birth pangs, and the pains of rearing a family. But instead, what does it actually have in store? Nothing but exploitation, injustice, oppression, aggression, harassment and indignity. In the name of emancipation, women today have to bear with rape, mutilation, abuse, inequality, discrimination and harassment.

Coming nearer home, we find that the apparent glamour of the feminist movement has overawed us. We have our own roots in the culture

and religion embedded in our soil, but we try to blindly imitate the 'developed' countries in as much of our activities as possible. On the one hand, our women with their demure and bashful nature seem to us symbols of virtue, on the other hand we try to instigate our women to reveal as much of their bodies as possible. Then, when our women are waylaid and their modesty torn, we shed crocodile tears. The present scenario, with events of female harassment ever on the increase, is a most pathetic sight. Even our workplaces (not to talk about our homes) are not safe. Even those women holding higher bureaucratic posts are not spared. Laws against sexual harassment and rape are being moulded and remoulded but the escalation in gender related crimes keeps rising unabated. Female foeticide is on the increase. Most dowry deaths go unreported. In fact, with the present day status, who would refuse to accept that women are poised on the brink of disaster? The facts and figures showing deliberate women's subjugation under the cover of pleasure and entertainment cannot put them to sleep. There is a wave of restlessness to be found everywhere.

Islam considers each gender unique in its own sphere of activity and allots roles to each gender, best suited to them and according to their nature and needs.

Many suggestions have been made to improve the situation. For instance, it is being felt at certain quarters that women need rights, not power. At other places, education is being recommended for women's overall development. Some recommend political empowerment. Yet some say that women can only be truly emancipated by becoming economically independent. Whatever be the case, we cannot isolate the various aspects of women's development into different channels and work for any one or the other.

We have to devise a comprehensive system which, while recognizing women as respectable human beings, may at the same time lend them confidence, dignity, poise, self-respect and freedom from exploitation of all kind. Only then could the human race become stronger and of a superior breed, capable of taking up the responsibility of spreading welfare, love, friendship and goodwill to make this beautiful earth a better place to live in.

Till now, a dispassionate study of the position of women in Islam has rarely been made. Orientalists are in the habit of quoting and misquoting, even misinterpreting the Quranic injunctions and the *Sunnah*, which form the source of the Islamic system. The Muslim

society is also by and large responsible for stultifying the dynamism of Islam and creating misconceptions, because they have lost their capacity to represent Islam in its true spirit. The Muslim culture that we see around us is not truly the Islamic culture that the Prophet had evolved, but a sad mixture of many cultures, where un-Islamic infiltrations have altered the very essence of what should have been the Islamic society. So while presenting these points regarding the rights of women in Islam, one thing should be clear in our minds that these are purely what should have been in Muslim society and not what is existing today.

One significant point that we have to understand about Islam is that it does nowhere raise the question of superiority or inferiority of any gender, while talking about men and women. Islam considers each gender unique in its own sphere of activity and allots roles to each gender, best suited to them and according to their nature and needs. Men and women in Islam are not antagonists, but separate entities created to complement and complete each other. Each gender is given a definite set of goals, to be achieved by their own individual efforts. The unit of society is the family. As such, the well-being of the family would mean the well-being of the whole society.

During the era of the Prophet and the Caliphate, Muslim women played an indispensable role in the construction of society.

Islam makes the family the key social unit. All the members of this unit play specific roles for its welfare and upkeep. The position of women derives from the very premise that the family is the cornerstone of the Muslim society. The Islamic system is very sensitive about protecting and safeguarding the foundation of the family. Hence there is strict prohibition of extramarital relations or intimacy outside of marriage, as this weakens the base of the family.

Under the Islamic system, discrimination on grounds of gender, power or wealth is not allowed. Indeed the Quran states very simply the origin of mankind by rejecting any distinction or discrimination on account of birth. The Holy Quran explicitly states:

O Mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul. He created its mate from it and from the two of them spread countless men and women [throughout the earth]. (4: 1)

While conceding equality of the genders, the Quran categorizes men and women according to their deeds in this world. It states that all men and women are answerable equally to God:

To whoever does good deeds, man or woman, and is a believer, We shall assuredly give a good life; and We will bestow upon them their reward according to the best of their works. (16: 97)

Even while seeking the blessings of God, both men and women are promised full returns of their labour, apart from the excessive bounties showered by Him: *“Men shall be rewarded according to their deeds, and women shall be rewarded according to their deeds. You should rather ask God for His bounty. God has knowledge of all things.”* (4: 32)

Islam does not have any concept of dowry or dehej. On the contrary, the woman receives the Mehr (Dower) in marriage, which is the bride-money, an exclusive right of the bride.

The wisdom of the principles and laws of nature have been employed in regulating mutual relationship. The Quran states: *“All things We made in pairs”* (51: 49). This acknowledges men and women as distinctly separate entities, yet relates the two mutually making each the guardian of the other: *“The believers, both men and women, are friends to each other; they enjoin what is good and forbid evil, they attend to their prayers and pay the alms and obey God and His Messenger.”* (9: 71)

Personal development, intellectual pursuits and the acquisition of knowledge are human rights that should be conceded to males and females alike, without discrimination. Islam allows for equal opportunities to both the genders in the pursuit of knowledge. There is no derision, no underestimation anywhere. Each gender is encouraged to build up its individuality in every way. The Prophet said, *“It is essential for every Muslim man and woman to acquire knowledge.”*

Women’s guardians are advised not to obstruct their pursuits in education but to encourage them and provide them with opportunities. Examples exist of a number of educated women scholars during the Prophet’s time and after, who have contributed to Quranic interpretations, medicine, poetry and many other fields. The wives and daughters of magnates and sovereigns have known to patronize knowledge and give lavish endowments for the establishment of institutes of learning and social service. All such actions undertaken for the construction of society and building up righteousness will not go

unrecognized. God says in the Quran: *"If any do deeds of righteousness, be they male or female and have faith, they will enter Heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them."* (4: 124)

Spiritual attainment is not exclusively for men. Women have as much right over spiritual purification as men. The Quran is very explicit about this. *"Surely, for men and women who have surrendered to God—believing men and believing women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, men and women who are ever mindful of God—God is ready with forgiveness and an immense reward."* (33: 35)

Islam regards women in different roles: as a mother, as a daughter as a wife and as a separate human being, and gives them rights accordingly.

Mothers contribute enormously to society. Their love and sacrifice for the off-spring cannot possibly be ignored. The Quran recognizes the pain and hardship the mother experiences while keeping the human race alive and evokes, *"In travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in two years was his weaning"* (31: 14). Keeping this noble service in view, the mother is elevated to the highest pedestal of human glory. Islam makes it compulsory for children to obey their mothers. A mother's interest and welfare must be preferred three times more than a father's interest and welfare. A mother deserves gratitude, respect, love, kindness and obedience.

Islam encourages marriage and prohibits any deviated forms of gratification.

As a daughter, women always belong to the paternal family. Marriage does not break this bond. The Islamic social order makes elaborate arrangements for the fair treatment of the daughter. They must receive love and best maintenance. They have as much rights as the son in educational, physical and mental upliftment. They have their share in the father's property, which is recognized and granted at every cost. If, by chance, a woman becomes a widow or is divorced, Islamic law reverts her back to the paternal home where she may be looked after with love and affection. The Prophet said, *"Should I not tell you what is the best charity; That you should show kindness to that daughter who (becoming a widow or having been divorced) has been returned to you, and who has no other maintainer or supporter."* (Ibne-e-Majah)

Islam encourages marriage and prohibits any deviated forms of gratification. Marriage helps men and women to develop along natural lines and head towards development and success through mutual co-operation. Marriage prevents immorality, licentiousness and irresponsibility. The spouses in marriage agree to share rights and responsibilities to develop a happy family. In this regard it is a contract entered upon by both participants who vow to be ruled by the established law of God. The consent of the woman is essential for the completion of the marriage. What a contrast this is to the prevalent system of marriage in our country where the women are given over in the possession of greedy people who cannot be satisfied without demanding for a handsome amount of monies as well as other items of domestic luxury together with the girl.

Islam does not have any concept of dowry *or dehej*. On the contrary, the woman receives the *Mehr* (Dower) in marriage, which is the bride-money, an exclusive right of the bride. This *Mehr* may be paid at once after the solemnisation (*Nikah*) of marriage or at any time in life. But if it is not paid during the lifetime, it is considered a debt and like all other debts must be paid from the legacy of the deceased even before distribution of property among the legal heirs. Apart from the *Mehr* the wife is entitled to a share of the deceased husband's property also.

Women's guardians are advised not to obstruct their pursuits in education but to encourage them and provide them with opportunities.

The educational system that is followed completely ignores the moral and spiritual guidance of human beings. This is the reason why society itself is ignorant about how to

respect the women. Islam draws out the complete code of conduct and provides for maintaining the honour and dignity of the women through a modest dress code. All the exploitation and crimes regarding the women generally centres around their physical charms. So, to put a full stop on any such exploitation, believing women have been encouraged to follow a modest dress code and come out of their houses only when in need, not ramble aimlessly. Their safety is further ensured by making it a rule that in long distance and overnight journeys, they be accompanied by a male close relative with whom marriage is not possible.

The rights of women in Islam are really God's blessings. In this age of violence, misogyny, subordination, exploitation and oppression, women are frantically seeking fair ways and means of deliverance. They want

the assertion of their motherhood, in whole, their womanhood. They want to retain everything they own as their own, even their names.

But today, more often it is the women falling prey to the male dominated society. Muslim women are not any the better. They have also remained lagging behind particularly in education, and this is one reason why they have misrepresented their religion. During the era of the Prophet and the Caliphate, Muslim women played an indispensable role in the construction of society. They took active part in opinion building and decision-making. They delivered religious discourses, ventured outside their homes for the pursuit of knowledge and carried out independent trade.

But later on, Muslims themselves started to lose their mark of identity. Stagnation set in, in their society, and with this the position of women also gradually deteriorated. Today Muslim women, are in a deplorable condition, deprived of their rights and opportunities and kept under extremely rigorous conditions.

Hence, to improve the present status of Muslim women and to give them their due share in what is their right, it is indispensable that the Muslim organisations should come forward and make efforts to improve the status of women. It is their duty to see that Muslim women are not deprived of proper education. They have to see that more and more educational institutions for girls are opened and run efficiently, for the benefit of women. A fully planned strategy must be chalked out for vocational and professional training to make them self-sufficient, so that they may stand on their own feet when any such need arises. More centres should be opened for training and guidance for girls.

It is generally thought that Muslim women are only duty bound to their husband, family and home and that they have no other activity outside their home. This is a gross mistake and against the spirit of Islam, which does not restrict women within the four walls of their houses. Whenever there is a need for their positive and constructive contribution outside the home, they are allowed to do so. In doing so, their main motive should be to obtain the pleasure of God and service to humanity.

It is a great responsibility for the educated Muslim women to speed up their movement and work amongst all sections of society, be they

The Muslim culture that we see around us is not truly the Islamic culture that the Prophet had evolved, but a sad mixture of many cultures.

educated, semi-educated or uneducated and awaken them to the true knowledge of Islam, and to revolutionize their lives so that they can stand as examples before all womenfolk. Islam presents solutions to the problems of women. The need is to exert and express, to come out with the message and to spread this message of a peaceful and free existence that is in absolute conformity with the will of God. □



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STATUS OF WOMEN VIS-A-VIS MEN

Equal in Respect Different in Role

THERE is a common belief that Islam gives a higher status to men in comparison to women. This is a misconception in the truest sense of the word. Contrary to the common misconception cited above, Islam actually gives equal status to women as that of men. The Quran says:

“You are members, one of another.” (3:195)

There are many *Hadith* of the Prophet regarding women:

Fear God in respect of women.

Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit. (Al Tirmizi)

The most perfect man of religion is one who excels in character and the best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk.

However, studies in biology and psychology show that the two genders are different in nature, each being designed for a different purpose. So, the Islamic maxim runs: *Equal in respect, but different in role*. Each being equal has a different sphere of action. That is, in making their contribution to social activity, the men undertake whatever is physically harder, while the women deal with whatever is physically lighter.

Although males and females differ from one another biologically, they are equal in terms of human status. No distinction is made between women and men as regards their respective rights. Man and woman in the eyes of Islam complement each other. This concept permits the shortcomings of one gender to be compensated for by the strengths of the other. This is all for the good if they are to be lifetime companions.

It is a fact that women in general are not physically as strong as men, but their physical weakness in no way implies their inferiority to men. The eyes are the most delicate parts of our body, while the nails by comparison are extremely hard. That does not mean that the nails are superior to the eyes.

Just as two different kinds of fruits will differ in colour, taste, shape and texture, without one being superior or inferior to the other, so also do men and women have their different qualities which distinguish the male from the female without there being any question of superiority or inferiority. They are endowed by nature with different capacities so that they may play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness.

However, in respect of innate talents, all individuals, be they men or women, differ from one another. Yet their need for each other is equal. All are of equal value. One is not more important or less important than the other. Similarly when it comes to the establishment of a home and raising of a family, men and women have their separate roles to play. But each is vital. Each is indispensable to the other. And for them to come together, function in unison and live in harmony, there must be mutual respect and a prevailing sense that a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man.

In ancient times, women had come to be considered inferior and were deprived, among other things, of the right to inherit property. Islam for the first time in human history gave them their due legal rights over property. Neither did it distinguish between men and women as regards status, rights and blessings, both in this world and the Hereafter. Both were considered equal participants in the carrying out of the functions of daily living.

Since the earliest ideal phase of Islam, Muslim women have successfully used their talents in the field of education in particular. Homes had become centres of learning. As women performed their role without going outdoors, there is a general impression that Islam has restricted

Islam sets great value on the proper management of home. It is because home is the most important unit of any society. Home is the centre of preparing succeeding generations.

women's workplace to performing only domestic chores. But this is not the truth. Islam first encouraged them to receive education, and then enthused them with a new zeal. Subsequently, they went out to impart this learning to the next generation. Let's take the instance of the Prophet's wives, held up as role models for women in Islam. Preserving their femininity, they participated in all kinds of religious and worldly activities. For instance, the Prophet's wife Aisha, having gained full knowledge of Islam from the Prophet, was able, after the death of

the Prophet, to perform the task of teacher and guide to the Muslim community for a period of about fifty years. Abdullah ibn Abbas, a Companion of great stature, and one of the best commentators of the Quran, was one of Aisha's pupils.

As modern day research tells us, women are better with words than men. It is perhaps this reason why they are able to run educational institutions successfully. Besides this there may be many such workplaces where

women are able to use their full potential. Since earliest days of Islam we find Muslim women working outdoors. Umme Dahdah, wife of a Companion of the Prophet worked in her orchard. Khadija, the Prophet's wife conducted business, to cite only a few of such examples. However, Islam sets great value on the proper management of a home. It is because a home is the most important unit of any society. Home is the centre of preparing succeeding generations. Thus neglecting the home front will amount to neglecting the next generation, which in turn will result in a great national loss.

Islam grants even more respect to women than to men. According to one *Hadith* a man once came to the Prophet and asked him, who rightfully deserved the best treatment from him.

"Your mother," said the Prophet. "Who's next?" asked the man. "Your mother." "Who comes next?" the man asked again. The Prophet again replied, "Your mother." "Who is after that?" insisted the man. "Your father," said the Prophet.

Another example concerns Hajra, the Prophet Abraham's wife. Hajj, regarded as the greatest form of worship in Islam, entails the performance of *Sai*, one of the main rites of the Hajj. This is accomplished by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kabah. This running, enjoined upon every pilgrim, be they rich or poor, literate or illiterate, kings or commoners, is in imitation of the desperate quest of Hajra, Abraham's wife, for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant, four thousand years ago. The performance of this rite is a lesson in struggling for the cause of God. It is of the utmost significance that this was an act performed by a woman. Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman's greatness than God's command to all men, literally to follow in her footsteps.

When it comes to the establishment of a home and raising of a family, men and women have their separate roles to play. But each is vital. Each is indispensable to the other.

The Quran says that men are in charge of—that is, they are 'maintainers' of women (4: 34). This leads to a common misconception that Islam gives a higher status to men than women. According to this verse of the Quran, it does not mean that men have a distinctive status over women. Being maintainers of women has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment, it rather concerns the practical management of the home, for which the man is held responsible. However, this

does not mean that a woman will never be allowed to shoulder these responsibilities. If she finds that she can bear this burden, no objection will be raised from any quarter.

In fact, in the early period of Islam, both men and women were fully active in different fields of life, from housework to agriculture and horticulture; and worship in the mosque. Everywhere women were visible and active. Gradually there came about a division of labour, which is justifiable not only biologically and physiologically, but also in terms of the ensuing social benefits. One such important benefit is that they can see each other's lives objectively, without that personal involvement which tends to cloud their judgment and lead to a damaging emotionalism. They are better able to counsel each other coolly and wisely, to give moral support at critical moments, and to offer the daily encouragement with which every successful union should be marked.

Difference of biological function does not imply inequality. For the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of the purposeful planning of our Creator.

In Islamic history, there are many examples of women giving invaluable help to their husbands in critical situations. One of the most notable was Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet of Islam who successfully brought the Prophet back from a state of fear and trembling to a state of normalcy after his receiving the first divine revelation in the solitude of the Cave of Hira from the Archangel Gabriel. She was

able to reassure him that his life was not, as he feared, in danger, as she herself was emotionally detached from the incident. She observed: "God will surely never forsake you. You are kind to your kin; you always help the weak; you take care of whoever crosses your threshold; you solace the weary; you speak the truth." The reassurance that Khadijah gave to the Prophet of Islam on this occasion was one of the most significant contributions to the furtherance of Islam.

We see that the sacred scriptures of Islam make it clear that neither gender is inferior or superior to the other. Difference of biological function does not imply inequality. For the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of the purposeful planning of our Creator. □

VEIL OF INTERPRETATION OVER ISLAM

Clear your Understanding

ONE reason for the alienation of Islam is that as time went by self-styled interpretations of the Quran and *Sunnah* gradually placed a veil over the original content of these texts. A time came when the original Islam was completely obscured from view. The wrong, man-made interpretations took the place of revealed guidance and people mistakenly took the misconceptions in Islam to be the real Islam.

In the early phase of Islam people derived their religion directly from the Quran and the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, therefore, their association with the original Islam remained intact. But the interpretations and explanations of later days served only to obscure the original teachings. The natural beauty of Islam disappeared over the centuries. The Quran and *Sunnah* now turned into relics instead of being instruments of guidance. Thus the religion came to be based on latter-day interpretations and explanations instead of the original scriptures.

How did this corruption set in, in the religious literature produced by the later generations? The answer is that the basic requirement to understand the scriptures in depth is God realization. When one finds religion at the level of realization, one is endowed by God with the wisdom to be able to understand the deeper meaning of the scriptures. On the other hand those who are not blessed with this special gift of wisdom, have nothing by which to understand Islam, except their own pre-conceptions.

They begin to interpret religion according to their own mindset. The result is that, although they refer to the original sources of Islam—the Quran and *Sunnah*, their interpretations have little bearing on the original texts. Religious degeneration ensues in which they appear to follow Islam but actually stray far from its spirit. They fail to differentiate between God-sent religion and man-made interpretation.

When one finds religion at the level of realization, one is endowed by God with the wisdom to be able to understand the deeper meaning of the scriptures.

One great loss created by these additions to the original Islam was the shift in emphasis. Some important teachings of Islam were

relegated to the background—for instance, concern for the larger humanity, missionary work, and patience. Missionary work—that is conveying the message of Islam peacefully—is the greatest mission of the Muslim community for, although prophethood came to an end with Prophet Muhammad, the mission of the Prophet has not yet come to an end. The mission continues through the followers of the Prophet as a matter of religious duty. It would be no exaggeration to say that without the performance of this duty, the very credibility of being the Muslim community would become doubtful. Strangely, indeed, missionary work found no place in the literature of the centuries after the Prophet Muhammad. Neither has it been mentioned anywhere in the Muslim agenda of today. The classical commentaries of the Quran also fail to give any prominence to missionary work as a concept. In books of sayings of the Prophet too, we find chapters on all subjects except missionary work. The same is true of Islamic

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jurisprudence in whose texts we do not find a chapter on missionary work.

According to the Quran, the exercise of patience is a deed, which makes man eligible for the highest reward (8: 46); the patient man will be rewarded “beyond measure” (39: 10). But the interpretation that gained popularity in later times was that the injunction of patience had been abrogated and replaced by *jihad* (in the sense of fighting). Thus, one who studies these books gathers the impression, that consciously or unconsciously, patience might have been important in the past, but nowadays it has lost its relevance. Now *jihad* and not *sabr* is of foremost importance.

So, the ensuing result of the attitude of Muslims is that whenever someone presents the real Islam, it appears alien to them. □



LEGALISTIC OR PSYCHOLOGICAL LANGUAGE

Make or Mar the Message

THERE are two ways of trying to offer advice to others. One way is to do so in a legalistic language. The other way is to do this using the 'language of the psyche'.

The former approach seeks to explain things in the form of do's and don'ts. It is the language of commandments: 'Do this!' or 'Don't do that!' This sort of language is useful for people who are already prepared and ready to act in accordance with the advice they are given. But for people who are not ready for this, the language of do's and don'ts is not appropriate. Instead, the appropriate language for such people is what can be called 'the language of the psyche'.

What is the 'language of the psyche'? It is the very same language that is referred to in the Quran when it says "speak to them in such terms as will address their minds" (4: 63). That is to say, to convey one's message in such a manner that it addresses the mind of one's addressee, so that by hearing it one discovers the importance of what is being said and considers it worthy of reflection and deeper thought.

The language of do's and don'ts is effective only with people who already agree with you. In contrast, the 'language of the psyche' is effective with and useful for everyone. If you speak this language, someone who already agrees with what you are saying will be further convinced of its veracity. And someone who does not as yet agree with what you are saying will at least reflect on it, and it is possible that he will soon accept it in his heart.

To convey one's message in such a manner that it addresses the mind of one's addressee, so that by hearing it one discovers the importance of what is being said and considers it worthy of reflection and deeper thought.

The language of do's and don'ts is appropriate when discussing legalistic rules, but in the field of calling people to God only that sort of language is useful that is expressed in a psychologically-appropriate manner, one that addresses people's minds, and that touches their hearts, convincing them of the truth of what is being conveyed to them. □

THE TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHET

For All Times

GOD'S religion is one religion. It is that one religion which has always been revealed to prophets, but man, in his carelessness, has always marred or altered the true way. Prophet Muhammad revived the divine religion and presented it in scriptural form for posterity. He showed the way to achieve closeness to God and salvation in the afterlife. He taught that God is One; He has no partner. He created all things and has complete control over the universe. We should serve Him and submit to Him alone. In Him should we repose our hopes and to Him should we pray. Though He cannot be seen, He is so close to us that He hears and answers us when we call upon Him. There is no greater sin than to consider that He could have any counterpart or equal.

There is no intermediary between God and man. By remembering God, a person establishes direct contact with Him; there is no need for any go-between. No one will be able to intercede before God in the Hereafter either. He will decide everyone's case according to His own knowledge; no one will be able to influence His judgement. God is not accountable to anyone for His decisions. All His judgements are based on wisdom and justice; He is not influenced by intercession and proximity. Worship of God is much more than just superficial rituals; it is total submission. If one worships God, then one devotes oneself entirely to one's Lord, fearing Him, loving Him, having hopes in Him, and concentrating on Him alone. Worship of God is total self-surrender; it is much more than occasional observance of mere formalities.

Worship of God is much more than just superficial rituals; it is total submission.

When dealing with others, we should always bear in mind that God is watching over us. He will deal with us as we have dealt with others. So, in order to avoid recrimination when our actions are weighed up on the divine scales of justice, it is essential that we avoid evils such as cruelty, dishonesty, pride, antagonism, jealousy, selfishness and callousness. If one fears God, one will not treat His creatures with disdain, for those who mistreat God's creatures should not expect kindness from the Creator; only those who have treated others well deserve good treatment from Him.

The Prophet taught that the only acceptable life is one of total obedience to God. The basic principles of this life are forms of subservience as laid down in the Quran, and God's Prophet has demonstrated them practically in his life. The only life pleasing to God, then, is one which follows the guidance of the Quran and the example set by the Prophet. The religion which the Prophet left us guides us in every walk of life; everyone should proceed in accordance with the scheme with which he has provided us. This scheme is based on certain tenets on which the whole of the Islamic life is based.

Firstly, there is the testimony: *"There is no one worthy of being served save God, and Muhammad is His messenger."* This declaration marks man's exit from one arena and his entry into another—his departure from all that is un-Islamic and his inclusion in the ranks of Islam. Secondly, prayer, that is worship five times a day in the manner of the Prophet. Thirdly, fasting, a test of patience and endurance annually performed during the month of Ramadan. Fourthly *Zakat*, the setting aside of a fixed portion of one's income for the poor. Fifthly, pilgrimage, a visit to the House of God at least once in a lifetime, if one has the means. When one fulfills these five conditions, one becomes part of the prophetically established Islamic brotherhood. Life can be lived in either of two ways; it can be founded either on the Hereafter or on the world. In the former case, the Prophet's guidance is accepted and a person forms his beliefs and arranges his life accordingly. In the latter case a person guides himself, letting his own intellect dictate the way he thinks and acts. The first person can be called a God-worshipper, while the second is a self-worshipper.

When dealing with others, we should always bear in mind that God is watching over us. He will deal with us as we have dealt with others.

There are several parts to the credo based on prophetic guidance: belief in God, the angels, the scriptures, the prophets, the resurrection of man and life after death, heaven and hell, as well as the recognition of God as the overriding Lord and Sovereign. If one bases one's life on these tenets of faith, then one has truly submitted oneself to God. All of one's efforts in the world become oriented towards the Hereafter. One's worship, sacrifices, life and death are all dedicated to God.

The self-guided life, on the other hand, is a free and unprincipled one. One who lives such a life is unconcerned about the nature of reality. He believes what he wants to; he passes his time in whatever way his

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intellect and desires direct him; his efforts all centre on worldly gain; he develops into the sort of person he wishes to be, rather than what God and His prophets would like to see.

Divine religion has to be rediscovered based on the message of the Prophet. For this one has to discard the veil of prejudice. One has to rise above their previous beliefs and study deeply and objectively and if they recognize it as the truth accept it and stay firmly established. □



Teacher Tree

A tree stands above the ground, fixing its roots firmly beneath the ground. It grows from beneath, upwards into the air; it does not start at the top and grow downwards. The tree is our teacher, imparting to us the lesson of nature, that if we seek to progress outwardly we must first strengthen ourselves inwardly, we must begin from the base of our ourselves before we can hope to build society anew.

THE HUMAN PERSONALITY

Portrayed through Behaviour

IF from a vessel containing water, a single drop is found to be brackish, it means that all of the liquid is undrinkable. We need sample only of one drop to know with certainty what the rest will be like. Much the same is true of the human personality. It is like an over brimming vessel, which keeps on shedding drops for other people to savour, to find sweet or brackish as the case may be. Small instances of an individual's behaviour and short interludes in his company are generally sufficient to tell us what his overall personality is like. A thoughtless remark, an unfair manoeuvre, a failure to give much-needed sympathy or support, a devious transaction—all these are the plain indicators, like those brackish drops of water from the larger vessel, which indicate the lack of integrity or callousness of the person you are dealing with.

The human personality has the same homogeneity as water. A single human weakness cannot therefore be considered in isolation, as if it were an exception. It has to be looked upon as being representative of the entire personality. If an individual proves unreliable in one matter, he is likely to evince the same unreliability in other matters; if he is guilty of untrustworthiness on one occasion, the chances are that this trait will show up time and again.

There is only one kind of person who is an exception to that rule, and he is the one who subjects his own behaviour to constant re-appraisal, who is continually scrutinizing himself for weaknesses and faults and who, once having found such faults, wastes no time in rooting them out.

A man who has made a mistake can completely erase the marks of what is an unfortunate experience for others by admitting his mistake and begging forgiveness. Some people are pricked by their consciences, but do nothing to assuage the ruffled feelings of others, thinking that to do so would be sheer weakness and would mean a loss of face. Such people can never have healthy social relationships and can never win the respect of their fellow men. They do not realize that a man displays his true mettle when he sees his own wrong actions for what they are, and humbly asks forgiveness.

It is only he who has learned the art of moral introspection who will, in the long run, prove to be a person of inviolable integrity. □

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



DEPRIVED OF PARADISE

THE Quran says that the believers should discover Paradise in such depth that they obtain an introduction to Paradise in this very world itself (47: 6).

According to the Quran, the world of Paradise is similar to this present world. This means that people of faith should recognize Paradise by seeing and observing this world. For them, Paradise will become a discovered realm while in this very world. When someone discovers Paradise like this, then, very naturally, he will become desirous of Paradise to the greatest possible extent.

If you keep this fact in mind and analyze present-day Muslims, you will discover that the Muslims of the whole world live in a psyche of hatred and complaint. This psyche is so widespread that it is found among every single class of Muslims, equally among educated and uneducated Muslims.

This negative mind-set of Muslims appears to be against others. But in terms of practical results, it is against Muslims themselves. It destroys the positive thinking among Muslims that is indispensable for living in remembrance of Paradise.

Human beings have been created in such a way that they cannot harbour within them both enmity and friendship at the same time (33: 4). A person who lives with a psyche of constant complaint will be bereft of a psyche of gratitude. Someone who lives with a sense of deprivation cannot at the same time feel like as if he has achieved something.

The present psyche of Muslims is against the Creation Plan of God. God wants that people should have a glimpse of Paradise while in this very world, so that they can think of the real Paradise and seek it. But the present mentality of Muslims is a barrier to the development of such a character. One who thinks negatively will live in hatred and frustration. And a person whose mind is filled with hatred and frustration cannot live in the thoughts of a great blessing like Paradise. □

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Key To Success

When work is done in a spirit of co-operation, co-ordination and blessed with an atmosphere of harmony in an organization, the sky is the limit in quantity and quality of production. It is unity then which is the true key to success.

THE WISDOM OF LIFE

For Success

MACHINES, for instance, clocks and watches generally run on a system of cogwheels. The movement of one such wheel sets another in motion. If either of the wheels does not mesh with the other, neither will the cogwheel move, nor will the machine be set in motion.

The same applies to human plans in the modern world. There are two "cog-wheels" here as well. And life's system functions properly only when the two engage and work together in unison.

One wheel in this world is that of man, while the other is that of accompanying circumstances. Here, the individual can be effective only to the extent that external circumstances will permit. Given this state of affairs, wisdom lies in knowing what is possible and what is not possible in terms of circumstances.

Where interests are in conflict, the matter at issue is not what should be the settlement from the point of view of justice; the solution to be sought in such a situation, is that which is possible in practical terms.

The right way to proceed in this world is to allow things to take their natural course without placing any obstacles in their path.

That is why, in such instances, one should be willing to accept the possible, instead of engaging in futile hostilities over the issue of ideal justice. Such efforts will lead to nothing but further loss.

The same is the case with nations. Here, too, the leaders should look to what is achievable and what is not with respect to the actual circumstances. This is a universal matter where the degree of success achieved by

the individual or the nation is in direct proportion to the effective interlocking of "cog-wheels", within a broad framework of non-adherence to rigid ideologies.

It was America's good fortune that it found leaders throughout its history, who were free from the delusions of utopianism. They understood the laws of nature and started their national journey in accordance with these laws. By making steady progress for the last two hundred years, America has come to be the foremost power in the world.

This principle of nature, in brief, favours healthy competition. The American leaders granted freedom to their citizens and opened up opportunities to achieve the desired success by proving their capability in a highly competitive field. These leaders limited the Government's sphere to law and order, thus granting its citizens full freedom of action in other fields. As a result everyone found unhampered opportunities for the optimal development of personal potential.

The American leaders did not attempt to pour society into the mould of a fabricated ideology as the basis for national progress. Instead they looked only at what was naturally sustainable and adopted it.

On the contrary, in the Soviet Union certain theorists clinging to a contrived ideology, attempted to re-structure the whole of society accordingly. When society refused to accept this, the rebels were killed in millions, as if they had no more significance than insects. This scheme of things was against nature and that is why, after a tumultuous struggle spanning over 75 years, it has met with total failure.

The same was the case with a few other countries. Their leaders devised certain ideologies of their own and wished to recast their entire countries in this mould. The attempt to implement this system by force was a total failure. And precious time was wasted callously.

These leaders should have adopted the same principle as nature adopts with regard to water. When water flows from a mountain peak, it is left free to cascade down the hillsides, meander across the plains, spread out into lakes—in short, follow its own natural course until it reaches the sea.

Having properly understood actual conditions and circumstances, they should have left society to proceed unhindered on the thoroughfare of nature. In this way an atmosphere of healthy competition would have been produced, and the capabilities of all their citizens would have played their role in the process of progress and development. But this was not to be. Ideological fanaticism produced the logic of coercion, which vitiated everything that came within its orbit.

The right way to proceed in this world is to allow things to take their natural course without placing any obstacles in their path. If any wielder of power conceives of a plan which in his view is superior (whatever its

It is good to be an idealist, but it has to be conceded that the attainment of the ideal in social life is seldom within the realms of the possible.

actual merits may be), he should work towards its implementation along peaceful lines, remaining strictly within the sphere of persuasion. He should wait also for the appropriate moment when people's thinking has changed, so that his plans may be carried into effect in consonance with the law of nature itself. In that way, its outcome will be beneficial to all.

The actual point worth considering in the building of the social system is not some ideological scheme of things formulated by any particular leader, but what is humanly achievable from the practical standpoint. The part played by any given leader in the overhaul of the social system and, in its subsequent consolidation, is only fifty per cent. The remaining fifty per cent is attributable to external circumstances. If a leader, failing to grasp this reality, is under the apprehension that the entire country is his personal fiefdom, it would be the gravest blunder

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on his part to force upon the people his personal ideology. This would be verging on madness, for whatever he then did as a result of his misunderstanding should culminate not in construction but the very opposite.

It is good to be an idealist, but it has to be conceded that the attainment of the ideal in social life is seldom within the realms of the possible. The secret of success in restructuring society is for leaders and followers alike to aim at elevated goals, while taking care to subordinate personal idealism to overarching practicalities. □



After Every Mistake

After every mistake certain opportunities arise through which one can rectify matters.

SUCCESS IN PERSEVERANCE

Time-tested Quality

IT has been very aptly observed that success lies in perseverance. The entire gamut of human history testifies to the truth of this saying. Life's journey, frequently directed along uneven paths, is one in which one faces many unfavourable situations. Yet the wayfarer has to continue his journey whatever the odds. This is called perseverance. One who possesses this quality reaches the destination of success in this world. The greater the perseverance the greater the success.

This is a law of nature. Just open your eyes and you will find clear indications of this reality.

Think of the man, standing by the side of a rock, who looked down and found that, due to the continuous lashing of the waves, the rock had worn away and then remarked, "Look, the rock is a hard object, while water is so soft. But even if as soft a thing as water acts with perseverance, it can crush as hard an object as a rock into pieces. All the huge quantities of sand found on the sea shores have been produced by this lashing of water against the rocks."

The career of Dr. Subramaniam Chandrashekar (1910-1995) provides a recent human parallel. From his childhood he showed a keen interest in mathematics and astronomy. Later on he took up as the subject for his research, the birth and death of the stars. In this connection, he presented his initial conclusion in the form of a research paper at a meeting of Astrophysical Society held on January 11, 1935. Scientists of repute, including Sir Arthur Eddington, were present at the meeting. Sir Arthur Eddington ridiculed Chandrashekar and tore his papers to pieces.

If you want to achieve success for yourself, you should cultivate the virtue of patience, for success is always dependent upon the exercise of patience.

Later on Chandrashekar wanted this paper to be published in the Astrophysical Journal published from London. But his paper was again rejected. Discouraged by this experience, he left Britain for India. Here he applied to different universities for a job but failed to find one. He was rejected both at home and abroad.

Yet this was not enough to dishearten Chandrashekar. He now left India for Chicago, where he found the circumstances more favourable. He devoted himself once again to his research. Gradually his theories

on stellar evolution became so popular that his papers were regularly published in important scientific journals and magazines. Finally he gained success with his discoveries being acknowledged and accepted. His name was even given to the maximum mass of a stable white dwarf star—the *Chandrasekhar Limit*—in the world of science. At the age of 73, in 1983, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for science.

Human history is replete with such exemplary lives. Anyone who has achieved any real success in this world has done so through continuous effort and perseverance. There is no other path to success in this world.

It has been observed that if you want to achieve success for yourself, you should cultivate the virtue of patience; for success is always dependent upon the exercise of patience. This is necessary because in a period of struggle such obstacles come in the way as apparently remove one further from one's destination. That is why man must never allow himself to become demoralized. Equipped with patience and perseverance, he should persist in his efforts.

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This is so great a certainty that it leaves no choice as to our course of action. We have to abide by this verdict of nature, for we can survive only by living in accordance with it. It is not possible for us to change the system of nature.

Given this state of affairs, wisdom demands that we refrain from wasting our time in complaints and protests, and take steps to banish despair and discouragement. Adopting the path of realism, one must continue one's efforts. In that case, success will become as certain as the setting of the sun in the evening and of its rising again the next morning. Unflinching effort inevitably leads one to the desired goal.

Nature requires only a few months to grow a crop of cucumber. But this is not the case with the oak tree. Nature here requires a period of a hundred years. Then how can man be exempt from this universal principle?

If you are not willing to accept the reality of a long struggle, then you shall have to be content with minor success: the necessary price of great success is long-term endeavour. One who is not willing to pay this price should not expect any great success. □

THE PERIOD OF YOUTH

Sole Opportunity

THE Prophet is reported to have said that on the Day of Judgment every person would be questioned about some issues, one of these being how he spent his youth (*Al-Bayhaqi*). Youth is said to be the best part of a person's life. That is why we will be questioned specifically about it.

Youth is a period when a person's strength is fully alive and he is capable of doing whatever he likes. This period lies between two periods of infirmity—childhood, on the one hand, and old age, on the other. If you waste your youth, it is like wasting your whole life.

Youth is the age of good health. If you have good health, you have everything. If you don't have good health, you have nothing. Good health is truly something to be very grateful for. The period of youth is the period of the greatest blessing. It is because of this that in the Hereafter we will be specifically asked about how we spent our youth. The period of youth is the best period in a person's life. What you can do in this period you cannot do either before or after it.

In our youth, we have great strength and energy. That is why most people at that age don't really think they face very difficult problems. What the *Hadith* referred to above means is whether in this precious part of our lives we thanked God for this gift or not. Were we arrogant, or were we modest? Did we cause problems to others? Were we a source of goodness for others or did we do them harm?

The period of youth is the best period in a person's life. What you can do in this period you cannot do either before or after it.

But there is a weakness as well, in this period of youth. It is a period prior to a person's full maturity. In his youth, a person bubbles with energy, but in terms of experience and intellectual development, he still remains in a relatively undeveloped phase. For this reason, most people make the biggest mistakes of their lives in this period. Hence, it is necessary to be particularly cautious when one is at this stage in life. A person in this stage must form his opinions based on deep thinking and his actions should follow deep reflection.

Young age is a very precious part of our lives. At this stage of life, we have much to give to others. It can also become something to be very grateful for if we spend this period of our life in the right way. □

TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



THE MODERN AGE AND NON-VIOLENCE

THE greatest problem facing Islam today is, that Muslims have almost totally forgotten the Prophet's way of non-violence. In latter times when the Ottoman and Mughal empires disintegrated and problems like that of Palestine have had to be confronted, Muslims all over the world have fallen a prey to negative reaction on a colossal scale; they have failed to remember that the policy of Islam is not that of violence but of non-violence. It is the result of this deviation, that despite almost a 100-years of wars, Muslims have achieved no positive gain. Rather whatever they already had, has been lost by them.

According to Imam Malik, later generations of Muslim community settled matters at issue in the same way that earlier generations had done, i.e. non-violent methods. Similarly, Muslims of modern times must likewise resort only to non-violent methods. Just as no gain could accrue from violent methods earlier, no gain can accrue from violent methods today.

Muslims of modern times must likewise resort only to non-violent methods. Just as no gain could accrue from violent methods earlier, no gain can accrue from violent methods today.

At the time of the Hodaybiya peace treaty, the Quraysh, who had secured the leadership of Arabia, were bent on waging war. The Kabah was in their possession. They had expelled the Prophet and his Companions from their home town. They had taken possession of Muslims' homes and other properties, and

spared no effort in disseminating negative propaganda against Islam. Given this state of affairs, there were only two options before the believers. One was to attempt to put an end to tyranny and launch an outright war on the other party in the name of securing their rights. The result of such a move would certainly have been further loss in terms of lives and property.

The second option was to remain patient in the face of immediate loss, be it political or material, and, in spite of the losses avail of the opportunities that were already available. The Prophet of Islam and his Companions chose this second course. The result was that in just a few years, the entire history of Arabia was altered for the better by an Islamic revolution.

The present age however is an age of religious freedom; the world has become a global village. There is openness amongst people about learning from each other. The development of science and technology has made the canvas needed for God realization bigger.

Today there exists a great number of opportunities for self-betterment and for working on a much larger scale. If availed of wisely, we can rewrite the history of Islam in magnificent terms.

Towards a Non-Violent World

Though the history of the non-violent movement is a very long one, historians concede that "the most massive and historically effective example of non-violent activism was that of the movement organized by Mahatma Gandhi".

India can be justly proud that it was in this country, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, where for the first time in human history a non-violent movement culminated in such resounding success.

The first target for Mahatma Gandhi was to usher in peaceful political change throughout the country. This ambition was fulfilled in 1947. Mahatma Gandhi's second target was to bring about social change on the basis of non-violence. But before he could achieve his second target, he was tragically removed from the scene of action.

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Now our greatest need is to fulfill Mahatma Gandhi's mission. After political change we have to bring about social change in our country through Gandhi Andolan, that is, a non-violent movement. If India could be successful on this front, it would undoubtedly find itself in a position to give the lead to the entire world.

There is only one way of exploiting the non-violent method for the reform of a society – and that is, to bring about a change in the thinking of the individual, the basic unit of society.

Violence is born in the mind and it can be ended in the mind itself. For instance, during the Second World War, Japan was burning to avenge itself against America. They said that America had devastated their city of Hiroshima, so they would destroy America. Although Japan's Air Force had been badly hit, its army was still intact, and its officers were bent on vengeance. At that juncture certain intellectuals in Japan pointed out that if America had destroyed Hiroshima, they had already destroyed America's Pearl Harbour. In this way they were at par. The score was even.

Due to this timely guidance, the Japanese came to rethink their position, and, abandoning the path of confrontation with America, opted instead for the path of adjustment; in so doing, they were tremendously successful.

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The truth is that intellectual awakening is the only way to produce a non-violent world. This is, without doubt, a long and laborious struggle. But we have no other alternative.

Most instances of violence are the results of misguided thinking. The day one succeeds in putting an end to such thought, violence will disappear on its own.

Take the case, for example, of communal riots in India. It has been found that in most of the cases communal riots result from an erroneous way of thinking. For example when a procession of people of one community

passes by the place of worship of another community, the choice for the people in the place of worship is not between tolerating the procession or disrupting it. The right choice is between being patiently waiting for the procession to pass which is a temporary disturbance or to witness riots resulting in loss of precious lives and property.

An individual is always governed by his thinking. That is why, if we have to make a non-violent world for a peaceful society, there is only one way, and that is by using educative methods to convert people's thinking from violence to non-violence, and to enable them to seek the solution to matters of controversy through peaceful means. They must learn to understand the value of tolerance and avoidance as opposed to intolerance and confrontation. It is from such intellectual awareness alone that a non-violent world and a peaceful society can be constructed. □

There is only one way of exploiting the non-violent method for the reform of a society—and that is, to bring about a change in the thinking of the individual, the basic unit of society.



Higher Purpose

It is in terms of the unique conceptual quality of man that we can conceive of what his higher purpose in life should be. It can only be one which does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exigencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God.

IDEOLOGICAL HATRED

Root cause of Violence

HATRED is a crime and ideological hatred is the greatest crime. The so-called Islamic fundamentalism, if judged by its result, is the greatest crime of this kind against humanity. Anything can be eliminated, but what is impossible to eliminate is the hatred produced by a sacred ideology: Hatred generates violence and ideological hatred generates unlimited violence. It can kill all of humanity without suffering any feelings of remorse or repentance. Hence, we see the violence perpetrated by the self-styled Islamic fundamentalism which has turned into an un-Islamic theory.



One type of movement is that which is based on love. Such a movement awakens in its adherents, feelings of well-wishing towards other human beings. Its exponents strive peacefully to pass on the truth that they have discovered for the benefit of their fellow men. Such a movement, far from causing harm to society, becomes a driving force towards the moral and social upliftment of people in all walks of life.

A movement based on love becomes a driving force towards the moral and social upliftment of people in all walks of life.

The other type of movement is one, which is based on hatred. The adherents of this movement consider those who are not like-minded to be enemies. They have an overriding desire to wipe them off the face of the earth. They hold that these “enemies” are obstacles to their success and that it is therefore necessary to destroy them altogether. Only then can a system of their own choice be set in place. Islamic fundamentalism—so-called—is a movement of this second type. As

a result of this negative thinking they divide humanity into two camps, one consisting of their enemies, and the other of their friends. Once having made this division, they allow their aversion for their “enemies” to grow into virulent hatred. If the incentives for the members of the movement based on love are well-wishing and the goodwill of the people, the incentives for the members of the movement based on hatred are ill-will and animosity. Owing to this negative attitude, all the activities of Islamic fundamentalism take a pernicious direction.

To make matters worse, the hatred felt by the Muslim fundamentalists has become inseparable from their ideology. They hate others who think differently from themselves because they hold them to be ideologically in error. Experience shows that of all kinds of hatred, that based on an ideology is the most rabid. Personal hatred, on the other hand, arises from temporary factors, and seldom takes long to dissipate in the ordinary course of events. But there is little chance of ideological hatred abating. And its target is the obliteration of enemies. Not until this end is achieved will it ever die down. This is the reason that ideological hatred takes no time in assuming the shape of violence. When it is found that peaceful means of persuasion are showing no results, arms are then resorted to, so that all enemies may be removed from its path. □



A New Beginning

When the darkness of the night gives way to the light of the sun, it is nature's silent way of announcing that one revolution of night and day is over and that with a fresh day, a fresh life is beginning and that with the light of the day, the wayfarer may take courage and hope to reach his destination.

A HIGHER FORM OF WORSHIP

True Well Wishing

A believer who engages with people and is patient when he faces annoyance from them shall have greater reward than him who neither interacts with others nor remains patient over the troubles caused by them.

—Prophet of Islam, reported by IbnMajah, at-Tirmidhi

THE interaction that this *Hadith* refers to is not interaction in the ordinary sense of the term. Rather, it refers to that interaction as a result of which one experiences annoyances at the hand of others.

Interaction in itself is not the cause for experiencing annoyance at the hands of others. If you interact with people by speaking sugary words, if you compromise with them, if you entertain them and say only those things that people want to hear, you will become the apple of their eye. And then, people will behave very nicely with you.

For instance, if whenever your community has a problem with another community you support your own community and always say bad things about the other community, then your community is bound to make you into their hero. If you tell people things that will inflate their sense of pride, why would anyone trouble you? If you narrate such stories to people that promise them entry into Paradise for a very low price,

there is no reason why they would harass you.

You are likely to face annoyances from others especially when you act according to the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil, which is a cardinal teaching of Islam.

If you support people's economic demands, their communal complaints and their political agendas and talk in a manner that appears to legitimize their every stance, they are not going to cause you any annoyance.

Interaction in the *Hadith* cited above is no interaction in the ordinary sense of the term as explained above. Rather, it is that sort of interaction in which you speak things that are against the people's mind-set and that indicate their errors. It refers to that sort of interaction in which you show people where

they have gone wrong and suggest appropriate reform or change. When this happens, you are likely to face annoyances from others.

Your critique is likely to provoke them to oppose you. In order to insist that they are right, they might malign you.

You are likely to face annoyances from others especially when you act according to the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil, which is a cardinal teaching of Islam. You criticize others when you find they are doing wrong. When you do this, people are compelled to introspect. If, for instance, you see people fomenting violence in the name of *jihad*, you have to criticize them. If in the name of their leaders they project as 'right' something that is clearly wrong, you have to tell them what is really right and wrong. If they are exploiting religion for their perceived communal interests, you have to openly speak out against this.

These are the instances of interaction that make interactions synonymous with facing annoyances. In addition, when someone who calls others to God, interacts with others, he has to bear with different kinds of hardships and inconveniences. These things may be a source of concern for him, but it is a necessary price for conveying the message. □



Defeat

When a man is beset by defeat his inner forces are released. His senses are aroused. His concealed strength comes to the fore and he sets about redressing his setback. Spurred on with new resolve and determination, he devotes himself to the task of regaining what has been lost. An irresistible spirit arises within him. Nothing can arrest his advance. Like a river flowing to the sea, he surmounts every obstacle in relentless pursuit of his goal.

THE GREATEST BLESSING

Efforts Required

*The best provision in this world is a pious woman.
—Prophet of Islam, Sahih Muslim, Sunan an-Nasai*

THIS *Hadith* means that every woman is, in terms of potential, capable of being the best companion for a man. But it is for the man to convert this potential into actuality. This is just as iron ore which is a gift of nature but gets transformed into steel through human effort.

The first and foremost responsibility of a man towards his wife is to respect and appreciate her true worth. He must recognize her true value. He must discover her inner beauty. Every woman has immense natural potential, and her spouse can either help transform them into reality or let them go waste.

Every woman has immense natural potential, and her spouse can either help transform them into reality or let them go waste.

The process of the actualization of a wife's potential begins when her husband regards her as a gift of God. If a man considers his wife as a direct gift of God, he will naturally be serious about her and will have faith that God's choice cannot be wrong. When a man thinks like this, the process required for converting a woman's potential into actuality automatically begins.

When a man considers his wife as God's gift to him, he will consider his dealings with her as a form of worship. Paying whatever price he needs to, he will do what he can so that his wife becomes, in the true sense of the term, the best companion for him.

Every man wants to have a good wife. But a good wife isn't something that comes readymade. This is a task that the husband must do. And for this he must have true compassion, patience and tolerance. □



THE FLIGHT OF THE BEE

Lessons from Nature

BEES make their hives at one place, but often have to travel many miles to other places to suck the nectar from the flowers. Sometimes they have to keep flying the whole day in order to do so, and observation of the bees has shown that when they leave home in the early morning, it is still dark, but that when they set off for home in the evening, the sun has not yet set. To leave in the morning darkness and return in the evening light is a very practical thing to do, because travelling in the morning means moving from darkness to light while travelling in the evening means moving from light to darkness.

The bee takes into account the time-span between its arrival and departure and makes its journeys accordingly. It knows that it can travel to distant parts without losing its way provided it does so in the daylight, but it can start its journey in darkness because it knows that daylight is not far away. Similarly, it avoids the possibility of going astray in the darkness by being as close as possible to its hive in the evening when darkness is about to fall, so it sets off on its last journey home while it is still light.

Nature teaches us a lesson through the bees. It shows us that each of our steps should be based on realities and not on wishful thinking or vague suppositions.

Nature teaches us a lesson through the bees. It shows us that each of our steps should be based on realities and not on wishful thinking or vague suppositions. The future will of necessity, have its moments of darkness as well as its moments of light. If we fail to note the significance of this difference and begin our journeys in ignorance and without forethought, the future will hold little that is bright for us. Moments of light and darkness will come according to their own set course, and not as a result of our wishful thinking. If we do not pay heed to the realities of existence and plan our lives accordingly, we shall have the illusion that we are heading towards a bright future and splendid results, whereas, when the next moment of darkness arrives, we shall discover that all along, we had been heading towards darkness. □



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 CE. 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**

Believers, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing; have a scribe write it down with fairness between you. No scribe should refuse to write: let him write as God has taught him, let the debtor dictate, and let him fear God, his Lord, and not diminish [the debt] at all. If the debtor is weak in mind or body, or unable to dictate, then in fairness let his guardian dictate for him. Call in two of your men as witnesses. But if two men cannot be found, then call one man and two women out of those you approve of as witnesses, so that if one of the two women should forget the other can remind her. Let the witnesses not refuse when they are summoned. Do not be disinclined to write down your debts, be they small or large, together with the date of payment. This is more just in the sight of God; it is more reliable as testimony, and more likely to prevent doubts arising between you, unless it be ready merchandise which you give or take from hand to hand, then it will not be held against you for not writing it down. Have witnesses present whenever you trade with one another, and let no harm be done to either scribe or witness, for if you did cause them harm, it would be a crime on your part. Be mindful of God; He teaches you: He has full knowledge of everything. (2: 282)

If you are on a journey and do not find any literate person, something should be handed over as security. If one of you entrusts another with something, let the trustee restore the pledge to its owner; and let him fear God, his Lord. Do not conceal testimony. If someone does conceal it, in his heart he commits a crime. God knows what you do. (2: 283)

Where there is a cash transaction between two parties, the matter ends there itself. But contracting a debt is a different matter. In such a case, if the transaction is purely verbal, there is a possibility of differences arising due to the absence of written proof.

Either party will present the matter according to his own perceptions, for there is no clear or absolute basis on which a proper decision may be arrived at. As a result, differences and complaints arise between the two parties at the time of payment. The only solution is to write down the particulars of the loan and then have witnesses testify to it. If any difference arises, this document would become the basis for a final decision. For a believer this would be a strategic safeguard based on *taqwa* and justice. In abiding by the written conditions and making a proper payment of dues, he acquits himself before the people and before God.

Believers are witnesses of God's religion. Just as they are not allowed to knowingly hide any part of God's message, they should similarly never conceal any evidence they may possess. Concealing evidence is to nurture a criminal mentality and to shirk the role they can play in making just decisions. Man's conscience demands that the truth should be acknowledged and untruth should be proclaimed to be such. In matters of justice, one who withholds evidence for the sake of prestige or some other worldly considerations, is like a criminal who becomes a witness to his own crime. □



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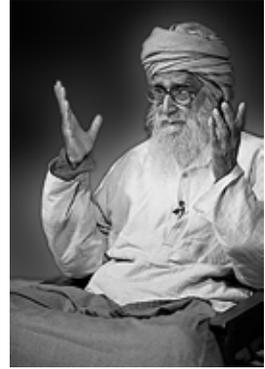
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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Director of the New Delhi-based Centre for Peace and Spirituality, editor of the monthly *Al-Risala* journal and author of almost two hundred books, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is one of India's best known Islamic scholars. In this interview with Yoginder Sikand, he talks about issues related to Islam and women.



You have written extensively on the issue of Islam and women. Contrary to many traditional ulema, you argue the case for gender equality in Islam. How does your approach differ from that of most traditionalist scholars?

The approach of the traditionalists is based largely on the corpus of medieval *fiqh*, while my understanding is based on a direct reading of the principal or original sources of Islam—the Quran and the authentic *Hadith*. The former, by and large, uphold what can be called the Muslim cultural tradition that developed in the medieval period of Muslim history. So, I would call mine a scriptural approach and theirs a cultural approach.

Take, for instance, the institution of the *burqa*, which many traditionalists stress as essential for Muslim women. The *burqa* is part of Muslim culture, but is not mentioned or advocated in the Quran. Another example is the traditionalist *ulema's* insistence that women and un-related men cannot, or should not, talk to each other, on the grounds that, so they say, a woman's voice is something to be kept concealed from such men. This notion is absent in the original sources of Islam. In fact, there are many *Hadith* reports that tell us that there was considerable intellectual exchange between men and women at the time of the Prophet. For instance, Aisha, one of the wives of the Prophet, regularly spoke to or addressed many of the Prophet's Companions, on a vast range of issues. They used to come to her for guidance and discussion. According to one report, whenever the Companions faced a problem to which they could find no answer they would approach Aisha. So, how, then, can it be said that a woman's voice is to be kept concealed. I am not aware of any authentic *Hadith* about the women's voice.

If the traditionalists have any such proof of their claim, they must offer it. But even supposing, hypothetically, they are able to come up with

such proof, we need to redefine or reinterpret it in the present context, and also by taking into account the accepted principle, recognized by Islamic scholars, that sometimes 'necessity makes the unlawful lawful'. We are living in a vastly different age today, where there is simply no escape from hearing the voice of women!

Many traditionalist scholars often cite a Quranic verse that describes men as the qawwam of their wives to argue that this means that men are their superiors and that women must be subordinate to them. How do you interpret the term qawwam?

It is a universal principle that everywhere—in government, in a business, in a school or whatever—there has to be a manager to manage practical affairs or else there will be chaos. This applies to the family also. This role of manager of affairs is what is actually meant by *qawwam*. It does not at all imply subordination or degradation, or any sort of hierarchy. Rather, it is simply a principle for overall management and administration of the family. In my own home my daughter is the *qawwam*. She runs the affairs of the house. She is the manager of the house. So, it does not mean that a woman cannot be the *qawwam* of her house.

Unfortunately, many scholars translate the term *qawwam* to mean that the man is the *hakim* or ruler of the house, as if he can be some sort of dictator. Many Quranic commentaries give a completely wrong interpretation of the term. Some go to the extent of describing husbands as the 'symbolic god' of their wives. This is really a sign of deep-rooted patriarchy and deviation from Islamic teachings. It is a wrongful innovation

We have the model of the Prophet Muhammad to explain the correct meaning of the term *qawwam*. His first wife Khadjiah looked after him when he was in distress. He worked for her, in the business that she ran. He took the advice of another of his wives, Umme Salamah, on many issues, contrary to some Muslim scholars, who argue, without any convincing proof, that a Muslim man may take the advice of his wife but must do precisely the opposite of what she recommends.

One can cite several examples to suggest that the Quran does not call for women's subordination to men, unlike what some traditionalist Muslim scholars as well as critics of Islam claim, and contrary to what their rendering of the term *qawwam* suggests. Thus, for instance, although the Caliph Umar issued a *fatwa* calling upon women not to pray in mosques, his wife refused to listen to him and he could not stop her because that was her Islamic right. Barirah, the wife of Mughis, a

Companion of the Prophet, once came to the Prophet in order to seek a divorce from her husband. The Prophet advised her against this, to which she responded by asking him if that was his personal opinion or the command of God. When the Prophet replied that it was his own view, she told him that she did not agree, and so the Prophet arranged for her to be separated from her husband.

Traditionalist scholars (as well as critics of Islam) contend that the Quran allows husbands to beat (dharaba) their wives if they are disobedient. How do you respond to this argument?

The *dharaba* that the Quran refers to is simply a token pat, not wild hitting. One *Hadith* report suggests that this should be done with a tooth-stick (*miswak*), which implies that it is not meant to be any sort of serious beating. According to another *Hadith* report, contained in the *Masnad* of Imam Ahmad, no prophet ever beat his wives. Sometimes, the Prophet Muhammad had problems with some of his wives but yet he never beat them.

The Deobandi-dominated All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) projects itself as the sole authority as regards Muslim Personal Law matters (most of which impinge on Muslim women) in India. What do you feel about this organization, particularly its stance on Muslim women's issues?

The claim that the AIMPLB is the spokesman of all the Muslims of India is completely false. In fact, it does not have any mass base. It is, to my mind, just a group of *maulvis* who have put a stamp on themselves, projecting themselves as leaders while they have little contact with the masses. They might represent just themselves, but certainly not all or most of the Indian Muslims.

Permit me to say this, but I regard the traditionalist *maulvi* class, to a very large extent, as responsible for the backwardness of the Muslims of this country—and not just as far as women's issues are concerned. They have little knowledge of the complexities of the contemporary world and so cannot address modern problems or interpret Islam in a manner that would appeal to modern minds. But, I see signs of change all around now. Increasingly, Muslims are refusing to listen to their *fatwas* which they find outlandish, and are marching ahead in the race for modern education. Even the sons of leading *maulvis* are choosing not to become traditional *maulvis* but, instead, are entering universities. I hope that augurs well for the future and that modern-educated Muslim scholars would be in a better position to interpret Islamic teachings, including about women, in a proper manner. □

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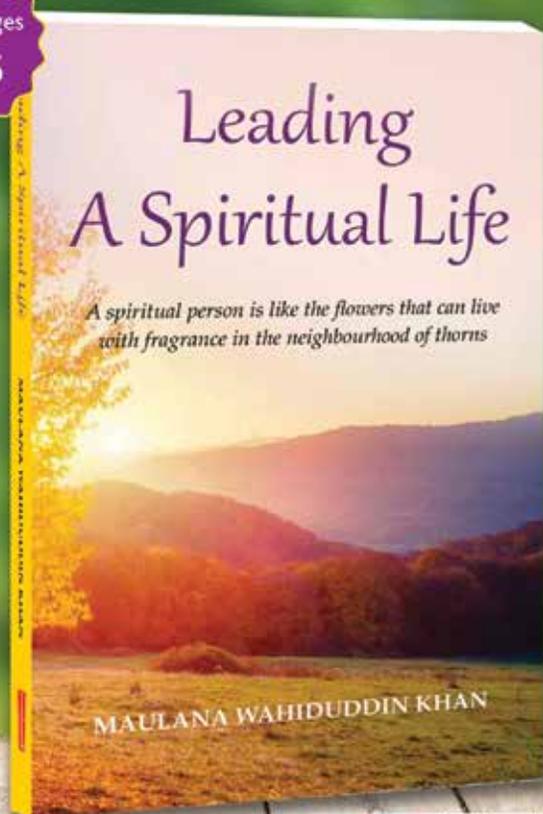
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