

*In the remembrance of God hearts
can find comfort. The Quran*

LOVE *of* GOD

**DEVELOP STRONG
ATTACHMENT TO GOD**

**MAULANA
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN**

LOVE
of
GOD

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WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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FOREWORD

The Quran describes one basic quality of the believers thus: “Those who believe love God most.” (2:165) The Believers mentioned in the Quran in this verse are those who have discovered God at the level of realization. All their feelings and emotions will be associated with God alone. Their hearts and minds will focus solely on God.

Owing to his limitations man cannot see God in this present world, but he experiences God’s mercy and blessings at every moment, and this experience is the real source of his love of God. Everything man has received in this world is a blessing from God. The more one thinks of divine blessings, the more one’s love of God will increase. The source of the love of God is the discovery of blessings and not the sight (*deedar*) of the Benefactor (God).

Who has created man? God! Who has given man great abilities of different kinds? God! Who has created an exceptional planet like the Earth for man? It is God alone! Who has created the life support system for man? God! Who has provided all the needs of man? Again it is God. Who has given man such a mind that, living on this planet Earth, he can encompass the entire universe? It is God alone!

Realization of God is the discovery of the Benefactor who is the source of all blessings. When man attains this realization in the real sense, the love of God wells up within him. Every fibre of his being is enlightened with divine love. Obedience to God is, without doubt, the demand of faith,

but it would be an underestimation of the love of God if it is taken only in the sense of obedience. Obedience is only a legal description of the relationship with God, whereas love entails man's entire existence being moulded in the remembrance of God. Man comes to acknowledge God in the perfect sense when it is with the whole of his being.

Faith in God is for man to discover God to the extent of loving Him more than anything else. The Quran says that "those who believe love God most." (2:165) One who loves God the most is one who has made God his object of worship. Real love for God will find expression in many ways. Even uttering such words as praise (*hamd*), thanksgiving (*shukr*), and remembrance (*zikr*), as we find in the Quran, is also an expression of our love for God. It would be right to say that *Alham-do-lillah*, praise be to God, signifies love for God (*Alhub-bu-lillah*). Praising God means loving God. Gratitude to God also means loving God. Remembering God also indicates a strong love and affection for God.

What is Paradise? Paradise is another name for eternal life in the neighbourhood of God (66:11). In the world before death man lives in the neighbourhood of God at the level of mind and feeling. After death his living in the world of God will be a reality.

God, without doubt, is the source of all virtues. That is why man can find true peace only in the neighbourhood of God. Anything short of that cannot become a source of real peace for him. The present world, in actual fact, is a selection ground for the right kind of people. Here those people are being selected who in respect to their virtues or character are worthy of being lodged in the neighbourhood

of God. Their thinking, activities, feelings, behaviour and dealings must all pass the ethical criterion which is required to become God's neighbour. It is only people such as these who will be selected for this honour. This selection will be based on the records kept by the angels of man's deeds.

The good fortune of finding a place in God's neighbourhood in the eternal life of the Hereafter will be based totally on merit. God's neighbourhood is like a universal garden. In this universal garden, only those will find a place who measure up to the divine criterion. Anything short of this will not be sufficient to guarantee a place in this universal garden. Those selected for Paradise are the ones who have made God their supreme concern in the life of this world. Their thinking and feelings have all been devoted to God. Their mornings as well as their evenings have been filled with the remembrance of God. These are the fortunate souls who will be selected to live in the neighbourhood of God.

What is life? A journey towards death. What is death? A leap towards an uncertain future. One who realizes this reality will undergo a revolution in his thinking. Both life and death will become meaningful to him. His days and nights will not be subservient to his desires, but will be subservient rather to the will of His Creator who has established the system of life and death. He will start living not for himself but for God. He will live in this world but will become like a creature of the Hereafter. One who knows only this life, knows nothing. One who knows the stages that he will face after death is truly the knowledgeable one. For the entire span of life is but a brief moment. The ultimate experience to be faced by man is the experience of death. Life is a journey

which is ultimately going to reach the stage of death. Death is not the end of life, but is rather the beginning of a very long stage of life.

The actual importance of life is that it is a period for prior preparation to face the crucial moment of death. The right thing for man to do is to understand this reality of life. He should not engage himself in worldly matters to the extent that he forgets the stages he has to face after death.

Man must live in this world in such a way that when he is faced with death it comes to him like something that he already knows, a recognisable event, rather than an accident which all of a sudden he is confronted with and for which he had made no prior preparation. Wise is he whose mind is alert about death, whose actions are planned in accordance with what is beneficial for him in the period after death, whose life is Hereafter-oriented rather than worldly-oriented.

The feeling and prayer of a believer at that moment of death should be: "When the time to depart from the people of this world comes, I want to be near to God Almighty. When I have to leave the company of human beings, I want to be blessed with the company of angels. When death separates me from my people, let me not be left all alone but let me find the blessing of a nobler assembly in the company of God. Let my journey of death become a journey from a lower to a higher level of being." This prayer is not just a set of words. It is a verbal expression of the internal feelings of a true believer.

Wahiduddin Khan

August 6, 2020
New Delhi, India

CHAPTER ONE

LOVE OF GOD

MAKING GOD ONE'S SUPREME CONCERN

REALIZATION OF GOD

Realization of God is the discovery of the Benefactor, the source of one's support system and all blessings. Love of God wells up within one's entire personality with this realization.

The Quran describes one basic quality of the believers thus: "Those who believe love God most." (2:165) The Believers mentioned in the Quran in this verse are those who have discovered God at the level of realization. All their feelings and emotions will be associated with God alone. Their hearts and minds will focus solely on God.

Owing to his limitations man cannot see God in this present world, but he experiences God's mercy and blessings at every moment, and this experience is the real source of his love of God. Everything man has received in this world is a blessing from God. The more one thinks of divine blessings, the more one's love of God will increase. The source of the love of God is the discovery of blessings and not the sight (*deedar*) of the Benefactor (God).

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Realization of God is the discovery of the Benefactor who is the source of all blessings. When man attains this realization

in the real sense, the love of God wells up within him. Every fibre of his being is enlightened with divine love. Obedience to God is, without doubt, the demand of faith, but it would be an underestimation of the love of God if it is taken only in the sense of obedience. Obedience is only a legal description of the relationship with God, whereas love entails man's entire existence being moulded in the remembrance of God. Man comes to acknowledge God in the perfect sense when it is with the whole of his being.

MAKING GOD ONE'S SUPREME CONCERN

Faith in God is for man to discover God to the extent of loving Him more than anything else. Praise (*hamd*), thanksgiving (*shukr*) and remembrance (*zikr*) are expressions of our love for God.

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

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

Real love for God will find expression in many ways. Even uttering such words as praise (*hamd*), thanksgiving (*shukr*), and remembrance (*zikr*), as we find in the Quran, is also an expression of our love for God. It would be right to say that *Alhum-do-lillah*, praise be to God, signifies love for God (*Alhub-bu-lillah*). Praising God means loving God. Gratitude to God also means loving God. Remembering God also indicates a strong love and affection for God.

The Quran has this to say: “Remembrance of God gives one’s heart peace of mind”. (13:28) This means, moreover, that it is only love of God which can give man peace of mind in the real sense.

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

SUBMISSION TO GOD

Emotional attachment is established not by observation, but at the conceptual level, through thinking. Then both belief in God and love of God is possible while He is unseen.

There are certain people who say that loving God means being obedient to God. They explain it by saying that God is an invisible being, and, in the case of an invisible being, an emotional attachment cannot be established. Only

obedience to Him is possible. This obedience will be in accordance with commands which we have learnt from the Quran and the Hadith.

This is incorrect. Because what is said about the love of God relates also to faith in God. If faith in God is possible while God is invisible, then the love of God is also quite possible when God is invisible.

The truth is that, whether it is a matter of faith or a matter of love, both are desired in relation to God, rather than in the general sense. Faith means belief (*aqida*). The word faith or belief is applicable to a visible entity. At that time, belief will be used as defined in the dictionary. But when the word belief is applied to God, because of the change in its relation it will be taken in the sense of elevated belief. In the same way, when the word love is used in relation to God, it will relate to elevated love.

The study of human psychology tells us that emotional attachment to or with any person is not in reality established by seeing but is rather established at a conceptual level, through thinking. Whether it is something seen or unseen, man's relationship is established with it only at a conceptual level.

In respect to human psychology, belief is conceptual in nature. It is at the conceptual level that the individual attains to the realization of God; it is at the conceptual level rather than at the level of observation that the human being loves God in the real sense.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF GOD

Love of God, the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth, ushers a revolution within one's personality producing positive thinking in oneself and well-wishing for others.

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

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

Love of God is not something mysterious. It is the highest degree of acknowledgment of God. When a person discovers God, when he becomes consciously aware of God's blessings, when he realizes that his existence and entire life are replete with God's blessings, at that moment a strong affection wells up within his heart. This strong affection is called love of God.

To love God is to love the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth. Such a love is not only an emotional relationship. It brings about a revolution within the human personality. Love of God produces many elevated human qualities, for example, positive thinking, well-wishing for others, trust, courage, etc.

Love in relation to God, is the highest degree of discovery and with reference to man it means developing human-friendly behaviour. Calling people to God is also a manifestation of love of God.

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

CAUSE OF THE FAILURE TO LOVE GOD

When someone develops love of God, he starts remembering Him most of the time. Love for anything other than God gives one mere lifeless rituals.

According to the Quran, only that person is able to achieve a high level of realization of God who is able to develop a relationship with God on a very high plane. The sign of this level of relationship is his developing an intense love for God (2:165) and standing in awe of God alone. (9:18)

When someone develops such a profound relationship with God, he begins to remember Him most of the time, if he is lacking in this relationship by even one percent, he will be deprived of any high level of realization of God.

This was the state of the Jews in later periods of degeneration. Their deep relationship was centred on their great religious scholars. As a result, they were deprived of this high level of realization. This is the case of the Muslims in present times. Each group of Muslims has certain great men and they are deeply attached to them. They have no real attachment with the Almighty.

These great men have been given different titles, *Akaabir*, *Aslaaf*, *Mashaaikh*, *Buzurgan-e-din*, etc. Muslims owe their

allegiance to these supposed saintly figures. The proof of their deep attachment is that any criticism of these great men is not tolerated by them.

This intense love for anything other than God deprives one of God's granting man true love of Him. Only lifeless rituals come to their share, rather than any high quality of faith which can bring one to a high level of realization. The love of God has a price, and it cannot be attained without paying its price.

TWO ASPECTS OF GOD REALIZATION

The personality of a believer is made up of these two feelings. On the one hand, he loves God the most. And on the other hand he fears God the most.

There are two aspects of God's realization—Love and Fear. On the one hand, God is very compassionate, and on the other hand, He is very just. When man thinks of the unbounded mercy of God, he develops the feeling which has been called in the Quran, "Loving God Most." (2:165) Similarly when man thinks of God as being just, he has that feeling which has been alluded to when the Quran speaks of: "those who stand in awe of none but God." (9:18)

The personality of a believer is made up of these two feelings. On the one hand, he loves God the most. And on the other hand he fears God the most. The love of God is such as is filled with agony. Similarly, the fear of God is such as is filled with the love of God. This is a relationship which man hopes to have with the Being he fears lest He deprives

him of His blessings. This is the combination of love and fear which can be felt but cannot be expressed in words.

This is the sign of a high level of realization, in which there is peace as well as agony. A high level of realization implies hope as well as fear. A high level of realization brings conviction as well as uncertainty. A high level of realization embraces closeness as well as distance. A high level of realization is a place where sometimes the believer is sure that he has reached his destination, while sometimes he is in doubt as to whether or not he is on his way to the right destination. At times he has this feeling that he has reached a full stop, while at other times, he is in doubt as to whether he is still at the stage of the comma. This feeling of love and fear is true realization, another name for which is *maarifah*.

PRAISE BE TO GOD (*ALHAMD-O-LILLAH*)

When man has an ocean of gratitude for God's innumerable blessings, he spontaneously utters words of praise in universal acknowledgement. This is true Alhamd-o-lillah.

The second verse of the Quran is, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe." (1:2) These are words which it takes but a moment to repeat. But if these words have to express true realization of God, their significance is so great that nothing can be greater. That is why, there is a Hadith which has this to say: "*Alham du Lillah*, fills up man's balance (of good deeds) or scale of action." (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 223)

When one thinks that the universe came into being fifteen billion years ago, and that it is still expanding, one finds this extremely frightening. Then, when man thinks about his own creation, he finds that his existence is a miracle, no part of which can be reproduced, however minute.

Then man thinks about how God sends him light and heat from the sun in the space and has provided him a continuous supply of oxygen through the air. The earth gives him a variety of produce. It also gives him stability through the force of gravity. In fact, a complete life support system has been established for his special benefit.

Thinking upon these things man feels that he owes oceans of gratitude to God. It is as if his soul has been engulfed by a huge divine storm, which has had a thrilling effect upon his mind. When man experiences these indescribably godly feelings, he spontaneously utters words of praise in universal acknowledgement. This is true gratitude to God. It is these feelings of praise to God which have been expressed thus in the Quran: "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe."
(1:2)

THE SOURCE OF THE LOVE OF GOD

When man consciously discovers God's blessings, a deep feeling of love is produced in him for the Benefactor. This love manifests itself in the form of thanksgiving and worship.

Chapter 16 of the Quran has this to say: "And be thankful for the blessing of God, if it is Him you worship." (16:114)

Thanking God for all His blessings is no simple matter, for in this love of God is automatically included. Awareness of God's blessings produces love in the believers. Then, man spontaneously gives voice to such words as are an acknowledgement of the divine blessings. This is praise (*Shukr*) to God. The bestowal of blessings produces emotions or feelings of love for the Benefactor, and this love is expressed in words of acknowledgement. This is what is meant by gratitude.

This reality has been expressed in a tradition of the Prophet: "That is, love God for all His blessings that He has given you." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3789)

In the original version of this tradition, the word provision is used in a symbolic sense to mean all the kinds of blessings which man has received from God, both material as well as spiritual.

On deeper thinking on this verse of the Quran and the tradition, we learn that the source of the feeling of our love for God, is the awareness of how blessed we are. In the present world whatever man has received, whether great or small, has been received from God as a unilateral reward without there having been any contribution from us. The more one thinks of the state of oneself as well as that of the external world, the more one will discover the blessings of God.

When man consciously discovers divine blessings, the natural result is that a deep feeling of love is produced in him for the Benefactor. It is this love which manifests itself in the form of thanksgiving and worship.

THE PRICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD

To be held deserving of God's choicest blessings it is desired of man that he love God most (2:165). One who loves God most can never allow feelings of hatred to enter his heart.

Chapter 33 of the Quran describes a law of nature in these words: "God has not placed two hearts in any man's body." (33:4)

It is the result of this law of nature that both hatred and love cannot come together in the heart of a man. If hatred finds a place in a man's heart, the feeling of love will go out of it. Similarly in the case of one who loves everyone, the feeling of hatred for others will find no room in his heart. This is something serious and worth paying attention to.

It is desired of man that he love God most (2:165). Without this, no one can be held deserving of God's choicest blessings. But this love of God necessarily has a price. The price is that in no circumstances should man allow feelings of hatred to enter his heart. He should forgive and forget all the wrongs done to him, he should remain patient about any harm done to him and he should avoid reacting to anything unpleasant meted out to him. In short, he should be willing to pay any price to save himself from hatred. This is the price of love of God. One who does not pay this price, will remain deprived of the blessings of the love of God.

People generally find one or the other excuse for hatred. They think their hatred is justified for one reason or another. But the truth is that all such excuses are false. When it comes

to the love of God, no excuse is justifiable. If one resorts to any such excuse, the cost to him will be the love of God.

STRONG, EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO GOD

Love of God—the strong, deep, emotional attachment of the heart—is produced within one who discovers God’s great, superior blessings at a conscious level.

Chapter 2 of the Quran tells us that “those who believe love God most.” (2:165) What is meant by love of God in this verse? Religious scholars generally hold that “loving God” means “obedience to God”. The Sufis take it in the sense of a strong love of God (*ishq ilaahi*). But neither of these interpretations conveys the real sense of love. Love, in actual fact, is another name for strong affection, deep emotional attachment.

This strong, deep, emotional attachment of the heart is produced within one who discovers God’s great, superior blessings at a conscious level. God created man when he had no existence (19:9). “God shaped you, formed you well” (40:64). God created man in His own image. God gave man the earth to live on where all his exceptional needs were available. God made a perfect world for man in the form of Paradise, where he can have total fulfilment. God gave man reason and intelligence which, according to a tradition, made him the most respected of all creatures. God created in man this exceptional affection because

of which family and society have come into existence (30:21). Furthermore, as a matter of prime importance, God gave man consciousness, so that he might realize the divine blessings. He also gave man a sense of pleasure, so that he might fully enjoy the divine blessings. There are innumerable blessings which God has bestowed upon man. When man thinks about these countless blessings of God, he has the same experience as has been expressed in the Quran as, “strong love and affection for God” (2:165).

REAL LOVE, RELATIVE LOVE

God alone is the giver of all bounties. When man acknowledges these blessings wholeheartedly, that is another name for the love of God.

Chapter two of the Quran tells us that the believers love God most (2:165). What does it mean to love God? Religious scholars generally say that ‘love of God’ means submission to God. On the other hand, the Sufis hold that loving God means having an intense love (*Ishq*) for God. Neither of these explanations is a correct interpretation of this verse of the Quran.

Love, in actual fact, is another name for a strong heartfelt attachment. When you develop a strong attachment for anyone, that is love. In this respect, God alone deserves to be loved by His servants.

Love, in relation to God, is another name for a thoroughgoing acknowledgment of God’s blessings. Therefore,

without doubt, God alone deserves this kind of love from man.

There are two kinds of love—real and relative. For various reasons, in the life of this world, an individual may develop love for another creature, even sometimes for an animal, or even any inanimate object, such as his home. But no love of this kind exists after death. All of a sudden, man is cut off from all such relationships. For all such feelings are relative, produced on the basis of temporary reasons. And the moment the reasons are no longer there, they vanish instantly. On the contrary, the love of God is real love—feelings produced for real reasons, and when these feelings are engendered in man they are everlasting. Death cannot put an end to them. God gave man existence, and an extremely favourable world to live in, with a sophisticated kind of life support system. Such being the case there are innumerable things in this world—all put there for man’s benefit. God alone is the giver of all these bounties. No other being has been instrumental in the granting of these blessings. When man acknowledges these blessings wholeheartedly, that is another name for the love of God.

TWO CATEGORIES OF PARADISE

Those who have made God their supreme concern, live in the presence of God at a psychological level. Then their thinking becomes God-oriented in the full sense.

The Quran says of the people of Paradise that they will find themselves “in the seat of truth with an all-powerful sovereign.” (54:55)

This verse and other verses from the Quran indicate that there are two categories of Paradise. One Paradise is near and the other Paradise is far away. The Paradise which is close at hand will be in the neighbourhood of God and it is here that those people will be lodged who have attained a high level of realization. The Paradise which is far away is that which is distant from the neighbourhood of God. The people of Paradise who are of a general category will find a place in this latter Paradise. That is, the true believers of the general category will find a place in the far off Paradise and not in the nearby Paradise.

The Quran has this to say about people who have attained God realization: “those who believe love God most.” (2:165) These realised souls have discovered God as the most superior Being, and acknowledge Him as such in the innermost recesses of their hearts and minds.

They have truly dedicated themselves to God and God has become their supreme concern. Their thinking has become God-oriented in the full sense.

Those who develop this kind of relationship with God begin to live in the presence of God, that is, they begin to live in the vicinity of God in this world itself, apprehending such proximity at a psychological level. In the hereafter they will have the same experience but as a material reality. If they have been experiencing closeness to God in the life of this world itself, in the hereafter they will be blessed with a far greater degree of closeness to Him.

INTENSE LOVE OF GOD

When man discovers that God created him, gave him a life support system and arranged for his guidance through prophets, then his heart overflows with love for and gratitude to God.

The second chapter of the Quran states that believers are “those who love God most.” (2:165)

According to this verse, the sign of a true believer is his capacity for intense love for God.

The truth is that love is produced within man as a response. When man discovers God, his greatest benefactor, his heart is filled with a vast ocean of love. This intense love by its nature is the result of discovery. It is not just the carrying out of a command.

When man discovers himself as having been created in the best of mould (95:4), when he discovers that God has granted him great honour (17:70), when he discovers that God has subjected the earth and the heavens to him, when he discovers the innumerable blessings of the life supporting system, when he discovers God’s blessing of having, unbeknownst to him, arranged for his guidance through the prophets, when he discovers God as the Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe, then his heart is overflowing with gratitude to God. This gratitude is the source of the love of God. This produces that deep attachment for God which is called in the Quran ‘loving God most’. Loving God, in reality, is to discover God as the greatest of Givers. This is what engenders intense love for Him.

STRONG BELIEVER, WEAK BELIEVER

God is All-powerful and man is completely helpless. This helplessness is the meeting point between God and man. Acknowledging one's helplessness make one deserving of God's succour being granted to him.

Among human beings there are those who are strong and those who are weak, mentally as well as physically. This difference is also found among the believers, in the way they have been created. There are some who are strong believers and others who are weak believers. Referring to this difference, there is a Hadith which says: "To God, the strong believer is better and more loving than the weak believer, but there is goodness in both." (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2664) Now the question arises as to what is meant by goodness in both kinds of believers. The truth is that the goodness in both has two different meanings. The goodness of the strong believer is that God has created him with greater capability, and the goodness of the weak believer is that, due to his lesser ability, God has compensated him with more divine succour. It is obvious that, divine succour ranks higher than human capability. That is why, the weak believer, if he is sincere in his faith, can also, thanks to special divine succour, perform greater tasks than the strong believer. This is without doubt a good tidings for the weak believer.

Weakness is the cause of helplessness, a state in which man cannot stand by himself. God is All-powerful in the complete sense: the power of God encompasses this universe to the ultimate extent. No place is beyond His power. In such a

situation, in this world man can stand only at one place, and that is one of helplessness, the level at which man's relation with God may be established. Helplessness is the meeting point between God and man. It is only when the weak man acknowledges his helplessness that he can become deserving of God's succour being granted to him.

TWO LEVELS OF REALIZATION (*MAARIFAH*)

One level of *maarifah* is at the conscious level, when one adopts a modest attitude of his own free will. The second level is when God, out of His mercy, places man in a compulsive situation and praise and thanksgiving spontaneously pour out of his heart.

The Prophet of Islam is reported to have said: "My Lord offered to turn the entire valley of Makkah into gold. I said, No, my Lord I want to eat my fill one day and go hungry the next. When I am hungry I entreat you, I remember you. And when I have my fill I praise you and thank you." (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2347)

The Hadith shows the level of realization of the Prophet. The Prophet's realization is at the conscious level. He speaks, and takes decisions of his own free will without any pressure being applied to him. This we find exemplified in the above tradition. This level of *maarifah* may be called the adoption of a modest attitude of one's own volition.

The second level of *maarifah* is that in which God grants His mercy to someone by putting him in a compulsive situation

and then owing to the exigencies of such a situation, that person experiences spontaneous praise and thanksgiving.

It is perhaps this point which is mentioned in this tradition: “When God loves anyone, He puts him on trial.” (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*; Hadith No. 2396)

It is as if the realization of the Prophet is at a voluntary level, while the realization of others is a matter of compulsion.

Fani Badayuni (d. 1941) was an Urdu poet and a truth seeker. One of his couplets expresses this level of God-realization:

*“Meri hawas ko aishe du Alam bhi tha qubul
tera karam ke tu ne diya dil dukha hua.”*

(My desire sought all the luxuries of both the worlds. But it is Your Grace that is kind enough to grant me the grieving heart.)

PEOPLE WORTH ENVYING

Those who make God the object of their love and the centre of all one's feelings and emotions, also become God's beloved. This is the highest level of faith.

According to Sunan Al-Baihaqi, there is a tradition recorded in different books of Hadith which says: “So, I tell you of those who will neither be prophets nor martyrs but on the day of judgement the prophets and the martyrs will envy them, because of their rank with God. There they will be on the pulpit (raised platform) of the light.’

The Prophet was asked who they would be. The Prophet said, “They are those who make efforts to bring people to love God, and so enable them that God loves them and they walk the earth as the well-wishers of others.” (*Shu‘abul Iman of Al-Baihaqi*, Hadith No. 405)

Who are these people whom even prophets would envy? They are those who discover God in such a way that God becomes their beloved, who live in the love of God. There is no being greater than God, therefore, no act can be greater than the love of God. When one lives in the love of God, he will also try to give to others what he has discovered for himself. He will expend all his energy in the effort to make others also discover God in the same way, so that the realization of God may become embedded in their hearts, and God becomes the Being whom they love most, and who is the centre of all their feelings and emotions. Those who make God the object of their love in this way, also become God’s beloved—this is the highest level of faith.

SACRED NARRATION

When a servant of God loves and remembers God, then God loves him from this world to the next and that servant becomes the recipient of divine mercy.

The wordings of one Hadith Qudsi (sacred narration), attributed to God are: “God said that when one of my servants finds meeting Me the most cherished thing, (then) for Me also meeting him becomes the most cherished thing.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 7504)

There is nothing mysterious about this. It is an expression of a known reality. It is an event of discovery by man and the response to, and appreciation of this discovery by God.

The truth is that when a servant of God thinks deeply, the result is that he discovers God and when he remembers God and His boundless blessings, it is but natural that he should start having feelings of boundless love for God. God loves such a servant from this world to the next world, and that servant becomes the recipient of spiritual divine mercy.

When a servant of God has love in his heart for Him, when he discovers God as the real Benefactor, acknowledges the Benefactor as well as His blessings; then he becomes a servant who is desired by God. He is a servant who will be fortunate enough to be able to meet God. This is the servant who will be eternally lodged in the neighbourhood of God. This eternal neighbourhood of God is another name for Paradise.

The source of loving God is the discovery of God's blessings. It is owing to this discovery that the door to the great blessings of the Hereafter is opened to him. It is through this discovery that sublime feelings of gratitude and feelings of acknowledgement of God are produced in a person. It is this sublime feeling of acknowledgement which is another name for the love of God. The love of God by man is the result of discovery, and the love of man by God is the result of His appreciation of this discovery.

LOVE, OBEDIENCE

The love of God is the most elevated state that stems from realization of God. Obedience to God and His Prophet is a necessary demand of this love.

In chapter two of the Quran what typifies the believer has been indicated in these words: “Those who believe, love God most.” (2:165)

Love literally means a strong affection. A believer is one who develops a strong affection for his Lord.

There are some who take love in this verse to mean obedience. To support this interpretation, they refer to the following verse of the Quran: “Say, ‘If you love God, follow me and God will love you.’” (3:31)

This reference does not warrant taking love in the sense of obedience. This verse of the Quran, rather than defining the love of God, merely tells us one demand or aspect of the love of God, and that is, that the love of God demands that you become the follower of God’s Prophet.

The love of God is the most elevated state. The source of the love of God is the realization of His blessings. When a person discovers God as a perfect benefactor, this results in his total immersion in the love of God. The love of God becomes the most cherished thing in his heart and mind.

The truth is that, everything that we have in this world, right from one’s own existence to all things external, are gifts from God—including one’s feelings of happiness and pleasure. This being so, it is but natural that, man should

love God more than anything else, that he will have a strong attachment to God and that God should become the centre of his feelings and emotions. Such love is a psychological state of the highest order. It is a feeling that cannot be properly described in words. Obedience to God and His Prophet is a necessary demand of this love. But love cannot be defined as obedience.

LOVE OF GOD

An all-embracing love of God arises in one who discover God as one's Creator, Giver and Benefactor. Then God becomes one's Supreme concern. Everything else becomes secondary.

Someone once asked me, "In your writing you lay more emphasis on the love of God than on anything else. Please tell us how to love God. What is the way to do this?" I asked him, "Have you got a son?" He said he had. Then I asked him, "Do you love your son?" He said, he did. Then I asked him, "When your son was born to you, did you go to people asking them how to love your child?" He said, "No". Then I observed: "Without asking anyone how to love your son, you love your son but when it comes to loving God, you are asking me how to love God?"

I said, "This is no simple matter. It relates to your consciousness." Every father loves his son, for he thinks that his son is an extension of himself. This is why every father starts loving his son automatically. In this matter, no father

needs to ask anyone how to love his son. God's place is far far greater for everyone than this. God is your Creator and you are His creature, yet you have not discovered God as your Creator. It is this lack of awareness that explains your lack of love for God. If you had discovered God as a Creator, as a Giver, as your Benefactor, then certainly, you would not have asked this question. An all-embracing love of God, your Creator, would have arisen on its own. God would have been Supreme in your life. All other things would have been secondary to Him.

There is nothing artificial about the love of God, it is the call of human nature. It is indeed the wrong conditioning of man's environment which turns him away from God. If you could de-condition yourself by your own thought processes, you would on your own become attached to God. You would start loving God by the force of the voice of your very own nature, just as you love your son.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A deep love of God formed by a profound discovery of divine blessings produces a deep relationship with God in a person. This is called 'loving God most'. (2:165)

Discovering God as an external reality is not enough. A deep relationship with God can be established only when man discovers God as the Giver of all blessings. For instance, everyone is deeply attached to his parents. Man keeps thinking that his parents have done this for him, his

parents have done that for him. If God were the object of this kind of thinking in a person, a strong attachment with God would be formed.

The present world with all its components is an expression of the blessings of God. For a thinking person, every such experience and every observation remind him of the universal gifts of the blessings of God. This discovery is enough to make him regard God as his Benefactor. He becomes the grateful servant of God. But this feeling becomes the most intense when man discovers all these blessings at the level of his own being. The first discovery causes man to utter these words, "God, You have given me so much!" But further discoveries cause him to call out spontaneously, "O God, You are so merciful that You have given me those blessings of which I knew, and besides those You gave me Your countless blessings about which I had no knowledge and so could not have asked You for them."

What is most desirable for man is a deep relationship with God. Such a relationship can be formed by profound thinking which causes man to discover divine blessings at the level of his own being. It is this kind of personal discovery that can produce a deep relationship for anyone. It is this deep relationship which has been called 'loving God most'.
(2:165)

CLOSENESS TO GOD

God will only accept those who have developed a divine personality in themselves in this world. In the Hereafter only divine souls will find a place in the vicinity of God in Paradise.

Plastic Surgery in medical terms is known as auto-grafting. If any grafting is to be done on any part of the human body, the skin of the person concerned is used for this purpose. No other person's skin can be successfully used. Making this point, Professor William Boyd writes: "Self will not accept not-self."

The most fortunate people in the Hereafter will be those who can have God's company, once they are lodged in the divine vicinity of Paradise. These fortunate people will be those who have adopted the divine way of life in this world, who have opted for a life of divine choice, and who measure up, therefore, to the divine criterion. These superior qualities can be produced only in one who develops his consciousness to such a degree as may enable him to realize God at a deeper level. The life before death has the status of a preparatory period. What man must do here is discover what God wants from us and then he should build his personality accordingly. His thinking, his speech, his behaviour, in short, his whole lifestyle must be dyed in God's hue. (2:138) Man should be so sensitive in this matter that he will refuse to allow any erosion of this ideal. This is divine personality, and those who are able to develop it are the fortunate ones who will find a place close to God in the eternal life.

Just as, 'self does not accept not self,' similarly God will not accept those human beings who have not developed a divine personality. In the eternal world of the Hereafter only divine souls will be fortunate enough to find a place in the vicinity of God.

THE CONCEPT OF INCARNATION

The concept of unity (*wahdat*) does not exist between God and man, but in Islam the concept of the nearness between God and man is valid in the perfect sense: "Prostrate yourself and come near" (96:19).

Some religions subscribe to the concept of incarnation, which is also known as *hulool*. *Hulool* means embodiment in flesh or *vahdate-wajood* (monism). *Hulool* or *tajseem* (incarnation) has been expressed thus: "God's embodiment in human form."

The concept of incarnation is originally a philosophic construct. The ancient philosophers held that there was a God of this universe, but that God was a kind of spirit, without corporeal form. When this God wanted to manifest Himself, he took human form. It is this which is called "*avtarvaad*" in the Hindu religion. According to this concept, God is essentially an impersonal God, but in different periods of history he has taken some human form. This is called taking an avatar in the Hindu religion.

This concept of *hulool* or incarnation, is totally baseless. Some Sufis have introduced this concept in the form of

monism into Islam, but it is certainly without foundation, and has no room in Islam.

The Quran says, “Prostrate yourself and come near” (96:19). This shows that the incidence of nearness between God and man does take place but God and man do not become one entity. Rather what happens is that when the servant becomes a true *sajid* (one who prostrates himself before God), at a psychological level, he experiences nearness to God. He comes in contact with God. He whispers to God. In the words of the Hadith, he begins to worship God as if he were seeing God. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 50) The concept of unity (*vahdat*) does not exist between God and man, but in Islam the concept of the nearness between God and man is valid in the perfect sense.

GLORIFICATION OF GOD

Hamd or acknowledgment entails man’s acknowledgement of the innumerable blessings he receives from God. Offering the utmost gratitude to God enables one to gain entry into Paradise.

Man is required to glorify God. That is to say that a believer’s God realization should be so deep that he may acknowledge God from the innermost recesses of his heart. From the Quran we learn that this, the glorification of God, is also required from the whole world of nature. According to the Quran, “All that is in the heavens and on the earth extols the glory of God.” (64:1)

What does this mean? It means that what God wants from His creatures more than anything else is *Hamd*, that is acknowledgment. Besides man, all the things of the universe are constantly engaged in God's glorification, albeit in an unspoken language. God has exceptionally granted man speech, so he is required to glorify God in spoken language. On seeing how highly meaningful the universe is, man cannot but make a profound acknowledgement of God. This is known as *Hamd*, or praise.

When man thinks about himself, he finds that God has created him in the best of moulds (95:4). Similarly, when he reflects on the creatures of God, he finds that everything is in the ultimate state of perfection. "God has ordered all things to perfection." (27:88)

Reflection on all these things produce vibrant praise for God within him. Man, with all his heart, soul and mind, starts acknowledging God.

The Quran tells us, "He has given you all that you asked of Him." (14:34)

That is, God has given man everything he asked for. When you realize this it means that God gave to man all that he wanted, without his even asking for it. When man thinks of the innumerable blessings given by God, then he offers the utmost gratitude to God. It is *Hamd* or acknowledgment of this high order that will enable the believer to gain entry into Paradise.

A CASE OF EXCEPTIONAL MERCY

Pleasure is an exceptional gift given to man that he can enjoy in the present world in a limited way, whereas in Paradise he will experience this to the ultimate degree.

Man's being is a manifestation of the mercy of God. All the things that have been given to man in this world according to his needs (14:34), will be given to man in greater abundance in Paradise as a special mercy of God. According to the Quran: "All these things will be given to man in Paradise according to his desires." (41:31)

It is desired of man that he discovers all these blessings in relation to divine mercy. Just as in the present world, man's receiving everything according to his needs is a manifestation of divine mercy, so also in Paradise is the receiving of all things according to one's desire an expression of divine mercy. In the present world, we experience divine mercy at the level of our needs being met. Paradise is the place where we will experience divine mercy at the level of enjoyment.

Pleasure is an exceptional gift given to man. In the entire universe it is man alone who has been given this special capacity to enjoy things. He has this ability to enjoy things in the present world in a limited way, whereas in Paradise he will experience this to the ultimate degree.

The special mercy God gives to man is his greatest asset. It is the discovery of this special mercy which produces the feeling of the utmost love for his Lord (2:165). This strong affection is the most superior level of God realization. A real basis is required for this strong affection for God.

This real basis is man's ability to discover God's exceptional mercy. It is this discovery which will produce in man a strong affection for God. Without this discovery, no other method or way can promote the attainment of this state.

GOD IN OUR HEARTS

The true believer is one who discovers the Greatness and Glory of the Lord of the Worlds. Then his heart is filled with God's Greatness.

Maulana Abdul Basit Oomri, who lives in Qatar, is associated with our Dawah Mission. He listens to our Internet lecture broadcast from CPS, New Delhi. He sent an e-mail to me expressing his impression in these words: "The Ruler and Founder of the United Arab Emirates, Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan, died in 2004. At that time there was a program broadcast on Arab radio on Shaikh Zayed. This program was titled: "Shaikh Zayed in Our Hearts". In this program people spoke on the personality and contributions of the Shaikh. People would often have tears in their eyes while expressing their thoughts. When I thought about this incident, I felt that there is no one in this world who speaks of 'God in our Hearts'. There ought to be a program entitled "God in Our Hearts", on which people speak on the blessings of God, the Majesty of God and the greatness of God, thus expressing their love for God.

Indeed, the true believer is one who discovers the greatness of the Lord of the Worlds. Anyone who discovers the Lord

of the Worlds in all His Glory and Power, will feel his heart filled up with His Greatness. He will start living in the greatness of God. God will become his greatest asset. Everything in the universe will remind him of God. He will see the Glory of God in the sun and the moon. He will observe the wonders of God in the mountains, and on the oceans. Human life and death will remind him of God.

Those believers who live in God's greatness will have their lives coloured in the hue of God. (2:138) When they will speak, they will speak of the greatness of God. When they write, their writing will be an introduction to the Majesty of God.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Remembrance of God is that man's mind may become so alert that he is able to relate creation to the Creator. Everything then becomes for man a reminder of God.

Remembering God is without doubt the greatest form of worship but this remembrance does not mean just repeating the name of God with each rosary bead you count. The remembrance of God is that man's mind may become so alert that he is able to relate creation to the Creator. Everything then becomes for man a reminder of God. A certain person was once walking along a street in the city with his friend. There was a toy shop on the way and when they reached this shop he stayed there for a moment. The friend saw that when he looked at the shop,

his eyes were filled with tears. When his friend asked him why his eyes welled up, he did not reply. Finally when his friend insisted, he told him that two years ago he had come here with his eight year old son. The child had asked him to buy a toy for him from this shop. But the next morning his son had to go to another city with the family so the father told him that when he came back, he would buy this toy for him. But on the way back the car met with an accident and the child died on the spot. When he looked at the toy in this shop, he remembered his child's desire and then he became disturbed and tears came to his eyes.

For this person the toy became a point of reference for the remembrance of his son. When reminded of his son he started crying. Similarly, man's own existence and the entire world around him are points of reference for the remembrance of God. Every event of creation reminds us of the Creator. If people were as serious about God as they were for their children, everything in this world would serve as a reminder of God. Everything would awaken godly thinking in them. They would find a reflection of God in everything. Everything would serve as a reminder of God.

TWO LIFESTYLES

Those who live in a godly way will be lodged in eternal Paradise in the Hereafter. Those who live an ungodly life will be eternally deprived of divine blessings.

There are two ways of leading one's life in this world—one, living in God, the other, living in something other than God. True believers are those who live in God. Those who live in something other than God, may be described as worldly people. These two lifestyles were just as prevalent in earlier times as they are today.

Who are the people who live in God? They are those who are serious about life, and who being truth seekers, ultimately discover God. Then they have to build their lives in accordance with this discovery. Their thinking, speech, behaviour, dealings with others—all become dyed in God's hue. (2:138) A very different kind of life is that lived by those who accord some worldly thing that status which is due to God alone, who think only about material progress and establish their relationship accordingly.

For them their family enjoys the greatest importance. Political matters form the centre of their attention. They regard the interests of their community as supreme. Worldly honour and worldly progress are the be all and end all for them. They are happy when they make some worldly progress, conversely, worldly loss makes them sad. Worldly things are the target of their ambitions and desire. All such people are those who live an ungodly life.

Those who live in a godly way are those who are desired by God. They will be lodged in eternal Paradise in the Hereafter. Those who live an ungodly life are not God's desired servants. Such people will be eternally deprived of divine blessings.

THE POWER OF HELPLESSNESS

Arrogance (*kibr*) is a means of distancing oneself from God, while helplessness (*ijz*) is a means of achieving closeness to God.

People are aware of the power of the oppressed, but they do not know the power of the helpless, although, the power of the helpless is greater than that of the oppressed. Helplessness is a greater reality than being oppressed. If someone discovers his helplessness in the real sense, if someone in the real sense realizes or understands that he is totally helpless as compared to the Omnipotent God, then such words will come to his lips as even the Earth and the Heavens cannot bear to hear. These words are: "O God! You have created me as a helpless person. Now can You become indifferent in my case? How can You do so?"

What is helplessness? Helplessness is in fact the discovery of the real position of man. Helplessness is man's real position in relation to God. Helplessness, or (*ijz*), is not simply powerlessness. *Ijz* is another name for the discovery of reality. *Ijz* is a power on its own. *Ijz* is the greatest recommendation to God. *Ijz* means being pleased in being

God's servant and, without doubt, there is no position greater than that of servitude to God for man.

The Quran has this to say: "Prostrate yourself and come near." (96:19) *Sajda* or prostration is the ultimate form of the expression of *ijz* or helplessness. Helplessness, without doubt, is the greatest means of being near to God. At the last extent of helplessness one starts having that experience of God which is called, 'meeting God'.

It is a reality that arrogance distances man from God, whereas helplessness brings man closer to God. *Kibr* or arrogance, is a means of distancing oneself from God, while helplessness, *ijz* is a means of achieving closeness to God.

CRYING IN REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Self-prostration (*sajdah*) is a moment of nearness between God and man. This experience of nearness to God is the greatest spiritual experience a man can have.

It happened once that the parents had to send their son to a distant place, where he had to stay for about 10 years without any further contact between them. Finally, a friend of the son came to meet the mother. He had a photograph of her son. When the mother saw this photograph, her eyes were full of tears. Why did this happen? The reason was that on seeing the photograph the mother remembered her son. After seeing the photograph an invisible contact was established between the mother and the son as so many memories were associated with it.

This example tells us what it is to weep in God's remembrance. Such remembrance is the result of a contact at a psychological level between the Lord and His servant. When a human soul undergoes this experience of contact with God, then it is reflected in the form of tears.

This same reality has been expressed thus in chapter 19 of the Quran: "For when the revelations of the Merciful were recited to them, they fell down, prostrating themselves and weeping." (19:58) At another place in chapter 96, the Quran has this to say: "Prostrate yourself and come closer to God." (96:19) A true act of self-prostration is a moment of nearness between God and man. At that moment a spiritual contact is formed at an invisible level between God and man. This experience of contact is so intense that tears fall from the eyes of the servant.

In the life of this world this experience of nearness to God is the greatest spiritual experience a man can have. This state of nearness is not between two equals but rather is between two who are unequal. This is why at the time of contact, man undergoes the same experience as that of the mountain during the time of Prophet Moses, because in this kind of unequal contact, "When God manifested Himself on the mountain, He broke it into pieces." (7:143). For a servant this experience is like the coming together of two extreme states, in one sense intense anguish, and in another sense, ultimate comfort.

THE SPIRIT OF RELIGION

People are in awe while passing through a worldly palace, but show no awe when they pass through the divine palace. Showing no signs of modesty, they distance themselves from the mercy of God.

Once, having been invited to participate in a conference I had occasion to go to a country which had formerly been ruled by a king but now the monarchy had been abolished, and replaced by a presidential form of government. All the grandeur and majesty of the ancient royal palaces were still intact. But this royal palace was now called the 'Presidential Palace'.

I and other members of the conference were ushered into this Presidential Palace to meet the President of the country. When we entered this awe-inspiring building we saw that everyone's demeanour had changed all of a sudden. Everyone fell silent and when they talked, it was in hushed tones. They all looked very serious and in awe as they looked at all the objects in the Palace.

On seeing this, I thought that the world we live in is also a great Palace of God. Everywhere there are the splendours and wonders of God's Glory and Power. In this divine Palace, man should have the same feeling—only more intense—which he has while walking inside a royal palace. But when I see people walking along the roads of the world, I am shocked to see that they walk here as if totally unaware of this great reality. There are no signs of modesty on their faces which they should actually demonstrate.

On the faces of the people I find unawareness rather than

discretion. Their gait shows no modesty. There is arrogance in the way they walk instead of responsibility registered on their faces, there is insensitivity. In this world of God, people are not even as serious as they are while walking inside some palace or some presidential home. Those who are in awe while passing through the human palace show no awe while walking through the divine palace. It is as if they have distanced themselves from the mercy of God.

GOD'S PLEASURE, MAN'S PLEASURE

Depending on what one's inner state, intention (niyyah) is while doing anything, actions can either be seeking the pleasure of God or seeking the pleasure of man. The former have their seats reserved in Paradise, while the latter have a place reserved in the eternal dustbin.

The Quran and Hadith have in many ways stressed this point that in respect of the Hereafter "Only that action has any value in which the spirit of seeking the pleasure of God is immanent" (57:27). Any action which is devoid of this spirit is not going to be of any value in the tally of deeds in the Hereafter.

God does not reach a verdict just by seeing an individual's outward acts. He decides by looking into the inward states, or the state of the heart of the person concerned. This is called 'intention' or 'Niyah' in the Shariah. In this respect, there are two kinds of human actions. One is that which has been done by seeking the pleasure of God, and the other is that which has been done by seeking the pleasure of man.

One who seeks the pleasure of God is always focused on

God. In all matters he strives to gain the approval, or avoid the disapproval of God. He always bases his behaviour on the principle of truth. He speaks only what is in accordance with the will of the Lord. He walks only in the direction commanded by God. He adheres to this path, or attitude or way, even although he is opposed by everyone.

Conversely, the case of one who is the seeker of man's pleasure is different. The attention of such a person is focused on man instead of God. In all matters he thinks of his nation, of his community, of his circle, of his party, of his worldly guardians, etc. He always says such things as are liked by these people, he does such things as are aimed at making him popular with others.

Those who seek the pleasure of God are sensitive about God's will to the ultimate extent. They can ignore all else, but ignoring the importance of God is not possible for them. On the contrary, those who seek the pleasure of man are sensitive about man's affairs only. They totally focus on man, just as they should have focused on God. The former have their seats reserved in Paradise, while the latter have a place reserved for them in Hell.

THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD

When the realization that God is All-Powerful, the Giver, while man is only a taker becomes articulate, it is described as the glorification of the Lord.

The Quran has repeatedly urged man to glorify God. There are other similar synonymous words used in the

Quran such as praise (1:2), glorify (30:17), revere (*tahmid, tamjid, taqdis*), etc. We can sum up all these words as acknowledgement. What is called acknowledgement in relation to man, is called glorification in relation to God, that is to say, man's expressions of God's glory and majesty.

The relation between God and man is that of Giver and Taker. A servant has nothing to give to God. The only thing he can offer God is to discover God as the Lord of the worlds, as the All-Powerful Being. Realization is the name of this discovery. When a servant strives towards God, that is, engages in deep thinking about God, at that time by God's grace, the reality of God, the Omnipotent, is revealed to him. He attains realization of God with perfect conviction. He subsequently experiences an intellectual storm in his mind. He starts uttering words of high acknowledgement of God. This is the inner realization becoming articulate. This is the event which has been described as the glorification of the Lord. This is to discover the Creator through the creation. This is to discover the Sought One by the seeker, this is to discover the Omnipotent by the totally helpless. This discovery can be differently described as the moment when a human being discovers his Lord. He is then in a position to see God without seeing Him, to experience God's closeness in spite of the immeasurable distance separating them.

THE OMNIPOTENT GOD AND HELPLESS MAN

Only those men and woman have the right to live in this world who accept their position of helplessness vis-à-vis the All-Powerful God. This helplessness leads to humility and the voluntary acknowledgement of the higher truth.

The relation between God and man is not that God is the whole and man is a part of Him or God is the ocean and man is a drop in it. All such relations are wholly baseless. The truth is that the relation between God and man is that God is everything and man, in relation to God, is nothing. God is self-existing, whereas man is totally, and in every respect, a creature which has come into existence by the command of God. The special virtue of man is that it is endowed with consciousness. Man illustrates the phenomenon of conscious helplessness. And, without doubt, there is nothing greater than this. This is the real value of man. Man is a unique creature who presents another dimension of conscious helplessness as compared to conscious Power. He proves to be egoless as compared to the Divine Ego.

This conscious helplessness is man's greatest asset. This is the greatest discovery for man. When any man or woman speaks in the language of helplessness, they are making the right use of words as compared to those men and women who speak in the language of superiority such as pride, arrogance, self-centeredness, selfishness, etc. That is when they make the wrong use of their language. In this world,

only those men have the right to live who pay its price and this price is humility and helplessness. Without paying this price of helplessness, living in this world is without doubt equal to committing a crime.

Helplessness is in fact another name for accepting the highest form of reality. Helplessness is not something to be done out of compulsion. Helplessness is in fact the positive feelings which are produced by the voluntary acknowledgement of the higher truth. There is no passivity about helplessness. It is a far more active state than anything else.

INITIAL *HAMD* (PRAISE), ULTIMATE *HAMD*

In this world a believer, due to his limitations, can engage only in the initial *Hamd*. In the unlimited world of God, a believer will have the opportunity to express the ultimate *Hamd* of God in eternal Paradise.

Rabindra Nath Tagore (died 1941) a famous Bengali writer, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. He wrote in one of his poems: “The whole life was spent in setting the strings of the Sitar, but I could not ultimately sing the song that I wanted to sing.”

Tagore said this in his particular poetic way. But this is more true of *Hamd*, Praise of God. When a believer discovers God, he spontaneously desires to praise God. He wants to sing the song of God’s majesty. But his time in this world comes to an end without the feeling that the glory of God has been extolled. The Quran urges the believer to say: “Praise be

to God, the Lord of the universe.” The Quran (1:2) tells us that this *Hamd* (Praise) will again be expressed in the Hereafter. What is the difference between the two? In fact, in this world a believer, due to his limitations, can engage only in the initial *Hamd*. In the unlimited world of God, a believer will have the opportunity to express the ultimate *Hamd* of God. In present times, people are busy talking of their beloved personalities and other worldly subjects. In the Hereafter, only God and His glory will be talked about. It will be an ongoing discussion which will continue eternally with fresh aspects each time. It will never come to an end. At that time, a believer will feel that the new circumstances have given him the opportunity to tell the untold story of God, and continue to do so for all eternity. The present life is like a training period for producing this spiritual capability. In the Hereafter, he will be given the capacity to engage in unlimited *Hamd* (praise) of God. This is undoubtedly a manifestation of the greatest grace of God. This blessing will be given only to those who in their lives before death have proved their capability for this.

CONSCIOUSNESS IN NATURE

The Creator has made consciousness inherent in human nature. This serves as inner compulsion to recognize God and establish a special relationship of love with Him.

The one most loved by anyone—man or woman—is the mother. This love does not stem from logic. It is totally governed by internal consciousness. If this internal

consciousness did not exist, no one could establish the relationship of love for one's mother. The same is true of God, the Creator and Sustainer, only on a more elevated scale.

God's existence is undoubtedly a reality. But we cannot see God with our physical eyes. Similarly, rational or logical arguments work only partially to prove the existence of God. The rational or logical argument about God only takes one to the extent of probability and not to the extent of conviction. It is a great blessing from the Creator that He has made consciousness inherent in human nature. Recognizing God has, therefore, become as certain a thing as recognizing one's mother and establishing a special relationship of love with her. This natural consciousness serves as inner compulsion for everyone.

This inner compulsion is greater than the greatest of blessings for human beings. Had this compulsory consciousness not been a part of human nature, just rational, logical argument would not have sufficed to bring about belief in God. Even if man were to believe in God, he would not have done so with total conviction in the absence of this consciousness, inhering in his nature. Perhaps without this, no one would have become a true believer in God. The only exception would have been the prophets whom God had made experience faith by direct observation.

The greatest blessing man has is his capacity to realize his Creator. Had everyone expected to believe in God only as a matter of logic, this would have ill-served mankind. It is a great blessing—rather the greatest blessing of God, that He has saved man from this dependency upon logic alone.

THANKFULNESS AND KNOWLEDGEMENT

Everything man receives is from God. However, when man attributes these blessings to someone other than God, feelings of gratefulness and acknowledgment are not produced within him.

The greatest thing that is desired from man is that he should be grateful to his Creator and Sustainer, and that he should acknowledge God as the Giver of all blessings. But this thankfulness or acknowledgement is the rarest of rare things in this world. Man lives in this world amidst a multitude of divine blessings, yet he remains ungrateful.

What is the reason for this? The reason is that whatever man receives, he gives himself rather than God the credit for it. How did he come to this world? This was owing to his parents. How does he survive in this world? Through his planning and strategy. How did he make progress? By his cleverness. How did all his issues get solved? Through his friends and relatives. How did he receive the place of honour? Through his connections and relations, etc.

In this way, what happens is that everything man receives from God is attributed to someone else, rather than to God.

It is due to this wrong association that feelings of gratefulness and acknowledgment are not produced within him. Just uttering some words like '*Alhamdulillah*' or '*Subhana Allah*' do not suffice for thanksgiving to God.

Gratefulness is always a result of discovery. First of all man discovers the reality of God being our greatest benefactor. This discovery awakens his mind. Subsequently, a process

sets in in his mind which results in the flowing of a spring of gratefulness within his heart.

This internal state produced within one finds expression in the form of words of thanksgiving and acknowledgement of God's blessings. One who has not known gratefulness at the level of discovery will fail to do the obeisance of thankfulness to God at the level of human utterance.

THE HIGH DEGREE OF THE DIVINE EXPERIENCE

The realization of God lies hidden in the unconscious mind of man. Shocking experiences awaken this. Then words of creative remembrance are awakened in a person with the special divine blessing granted by God to His chosen servants.

In some traditions it has been recorded that when God's servant calls upon his Lord and God loves that servant, He tells the angel Gabriel not to hasten to fulfil his need, because "I love to hear his voice." (*Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* of Al-Tabarani, Hadith No. 8442) This refers to the word of true realization. When someone suffers from some problem, at the time all his innermost feelings get awakened and his latent nature comes to the fore.

This is the moment which in modern psychology has been termed brain storming. At that time, such words come out of one's lips as express true divine praise and acknowledgement.

The truth is that in the unconscious mind of a human

being there lies hidden, very deeply, the realization of the Creator. But this realization is initially in a dormant state. To awaken these latent hidden feelings, man needs shocking experiences. On such occasions the latent feelings, that is, godly feelings are awakened, and at that time such words of the remembrance of God come out as are of a creative nature. These words he had never heard from anyone, nor had such words ever come out of his lips, nor had he read them from any book.

This remembrance of God is of a very special nature. In other words, we can call it creative remembrance of God. It happens with the special divine blessing which God grants to His chosen servants.

LIMITLESS MAJESTY OF GOD

The extremely vast universe suspended in limitless space being proof of the infinity of God's majesty defies all description, making man stand in awe of his Creator.

The Quran states: "It was God who raised the heavens with no visible supports."(13:2)

This verse describes a great universal reality. This reality is so great that, on giving it deeper thought, man's heart might well tremble and the hairs on his body stand on end.

In ancient traditional times, man believed that all the objects visible to him had some material support. For instance, the stars, he supposed, were hanging from some heavenly roof, and the earth was based on some material support. But in modern times, with the invention of the telescope, space

was observed by it. It was learnt that the whole universe consists entirely of empty space without any support.

Galaxies, the solar system, the stars, and planets were all revolving in a limitless space without any support. All this is happening in such a vast expanded space that even the most powerful telescopes cannot view the boundaries.

This universal system without any support is so huge that we can only make a conjecture about its magnitude. The estimates arrived at about the vast universe and the photos taken of it show that the distances between the heavenly bodies and the earth are so great that they cannot be described in ordinary numbers. They can be estimated only in light years: A light year is a unit of astronomical distance, equal to the distance that light travels in one year, approximately 6,000,000,000,000 miles. Such an extremely vast universe suspended in limitless space is a proof of the infinity of God's majesty which defies all description.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FEAR OF GOD

Fear of God is the real focus in Islam. Being the source of all positive qualities, it makes man both serious and modest and is the greatest source of personal reform.

Faith is the discovery of God. This discovery produces certain qualities in a human being. One such important quality may be called fear of God (*khushu* or *taqwa*), that is, always going in fear of being accountable to God. That is, God will take us to task for all our misdeeds. By introspection one must remind oneself of the accountability

on the Day of Judgement. This is the sign of true faith. The true believer is only that person whose greatest concern is God. The true believer's focus of thinking is only one and that is fear of God. That is, he never forgets that he will be called to account by God. Such a person is always conscious of God.

In present times, great movements have been launched for the revival of the Muslim community. But these movements have been infructuous. The basic reason for this failure lies in the shifting of focus in all these Muslim movements. Some have focused on protection from those who are conceived of as enemies, some have focused on political power, some have focused on the forms of worship, others on community identity, etc. That is why all the Muslim movements of the present time, despite a great furore, have totally failed to achieve the desired result.

It is a fact that fear of God is the real focus in Islam. The fear of God is the source of all positive qualities. The fear of God makes a man both serious and modest. Fear of God instils in man the incentive to admit his mistakes. Fear of God is the greatest source of personal reform. Fear of God nullifies the individual's sense of his own greatness and paves the way for social unity. Fear of God makes one a realist. Fear of God produces Quranic thinking in a man. Fear of God compels man to live in constant remembrance of his death. Fear of God saves man from becoming egoistic and arrogant. The position of the fear of God is, to use the jargon of the carrom board, that of the master stroke, which completely transforms man's entire personality.

THE MAJESTY OF GOD IN THE VAST UNIVERSE

Conscious discovery of God in all His majesty ushers in an intellectual revolution in a person. With this belief a new spiritual (*Rabbani*) personality emerges within him.

There are about 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe and there are more than 100 billion stars in each galaxy. Our solar system is a very tiny part of this gigantic cosmos. It is in this solar system that our planet earth is situated.

All these stars and planets are continuously moving in an extremely organized fashion in a limitless space. This vast universe has been in existence for about 13.3 billion years, but in all that time collisions between celestial bodies have not taken place.

This great universe is a witness to the existence of a greater Creator. A Creator who is not just a Creator but who is also ever-living and self-existing. He is Almighty as well as being an unlimited source of wisdom and mercy. This Creator manages this vast universe at such a high level that the whole universe is astonishingly defect-free.

Belief in God is not a mere repetition of certain words. Belief, in fact, is another name for the discovery of this great Creator. When a thinking person reflects, he discovers great miracles of creation, right from his existence to the rest of the universe. Then, he spontaneously calls out that, without doubt, there is a

Creator of this universe, and that he should acknowledge Him and surrender before Him totally.

Belief in God is another name for this conscious discovery. This belief, or realization, is an intellectual revolution of a nature which transforms man's entire personality. With this belief a new spiritual (*Rabbani*) personality emerges.

It is this person with the revolutionized personality who is called a believer, or a Muslim. Such a personality is inevitably the result of conscious realization. In the absence of such a conscious discovery, there can be no believing, spiritual personality.

THE FEELINGS OF WORSHIP

Those who make one God the centre of their feelings of worship are the true worshippers. Whereas those who make other than God their object of worship are indulging in *shirk*, or polytheism. And God will never accept this from anyone.

Man by birth is a worship-loving creature. Man wants that there should be a Deity or an object of worship, whom he may worship. Man wants that there should be someone whom he may make the centre of his attention, upon whom he can focus. This is why all the communities or nations become hero worshippers. They made their Mr. Bigs or VIP's or saints (*Akaabir*) the centre of their feelings of worship. This extraordinary attachment to heroes is, in fact, the wrong use of the feelings of worship with which

God has imbued man right from the time of his birth. Just as when man feels thirsty, he is compelled to drink water, similarly, every man is forced by his inner feelings to make someone his God, his object of worship and worship Him or It. No one can be free from this feeling.

This is the point upon which man is being tested. Those who make the one God the centre of their feelings of worship are the true worshippers. They are the ones who have passed their test, whereas those who make anything other than God the centre of their worship are false worshippers, and have failed in their test.

Those people who make the forces of nature, or idols, the centre of feelings latent in their nature and others who make national heroes their object of worship and reserve their feelings of worship for them, are indulging in *shirk*, or polytheism. And God will never accept this from anyone.

Similarly, there is another class which starts loving his Mr. Bigs, like leaders or saints, with the devotion that they ought to show to God. They start attaching such importance to the words of their Mr. Bigs as they should attach to the words of God. Such people are not ready to listen to any kind of criticism about their leaders or saints. This reverence for their saints becomes the best possession of their lives. This is undoubtedly what has been stated thus in the Quran: "They have taken their learned men and their monks for their lords besides God." (9:31) This is to make God out of something which is not God.

The true monotheist is one, whose feelings are centered to the ultimate extent on God alone. One who is not focusing

on any other personages, will never become enraged on hearing any criticism against their religious leaders or their Mr. Bigs.

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

When anyone does something to earn God's pleasure, in the course of his tasks, he has such experiences as if he were meeting with God. At that time, he feels as if he is seeing God.

According to a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad: "God will say on the Day of Judgement, 'Son of Adam, I was sick but you did not visit me.' He will reply: 'My God, How could I have visited you when You are the Lord of the World?' Thereupon God will say: 'Did you not know that one of My servants was sick, and you did not visit him? If you had visited him you would have found Me there.'" (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2569)

From this tradition, we learn that when anyone does something to earn God's pleasure, in the course of his tasks, he has such experiences as if he were meeting with God. At that time, he feels as if he is seeing God.

A visit to a patient which is not done to seek God's pleasure, but for some worldly purposes, does not engender godly feelings. Another kind of visit to a patient is one when a servant of God is greatly perturbed to hear about the sick man and is reminded of God's command to be merciful to others so that He will be merciful to man on the Day of

Judgement. With the sincere feeling of pleasing God, he goes to see the sick man and prays for him and helps him in whatever way he can. In this way, the believer experiences God in this world as well as in the next. The only difference is that, in this world, this is an indirect experience, while in the Hereafter, it will be in perfect form and a direct experience.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS IN HUMAN NATURE OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

The faith, or *iman*, arrived at by rational arguments alone is the beginning of faith. One who has found God at the level of this internal consciousness has really discovered faith.

The Chapter 51 of the Quran states: "We created pairs of all things so that you might reflect" (51:49). That is, God has created everything in pairs. There are several aspects to this verse, one of its aspects relating to the being of God Himself. If we think in the light of this principle, it will become a source of faith (*iman*) in the existence of God.

It is undeniable that everyone has tremendous feelings of wanting to find the higher reality. Everyone in this respect is a seeker. When man succeeds in his search and is able to discover God, all of a sudden he feels that he has found the answer to his most natural urge. In this respect, the consciousness of the existence of God in human nature is the internal aspect and the existence of God in the outer

world is its external counterpart. This is the greatest proof of God's existence.

There are many philosophic and scientific arguments on the existence of God. These arguments are only partially acceptable, for they provide only rational probability. But faith with total conviction can be achieved by one only when he has discovered God at the level of his own consciousness. Where the rational arguments lead man to probability, it is this internal consciousness which gives man conviction.

Finding God at the level of consciousness in human nature is like a child finding his mother after a long period of separation. At that time, the child without doubt is convinced that this lady, or woman, is his mother. But the basis of this conviction is not on any rational analysis but is rather, a matter of internal consciousness. One who has found God at the level of this internal consciousness has really discovered God. Real faith is one which is attained as a result of internal conviction. The faith, or *iman*, arrived at by rational arguments alone is not the faith which is desirable for man. It is only the beginning of faith.

SEEKING GOD'S PLEASURE

When the truth is fully revealed to a seeker after deep study, one starts living with profound inspiration that helps one to perform such acts as aim at seeking God's pleasure.

According to Islam, such action is approved of by God which is performed purely to please Him (57:27) and for

His approval (2:265). An act in which there is no intention of pleasing God is not an approved act with regard to the Hereafter, even although it may appear to be a very great undertaking.

Functioning for God's pleasure is no simple matter. It does not mean that when you start on any task you should first say, "I am doing this for God's pleasure." This would amount to an insufficient appreciation of God's pleasure. God's pleasure demands a more profound inspiration which arises after a long process. The deeds of one who works with this living inspiration are indeed carried out seeking the pleasure of God. Any action which is devoid of this spirit is like an artificial flower. The artificial flower appears to be a flower, but it can never be given the status of a real flower.

The truth is that, when a servant goes in search of God, he seriously, wants to know the truth. He studies the book of God, he studies the traditions of the Prophet, he ponders on the creation of God. Wanting to know the truth, he is free of all biases. Finally, the truth is fully revealed to him. This discovery is the point from which begins his journey towards the pleasure of God.

After this discovery, man's thinking is transformed. He thinks of the same thing night and day. Finally, it becomes the focus of his life. This focus is the divine pleasure. He is keen to make his Lord pleased with him. He longs to be held deserving of the mercy of God. On Doomsday he hopes to find a place in nearness to God. Any task performed by this spirit is work done for the pleasure of God.

WHAT IS POLYTHEISM?

God is man's real goal. Monotheism means making God one's sole concern, whereas polytheism means partly or totally including anyone or anything else in the godhead.

Chapter two of the Quran, elaborates thus on polytheism: “Yet there are some who set up equals with God and adore them with the adoration due to God, but those who believe love God most. If only the wrongdoers could see—as they will see when they face the punishment—that all power belongs to God, and that God is severe in punishment” (2:165).

From this verse we learn what is meant by polytheism. It is to set up something equal to God, whether in a partial or total sense. Setting up an equal with God can be done with respect to a number of things, two of which have been mentioned in the Quran: love and power (2:165). According to one verse of the Quran, its third aspect is fear (9:18). Basically, these are the three things which are the signs of polytheism. With reference to all these three matters—love, power and fear—whoever sets up equals with God is a polytheist. According to the Quran, there are sometimes people who give themselves the same status as that of God. On this the Quran says: “Consider the one who has taken his own desire as a deity, whom God allows to stray in the face of knowledge, sealing his ears and heart and covering his eyes – who can guide such a person after God [has abandoned him]?” (45:23).

This can be expressed as an antithesis: monotheism means in every respect making God one's sole concern, whereas polytheism means partly or totally including anyone or anything else in the godhead.

Whenever anyone discovers God in the capacity of One Who gave him existence out of nothing, Who gave him a sterling personality, Who placed him on a rare unique planet like earth, Who arranged for his life support system, etc. he starts regarding God as his own, and has immeasurably elevated feelings for God. This is the basis for man's intense love for God.

Then when man discovers that all things he has are unilateral gifts of God, and that God can take away these things any time, and that every gift is linked with accountability, it makes him apprehensive that if he does not do justice to all these divine gifts, he will be taken to task. These produce that state within him which has been described in the Quran as akin to that of believers who: "stand in awe of none but God" (9:18).

Moreover, man discovers that, in this world, God alone is Omnipotent. No one has any similar power, even in a partial sense. God gives and God takes away. The certainty of this reminds us of our total helplessness. The believer can do nothing other than surrender himself fully before God.

Realization is another name for this discovery. When with this discovery such a person makes God his all in all, who lives in God's remembrance, whose thinking is God-oriented, he is in terms of the *shariah*, a monotheist. On

the contrary, one who has not made God his sole concern, but has rather made other things his concern, in terms of the *shariah* he is guilty of polytheism. The personality of the monotheist is an integrated personality, while the personality of a polytheist is a split personality.

According to the *shariah*, God is man's real goal or purpose of life, other things are only his need. Both monotheism and polytheism relate to reality and not just to appearances.

IN THE COMPANY OF GOD

When a man discovers his Lord, he repeatedly feels that he has come very close to his Lord. Finding one's Lord at the spiritual level, his heart trembles and his eyes are filled with tears.

Many articles and books are published in Arabic with this title: Time Spent with a Particular Person (*Saa-atun ma-aa-fulanan*). Such a title is apparently well-chosen, but it is strange that no writer has ever written an article with this title—Time Spent in the Company of God (*Saatun ma Allah*). This is a proof that our writers have set a value upon the company of man, but they have not done so for the company of God.

As mentioned in a Hadith, such moments when the believer must be whispering with his Lord should be a part of his life (*Sahih Ibn Hibban*, Hadith No. 361). Whispering suggests such an experience when man finds himself so very close to God that he starts speaking to Him in undertones.

Although there is evidence in the Quran that, “God is very close to man.” (2:186) The Quran also tells us: “Prostrate yourself and come closer to God.” (96:19)

This is no simple matter. When a man discovers his Lord, when he reflects deeply on the Heavens and his own self, he repeatedly feels that he has come very close to his Lord. At that time his heart trembles, his eyes are filled with tears, and he feels that at the level of divine inspiration he has come very near to God. At that time, unexpectedly, his lips utter divine words, and his whole existence is immersed in spiritual experiences. He starts seeing God who is in the unseen, he starts speaking to God without God being visible. In spite of the apparent distance, he comes very close to God—in this world closeness to God means finding one’s Lord at the spiritual level.

CHAPTER TWO

PARADISE

LIVING IN GOD'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

GOD'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

Paradise, God's neighbourhood is like a universal garden where only those will find a place in the Hereafter who have made God their supreme concern in the life of this world.

What is Paradise? Paradise is another name for eternal life in the neighbourhood of God (66:11). In the world before death man lives in the neighbourhood of God at the level of mind and feeling. After death his living in the world of God will be a reality.

God, without doubt, is the source of all virtues. That is why man can find true peace only in the neighbourhood of God. Anything short of that cannot become a source of real peace for him.

The present world, in actual fact, is a selection ground for the right kind of people. Here those people are being selected who in respect to their virtues or character are worthy of being lodged in the neighbourhood of God. Their thinking, activities, feelings, behaviour and dealings must all pass the ethical criterion which is required to become God's neighbour. It is only people such as these who will be selected for this honour. This selection will be based on the records kept by the angels of man's deeds.

The good fortune of finding a place in God's neighbourhood in the eternal life of the Hereafter will be based totally on merit. God's neighbourhood is like a universal garden. In this universal garden, only those will find a place who

measure up to the divine criterion. Anything short of this will not be sufficient to guarantee a place in this universal garden.

Those selected for Paradise are the ones who have made God their supreme concern in the life of this world. Their thinking and feelings have all been devoted to God. Their mornings as well as their evenings have been filled with the remembrance of God. These are the fortunate souls who will be selected to live in the neighbourhood of God.

A SIMILAR WORLD

God created two similar worlds: one, the present world for trial, and the other, future world of Paradise for reward or punishment. If man strives for Paradise in this world, with God's mercy he will gain entry into Paradise in the next eternal phase of life.

We learn about the believers from the Quran that “whenever they are given fruits to eat (in Paradise) they will say, ‘This is what we were provided with before,’ because they were given similar things.” (2:25)

The truth is that God created two worlds similar to one another: one, the present world, and the other, the world of Paradise. The present world is the world of trial and the future world is the world of reward. The present world is an imperfect world, while the world hereafter (paradise) is a perfect world. This world is far from ideal, whereas the next world will be ideal. This world is ephemeral, whereas the

next world is eternal. In the present world, man repeatedly undergoes the experience that here he has, apparently everything he desires, yet for man those very things are not attainable. Man wants a healthy life, but illness, accidents and old age negate all his desires. Man wants pleasure, but, despite all his efforts, when he finds all the objects of pleasure, it dawns upon him that he cannot enjoy them. Man wants a life laden with happiness but, when he has entered the garden of happiness of this world, he discovers that here the garden of happiness is full of thorns.

This is because, here, man is introduced to Paradise from a distance. Here man is certainly shown only a glimpse of heaven, but along with that he is told (albeit in silent words) that you cannot achieve Paradise in this world. What is required of man in this world is to strive for Paradise here and to achieve Paradise in the next phase of life.

Alongside this, he is given an initial glimpse to show that if he comes up to the mark in his deeds, he will, as a result, be awarded the world of Paradise. Thus, the present world is the place of introduction to Paradise, while the next world is the place of attaining paradise.

INTRODUCTION TO PARADISE

Thinking deeply about Paradise and the creation plan of God one will discover that this world has been created as an introduction to Paradise. It is only in the Paradise of the Hereafter that one will find all resources of comfort and luxury in the ideal form.

In chapter 21 of the Quran it is stated: “Had We wished to find a pastime, We should surely have found it in that which is with Us, if such had been Our will” (21:17).

According to this verse, Paradise is something unknown in this world. But another verse of the Quran says: “He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them” (47:6).

From the second verse of the Quran, it appears that Paradise is made known to the believers in this world itself. In such a situation, how can we reconcile the two apparently opposite statements?

The truth is that in the first verse the practical finding of Paradise is indicated while, in the second verse, the intellectual finding of Paradise is referred to. Paradise without doubt, in its full sense, can be known only in the Hereafter. In the present world, man can know Paradise in terms of potential, and in the Hereafter he will find it in terms of actuality.

Those who think deeply about Paradise, those who reflect deeply upon the creation plan of God and those who are engrossed in thinking about the wisdom of this world as well as the Hereafter will find the reflection of Paradise

in this world itself. They will discover the reality that this world has been created in such a way as to become an introduction to Paradise.

The Paradise of the Hereafter is perfect, while the present world is an imperfect version of Paradise. In the Paradise of the Hereafter, man will find all the resources or means of comfort and luxury in its ideal form. This experience of comforts and luxury he can have in this world in a less than ideal sense with the difference that the Paradise of the Hereafter is eternal, while the present world is only a temporary and a partial introduction to Paradise.

DESERVING PARADISE

Gratefulness is at the core of all forms of worship. The acknowledgement of worldly blessings can make one deserving of the blessings of Paradise in the Hereafter.

Chapter 14 of the Quran has this to say: “If you are grateful, I will surely bestow more favours on you” (14:7). That is, if you are truly grateful to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon you in this world, God will give you His blessings in Paradise.

A true feeling of gratefulness is the greatest of actions. Gratefulness is at the core of all forms of worship. One who proves to be grateful in the real sense in this life will be granted divine blessings once again in the Hereafter. It is true gratitude which makes one deserving of Paradise. Only noble souls which are imbued with feelings of praise and gratefulness can enter heaven. These noble souls will be

lodged in the gardens of Paradise. The Quran tells us that after the people of Paradise are ushered into Paradise, they will say: "Praise be to God who has taken away all sorrow from us" (35:34).

In this worldly life everyone passes through the stages of sorrow. Then a time comes when he is free from sorrow. So one who on such occasions, when he is relieved from sorrow, exclaims: "O God, you have freed me from sorrow in this world, similarly I pray to You to relieve me from sorrow in the Hereafter." One who can utter these words with true feeling, may, God willing, earn oneself a ticket to paradise. The acknowledgement of worldly blessings can make one deserving of the blessings of the Hereafter.

Such words are not to be lightly uttered. For this, a deeper consciousness is required. One who awakens in himself this kind of consciousness has the ability to utter such sincere words as will make him deserving of Paradise. Without a deep awakening of this consciousness, no one can be granted this blessing.

THE WORLD OF PARADISE

In the present world man has been given things commensurate with his needs. In the world of Paradise in the Hereafter, man will be given things according to his desires.

Chapter 14 of the Quran has this to say: "He has given you all that you asked of Him." (14:34) This relates to the present world. But what is said about Paradise has

a different connotation: "Therein you shall have all that your souls desire." (41:31) When we think about these two verses, we learn that in the present world man has been given things commensurate with his needs. But so far as Paradise is concerned, man will be given things according to his desires.

Man is regarded as a pleasure seeking animal. Pleasure is a unique phenomenon experienced only by human beings. The desire in humans for all kinds of pleasures is limitless. But in the present world these desires of men and women are not fulfilled. Almost without exception every one of us leaves the world without having attained total fulfilment, be he rich or poor, illiterate or educated, a commoner or a king.

There is a long list of pleasures man wants to enjoy: intellectual pleasure, the pleasure of sight, of hearing, of taste, of touch, of speech, of companionship, of study, of discovery, of happiness, etc. The pleasure taken in all these things by man is limitless. But man is not able to have these limitless pleasures in the present world. He is in search of this, but very soon his time to leave the world approaches. Man does have the experience of the feeling of pleasure but is not able to experience it to the full.

An atheist philosopher holding that Paradise is a matter of wishful thinking, writes that Paradise is a beautiful idealization of human wishes. But the more appropriate thing to say would be that Paradise is a beautiful actualization of human wishes.

PARADISE MADE KNOWN

Paradise is for those realized souls for whom there have been adumbrations of Paradise in the present world. Everything in this world will serve as an introduction to Paradise.

In chapter 47, the Quran tells us about the people of Paradise: “He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them.” (47:6) This verse means that, Paradise is for those realized souls for whom there have been adumbrations of Paradise in the present world.

We learn from the Quran that in the present world the earth, in reality, is like Paradise. The things which are found in an ideal form in Paradise are present in this world in an imperfect form (2:25). One whose faith is at the level of realization will become so sensitive in this matter that, in all the things of this world, he will find the reflection of Paradise. Everything in this world will serve as an introduction to Paradise.

The Quran says when the people of Paradise are given anything in Heaven they will exclaim “This is what we were provided with before” (2:25). There is also a Hadith which states that the intensity of heat in this world is because of the blowing of heat from hell. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 536)

When we reflect upon things in the light of this verse and this Hadith, we learn that the present world has been created in such a way as to become a reminder of Heaven and Hell for man. When man receives any blessings in this world, he

will find therein a reflection of Paradise. And when he is beset by suffering, he is reminded of Hell. Those who live in this world will thus go in fear of Hell while longing for Paradise.

AT THE SEAT OF TRUTH

The seat of Truth in the Hereafter is reserved for those who in the present world attach the greatest of importance to truth and honesty, not to self-interest and appearances.

Chapter 54 of the Quran has this to say about the people of Paradise: “They will be at the seat of truth with an all-powerful sovereign.” (54:55)

From the study of this verse of the Quran, we learn the difference between this world and the Hereafter. In this world those people find an honourable place who are at the seat of falsehood. In the Hereafter the position will be totally opposite. There the place of honour will be given to those who stood at the seat of truth in the life of this world.

Who are these people who stand at the seat of falsehood? They are the people who go by appearances, who are selfish, who are opportunists, who are exploiters, who seek material gain by pleasing people, who ignore tomorrow and live for the interest of today, etc. These people are seen sitting at the seat of honour today in this world, but in the Hereafter, in the real world, they will find a place at the seat of falsehood.

As compared to this, the opposite kind of people are those who in the present world attach the greatest of importance to truth and honesty. They lead a life of truth rather than of selfish interest.

They go by the criterion of principle rather than lead an unprincipled life. These are the people who will find places of honour in the Hereafter, even if they are regarded as unimportant in this world.

THE WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

The good things of this world for man are his achieving God-realization by unconditionally making the Prophet his guide. The good things in the Hereafter is that God gives him a share in the rewards of the Hereafter.

The Quran gives us this prayer: “Our Lord, grant us good in this world as well as good in the world to come, and protect us from the torment of the Fire.” (2:201)

There are some who think that this means to ask God to grant the benefits of both the worlds, that is, enough wealth in this world and Paradise in the Hereafter. With this in mind, a certain Muslim journalist brought out a monthly magazine titled, ‘Falaah Deen-O-Duniya’ (the good of both the worlds). But this is not what is meant by the Quranic prayer. The “good” thing means what is good in the eyes of God, rather than something of value in the eyes of men. In this respect, the “good” things would mean the blessing of good actions in this world and entry into Paradise in the Hereafter.

The good things of this world for a man are his achieving realization of God, having the ability to understand the correct meaning of religion, unconditionally making the Prophet his guide and wholeheartedly accepting the ideal religious example set by the lives of the Companions. Other good things are that God will save him from all kinds of intellectual evils, he will not misinterpret religion, being graced with the right understanding of religion and the determination to follow it. In this way, he will be saved from all deviation. No personal interest, no personal desires and no other inclination will divert him from the true path of religion. He will not become arrogant or insolent, nor will he do anything wrong in the name of religion.

The good things in the Hereafter will be that God will give us a share in the rewards of the Hereafter. In the Hereafter, a world is going to be built in the form of Paradise, which will be ideal to the ultimate extent. There man will live in the shade of God's mercy and blessing and will have a meaningful life for all eternity, filled with significance, happiness and comfort in the full sense. This heavenly life is the supreme destination for human beings. This prayer means "Oh God, grant me the life in this world of Your choice which will make me deserving of Paradise in the Hereafter."

INTRODUCTION TO PARADISE

Those true seekers of Paradise who achieve realization of Paradise in its imperfect form in this world itself will be given an honourable entry into Paradise in the Hereafter as a reward.

Chapter 47 of the Quran speaks thus about the people of Paradise: “God will admit them into the Paradise He has already made known to them.” (47:6)

Those believers who become true seekers of Paradise achieve realization of Paradise in this world itself. They are able to see this present world in the form of an imperfect Paradise. This feeling is the proof that they have become true seekers of Paradise. Such people will be given an honourable entry into Paradise in the Hereafter as a reward.

The truth is that the present world is a partial introduction to Paradise, and the world Hereafter is the place where one can find Paradise in the perfect sense. Those who develop their thinking in the spiritual sense are able to see the reflection of Paradise in everything. In this way, everything they have received in this world becomes an initial introduction to the Paradise of the Hereafter.

Everything of the present world is a reward given by God to man. When man develops or purifies his personality, his angle of vision changes. He develops a spiritual way of thinking. He then has the ability to see everything in its reality. Those who think in this way are the realized souls who will be held deserving of entry into Paradise.

This kind of insight into realization is born in only those who have purified themselves in the true sense. Without self-purification developing this ability is just not possible.

THE WISDOM OF CREATION

God created man with heavenly qualities, but placed him in this present non-heavenly world for a trial. Those who mould their lives on heavenly lines in this world will be lodged in the eternal Paradise of the Hereafter, where they will find every kind of fulfilment.

Chapter 95 of the Quran speaks of the creation of man and his final destiny.

“We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds—theirs shall be an unending reward.” (95:4-6)

‘The best of mould’ in this verse means a heavenly mould and the lowest of the low means the non-heavenly world. Faith indicates that man should discover this reality of creation. ‘Good deeds’ here means actions in accordance with this discovery. ‘Unending reward’ refers to the ideal world of Paradise for which man has been created.

According to this interpretation, these verses of the Quran mean that God created man with heavenly qualities. God gave man elevated tastes in every respect, the fulfilment of which is possible in Paradise. But God placed man in this present non-heavenly world. In this world, apparently, everything is there for the taking, but all this is only in accordance with need, rather than with desire. Now man has to discover the wisdom of this creation.

This discovery should be so profound that man’s whole life should be moulded accordingly. Those who have moulded

their lives in this way are the ones who will be lodged in the eternal Paradise of the Hereafter, where they will find every kind of fulfilment. They will remain there for all eternity. The world of Paradise will be a perfect world in every respect. It will be totally free from fear and sorrow (7:49). This is the eternal future of man. Many prophets over the ages have come to give man these tidings.

THE PRINCIPLE OF PAIRS

All the desires and pleasures man has inherent in his nature have their pairs in eternal Paradise. Man will fulfil all his natural desires in the most superior form in Paradise.

Chapter 51 of the Quran states: “We created pairs of all things so that you might reflect.” (51:49)

The concept of pairs relates not just to male and female, but to everything. For instance, God has created man as a desire-seeking creature. That is why man has all kinds of unlimited desires. But in the present world there is no way of fulfilling these desires. There are neither the means nor the resources to do so. That is, there is the seeker, but what is sought is not present in this world. The pair of the seeker is what is sought.

When the whole world has been created in the form of pairs, the question arises, as to where is the pair of these natural desires? When this principle of pairing is in force throughout the whole world, it must be that there is the

pair of desires as well. This pair without doubt exists and Paradise is the name of what makes up this pair. All the desires and pleasures have their pairs in Paradise. A way of fulfilling all natural desires will be found in the most ideal way or have already been provided in the most superior form in Paradise.

This reality gives man a point of reference to pray to God. He may say: "O God, when You have created all kinds of desires in my nature, You should also grant their fulfilment."

BECOME A SEEKER OF PARADISE

In his worldly sojourn, man has to become a seeker of Paradise. One who lives in this world as a true seeker of Paradise, will be selected by God to be lodged in eternal Paradise.

The Quran tells us that God has created man in the best of moulds (95:4). One aspect of this is that man is exceptional in that he has a sense of pleasure. In this vast universe there are many forms of God's creation such as the stars, the planets, the sun, the moon, the trees, the animals, etc. but none of these are blessed with a sense of pleasure.

On the one hand, God has given man a unique sense of pleasure and on the other hand He has created a unique world called Paradise. Paradise is the place where all the objects of pleasure exist to perfection. Man is born capable of experiencing pleasure, but he does not find those objects

of pleasure in this world which could become a source of fulfilment of that pleasure for him. In his worldly sojourn, therefore, man has to become a seeker of Paradise. For one who lives in this present world as a true seeker of Paradise, is one who will be selected by God to be lodged in eternal Paradise.

Those who fail to become seekers of Paradise in their present lives and whose hearts are set on things other than Paradise are not held desirable by God. These are the people who have set no value upon the blessings of God in this world. Their case is one of showing disrespect rather than showing respect.

Such people will be unworthy of being lodged in the gardens of Paradise. They will not receive the blessing of sharing in the heavenly provision of Paradise. They ignored God's Paradise in the present world. Now God will ignore them in the Hereafter. In the world Hereafter they will be subjected to eternal deprivation.

PARADISE: A KNOWN WORLD

As compared to the perfect eternal Paradise of the Hereafter, the present planet Earth is like an imperfect paradise that gives an advance introduction to the existence of Paradise.

In chapter 47 the Quran mentions Paradise and the people of Paradise thus: "He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them." (47:6)

This indicates that, Paradise is a place which an aware man can realize in advance in this present world itself.

There are two levels of the realization of Paradise in this world. On the first level man has unlimited desires by birth. Along with this he feels that these desires cannot be fulfilled in this world. Looked at rationally, when desires exist in reality, their fulfilment should be achievable. In this way, the knowledge of one's desires is in a sense half of the knowledge of Paradise.

This 'half knowledge' of Paradise, compels man to believe that the 'other half' should also be available in the system of nature. If the creation of desire is possible, then undoubtedly the fulfilment of desire should also be a possibility.

Another kind of realization or knowledge of Paradise is that which comes to him in the form of the planet earth. On the planet earth, all kinds of heavenly provisions are available. Earth is like a partial model of Paradise. As compared to a perfect Paradise, the present planet Earth is like an imperfect paradise. In this way, in a partial sense, this Earth is an advance introduction to the existence of Paradise.

THE PARADISE OF THIS WORLD, THE PARADISE OF THE HEREAFTER

The present world is a testing ground and the Hereafter is the home of reward. Discovering the present as an introduction to Paradise makes one deserving of eternal Paradise.

According to the Quran, the present world is exactly similar to the world Hereafter. (2:25) All those things which will be present in the Paradise of the Hereafter are all present in the Paradise of this world. The only difference is that in the Paradise of the Hereafter, everything will be perfect, while in the Paradise of this world, everything is in a state of imperfection. That is why the Quran says that man has been granted everything in this world according to need (14:34), whereas in the Paradise of the Hereafter, all things will be granted to man according to his desires. (41:31).

The Hereafter is the home of reward, while the present world is a testing ground. Due to the exigencies of putting man to the test, the present world is a world of toil and struggle (90:4), and is, thus, full of problems. In other words, the Paradise of the Hereafter is a flower without thorns. By contrast, the Paradise of this world is a flower with thorns. The trial of man in this world is to take the flowers and avoid the thorns. Avoidance of thorns is the real test in this world.

One who takes the flowers and pays no attention to the thorns, has passed the test. He will lead his life in this

world with feelings of thanksgiving. This is, in actual fact, what is desired by the Lord. On the contrary, one who fails to ignore the presence of thorns will always live a life of complaint. He will remain deprived of the worship of thanksgiving in this world and will, as a result, be deprived from entering into Paradise in the Hereafter. Discovering the present as being Paradise in actual fact makes one deserving of the Paradise of the Hereafter. But man is full of hatred and constantly complaining because of the presence of “thorns”. But you must remember that the thorns of the present world are to be avoided and not to be protested about. Those who do not understand this will experience only deprivation. They will have no success.

THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

In the present world, man has to endure grief (35:34) and labour hard (90:4); whereas all the activities of Paradise will be of a joyful nature (36:55).

The fifty-sixth verse of chapter 51 of the Quran explains the purpose of man’s creation as follows: “I created the jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me.” (51:56) In this verse, worship means realization of God. That is, man was created so that he might achieve the realization (*maarifah*) of his Creator. How will he arrive at this realization? To this end, God gave man such a mind as has the unlimited capacity to think.

Vis-à-vis this capacity, man was placed in a world which is a manifestation of God's attributes. There is food for God realization in everything in this universe. Man, under the guidance of the Prophet, can attain realization of God by pondering upon God's creation.

But history tells us that it has not been possible to fulfil this purpose of creation. Unfortunately, man leaves this world without properly utilizing his mind, yet the Quran tells us that God's signs are so numerous that, even if all the trees could become pens and all the seas, or even the double of all the seas, could become ink, the signs of God could not be enumerated (31:27). These signs are, in fact, signs of realization. In this way, we find that the signs of God have yet to be written, that is, have yet to be discovered.

Why is this so? We find the answer to this in the Creation Plan of God. According to God's Creation Plan, human life is divided into two stages. The temporary period that is, man's stay in this present world, and the permanent period, or man's stay in the Hereafter. Just as man has failed to utilize the potential of the human mind, the signs of the marvels of God, scattered throughout the whole universe, still remain undiscovered.

When we reflect upon this, we learn that the present world is the beginning of human existence, while the world of the Hereafter is its completion. In the present world, those individuals are being recruited who have the ability to complete this process in the Hereafter. In the Hereafter, the unworthy will be separated from the worthy and will be thrown into the universal dustbin, while those who have

proved their ability to live their lives in the right way will be selected for entry into Paradise.

We can express this differently: The world before The Day of Judgement (*Qiyamat*) is the world of incomplete human civilization; whereas after the Day of Judgement will come the world of perfect, divine civilization. Apparently the age of human civilization has reached its final limit. Very soon the time is going to come when the stage of divine civilization will begin. And this will last forever.

Just as the present civilization was developed by certain human beings, the divine civilization will also be developed by certain fortunate people, who will be aided by the angels. The process of developing the civilization of the present world was carried out by strenuous effort, as is referred to in the Quran in chapter 90, verse 4. But the process of divine civilization, on the contrary, will be a joyful activity (See chapter 36, verse 55). On the subject of Paradise the Quran states that there man will be given similar things (2:25). This does not just mean that the fruits of Paradise will be similar to the fruits of this world. The truth is that it covers the whole of human life. It means that just as man leads a life full of activity in this world, he will lead a life full of activity in Paradise. The difference is that, in the present world, all activities are performed in a less than ideal environment, while in Paradise these activities will be performed in an ideal environment. In the present world, man has to endure grief (35:34) and must labour hard (90:4); whereas all the activities of Paradise will be of a joyful nature.

HEAVENLY PERSONALITY

A heavenly personality is free from all kinds of negative feelings: he is free from hatred, revenge, anger and does good turns, only as a duty without any hope of recompense.

Abu Hurayrah, a Companion of the Prophet, narrated a tradition of the Prophet in these words: "Such people will go to Paradise whose hearts are like the hearts of birds." (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2840)

The bird may be an animal, but it has an exceptional quality which is not found in any other animal and, that is that the bird is free of all feelings of hatred and revenge. All other animals possess the instinct of defensive attack. But the bird is totally free of this. Look at the bird. You will find it to be innocence incarnate. That is why the pigeon is held to be a symbol of peace. According to this hadith, it is this quality which is required of one who is a seeker of Paradise.

The Hadith shows that a heavenly person is one who is free from all kinds of negative feelings. While the bird possesses positive qualities as a matter of instinct, the heavenly person acquires these positive qualities by the exercise of free will.

A heavenly man is one who trains himself in such a way that his heart is free from hatred, revenge and every other such negative influence. He refrains from anger, he does not react negatively, he does good turns without any hope of recompense. He lives with others as if they were sisters and brothers, he shuns the company of Satan and makes the Angels his companions. He fulfils the rights of others and asks for his rights only from God (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith

No. 7052). Such are the superior qualities which will entitle one to gain entry into Paradise.

TWO GROUPS OF PEOPLE OF PARADISE

Higher level of Paradise is for those who realized Truth at the level of mere arguments, while its lower level is for people who accepted Truth when it gained ascendancy.

We learn from chapter 56 of the Quran that there will be two big groups of people of Paradise, one to the fore (*Assabeqoon*), others on the right. Royal rewards await the first group, while rewards of a general nature (56:8-40) are reserved for the second group. What would form the basis of this difference between the people of the first category and those of the second category? The Quran tells us that the reason for this lies in the difference between the people who accepted the truth before the victory (conquest of Makkah) and those who accepted it after the victory (57:10)

Those who accepted the truth before the time of the victory and extended their full support to it would be placed in a high level in Paradise. And those who accepted and supported the truth after the period of victory, would find a place on the right. This relates not only to the Prophet's time, but also to the nature of belief.

When the truth dawns in its initial stages, it is in abstract form. Its position can be likened to an ideological reality supported only by the power of arguments. In later times when the call of truth reaches the stage of victory and

dominance, then the position of truth is no longer just a matter of ideology. Now everyone can see truth with one's own eyes as a solid reality.

In the first stage, truth needed to be recognized in the form of argument (*dalil*), consisting of mere words. In the second stage, there are clear events in favour of the importance of truth. In the first stage, truth has to be recognized by argument in words, but in the second stage there are clear physical events which suffice for one to understand and accept the importance of truth. In the first stage, the acceptance of truth reduced the person to a stranger in one's own society. In the second stage association with the victorious brings laurels, honour and popularity. The former is only a loser, while the latter is the gainer. The former found a place only in the foundation while the latter found a place on the heights of the structure. It is this difference in realization that is responsible for the first degree of reward for the former group while the second degree of reward will be earned by the latter group.

THE PARADISIACAL PERSONALITY

A heavenly personality shuns the company of Satan, and seeks the company of Angels. Remaining patient, such a personality pays his dues and asks for his rights only from God.

According to a tradition narrated by Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet of Islam once said: "Such people will gain entry into Paradise whose hearts are like the hearts of birds."

(*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 4840) The bird is an animal. But the bird has an exceptional quality which is not found in any other animal and that is, the bird is free from any feelings of hatred or revenge. All other animals have the predisposition to attack in self-defence. But the bird is absolutely free from this. Look at a bird. It will look like an emblem of innocence. That is why the pigeon is held to be a symbol of peace.

According to the Hadith, it is this paradisiacal quality which is desirable for one who is a seeker of Paradise. A heavenly personality is one which is free of all kinds of negative feelings. The only difference being that the bird possesses this positive quality as a matter of instinct, while the heavenly person possesses this positive quality by conscious choice.

A heavenly person is one who trains himself in such a way that his heart is totally free of such things as hatred and revenge. He can control his anger, he does not react negatively. He returns love for hatred. He conducts himself well with others without any expectations. He lives amongst people as if they were his sisters and brothers. He shuns the company of Satan, and seeks the company of angels. He remains patient instead of complaining. He pays his dues and asks for his rights only from God. These are the noble qualities which will make one deserving of entry into Paradise.

THE GREATEST HAPPINESS

Paradise, an eternal place where all desires will be fulfilled to perfection, will be the greatest source of happiness for those found deserving of it by God Almighty.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once said that God would thus address the inhabitants of Paradise: "O, dwellers of Paradise." And they would say in response: "At your service and pleasure, our Lord, the good is in Your hand." The Lord would then say: "Are you well pleased now?" They would reply: "Why should we not be pleased, O Lord, when You have given us what You have not given to any of Your creatures?" God would say: "May I not give you something even more excellent than that?" And He will say: "I shall guarantee you my eternal pleasure and I shall never afterwards be displeased with you." (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2829)

Paradise, a place where all desires will be fulfilled to perfection, is without doubt a combination of all blessings. Those who enter Paradise, will feel that they have received all kinds of genuine happiness there. Yet they may have the fear that the Paradise they have received, being a gift from God,—and they not being its creators, it might be taken away by God if He so desired. This tradition is an answer to this fear. When God Himself declares that His pleasure is eternal, it will mean that Paradise will be the place of their sojourn forever. It will never be taken away from them. The knowledge of this will be, without doubt, the greatest source of happiness for the people of Paradise.

THE CRAVING FOR PARADISE, THE FEAR OF HELL

Those people who craved Paradise more than anything else, and started fearing Hell more than anything else, will be held worthy of gaining entry into eternal Paradise by God.

According to Sunan Al Tirmidhi, on behalf of one who asked for Paradise three times, Paradise will say to God, “O God, grant him Paradise.” And on behalf of one who seeks refuge from hell three times, hell will say, “O God, grant him refuge from hell.” This tradition has been recorded in different books of Hadith. (*Sunan Al Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2572)

In this tradition, three times does not mean just three times, but rather three occasions. This does not mean that the person who speaks these words three times numerically will be held deserving of this reward. It means that it is those people who discover Paradise and Hell, with such intensity that it became a part of their thinking process, those who craved Paradise more than anything else, and started fearing Hell more than anything else, who owing to their heightened consciousness have come to think that if they failed to find Paradise, they would be ruined for all eternity: it is people such as these who would be held worthy of Paradise.

Such a person’s words were put on record by the angels. He called God in his solitude to include him among those chosen servants who will be rewarded with Paradise, and who will

be saved from Hell. In this way, the Angels will record his fervent prayer. According to the Hadith, this will apply to those who have been in this tumultuous state at least three times. This Hadith, in actual fact, simply describes states of being rather than mere numbers.

THE SEEKER OF HEREAFTER

The stage before death is for preparation. The stage after death is to reap the reward of one's actions. If man saves himself from desire that diverts him from the straight path, eternal success awaits him in the Hereafter.

Quoting the words of a traditionist, Al-Baihaqi, as recorded in a Hadith, Hazrat Jabir narrates that, the Prophet of Islam once observed, "What I fear most in my people (*ummah*) is their desires, ambitions and wishes, for desire comes in the way of truth and ardent wishes make man oblivious of the Hereafter. This world is a fleeting world. And the Hereafter is certain to come. There are people who are seekers of both this world and the Hereafter. Save yourself if you can from being a seeker of the world, for you are in a world today where there are actions, but no reckoning. And tomorrow you will be in the world of the Hereafter, where there will be reckoning but no actions." (*Shu'abul Iman*, Hadith No. 10132)

We learn from this tradition of the Prophet that there are two stages of human life—the stage before death and the stage after death. The stage before death is for preparation.

Preparation in the stage before death must envisage consequences, the stage after death is that in which man will reap reward of his actions. The greatest knowledge and the greatest wisdom lie in being able to grasp this reality about human life. The basic thing about preparation for the Hereafter is that man should save himself from desire which diverts him from the straight path. In relation to this, there are two kinds of men—the seeker of the world and the seeker of the Hereafter. Foolish is the one who is the seeker of this world, while the wise one is who is the seeker of the Hereafter. Eternal failure awaits the seeker of the world, while eternal success awaits the seeker of the Hereafter.

THE PRICE OF PARADISE

When a man attains realization of God, discovers the realities of divine creation, this spontaneously brings words of acknowledgement of God to his lips. This will make him deserving of Paradise.

A certain tradition has been recorded in different books of Hadith with slight differences. Its gist is that a person may be taken out of the Hell in the Hereafter. Then he will be asked as to how he met his fate. He will say that he had been very bad. Then he would be asked if he had possessed gold equal to the earth, would he like to pay out all that gold in order to save himself from hell fire. He will say, “Yes”. Then he will be told: that in the world he was asked for much less but he did not comply with that. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6538)

In this tradition, what is meant by 'less'? It means acknowledgement. If man had been asked to give gold as the price of Paradise it would have been the material price of Paradise. But a material price of this kind is not required of man. What was asked from man was nothing but acknowledgement, but man was so engrossed with things other than God that he could not pay this price of acknowledgement.

What is acknowledgement? Acknowledgement is not a simple matter: it is always the result of discovery. When a man thinks deeply, divine realities are revealed to him. On the one hand, he attains realization of God, and on the other hand, he discovers the realities of divine creation. He becomes fully conscious of Hell and Paradise.

These discoveries produce a storm in his mind. When this consciousness and this feeling spontaneously bring words of acknowledgement of God to his lips, it is such acknowledgement as will make him deserving of Paradise.

THE DESIRE FOR PARADISE

The desire for Paradise of the Hereafter is instilled in man by birth. But he starts building a Paradise in this world itself, where it can never be found. This for man is a real deprivation.

The Prophet of Islam once observed, "Those who should be striving to attain such a precious thing as Paradise are sleeping." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2601) This means

that those who should be striving for Paradise are engaging themselves in worldly pursuits. It means that Paradise is supremely precious. Every man should, therefore, be a seeker of Paradise. But it is very strange that man is totally oblivious of it.

According to his inner urge, every individual is running after the supposed Paradise. Some search for it in their children, in their jobs, in their businesses, in their status, in their fame, in their wealth, power and position, etc. But everyone is a failure in his discovery because Paradise, in fact, lies in the Hereafter. It is not present in this world at all.

The desire for Paradise is instilled in man by birth. It is that Paradise which man will achieve in the Hereafter. But, instead of Paradise, he becomes a seeker of things which are not Paradise. This for man is a real deprivation.

Paradise is that ideal place where people will have total fulfilment in the best sense. But it is not possible for anyone to find this Paradise in the present world. They do not try to find out where their desired Paradise is placed and are expending their total energy on trying to find Paradise where it does not exist.

This is the greatest error into which all men and women fall. Looked at from this angle, according to the Quran, the example of such people is like the person who runs after a mirage to quench his thirst. But when he reaches that place, he finds that far from being water it was nothing but an illusion. (24:39)

MAN AND PARADISE

Man will certainly enter Paradise if he saves himself from distraction. Then he will certainly discover his true divine nature, his conscience, and be held deserving of entry into Paradise.

According to a tradition recorded in books of Hadith, the Prophet once observed: “You will certainly enter Paradise, except for those who are bent on denial, and who ran away from God just as a camel runs away (when untied).” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 22226)

God has created man essentially for Paradise. According to the creation plan of God, Paradise alone is the only place for a noble soul like man. The truth is that man and Paradise are one another’s counterpart. Man is for Paradise and Paradise is for man.

The condition laid down by God for entry into Paradise is practicable to the fullest extent. The condition is that man must lead his life according to the natural state bestowed upon him by God at birth and he should reach God (after death) in that same natural state: ‘And when he alone will be saved who comes to God with a sound heart.’ (26:89)

This is the only condition for entry into Paradise: that man must adhere to the nature he is born with as given by God. He must not deviate from this divine nature. God “inspired this (divine nature) so that he might understand what was right and wrong for it.” (91:8) If man saves himself from distraction, he will certainly discover his

true nature, which is in the form of conscience within every human being.

This conscience is an internal sign of this divine nature. God's prophets came to the world to make men aware of this nature, so that what exists within man at the unconscious level, should be discovered by him even at the conscious level. The truth is that man is for Paradise and Paradise is for man. It is only one who knowingly deviates from the path towards Paradise who is the exception to this rule.

PARADISE AND HELL

Paradise is for one who detaches himself from the innumerable pleasures of this world, and remains disinterested; whereas the Hell is for one who remains immersed in the pleasures of this world until one dies.

A long tradition has been narrated about Paradise and Hell in books of Hadith.

“When God created Paradise, He said to Gabriel: ‘Go and look at Paradise.’ Gabriel went and looked at all the blessings God had provided for man in Paradise. Then Gabriel came back and said: ‘O my Lord, by Your Honour and Might, whoever knows of Paradise will surely enter it.’ Then God covered Paradise, with all kinds of unpleasant things. Then He said to Gabriel: ‘Go and have a look at it.’ Gabriel went to see Paradise, then he came back and said: ‘O My Lord, by Your Honour and Might, I am afraid that no one will enter

it.' God created Hell, then He said: 'Gabriel go and look at it.' Gabriel did as he was told. Then he came back and said to God: 'O my Lord, By Your Honour and Might, anyone who hears of it, will be so frightened that he will never enter it.' Then God covered hell with carnal desires, then He said to Gabriel: 'Go and have a look at hell.' Gabriel went and looked at it, then he came back and said to God: 'O My Lord, by Your Honour and Might, I am afraid that no one will be able to save himself from entering hell.' (*Sunan Al-Tirmizi*, Hadith No.2560, *Sunan Abu Dawood*, Hadith No.4744)

If people were to see Paradise in its real form, everyone would become earnestly desirous of entering Paradise. If people were to see hell in its real form, everyone would flee from it. But the present world is a testing ground. To facilitate this trial, the path of Paradise leads the way through many unpleasant experiences. In contrast to this, the path of hell is surrounded by attractive things. In other words, one has to place curbs on one's desires in order to become a deserving candidate for Paradise; whereas following one's desires without any restraint will lead one to Hell. Putting curbs on one's desires produces a purified personality which makes one a deserving candidate for Paradise. On the contrary, following one's desires unrestrainedly produces an impure personality, which is destined for hell. This is, thus, expressed in the Quran: "He who purifies it will indeed be successful, and he who corrupts it is sure to fail." (91:9-10)

To find entry into Paradise it is essential for man to keep a continuous watch over himself. He must set his course after

deep thinking. On the contrary one who leads a permissive life will apparently be living a happy life in this world; but he will be fated, finally, to reach a world where he will be eternally bereft of every kind of happiness.

The Paradise of the Hereafter is for one who detaches himself from the innumerable pleasures of this world, and remains disinterested; whereas the Hell of the Hereafter is for one who remains immersed in the pleasures of this world until one dies.

THE PRICE OF PARADISE

Success in this world is possible only by taking planned action. Similarly, success in the Hereafter, finding a place in the neighbourhood of God—Paradise, will also be possible only if one undertakes *Akhirat*-oriented planning, while living in this world.

Abu Hurairah narrates that the Prophet of Islam observed: “One who is concerned, starts his journey very early in the morning while it is dark and one who starts his journey early reaches his destination. Listen, the bargain of God is Paradise.” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2450)

In ancient Arabia, it was customary for travellers to begin their journey at dawn while it was still dark, so that they could reach their destination before the sun rose and it became hot. This was the traditional way of travelling in the desert, because it was always feared that travellers would be adversely effected by the hot sun and would die along with their camels.

The same is true of the seeker of Paradise. The seeker of Paradise plans with great foresight. He has to prepare himself so thoroughly for the journey to Paradise that no unexpected contingency can block his path. Nothing can make him deviate from his path to Paradise. Nothing can cause him to digress from the right path.

A businessman makes preparations to the utmost extent to get a worldly bargain. The bargain of God—which is Paradise, is the most precious of all bargains. That is why man should plan with the greatest of care for the journey to Paradise just as he would plan for any worldly journey. He should not be negligent in any way. Paradise will be achieved on the basis of real action rather than as a result of wishful thinking.

Success in this world is possible only by taking planned action. Similarly, success in reaching the Hereafter will also be possible only by *Akhirat*-oriented planning.

SEEKER OF PARADISE

Human nature is calling out at every moment: 'O Man!
Run away from Hellfire, and be a seeker of Paradise.'
Successful is the one who hears this call and follows it.

In a tradition of Prophet Muhammad, he wondered that those who should be running away from hell are sleeping and those who should be striving to attain such a precious thing as Paradise are sleeping. (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2601) In this tradition of the Prophet of Islam, the phrases *haarib-e-naar* (running away from hell) and

taalib-e-Jannat (seeker of Paradise) have been used. The choice of the phrases is very meaningful. It indicates the fact that man has been created in such a way, that because of his upright nature, he will run away from hell and be a seeker of Paradise. But because of the deviation of his human nature, he becomes a totally different person: he runs away from Paradise and runs towards Hell.

Man finds it difficult to tolerate suffering. Any kind of misery is the most disagreeable thing for human beings. Man wants comfort with all his heart, he is an extreme lover of happiness and pleasure. Therefore, his entire life revolves around these two things that is saving himself from miserable situations and ensuring all worldly comfort for himself. But experiences of history show that in the present world it is not possible for a person to save himself from woe and misery completely and neither is it possible for man to have comfort and happiness in the real sense. Even after striving for the whole of his life, he fails to achieve these goals.

On the one hand man has this inner craving for a life of comfort and happiness, while on the other hand this goal is unattainable in the present world. If we examine this situation, we come to know that man's real direction was towards the Hereafter, man deviated from this course and turned towards the present world. Human nature is calling out at every moment: 'O Man! Run away from Hellfire, and be a seeker of Paradise.' Successful is the one who hears this call and follows it. The failure is the one who does not listen to this call and finally falls down into the pit of eternal regret and despair.

MODESTY: THE PRICE OF PARADISE

Realizing God's Lordship, man realizes his position of helplessness and servitude. Then one kneels down before God, saying: "O, God, Forgive me." These words of humility are the price of Paradise.

Before the advent of Prophet Muhammad there lived a man in ancient Arabia by the name of Abdullah bin-Judaaan, who was a very noble and generous man. He often gave food to others and helped them. A tradition about Abdullah-bin-Judaaan has been recorded in Sahih Bukhari which is given here: "Hazrat Ayesha says that, she said to the Prophet Muhammad: 'O Prophet', Abdullah-bin-Judaaan fed the people and honoured the guests. Will his action benefit him on the Day of Judgement?' The Prophet Muhammad replied, 'No, because he did not say even once, 'O, Lord! Forgive my sins on the Day of Judgement:.'" (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 214)

This tradition tells us what God requires from his servants. What is required is acknowledgement. When man realizes his position of servitude and God's Lordship, an intense feeling of helplessness is produced within him. Before God's greatness and perfection, his own existence appears altogether trivial. This realization compels him to kneel down before God, pleading for mercy and forgiveness, saying: "O, God, Forgive me." These are the words of humility. And such words of humility are the final price of Paradise. The man who has neither any deed to his credit nor any confession of inaction, what will be the basis of his entry into Paradise?

VALUE OF PARADISE

Paradise is the name of God's neighbourhood. Only those will find a place in Paradise who discover God while He is unseen and starts living in the vicinity of God in this world itself.

Paradise is a unique world created by God. All kinds of comfort and happiness of a high standard exist in Paradise to the fullest extent. Paradise is the place where man will gain every kind of everlasting fulfilment. (41:31)

Who will gain entry into this unique world of Paradise? This world of Paradise in the eternal life after death will be for those men and women who will pay the price for this Paradise. It is for those who become truly divine or God-oriented. Man, who is apparently, far from God becomes closer to God at the level of realization.

Paradise is the name of God's neighbourhood. Only those will be able to find entry in the neighbourhood of God who start living in the vicinity of God in the world before the Hereafter.

Man sees himself in the form of a created being, but he has to discover God in the form of a Being not created by anyone. In the present world, people believe in things by seeing them, but they have to believe in God without seeing Him. Human beings have immense love for wealth and children but they have to start to fear God the most and love God the most, and on that basis establish a relationship with Him.

Human beings live for the things of this world and attach

importance to them. But Paradise is for those who can rise above worldly things and develop supreme concern for God alone. While man's interest is focussed on his family and his people, and has a relationship with God only at the level of formal rituals, he will not find a place in Paradise. Only those will find a place in Paradise who are focused on God, and whose interests are all God-oriented. Their relationships with everything and everyone else are purely duty or need-based such as having to care for the family, etc. Essentially, they love God and God alone.

THE CONDITION OF FINDING AN ENTRY INTO PARADISE

Paradise can be attained by controlling our desires and developing our minds to withstand Satan's whispered temptations. Man should place a barricade around his every desire so that Satan may not enter through it, taking him away from God's mercy.

Adam was the first man as well as the first Prophet. God first created Adam and Eve and then placed them in Paradise and said, 'O, Adam! Live with your wife in Paradise and eat freely from it anywhere you may wish. Yet do not approach this tree lest you become wrongdoers.' (2:35)

But after coming under the influence of Satan, both Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. As a result, they were expelled from Paradise and placed in the present world. And they were told that they and the whole human

race could go to Paradise only if they did good deeds and proved to be worthy of finding an entry into Paradise.

This description of the beginning of life shows what conditions must be fulfilled before gaining entry into Paradise. Paradise will be achieved neither through mysterious ways nor on the basis of any recommendation from someone. Paradise is not a birth right, even for the prophets.

God has set this example for all mankind through Prophet Adam and explained that Paradise cannot be found by some self-styled beliefs. This principle is so all-embracing that even the prophets are no exception to it.

From the case of Prophet Adam, another very important thing that comes to light is that the first thing on the basis of which Paradise can be attained is the controlling of our desires and the developing of our minds to the point where we may be able to withstand Satan's whispered temptations. Desire for eternal success is overwhelmingly present in man. Satan assailed Adam through his desires and he succeeded. Man, too, has many desires. Every desire opens the door to the devil. Man should place a barricade around his every desire so that Satan may not enter through it and take him away from God's mercy.

PARADISE: AN IDEOLOGY OF LIFE

Man is a Paradise-seeker by nature. Everyone wants to realize the latent Paradise hidden in human nature. To remain tension-free we have to realize that Paradise is achievable only in the next world. The present world is merely to prepare ourselves for eternal Paradise.

The conviction that Paradise exists is not a belief in any simple sense. It is a full-fledged ideology. The belief in Paradise relates to man's entire life. The importance of Paradise can be properly understood only when it is linked to all of human existence.

The study of man shows that man is a Paradise-seeking animal. Man's nature craves a world which is an ideal world, where everything man has meets the highest standards of perfection. Another name for it is Paradise. And the attainment of this Paradise is a dream every man and woman has in common.

If we study the present state of man, we find that all human beings are greedy to the utmost extent for material things. Everyone wants as much wealth and power as he can have. All this is because man wants to realize the latent Paradise hidden in human nature. But there is a permanent obstacle to it. The present world in terms of its resources is an imperfect world. And the building of paradise in such an imperfect world is not at all possible.

The contradiction between potential and actuality is the real cause of all evils in this world. It is due to this that people live permanently in a state of mental tension. It is due to

this that people fall a victim to frustration and frequently go to the extreme of turning violent.

There is only one solution to this problem and that is to create awareness of the reality that Paradise is achievable only in the next world, and never in the present world. The belief in Paradise makes man a realist, and realism is the sole secret to success.

THE WORLD OF PARADISE

Paradise will be a place of enormous attraction and unlimited enjoyable activities. The greatest attraction of Paradise will be the Being of Almighty God. The whole of Paradise will be filled with the light of God: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35).

A heavenly character is a must to gain entry into Paradise. And experience has shown that there are very few people throughout the entire course of human history who have evinced such a character. In such a case, people often think that Paradise must be a very desolate place, rather than a place alive with people.

The greatest attraction of Paradise will be the Being of Almighty God. The Quran has this to say about God: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35). This light will be omnipresent in Paradise. The whole of Paradise will be filled with the light of God. Every man and woman in Paradise will continually feel the presence of God. Besides this, there will be countless Angels of God in Paradise. The prophets who came to the world in the different ages

of history will be there with the status of distinguished personalities. There will also be virtuous men and virtuous women who were born in human history in different eras. There will be countless young people who died in innocence in childhood. These children will be a special attraction of Paradise. Perhaps it is about them that the Quran has this to say: “They will be attended by youths who will not age—when you see them you will think them to be like sprinkled pearls”. (76:19)

In Paradise, when there will be so many attractions and so many enjoyable activities, how can such a Paradise be a desolate place? The truth is that Paradise will be a place of enormous attraction. A tradition has it that, “Paradise has that which no eye has seen, and which no ear has heard of, neither could anyone ever have imagined what it is like.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3244)

PARADISE FOR WHOM?

Paradise is another name for God’s neighbourhood. Only those people will find entry into Paradise, who realize God and adhere to divine ethics in this world. Living merely by social ethics will never make one eligible for entry into eternal Paradise.

An educated non-Muslim said, “I conduct myself well with others. I never harm anyone. I always try to live as a good member of society. Therefore, I am convinced that after death I will enter Paradise. When I am a good man, why would God send me to hell?”

I said that, good behaviour on its own would not lead one to Paradise. What is Paradise? Paradise is, in fact, another name for God's neighbourhood. God will allow only those people to live in His neighbourhood, who adhere to divine ethics. No one can be held deserving of entering into Paradise just by adhering to social ethics.

In fact, there are two levels of ethics: one stands in relation to man versus man, another stands in relation to man versus God. These two codes of ethics are different in their dimensions. In relation to man moral behaviour is, in fact, social behaviour which is subject to social ethics. Adherence to the social moral code causes man to lead a harmless life in society. When people see that he is good to others, they regard him as a good member of society.

But the other moral code relative to God leads man to realization of God. When an individual discovers his Creator, this transforms his mind. His divine nature is awakened and, as a result, all those qualities are produced which measure up to the standard of elevated human ethics.

The human code of ethics comes into being because of social incentives. As such, once the relationship with a society no longer exists, this code of ethics does not exist either. Such a moral code serves a temporary purpose. But after the passage of time, it has no further reason to exist. On the contrary, the moral code relative to God results from an eternal incentive. This is interconnected with the eternity of God. Therefore, one who adheres to such a code of ethics is held deserving of being granted a place in the eternal Paradise of God.

Divine ethics is in fact, a phenomenon which comes into

being after the realization of God. God being the Creator, loves His servants. Therefore, man also begins to love other human beings. The belief that God is the judge on the Day of Judgement, produces in man a strong sense of accountability. He refrains from using such words and doing such deeds as will cause God to hold him to task, and award him a severe punishment. The thinking of such a person is that the giver is God as well as the Taker—one who can take away what He has given. This feeling puts a complete end to human arrogance. Regarding someone as being less or inferior, becomes an attitude which he cannot afford.

Where the social code of ethics permits certain freedoms, the divine code of ethics—the result of the believer having established a relationship of servitude to God—sets boundaries. In short—the former code of ethics is worldly, whereas the latter is heavenly ethics. Social ethics is narrower in purview, unlike divine ethics which embraces everything.

Everything has a price and the price of Paradise is the realization of God. Nothing less than that can open the gates of Paradise. The truth is that if anything less than realization of God is regarded as the price of Paradise that constitutes belittling of Paradise.

What is realization? Realization is, in fact, another name for the discovery of God. It is to see God with deep insight. It comes about in a high level of consciousness, when all worldly things lose significance and God becomes the greatest concern for man.

This realization is no simple matter. The truth is that tens of thousands of veils are cast over God realization. Those who

are able to tear aside these veils of doubt, reach that high level of conviction which is called God realization. A seeker of God realization has to pass this test. Only those who pass in this test of tearing aside the veils of doubt can experience the realization of God.

The real sign of the attainment of God realization is one and only one and that is internal in nature. That is, man finds God in such a manner that He becomes his inner voice in the complete sense. Man is by birth a seeker. It is man's nature to want to discover the higher truth. God realization is the answer to this quest. When a child is looking for his mother and finally finds her, he embraces her with his entire existence. The same is true of one who has achieved God realization. When a person achieves realization of God in the real sense, he is linked to God so completely, just as a small child is with his mother.

In the matter of God realization no excuse is acceptable. One who in this present life proves himself blind to the attainment of God realization, will remain blind in the Hereafter as well. The reason is that when the opportunities of God realization present themselves with all the arguments and signs, it becomes impossible for anyone not to recognize them. This feeling of God realization is in tune with man's instincts and, if he is serious, he will never fail to recognize it.

When a child's mother is absent for some time and then she appears, it becomes impossible for the child not to recognize his mother. In a child the remembrance of his mother is so strong that it becomes impossible for the child not to recognize her when she comes before him. Similarly,

when the door to realization of God is opened with all the arguments and signs, then man cannot afford not to recognize it. The child who does not recognize his mother is without doubt blind: he is deprived of his external vision as well as his insight.

THE VALUE OF PARADISE

Only those people will inhabit Paradise who are able to develop a divine, purified personality. (20:76)
A divine personality avoids negative feelings, remains positive, controls desires, adheres to justice, speaks the truth, keeps promises and lives by principles.

Paradise is a world of eternal happiness. Who are those people who will be worthy of getting entry in the standard world of the Paradise after death? They will be those people, who in their pre-death period itself have intellectually and practically made themselves capable of living up to the standard of this world called Paradise in the post-death period.

Considering anything else as the price of Paradise is an underestimation of this ideal world. For example, it is nothing but wishful thinking to believe that one will get Paradise by associating with a certain group, or by engaging in some formal ritual acts, undertaking a pilgrimage to a holy site, singing the and anthem of *naat* and hamd on the stage, engaging in the construction of a magnificent building in the name of religion, participating in rallies and processions, taking pride in Islam, etc. There is no

connection of Paradise to any such thing. None of such things are to lead man to Paradise.

Only those people will inhabit Paradise who are able to develop a divine personality. A divine personality has been called a purified personality in the Quran (20:76). A divine personality is a prepared personality in relation to Paradise.

The preparation of such a divine personality is possible only in this present world. Through different kinds of conditions and experiences, man develops a divine personality in himself in the present world by avoiding negative feelings and remaining positive. In spite of unfavourable conditions he remains on principles. He adheres to justice, he controls his own desires. He always speaks the truth. He keeps his promises to others. No failure makes him disappointed and no success makes him a transgressor. This is heavenly personality, and such people will be held deserving of Paradise.

THE GREATEST PROBLEM

When the realization of God reaches its ultimate limit, it manifests itself as fear of God. One who fears God becomes desirous of Paradise in its totality and along with this, he is fearful of his fate if God does not give him Paradise. This is the highest level of realization.

Human life is a continuum of consciousness. Man's existence is a living existence and coincidentally he is conscious of being a living entity. His consciousness is enhanced in having sensitivity. Man is an aware person

in the perfect sense and is moreover, highly sensitive in the fullest sense. As a result of these attributes of man, whenever he has a good experience, he is very happy and whenever he has any bad experience he is very disturbed. Both these feelings of pleasure and pain are found to an extreme degree in human beings.

Man has inherited these two qualities by birth. This should result in making man a very great seeker of Paradise, going greatly in fear of hell-fire. This is because after death every man is going to find a place either in eternal Paradise or in eternal hell. Paradise is eternally a place of happiness and comfort, while hell is eternally a place of sorrow and regret. In consequence of his deeds, man is inevitably going to reach one of these two destinations. This being so, every human being must be greatly concerned about this. It is, however, very strange that man in this gravest of matters has become an example of this tradition of the Prophet, which has been thus expressed: "How strange it is that people are not desirous of a thing as precious as Paradise, and how strange it is that people are not trying to save themselves from such a horrible or fearful place as Hell." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2601)

There is nothing negative about the fear of God. The truth is that when the realization of God reaches its ultimate limit, it manifests itself as fear of God. The fearful person becomes desirous of Paradise in its totality and along with this, he is always fearful of what his fate will be if God does not give him Paradise. This is the highest level of realization.

NO RECOMMENDATION, ONLY MERIT

The present world is designed for the selection of deserving candidates for eternal Paradise. Only those will find entry into Paradise who have proved their merit through their deeds in the present world.

In later times, many unauthentic traditions became prevalent which claimed that entry into Paradise was based on recommendation rather than on merit. For instance, the tradition that when there was a *Hafiz* or a memorizer of the Quran in a family, he would recommend his family members and, on his recommendation, they would gain entry into Paradise.

Similarly, there is another unauthentic tradition. “The good are for God and the bad are for the Prophet,” that is, the bad will find Paradise on the Prophet’s recommendation. But all these traditions have no basis in reality.

The truth is that the present world is designed for the selection of deserving candidates for Paradise. Only those will find entry into Paradise who have proved their merit by their deeds in the present world. Chapter 53 of the Quran tells us that, in the Hereafter, man will find his place only according to his actions in this world (53:31-32).

Chapter two of the Quran tells us that “the day comes when there will be neither trading, friendship nor intercession” (2:254).

Believing in strategies like recommendation to gain entry into Paradise, is an underestimation of Paradise. The truth is that Paradise is a sublime and very refined place and

only men and women of high calibre will be settled there according to the records of human beings being prepared in this world. According to the Quran, Paradise is a place which is in the neighbourhood of God. Here, in this world of truth, only the truthful will find an eternal abode, “in the seat of truth with an all-powerful Sovereign” (54:55).

Inhabiting Paradise is to be in the neighbourhood of God (66:11). The notion that entry into the neighbourhood of God can be had just on the basis of human recommendation is totally baseless.

THE BUILDING OF A PERSONALITY

Man is born with great potential. He has to turn his potential into actuality on his own. By facing life's difficult situations as challenges, man reaches high levels of progress and develops a purified personality. This makes him deserving of Paradise.

Chapter 90 of the Quran says, “We have created man into a life of toil.” (90:4) The word ‘toil’ here has been used in a positive, rather than in a negative sense. When we look at it from this aspect, we find that here it means ‘struggle.’

That is, the condition of man's stay in the present world is such that he has to lead a life of struggle. He has to pursue a difficult course in life. This is essential for the building of a positive human personality. It is a fact which has been expressed in this saying of Samuels Smiles: “It is not ease but effort, not facility but difficulty that makes man.”

Man is potentially like an ore. Machines are made from steel but it requires a long industrial process to produce it. Iron ore has first to undergo a long process of being heated in a blast furnace, and only then can steel be produced. Even then the metal has to go through various stages before it can take the form of machines.

The same is true of human beings. Man is born with great potential. But to turn nature's potential into actuality, he has to undergo various difficult stages in life. It is by going through these stages that man is able to develop himself intellectually and become a mature person. Without undergoing the processes of hard struggle, no one can become a man of high calibre which makes him deserving of Paradise.

Every difficult situation serves as a challenge in this world. By facing these challenges, man reaches high levels of progress and development which makes him deserving of Paradise.

CULTURAL INTRODUCTION OF PARADISE

Those people will find entry into Paradise who become as familiar with Paradise as if they were seeing it. They will be able to observe the Gardens of Paradise not only in scenes of nature but will also observe Paradise at the core of modern civilizational developments.

Chapter 47 of the Quran defines who the people of Paradise are. There is a verse in the Quran to this effect:

“He will admit them into the garden He has already made known to them.” (47:6)

This verse tells us that what it takes to be deserving of Paradise is its realization in this world itself. In the present world, those who have known Paradise at the level of realization are the ones who will be ushered into Paradise in the Hereafter.

They are those who have such a deep realization that they have a craving for Paradise and will be introduced to Paradise in this same world. Paradise is entrenched in their thoughts. Such individuals will begin to see Paradise before entering it. They become as familiar with Paradise as if they were seeing it.

The Quran provides the primary source of this introduction to Paradise for man. A man develops this capacity through reflection about Paradise aided by the Quran. Beyond that, there are two main methods for a practical introduction to Paradise: a natural introduction and a cultural introduction. A natural introduction means what a man realizes by his observation of natural scenes. Scenes of nature provide man with an introduction to Paradise from a distance.

A civilizational introduction to Paradise has become possible for the first time in the present world. The world developed by modern civilization is like a cultural introduction to Paradise. It means that the sophisticated material facilities of modern civilization are as it were, a means of allowing us to experience the pleasures of the world of Paradise. This introduction to Paradise has been arranged on behalf of God Himself through natural scenes

and material comforts. If a man reflects at a conscious level, he will be able to observe the gardens of Paradise not only in scenes of nature but will also observe Paradise at the core of modern civilizational developments.

THE REALIZATION, THE PARADISE

Knowledge of the realization of truth is potentially inherent in every man. To convert this potential into actuality is another name for realization. Paradise is actually the habitat of realized persons who will be settled there eternally by the grace of God Almighty.

In this world, the last thing to be attained is realization; and in the Hereafter, the last thing to be found is Paradise. What is realization? Realization is another name for the discovery of the truth, that is the highest reality, that is God. Knowledge of the realization of truth is potentially inherent in every man. To convert this potential into actuality is another name for realization.

One who reaches this high level of realization is called a realized person. Such people will be settled in Paradise. Paradise is actually the habitat of realized persons where they will be settled for all time by the grace of God Almighty!

Realization is just another name of an important aspect of wisdom. Indeed, realization is the name of an intellectual storm; it is the revolutionary experience which plays a major role in developing the human personality. It is only by realization that a superior personality develops which is capable of being settled in the upper levels of Paradise. In

the Quran, Paradise has been called the ‘Vicinity of God’.

Only such persons are able to stay in such a refined sphere as Paradise as are deserving of it. It is only those who have become God-conscious persons of a high level. It is for those who have attained the divine wavelength and have imbibed divine virtues. It is for those who have become no-problem persons to the ultimate extent. God will say, “This is the day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. They shall forever dwell in gardens through which rivers flow. God is pleased with them and they with Him: that is the supreme triumph” (5:119).

Such persons are truly spiritually elevated. Such persons shall attain to a place in Paradise with honour and comfort. On the contrary, those who are far away from realization will be cast into the eternal dustbin of the universe, where they will experience the punishment of eternal regret and remorse.

PARADISE: A GIFT OF GOD

No human action is the key to Paradise. Human actions are meant only to attract the mercy of God. One who realizes God will find that God will turn to him and, by His special grace, He will decide about his entry into Paradise.

All the animals either walk or crawl to reach whatever place they want to be in. There is only one exception and that is of the fish. A fish cannot live without water, but the fish has no power to reach the water on its own. It will continue to writhe in pain, but it will never be able

to reach the river until someone picks it up and puts it into the water. This incident is symbolic of the reality of reaching Paradise. However much one may be virtuous or God fearing, one's personal deeds cannot lead one to Paradise. An individual can reach Paradise only when God in all His mercy leads him to enter Paradise. This is the reality which has been explained as follows: "Without doubt no one's actions will usher him into heaven. A companion once asked the Prophet, 'O Prophet of God, will this be true of you also?' The Prophet replied, 'Yes, it will only be if God envelops me in His forgiveness and in His mercy.'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5673)

The truth is that no human action is the key to Paradise. Human actions are meant only to attract the mercy of God. That is why, the greatest of human actions is the realization of God. One who fulfils the criterion of the realization of God will find that God will turn to him and, by His special grace, He will decide about his entry into Paradise. One can enter into Paradise only by the grace of God. Paradise is not a reward for one's actions. The truth is that human deeds over a few years can never measure up to what is required for entry into Paradise. Anyone who thinks that his actions on their own will gain him entry into Paradise will find in the Hereafter that he is just like someone who has just one rupee and wants to buy an aeroplane.

PARADISE AND MAN

Faith means man consciously discovers his Lord, the Creator through His creation. Gratefulness means acknowledgement of God's blessing. Whatever man has in this world is all God's blessing. To deserve Paradise one has to acknowledge the Giver from his heart.

Paradise and man are each other's counter-parts. They are complementary to one another. Paradise is made for man, and man is made for Paradise. The truth is that Paradise is the sought after by man and man is sought after by Paradise. Man is incomplete without Paradise and Paradise is incomplete without man. It is part of the creation plan that human beings should be trained in this world in such a way that they may be held deserving of being lodged in the eternal world of Paradise.

In chapter 4 of the Quran the following verse has this to say: "Why should God punish you, if you render thanks to Him and believe in Him? God is appreciative and aware." (4:147)

This means that it is not God's creation plan that people should indulge in evil acts and make themselves deserving of Hell. According to God's creation plan, man must make himself deserving of Paradise so that when he reaches the world of the Hereafter, he may be settled in the Garden of Paradise.

The commentator Abul Barkaat Al Nasafi, (d. in 1310) explains the above verse, thus "One who has attained God realization is the recipient of blessings, and gratitude is

another name for the acknowledgement of these blessings.”
(*Tafsir An-Nasafi*, Vol. 1, p. 409)

The truth is that both faith and gratefulness are interlinked. Faith means that man consciously discovers his Lord: he is introduced to the Creator through His creation. Gratefulness means acknowledgement of God’s blessing. Whatever man has in this world is all God’s blessing. For these blessings one has to acknowledge the Giver from his heart and without doubt this is the greatest form of worship for man.

IN THE GARDENS OF PARADISE

One who discovers this world as Paradise will start grazing in the Garden of Paradise here itself. He will derive spiritual food from every experience of the present world. Death for such a person will be like coming out of one room and entering another in his own house.

In one of the traditions which appears in different books of Hadith, Hazrat Anas reports that Prophet Muhammad once said, “‘When you pass through the gardens of Paradise, try to graze there.’ The question was asked, ‘What are the gardens of Paradise?’ To this Prophet Muhammad replied, ‘Remembering God together.’” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3510)

In this tradition, the word ‘Halaquz-zikr’, that is, recitation in groups, is used in a symbolic sense. It means that, opportunities for divine experiences are present

everywhere. Recognize these opportunities and use them. Make your living in this world like living in Paradise.

It has been stated in the Quran that the present world has been created similar to Paradise (2:25). That is, all those components that are present in a limited way in this world will be present without limits in Paradise. The present world is an imperfect version of Paradise, whereas Paradise is the perfect version of the present world.

One who discovers this paradisiacal similarity in the present world, will start experiencing Paradise in the present world itself. The present world will become like the meadows of Paradise for him and he will be able to derive spiritual food from every experience of the present world.

This is what is meant by religious awareness. One who is fully awakened in terms of his religious consciousness will feel, as if he is grazing in the gardens of paradise. For such a person the experience of death will be just coming out of one room and entering into another room in his own house.

THE AWARD OF PARADISE

In the present world if believers develop a purified personality, their award will be their selection to play an honoured role in the joyful, everlasting divine activities of Paradise.

The difference between the present world and the future world is not that of saying prayers and fasting, developing a particular identity in this world and after that getting the

reward of Paradise in the next world. In the present world believers have to develop a purified personality. This will result in their selection to play an honoured role in the joyful activities of Paradise.

Paradise is not just a luxury resort, but a vast realm of joyous activities. These activities can be described in one word: divine.

In the present world, human activities are of a limited material nature. In the Hereafter the activities will be unlimited, divine and everlasting in nature.

These activities of a noble and superior form will be performed by selected divine individuals with the help of the Angels. During these activities, the inhabitants of Paradise will make great discoveries. They will ascend to high levels of spirituality, they will have experience of a superior order. They will have for company all the noble souls of heavenly society. They will attain divine achievements in a cosmic environment, and will live on such high planes of blessing and power as are not possible in this world.

This reality has been described thus in a tradition: "Paradise is what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived of." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No: 4779)

WHAT IS PARADISE?

The first category of people of Paradise will be of those sincere people who will enjoy the comfortable life of Paradise. The second category will be of those who are overwhelmed by the perfections of the Paradise Maker. For them, the experience of Paradise will be a high-level experience of the realization of God.

A young man acquired a luxury car of the latest fashion and technology. He was very happy to see it. When he entered the car and sat on its comfortable seat he said: "I feel like a king." This is one kind of person.

On the other hand, another kind of person would observe this luxury car and then would fall to thinking what a superb engineering mind it would take to design such a splendid car and then give it practical shape.

In this example, the first person is living in himself while the second person is thinking of its engineer. The first person is happy in the car while the second person is acknowledging the perfection of the car-maker.

From this example one can understand the case of Paradise. There will be two categories of people who will gain entry into Paradise. The first category will be of those who will be happy after getting the blessings of heaven and who will enjoy the comfortable life of Paradise. They are those people who are personally sincere, but who are unable to reach a high level of realization.

The second category will consist of those who were believers at the level of high realization. When these people

are ushered into Paradise then, they will be overwhelmed by the perfections of the Paradise Maker. They will think: “How powerful is the God Who created feelings of pleasure, then created all the objects of pleasure and then made that ideal world of Paradise where both feelings of pleasure and objects of pleasure are present!” There they will lead their lives eternally without fear or sorrow in eternal Paradise. Feelings of pleasure and objects of pleasure are both God’s creations. Similarly, Paradise is also the creation of God. The experience of Paradise will, of course, be a high-level experience of the realization of God. The realization of Paradise is its primary aspect and appreciation of the comfort of Paradise is its secondary aspect.

IMPERFECT PARADISE, PERFECT PARADISE

The present world has everything which is to man’s liking, but only to be tasted, not for satiation. So far as fulfilment is concerned, it can be granted only to the true believers whom God will find eligible for inhabiting the eternal world of Paradise in the Hereafter.

All those things that the Quran promises will be available to the believers in heaven, are also available on earth. Then what is the difference between the two? The difference is that the present world is an imperfect world, while Paradise is a perfect world. It is in this sense that the blessings of the present world are likened in the Quran to the blessings of Paradise (2:25).

Apparently the present world has everything which is to man's liking. But these things are meant only to be tasted and are not meant for satiation. We get only the taste of those things in this present imperfect world. We do not get any sense of fulfilment from them here. So far as fulfilment is concerned it can be granted only to the true believers who God will find eligible for inhabiting eternal Paradise in the Hereafter.

It is very strange that in this vast universe the faculty of taste exists only in man. While it is true that the animals also have tongues, but they do not have the taste buds that are found in the human tongue to enjoy the tastes. This is true of all the other pleasurable sensations.

Man possesses this special capacity that shows that out of all the creatures, man is the only one who has been created for Paradise. Paradise is for man and man is for Paradise. Man has been singled out in being given such sensory perception so that he may partially experience the blessings of Paradise in the present imperfect world and then go on to develop a keen interest in the superior blessings of Paradise.

Man must acknowledge this special position that he enjoys and strive to realise his full potential in this world so that he can be held eligible for entry into the eternal world of Paradise in the Hereafter by God. This is the key for human success in the next world. Any shortcoming in this matter will lead to his failure.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE EARTH

In the present world, good and evil people exist side by side. In the world Hereafter, the Angels will separate the evil from the righteous and enter only the good people into the eternal world of Paradise.

The fish is a living creature. It has its own complete existence but it requires a habitat in which to survive. If the fish is taken out of water and thrown down in the desert, it will be the same fish but it will just wriggle for a short time there, and, in desert environment, unable to find the blessing of life, it will soon expire. This applies also to human beings. Man has a living existence in the complete sense but in actuality, he requires a habitat in which to live. The present world gives him just such a habitat. Man can survive and develop only on the planet earth. If he is taken off of the planet earth and placed on some other celestial body like the moon, he will be just like the fish out of water. He will make threshing movements with his arms and legs, like the fish wriggling in the desert, but not finding his habitat, he will soon breathe his last.

The present world's features are well known to man, and, in the light of his knowledge he can fully understand what heaven and hell are like. If we study the matter, we find that on today's earth, all the things are present which will be there for man in Paradise. For instance, the scenes of nature here are so beautiful that when man looks at them he can understand that he is observing Paradise from a distance. But in the present world, good and evil people exist side

by side. The evil people fill the world with corruption. Had it been possible to expel the evil people from the earth leaving only good people here, the earth would have become a model of Paradise. A Hebrew Prophet expressed this as follows: “So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (*Matthew*, 13:49-50).

This is similarly expressed in the Psalms of David: “The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever.” (*Psalms*, 37:29)

A CONTRADICTION IN NATURE

God created the present world to give man an opportunity to perform good deeds and develop a paradisiacal personality. In the Paradise of the Hereafter, God will only settle those people who He finds deserving, by virtue of their good deeds in this world.

In the entire universe there is only one planet which is favourable to human life. This is our planet earth. An American scientific institution revealed after substantial research that with the speed with which man is using up the resources of the earth, the planet will become uninhabitable by the year 2030. Subsequently, the present life support system on earth will become so disturbed that here man, as well as other living species, will face extinction. This matter has one very serious ideological aspect. Man according to his

nature has unlimited desire, but, in this universe, the only world or planet on which man has been settled, possesses limited resources for continued life. Now this contradiction between the two, that is man with his unlimited desires and the limited means for life to continue, has become a well-established fact.

The Creator who created man is also the Creator of the earth. Then why is there such a great contradiction between the two: that is man and the earth. This contradiction is a clear argument in favour of the concept of Paradise. This difference can be explained only in terms of the Creator having divided human life into two phases—the phase prior to death, for which the Creator has made this present world, and the phase after death, for which the Creator has made another world, which is the world of the Hereafter.

This matter of contradiction can be explained by the creation plan of the Creator. The creation plan of the Creator is that in the present non-ideal or imperfect world, every man and woman should be given an opportunity to live out their lives, but in the perfect, or ideal world of the Hereafter, only those people will be accommodated who prove themselves to be deserving of being settled there by the virtue of their deeds. This present world is a selection ground. The final judgment will be done according to the records of the words and deeds of the people. Wise is he who can prove himself worthy of being ushered into the ideal world of the Hereafter. The unwise individual is one who is so oblivious to present opportunities that he is finally left with nothing but sorrow and regret.

THE GREATER EMPIRE

Often people build external empires in the material world. A realized soul develops a spiritual empire within himself which will eternally accompany him. If the former is a source of temporary happiness, the latter will become a source of eternal happiness for him.

Once a man became extremely appreciative of the extraordinary qualities that his son had developed in himself. Seeing his extraordinary qualities he exclaimed: “My son will build an empire!”

The father’s intuition proved right. When the son grew up, he set up a business, which, thanks to his God-given capabilities, made extraordinary progress. He even went on to create a business empire. But this empire did not prove to be an eternal companion. Finally, after a limited period of time, the son died and left this world in the same manner as all other people die and leave the world.

This is the case of the material empire. A material empire gives support only for a limited period of time. But there is another empire which can always remain with one. This is the empire of the intellect, in other words, intellectual development, spiritual discovery, personality development, and the turning of the potential into the actual. One who develops intellectually in this way has been called a divine person in religious terms.

The divine or heavenly person is one who discovers God and who by using his cerebral ability, is able to understand the

creation plan of God and tries to mould his life accordingly. He thus develops a divine character. Such a person will be lodged in eternal Paradise after his death. If others build external empires in the material world, a realized soul develops an empire within himself. A material empire gives support to a man only for a limited period of time, but a spiritual empire is one which will eternally accompany him. If the former is a source of temporary happiness, the latter is a source of eternal happiness.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

God will hand over the administration of the world Hereafter to the Angels. All those human connections or relationships will not be available to him which are now available at every level here. All work will be performed by the Angels as commanded by God.

The present world is given into the charge of human beings. All activities are performed here by man. The present world is based on man's connections. Directly or indirectly, all men and women are related to each other. Here one receives help from others. This connectivity is established at three levels: at the level of the family, the society, and the nation.

But the Hereafter will be totally different from the present world. In the Hereafter, things will be as they are in the present world, but the world Hereafter will be in charge of

Angels. Those who are selected for Paradise will receive their reward in the Hereafter, and unbelievers will be punished. But in both conditions, the administrative arrangement will be totally handed over to the Angels.

In the present world, man finds sympathetic people everywhere. Such individuals who help each other in their work are found at every level. This situation keeps man in a state of unawareness. He thinks, consciously or unconsciously that, just as his work is going on with the help of relatives or those unrelated to him in the present world, all his future works will be done in the same manner, in the Hereafter. This is a totally wrong perception. In the Hereafter, all those human connections or relationships will not be available to him which are now available at every level here. In the Hereafter all work will be performed by the Angels. These Angels will act only as commanded by God.

This situation is very serious. Taking the situation in the present world for granted, man came to believe that in the Hereafter also he would find such people as would come to his assistance. But the truth is that there will be no one who will do so. Everyone will have deserted him. He will find himself all alone. Except for the Angels, there will be no one to come to his rescue.

Man ought to think seriously about this in this world itself when he has a chance to correct himself.

PARADISE: MATERIAL OR SPIRITUAL?

Eternal Paradise will be replete with joyful, sublime, divine intellectual and material activities. The inhabitants of Paradise, the Lord's honoured guests, will have the opportunity to avail of their unlimited capabilities in these joyful activities.

Once, there was an argument between Maulana Sayyad Sulaiman Nadvi (d. 1953) and Dr. Mohd. Iqbal (d. 1938). The issue was whether Paradise was material or spiritual. Sayyad Sulaiman Nadvi held that Paradise was material while Dr. Mohd. Iqbal was of the opinion that Paradise was spiritual. When they could not come to an agreement with each other on the issue, Maulana Sayyad Sulaiman Nadvi put an end to this argument by saying: "All right, you will go to your spiritual Paradise and we shall go to our material Paradise."

The truth is that, Paradise is both spiritual and material. Paradise is not merely a luxury resort. In the words of the Quran, people of Paradise will say on receiving the blessings there: "This is what we were provided with before,' because they were given similar things." (2:25) This means that, the world of Paradise also will have all the activities that take place in the present world. However, these activities will be in the form of joyful occupations (36:55). These will include those activities which may be called intellectual activities.

It is a fact that there will also be material blessing and comforts in Paradise. These blessings will be given to the

inhabitants of Paradise as hospitality, such as is mentioned in one of the verses of the Quran: “As a rich hospitality from One who is ever forgiving and most merciful.” (41:32)

The inhabitants of Paradise will be busy in joyful, sublime, divine activities. This will continue for all eternity. In this way, the inhabitants of Paradise will have the opportunity to avail of their unlimited capabilities. They will not have to earn a living to acquire material things. Their position will be that of guests and they will be provided with all types of hospitality by the Lord Himself.

THE CONCEPT OF PARADISE

The items of comfort and luxury in Paradise will be only for the reception of the people of Paradise. The dwellers of Paradise would bring about a superior form of divine civilization full of enjoyable, intellectual activities which will continue for all eternity.

Tawfiq al-Hakim (d.1987) was a well-known Egyptian writer. According to his own statement, he suffered from an intellectual contradiction. He writes: “Outwardly, I lead the same kind of life as others do in such cities. But inwardly I cherish certain beliefs and noble deals. The cause of my sadness lies in this contradiction between my outward and inward life. That is to say that my outward and inward states are at variance with one another. This is the reason for my anguish.” He further writes: “If I did not

find an opportunity in Paradise to further my knowledge, it would become almost impossible for me to live comfortably in Paradise.” Paradise is just a luxury resort in the minds of such people as that of the Egyptian writer. It is but natural that intelligent people will not find any appeal in such a concept of Paradise. It is because, besides physical comforts, man is also in need of intellectual satisfaction. Scholars and preachers depict Paradise as a luxury house with all kinds of physical comforts devoid of intellectual activities.

Naturally an educated man finds no appeal in this concept of Paradise which does not meet his real requirement. The truth is that the items of comfort and luxury in Paradise would be only for entertainment or reception of the people of Paradise. The actual activity of the dwellers of Paradise would be to bring about a superior form of divine civilization full of enjoyable intellectual activities which will continue for all eternity.

THE FEELING OF ETERNITY

Man's awareness of his eternity and imminent death are a source for spiritual purification and personality development for him. Thinking of eternity makes him very grateful to God, while the concept of accountability in the Hereafter becomes a source of reform for him.

The Creator has created man with a sense of eternity. That is why the human genetic code gives no forewarning of death. Man lives with the feeling, at an unconscious level,

that he has an eternal existence. He lives as if death is not meant for him.

The reality is that every man born into this world has to die. But, within himself man feels that creation-wise he has an eternal existence.

These twin feelings place everyone in a very delicate situation, that is, living with the awareness of death vis-a-vis an awareness of the reality of eternity. Everyone regards himself as an eternal being, yet lives in the conviction that he has to die one day, for he is not destined to live in the present world for all time to come.

This apprehension of eternity is in one sense a great blessing for man, for it gives him the conviction that unlike the other entities of the universe, he has an eternal existence. But along with this, what he must do is always remember death and the accountability for his actions in the Hereafter. Living with this dual focus is undoubtedly the most difficult test for man. Only that person will gain entry into Paradise who passes this test.

If man is keenly aware, these twin feelings will become a great stimulus to his personality development. When he thinks of his eternal existence, he will be very grateful to God, his Creator, who has granted him that great blessing of eternity. On the one hand, the matter of death and accountability in the Hereafter will continue to become a source of reform for his personality. On the other hand, he will be a thankful servant of God and will live as a God-fearing person. There is no greater source for spiritual purification and the building of the personality.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE

If one develops true belief in death and the Afterlife, it will become the source of developing Hereafter-oriented thinking in man. This is the ticket to Paradise.

There are countless creations in the vastness of space—stars and the planets, the sun and the moon, and on the earth there are the rivers and the mountains, the trees, and the animals, etc... None of these are concerned with death and the Hereafter. Human beings have always been studying the universe. In this modern age, the scope of study and observation has been greatly increased with the help of the telescopes and the microscopes.

In this vast universe human beings stand out as an exception in that they die at a particular time and after that, they have to start a new life in the Hereafter which at the moment is unobservable. This unobservable world will become observable only when human beings enter the next stage of life.

This exceptional case of death and the life Hereafter is undoubtedly the greatest trial of man. On the basis of the common human principles of observation and experience, no man can understand the issues of death and the Afterlife. To understand the concept of Afterlife, it is necessary for man to develop the capacity for detached thinking. He has to elevate his thinking above the general principle of observation. This is possible only for those who have such abilities to understand the issues of death and the Afterlife and plan accordingly.

Man remains unaware of the exceptional aspects of death and the Afterlife for he does not make it a dominant part of his thinking. Either he does not believe in death and the Afterlife or if he does believe in them, he does so only at the traditional or ritual level, which is of no avail. The true belief in death and the Afterlife is that which becomes the source of developing Hereafter-oriented thinking in man.

THIS WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

A materialist is concerned only about the life before death, whereas a Hereafter-oriented person makes preparations in this world for the life after death.

This world is all about life today, while the Hereafter is all about life tomorrow. Human existence in this world necessities being concerned about the life before death, whereas in the Hereafter the major concern is about having made preparations in this world for the life after death.

For a human being, there are two kinds of life: The world-oriented life and the Akhirat-oriented or Hereafter-Oriented life. The demands of the world-oriented life are that man should make worldly success his objective. This means that he is interested only in the things of this world. He understands both success and failure to be worldly matters. His thoughts are focused only on this world and his heart is entrenched in the affairs of the world. Such a person is a materialist.

A materialist is one who can feel love only for the world. He is happy to be in possession of the things of the world and when the things of the world are not available, he is disappointed. Finding a place of honour in this world gives him a sense of pride, while experiencing dishonour here leads to a sense of negativity.

The Hereafter-oriented life is quite different from this. The Hereafter-oriented person is one for whom the Hereafter becomes his sole concern, who is always thinking about the Hereafter, who is concerned about the eventualities after death, who remembers the accountability that will be required of him on the day of judgement. The Hereafter-oriented man is one whose mind is dominated by his apprehension of the Hereafter and who is so overwhelmed by them that everything in this world seems worthless. He is one who is avid for Paradise in the Hereafter, and is highly disturbed when he thinks of the future hell. He is one who sees Doomsday before it has actually come and who can vividly imagine himself standing before God on that fateful day.

DEPRIVED OF MEETING WITH EACH OTHER

God on the one hand, created man with unlimited desires, and on the other hand, placed all the objects for the fulfilment of his desires in eternal Paradise. To fulfil one's desires one has to prove oneself eligible for entry into Paradise.

The river has two banks which can never come together. This parallels the lives of human beings in the sense that God on the one hand, created man with unlimited desires, and on the other hand, gave him all the objects for the fulfilment of his desires, yet no one is able to fulfil his desires in this world. It is as though, on the one hand, there is the world of pleasure, on which it is written 'no takers', while, on the other hand, there is the human world which is saying sotto voce: "Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink." (Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner)

This contradictory situation has gone on for thousands of years. Everyone, consciously or unconsciously, wants to know the answer to this conundrum, but no one has been able to find the answer.

One such expression of it is that every popular novel is a tragedy. The novel is an expression of human experience. And in the present situation it is only tragedy that addresses the human mind, not comedy.

This situation confirms what religious faiths say about the Hereafter. The explanation of this situation is that, "the two shores" which cannot be brought together in the pre-death

period, will be united in the post-death period. And then the individual will be able to have the sense of fulfilment which he could not get in this world. This fraught situation will end in the Hereafter. At that time it will be possible for man to write the story of his life not as a tragedy but as a comedy in the real sense of the expression.

THE SEARCH FOR PARADISE

According to the creation plan of God, the world of Paradise in the Hereafter is the place where all of man's desires will be fulfilled. The present world is a place to prepare for the desired Paradise.

Everyone has the concept of a beautiful world—a world that is perfect, that is standard, and in which all his desires can be fulfilled. This mental image is the greatest spur to action in all human beings. Every man and woman is engaged in achieving perfection. They expend their strength and energy in the attempt to attain it, but in the end it transpires that no one feels that he has been able to find the world he desires. Every man starts his life with high morale, but every man dies with the feeling that, despite all his efforts, he has failed to find what he wants.

This, without exception, is the history of the whole of mankind. This is the biggest question facing humanity. Why is it that people start their lives with expectations and hopes, but die with feelings of deprivation?

The answer is that the beautiful world so firmly fixed in man's imagination, is, according to the creation plan of

God, the world of Paradise. And that Paradise will be found in the stage of life after death, not in the stage of life before death. Human beings want to have their desired heaven in the present world, but the attainment of Paradise is not possible in the present world.

In this case, the example of man vis-a-vis Paradise is like the fish and water. The comfort zone of the fish is in the water, not out of the water. In the same way, human beings will be able to find comfort only in Paradise. Out of the Paradise, they will not find comfort or fulfilment.

The search for Paradise is actually another name for the search for the future. And the future can be found only in the time to come. No one can find it in the present world. One who discovers the truth will understand that the present world is a place to prepare for the desired Paradise, and is not the place to find his own desired Paradise.

NOISE, NOISE, AND NOISE

Paradise is an ideal world where there will be no noise. Noise deprives man of the company of the Angels. Those who adopt the noise culture will never savour Paradise.

Noise is a problem. Noise is an evil. Noise is pollution. In the present day, noise is one of the things that are regarded as polluters. Noise produces destruction in the same way as a bomb explosion causes destruction. The difference between noise explosion and bomb explosion is only apparent. There is no real difference between the two.

In the present age, the noise problem has greatly increased with loudspeakers, public gatherings, slogan shouting, transport, car and truck horns, and the mobile phones, etc. In earlier times, the donkey was considered as the creature making the worst noise. But in the present age, it is man who has become the worst offender. The noise he makes is a thousand times worse than this.

Noise is not an innocuous thing, for it drives human beings away from the company of the Angels. And one who is deprived of the company of the Angels, easily becomes the playmate of devils. Angels are the invisible power that protect all human beings from evil. The company of the Angels develops a divine personality in the individual. One who is deprived of the company of Angels will necessarily become a hellish personality. Such people will never be able to savour the fragrance of Paradise.

Paradise is an ideal world where there will be no noise. Noise and Paradise cannot exist together. This being so, those who adopt the noise culture are making themselves unworthy of being candidates for Paradise. There is only one fate for such people and that is being cast into the pandemonium of hell, where they will eternally suffer its din and commotion with no hope of ever escaping from it.

THE CAUSE OF DISSATISFACTION

Paradise is the home of man. According to the creation plan of God man has been inhabited in the present earth on a temporary basis for a trial. If he does good deeds, he will make himself eligible to receive the blessings of Paradise in the eternal world of the Hereafter.

In the present world, every man and woman lives to a great extent with a sense of dissatisfaction. It is true of almost everyone that he lives with the feeling of losing and not with the feeling of gain. This condition is so common that there are very few exceptions to it.

What is the reason for this? It is actually caused by what could be called homesickness. As is well known, when man was created, he was settled in Paradise. It was, as if Paradise was the home of man. But later on, man was cast out of Paradise and sent to the planet earth. Historically speaking all those who are here on the existing planet earth are no better than refugees. This is the real cause of people's dissatisfaction. Unconsciously, every human being has become homesick. No human planning has successfully removed this feeling. The solution to this issue is just one and that is, to make man aware of the creation plan of God. People should be told that they are on the present earth on a temporary basis and if they do good deeds, they will make themselves eligible to receive the blessings of Paradise.

When anyone travels to his home town, he has to face different kind of difficulties on the journey, but he has the satisfaction of knowing that after a few hours, he will

eventually reach his destination. If people were to become aware of the creation plan of God, they too would come to look upon themselves as travellers with just a few hours to go to complete the journey. Realizing the success the future can bring will make their present problems unimportant for them. This is the only way to relieve people of their feelings of dissatisfaction and tension. In this situation, there can be no more effective plan.

WHO DESERVES PARADISE?

Paradise is a colony of truthful people. In the present world those people who proved themselves to be totally truthful human beings of sterling character will be held deserving of receiving an eternal seat in the neighbourhood of Almighty God (54:55).

Paradise is an ineffable world of happiness and comfort. Paradise will be given to those who pay the price of unremittingly living a life of sterling character in this world, thus proving their merit. Paradise is another name for receiving an eternal seat in the neighbourhood of Almighty God (54:55). This kind of superlative abode can be granted only to those fortunate people who have the courage to pay the necessarily high price for it.

To find a seat of indescribable wonder in Paradise, man has to do deeds of an extraordinary nature. That is why it is necessary for man to be able to turn the invisible into the visible. Living in time and space, he has to be able to develop such a vision as can reach beyond time and space. In the dark

jungle of words, he must find the light of meaning; living in the ocean of desires, he has to save himself from getting immersed therein. Being a mountain of egoism he must rid of his ego. Living in the midst of the maleficent, he must make himself the well-wisher of others. Being a weak person, he has to play the role of a powerful person; possessing total freedom, he must surrender himself voluntarily to God Almighty. He must be able to hear unspoken words, and acknowledge unseen realities. He must insist on speaking the truth in a world full of falsehood. In an environment of dishonesty, he must maintain his own honesty.

The Angels of God are active day in and day out preparing the list of those who will be held deserving of entry into Paradise to live in the neighbourhood of God in the Hereafter. Those who have attained high levels of realization are able to concentrate their attention on the supreme God alone, the great desire for Whom has rendered every attractive thing of this world unattractive. Their sense of the glory of God obliterates all emotions or feelings of their own greatness and pride. Because of the fear of God's chastisement, they cannot enjoy any pleasurable thing even in the midst of this world of pleasure.

These are the people for whom material or worldly progress or worldly deprivation seems equally meaningless. These are the people who, instead of holding themselves to be in the right, prefer to say rather, 'I was wrong.' Those people will be inhabited in Paradise who bear godly qualities. Those who make themselves the bearer of godly qualities in this present world, are the people who will be held deserving

of entry in Paradise. Paradise cannot be given to anyone by mysterious reasons, it will rather be given by known reasons. Man has to make himself deserving of them in the present world itself.

Paradise is a colony of truthful people. In the present world those people who proved themselves to be totally truthful human beings are being recruited. They will be held deserving of being inhabited in the eternal world of Paradise.

DIVINE CIVILIZATION

The present world is only an introduction to Paradise, built by the scientific community, while the Divine Paradise will be built by the realized community with the help of Angels.

The Quran tells us: He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them. (47:6)

What is the source of this introduction? This is in actual fact the present-day human civilization. Prior to the emergence of this civilization man lived on the same planet earth, but there existed no paradise-like attraction in the human life of those times. Even the palaces of the kings were just a collection of stones. Our civilization for the first time gave comfort and beauty to human life on this earth. In this way life in this world became a distant introduction to paradise. But due to certain limitations this earth, which

was an introduction to Paradise, served only as a partial introduction.

How did the present 'Paradise' come into being? It was in fact the scientific community which made the building of 'Paradise' possible through their discoveries. But this present world was only an introduction to Paradise. In the next phase of life, the real Paradise will be built. If the present world is human Paradise, the world hereafter will be the divine Paradise. The human Paradise was built by the scientific community, while the divine Paradise will be built by the realized community with the support of Angels.

The present world is a training ground for realized souls. Every man born into this world necessarily undergoes this training course. Those who are not able to achieve success in this training course will be rejected in the next phase of life, while those who succeed will be selected to form the realized community, who will build the perfect Paradise in the next phase of life. There will be all sorts of activities in the world of Paradise, such as we find in this world. But with the difference that in this present world, human activities are marred by all kinds of limitations, while in Paradise, all these activities will be performed in boundless divine environment.

THE LIFE OF PARADISE

Boredom arises because of the limit of our ability to enjoy things, rather than pleasure itself being limited. Paradise is the place where pleasure will be received by all to a higher degree of perfection, and all limitations to the capability to enjoy such pleasure will be removed.

Once, in conversation with a Japanese person whom I happened to meet on a visit to Japan, in December, 1990, I remarked that, the present world is temporary abode whereas the Hereafter is an eternal abode, and that man should build his "Paradise" in the eternal world. But this person's response surprised me. He said: "People get bored after sometime with comforts and pleasure. In the modern world the problem of boredom has become widespread. That being so, what is the use of eternal Paradise?"

People who do not believe in the Hereafter say such things repeatedly. But this is just a fallacy. The fact is that, we are beset by boredom when we exhaust our ability to enjoy things, rather than the desire to enjoy pleasure comes to an end.

People make the assumption that when we want to savour some pleasure, after some time, we feel we have had enough. And then there is no pleasure left to us. But, in itself, this assumption is wrong. The fact is that, man is by nature insatiable. What man loves he wants to enjoy forever.

But in the present world, human beings suffer from all kinds of limitations. Therefore, whenever a man wants to enjoy something he loves, after a while, his limitations

become a barrier to enjoyment. Despite having desires, he loses the capacity to enjoy things. For example, when we eat delicious food, its taste does not end for us, but our stomach gets filled so we have to stop eating. Similarly, often wealthy people shun foods they love to eat in spite of having the desire for them, because they fear that they will become obese and victims of diseases.

This is the case with all other pleasures. The truth is that boredom arises because of the limit of our ability to enjoy things and not because of pleasure itself being limited.

Paradise is such a place where, not only will every pleasure be given to its denizens but such pleasure will be of a higher degree of perfection and all limitations to the capability to enjoy such pleasure will be removed.

In Paradise this contradiction will end, that is, of man wanting to enjoy things but being unable to do so because his limitations stand in the way of enjoying the things of his choice. As such Paradise will become a place of eternal happiness for human beings.

In this world, the boredom that people experience, is actually the result of this contradiction, that man is born as an idealist, wanting to have things in their ideal form, whereas in this world things are very far from being ideal. This is the real reason for boredom.

A man will run after something he loves. Before he gets it, he lives with the false feeling that, this is exactly the ideal thing which he had been seeking all along. But after acquiring it, he comes to realize that it falls far short of the

required ideal. That is why, in this world man has pleasure of seeking, but he does not have the pleasure of finding.

In the present world, there is pleasure for man but it is deceptive, whereas in the Hereafter the pleasure will be ideal. Everything in the Hereafter will be ideal. For this reason, it will become the source of real and unlimited pleasure for man. What one wants, one will get in Paradise and because it will reach the highest degree of perfection, there will be no question of boredom.

A TICKET TO PARADISE

The price of Paradise in the Hereafter is that the person acknowledges God's greatness, lives with modesty and develops a purified personality (20:76) in this world itself.

On one of my journeys to the western world, I met a Muslim of about 50 years of age, who said, "I want a ticket to Paradise. Tell me what this ticket to Paradise is?"

The fact is that there is no such window where a ticket to Paradise may be bought. It is not a question of a ticket to paradise. It is a question of having a divine personality. Ineffable Paradise will be given to those who have developed this divine personality. Entry into Paradise will not be on the basis of a ticket. The price of Paradise is man's own existence. Only by paying the price of his existence can one gain entry into the world of Paradise.

The condition for admission to Paradise is that the person should reach there with a purified personality (20:76). This means that he is such a person in whom the purified spirit dwells, whose heart and mind are free of impurities and who has grown a garden of divinity within himself. The present world is such that, on the one side there is mud and on the other side there is clean water. A man may pollute himself in mud or bathe in clean water and purify himself. Those who pollute themselves will be thrown into hell in the Hereafter, while those who purify themselves will dwell in the eternal bliss of Paradise.

Acknowledgement of God's greatness is to purify our personality and to do the reverse is to pollute our personality. Similarly an opportunity comes in which a man gives evidence of high morality while the other person gives proof of a base moral character. An opportunity arises for a man to give another person his due, while another person denies the right of others. An opportunity arises for a man to follow the path of modesty, while another person follows the path of arrogance or rebellion. In each case, the first person is the one who purifies his personality and such persons will definitely find a place in the refined world of Paradise. On the contrary, the second person is the one who pollutes his personality and, as such, Hell will be the abode of such people.

THE WISH LIST

The believer is one who has Paradise on his wish list, which is the world of eternal and ideal blessings where he will see his Lord, where he will meet noble, honest people, where he will live his life in the shadow of the divine blessings of the Almighty.

I read the story of Cleary Simpson, a highly educated woman. After completing her education she continued to do different types of temporary jobs until finally she got a job to her liking in America's Time Magazine. At the time I wrote this article, she was the Advertising Sales Director of Time Magazine's New York office.

Simpson's smiling photo is inset in an article that appeared on 5 August, 1991, p. 4. She was extremely happy to have found this post. In the caption below her picture, her happiness was expressed in these words: "Working for Time was always on my wish list."

Everyone regards something as the greatest thing one can look forward to. He lives desiring it, he sees it in his dreams and he lives his life waiting to find his cherished thing. It is marked as a top priority on his wish list. There is no one in the present world, who is free from such a wish list, which becomes an obsession for him.

The believer is one, who has Paradise on his wish list, which is the world of eternal and ideal blessings where he will see his Lord, where he will meet noble, honest people, where he will live his life in the shadow of the divine blessings of the Almighty, in a world that will be free from vain or sinful talk (56:25) and free from noise and tension. It will be an

environment which will resound with words of praises for God, where there will be peace, tranquillity and security (56:26) and from which fear and sorrow will have been eliminated (35:34). This will be a world where there will be complete freedom (76:20), and these pleasures will be limitless.

THE FIFTEEN BILLION YEAR PLANNING

This process of realization, intellectual development, is an eternal process that initially starts in this world, and it will continue in its ultimate form in the Hereafter. It is this realization that qualifies man for entry into Paradise in the 'seat of truth with an all-powerful sovereign.' (54:55)

According to scientific accounts, about 15 billion years ago, at God's behest, a large cosmic ball came into existence in space. In it all the particles were present which are a part of our Universe today. At God's instigation, an explosion took place in this enormous ball. This explosion in scientific terms is called the Big Bang.

After the explosion of the cosmic ball, all its particles were scattered throughout the vastness of space. After that, according to God's creation plan, the particles started gathering in different forms. The gathering of these particles created unlimited stars, the Milky Way, dark matter and then the solar system. In this way, gradually the starry firmament came into existence, which we call the Universe.

Thereafter, God, selected this planet earth to execute His

special plan. After action and reaction over a long period, the planet earth cooled down. With God's permission, water was formed on it. Then the rain, the rivers and the oceans came into existence. About three-fourths of the planet earth was covered with water. Thereafter, according to the creation plan of God, vegetation appeared on the planet earth and the dry land was covered with greenery and forests.

After this, according to the special creation plan of God for the planet earth, the next stage came into existence. That is, the world of animals came into existence. The earth was populated with different kinds of animals, fishes, birds, cattle and other types of living objects.

According to the creation plan of God, the next step was for human beings to be born and put on the planet earth. The first man Adam and his wife Eve were then born and from this first couple the entire human race was born. The population of human beings gradually spread out all over the world.

After this, another part of God's creation plan came into existence. It was the birth of the prophets. God sent His messengers among all the human beings who were settled on the earth. All these prophets were humans. This was because the Creator wanted them to tell human beings in a language understandable to them what the creation plan of God for them was.

The arrival of the prophets continued over long periods of time. The first man, Adam himself, was also a Prophet. After that, the Prophets came to every race. For example, Prophet Noah, Prophet Abraham, Prophet Moses,

Prophet Jesus and finally Prophet Muhammad. Through the prophets, God informed the people of every race that the present world has been created to serve as a selection ground and that the real and eternal place for human resettlement was in Paradise. Paradise is eternal and also ideal in every respect. But entry into Paradise will be only on a selective basis.

In the present world, the system of invisible recordings of God has been established on a large scale. According to this system, a constant record of the deeds of every man and woman is being prepared. This record will be presented on the Day of Judgement. According to the records of the deeds of the people, those will be selected who are held deserving of being lodged in the ideal world of Paradise. God wanted to give this special reward to selected people who may live with every kind of pleasure in the joyous environment of the perfect world of Paradise so that they may experience total fulfilment of their desires. Those who are found undeserving of Paradise will eternally suffer the punishment of deprivation and remorse in the universal dustbin.

God did not want to create this world by a miracle, but rather through cause and effect, in the full sense. For example, Moses was the Prophet of God. He cast a piece of wood on the ground and by God's decree, it became a living snake. Had God wanted, He could have created a whole universe in this miraculous way. But had He done so, there would have been no evolution of human creativity. Neither science, nor civilization would have come into existence. Therefore, God created the universe on a long-term basis, so that men might use their thinking skills and

reach the highest level of intellectual development. It was a plan that took a long time to unfold. In fact it took about 15 billion years to reach completion.

It has been repeatedly said in the Quran that the sky and the land and all the things in them are made for human beings. Looked at in this way, the 15 billion year-creation plan of the universe was solely for man's benefit. What is now required of man? That is just one thing: the realization of God. What man has to do is reflect upon God's creation and achieve this realization of God in this world itself. It is this realization which is the price of eternal Paradise. This process of realization is not limited in nature. It starts in the present world and continues right into the world Hereafter. It is an eternal process, the starting of which is known but whose end remains unknown. The process of the attainment of realization starts initially in this world, and it will continue in its ultimate form in the Hereafter. This realization is the real distinction of human beings. It is this realization, which qualifies man for entry into Paradise in the 'seat of truth with an all-powerful sovereign.' (54:55)

The present global warming and coronavirus pandemic is a signal from God alerting man to the fact that the first stage of creation is about to come to an end, that is, the stage of selection of man. That now the time has come for the Lord of the Universe to reveal Himself. With perfect justice, He will decide people's eternal future. Now the ultimate moment has come for man to wake up from his slumber and, by making due preparations, make himself worthy of finding a place in eternal Paradise, in the world of the Hereafter.

CHAPTER THREE

PARADISE FOR
PURIFIED SOULS
RE-ENGINEERING OF THE MINDS
ON POSITIVE LINES

PURIFICATION OF THE SELF

Purification (*tazkiyah*) covers a number of Islamic imperatives: purifying oneself of the temptations of the self and Satan and refraining from negative reaction when faced with unpleasant experiences.

The Quran mentions four responsibilities of the Prophet, one being the purification of the self. (2:129). The fact that this is set forth in the Scriptures underlines the importance of purification. It is, therefore, essential for believers to give first priority to the purification of the self in their lives. Similarly, it is necessary for the *dayee* and the reformer to attach great importance to the process of purification.

Purification (*tazkiyah*) covers a number of Islamic imperatives: purifying oneself of the temptations of the self and Satan; refraining from negative reaction when faced with unpleasant experiences occasioned by others; and remaining resistant to such influences as cause man to deviate from the straight path, etc.

The truth is that man has been created by God with an upright nature. But in the life of this world, it repeatedly happens that external factors compromise this positive aspect of his character. Man ought to become aware that this is an ever-present possibility and should make unremitting efforts to ward off undesirable influences.

The task of the Prophet was always to make people aware of this principle of purification and lead them towards

attaining it. In this context he should be looked upon by mankind as a unique model of self-purification.

With his contemporaries, the Prophet's approach to this task of *tazkiyah* was direct. For later generations the performance of the Prophet's task has to be continued indirectly. On the subject of self-purification, complete records of the Prophet's sayings and deeds, and the sayings and deeds of the Prophet's companions, have been preserved in the books of *Sirah* (the Prophet's biography) and later generations should feel themselves duty-bound to seek guidance from these records. Those who can read can do so directly, while those who cannot read themselves may seek the assistance of religious scholars, so that they can adopt that course in their lives.

THE REALITY OF TAZKIYAH

Tazkiyah can be attained, not through meditation but through contemplation. This entails pondering over or thinking about oneself and the universe, and receiving intellectual sustenance for God realization.

As stated in the second chapter of the Quran, one of the duties of the Prophet vis-à-vis his contemporaries was "to teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them." (2:129). It is necessary for every believer to purify himself. Without purification, that calibre of personality, which is called in the Quran a God-oriented personality

(3:79), cannot be developed. The truth is that purification alone can lead man to heaven. (20:76)

Tazkiyah literally means growth, one example of which can be seen in the tree. A tree is the result of the growth of a seed. When a seed finds a favourable environment, it starts growing until it becomes a green, verdant tree. The same is true of the purification of man. In this sense *tazkiyah* also covers intellectual development.

God has created man with great potential, and this potential of the human personality is actualized by *tazkiyah*. In this sense it would be right to call it the building of the human personality on a divine foundation.

When a person accepts faith he has, in actual fact, started the journey of *tazkiyah*. Gradually, he becomes a purified soul, or an intellectually and spiritually developed personality. This is the man who will gain entrance into the eternal Paradise of the Hereafter.

There is nothing mysterious about *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can be attained, not through meditation but through contemplation. This entails pondering over or thinking about oneself and the universe, and receiving intellectual sustenance for God realization. This is the process which results in a purified personality. There is nothing abstract about *tazkiyah*. It is a known reality. *Tazkiyah* is the result of a struggle on the part of the individual. It is not at all related to any mysterious inspiration from some supposedly saintly person.

THE IMPORTANCE OF *TAZKIYAH*

Purification means making oneself a purified soul, such as will be worthy of inhabiting the refined environment of Paradise.

A tradition recorded in the books of Hadith is set forth here in the words of Sahih Muslim: “On the Day of Judgement, when all the people of Paradise have entered Paradise and all the people of Hell have entered Hell, Death will be brought there in the form of a white sheep. It will be made to stand between Heaven and Hell. Then it will be said, ‘O People of Paradise, do you recognize it?’ They will look up to it and say, ‘Yes, it is Death.’ After this the people of Hell will be asked, ‘O People of Hell, do you recognize this?’ They will look up and say, ‘Yes, it is Death.’ After this the order will be given for Death to be slaughtered. Then, it will be said, ‘O People of Paradise, now you have eternity and no death, and O People of Hell, now you have eternity and no death.’” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2849)

What is purification? Purification means making oneself a purified soul, such as will be worthy of inhabiting the refined environment of Paradise. On Doomsday, the purified individuals will be ushered into Paradise and the unpurified individuals will be cast into Hell. After this it will be announced that the law of death has been ended. Now both parties have to abide eternally in their places. This will be a unique moment. The people of Paradise will be in a state of bliss for having found the eternal world of happiness. On the contrary, the people of Hell will experience

indescribable remorse, – an eternal torment over what has become their lot because of not having purified their souls. This perception is undoubtedly a powerful incentive to undertaking the process of purification. At that time, they would have lost their last hope: that death would come and save them from the torment of hell.

HEART-BASED *TAZKIYAH*, MIND-BASED *TAZKIYAH*

Tazkiyah is achieved at the level of the mind, rather than through any strivings at the level of the heart. Modern science has provided the scientific foundation by which Islamic *tazkiyah*, based on the mind, can once again be revived.

Study the last part of the third chapter of the Quran which exhorts people of understanding to reflect on the signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth so that they should realize their Lord. Through these signs, you will learn of the Creation Plan of God, you will discover heaven and hell, and you will comprehend the importance of the Prophet, —in short, all those things which are related directly or indirectly to *tazkiyah*. In all these verses of the Quran the realization of God is linked with pondering over the universe. In other words, *tazkiyah*, according to the Quran, is based on the mind and not on the heart. In this connection the word ‘heart’ is used in the Quran and the Hadith in the literary sense and not in the physical

sense. In later times, Muslims came under the influence of the Sufis, who believed in the concept of *tazkiyah* based on the heart.

According to this concept, it came to be accepted that the human heart was the treasure house of all divine realities. It was believed that one could reach this treasure house through meditation and then one would attain *tazkiyah*. But this concept of heart-based *tazkiyah* was not derived from the Quran. It was in fact derived from history. This concept of heart-based spirituality had its origin in ancient times and, as a matter of tradition, people introduced it into Islam.

Modern science has provided the scientific foundation by which Islamic *tazkiyah*, based on the mind, can once again be revived. Modern research has proved that the human heart functions only as a pump for the circulation of the blood. The heart has no capacity to think. The mind alone possesses the capacity to think. All human actions come into existence through thinking and the way to attain *tazkiyah* is no exception. *Tazkiyah* is achieved at the level of the mind, rather than through any strivings at the level of the heart. For the attainment of *tazkiyah*, paying attention to the heart is as infructuous as paying attention to one's nails or hair or anything else.

TAZKIYAH AND RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD

Renouncing the world is renouncing the *madu*.
Renouncing the world is to go away from those to whom
the *dayee* has to convey the divine truth.

In later times one group adopted the path of renunciation of the world in order to attain *tazkiyah*. But disenchantment with the world is required in the psychological sense rather than in the practical sense. The concept of the renunciation of the world is a product of non-dawah (missionary) thinking. The world is inhabited by human beings, as such, renouncing the world is akin to renouncing people. A *dayee* cannot afford to abandon people on any pretext. Others may see people from other angles, but a *dayee* looks at man as a potential *madu*. In the eyes of a *dayee*, every man is a *madu*, be he rich or poor, a commoner or a VIP, ruler or ruled. Even if he is a rival or a tyrant, in the eyes of the *dayee*, he is a human being. And a *dayee's* first desire is to convey the truth to him.

A *dayee* cannot afford to say that if someone enters from one gate, he will go out from another gate. He will instead say that the coming person (visitor) is a *madu* for him and, as such, he will meet him and convey the message of truth to him with wisdom.

Renouncing the world is to distance oneself from the *madu* whereas a *dayee* must maintain good relations with the *madu*, only then he can convey the message of God to them.

A businessman can walk away from everything but he cannot walk away from his customers. In a similar way, a *dayee* can tolerate everything but he cannot tolerate going to a secluded place where there are no *madus*. When he remains among the *madus*, he may be beset by certain problems, but he overlooks them because he cannot afford to break off his relations with them. Along with *tazkiyah*, *dawah* is an equally important goal for the believer. And if a believer is sincere it is not possible for him either to give up his efforts to attain *tazkiyah* or to give up his *dawah* activities.

WITHOUT MEDIATION

The concept of mediation is an obstacle in the path of *tazkiyah*. When God is closer to man 'than his jugular vein' (50:16), why should there be any need for mediation?

Consciously or unconsciously, people generally think that *tazkiyah* requires some mysterious mediation, say, of past saintly figures or great men of learning, or some religious guide who has attained a high degree of spirituality, etc. According to this mysterious concept of mediation, the religious guide (*shaikh*) himself becomes the goal, or the focus, whereas it is God Who must be at the centre and the position of the religious guide must be purely peripheral, i.e., as a means to an end.

The concept of mediation is entirely without foundation. *Tazkiyah* is attained through contact with God, without any

mediation; no mediation can be of any help in this matter.

Real *tazkiyah* is bestowed by God. There is no need of mediation to receive this gift from God. God directly bestows whatever He wills on all human beings; the condition for this to happen is to become a seeker of *tazkiyah* in real earnest.

The Quran says: “When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.” (2:186)

The word “near” used in the above verse of the Quran, shows that the means of attaining *tazkiyah* is to come close to God rather than rely upon mediation or a mediator. He, who wants to purify himself, ought to awaken his mind and make efforts to come as near to God as possible.

No mediation can ever be helpful in achieving this goal. *Tazkiyah* can only be attained directly from God. There is no other way of attaining *tazkiyah*. The truth is that the concept of mediation is an obstacle in the path of *tazkiyah*. When God is closer to man “than his jugular vein” (50:16), why should there be any need for mediation?

The concept of mediation stems from the notion that there can be a mysterious relationship between a human being and God, whereas the concept of a religious guide is established at a conscious level between the follower and the guide.

PRIOR TO TAZKIYAH

Living in the greatness of God, accepting the Prophet as the perfect guide and making Paradise one's greatest goal can be described as *tazkiyah*.

The real incentive to the attainment of *tazkiyah* is the feeling of being devoid of spiritual resources. The more one acknowledges one's feeling of need, the more one feels the necessity for *tazkiyah*. One so motivated will naturally seek fulfillment of this need.

This discovery starts with one's own existence. First of all, man consciously discovers his own existence. This discovery arouses his curiosity as to who is his Creator. In this way he discovers his Creator. This discovery produces a tremendous feeling of the greatness of his Creator.

Then he reflects that, as a needy person in the fullest sense of the word, he has been unable to fulfill any of his needs by dint of his own strength. It is not by his own efforts that all the basic things he requires are already there for him — earth, water, air oxygen, light, food and all those numerous things which are known to be constituents of the life support system. No, indeed. All are there for him as unconditional gifts. After this discovery, he attempts to understand who is the giver of all these blessings. In this way, he discovers his Lord. As a result of this, an immense amount of love is engendered within him for the Giver.

His search then leads him to the question: what is his goal? Then he learns that he cannot reach his desired goal in the present world. This discovery finally makes him extremely

desirous of Paradise, where he may attain his goal and have a life of fulfillment.

In a similar way, when he goes further in this thinking, he discovers that he needs authentic guidance for his life. Then he comes to the conclusion that, despite every effort, he cannot find such guidance on his own. This discovery leads him to the reality that the only possible source of authentic guidance is a prophet. He thus wholeheartedly accepts the Prophet as his guide. After all these discoveries, he naturally becomes a modest person. He begins to live in the greatness of God. God's creations become a perpetual impetus to His remembrance. He accepts the Prophet as the perfect guide and Paradise becomes his greatest goal. These are the experiences relating to the realization of God which can be described as *tazkiyah*.

SEEING A TEST PAPER IN ADVANCE

Tazkiyah is 50% concerned with the seeker and 50% with God. The seeker of *tazkiyah* ought constantly to pray to God. This prayer will become a means to associating with and receiving guidance from God.

A true seeker of *tazkiyah* often finds clear guidance in the form of dreams. Through dreams he learns how to advance along his path, stage by stage. In this way, the seeker is able to make his choices with conviction as if blessed with special divine succour. It may be likened to a student having access to a test paper in advance. A seeker

of *tazkiyah* is repeatedly faced with all kinds of questions. Suppose he has to take one of two options. If he prays to God on such occasions, it is quite possible that God may accept his prayer and guide him—through a dream – which may lead him from doubts and hesitation to conviction.

Such kinds of dreams are undoubtedly one of God’s great blessings. But if someone does not accept guidance, even after having the dream, then his case may be likened to a student who failed in his exams even after having advance knowledge of his test paper.

Tazkiyah is 50% concerned with the seeker and 50% with God. The seeker of *tazkiyah* ought constantly to pray to God. This prayer will become a means to associating him with God. He should perform *istikhara* (two-rakat prayers) before going to bed, asking God to give him guidance through a dream. *Istikhara* is as if seeking God’s counsel in his affairs. And one who does so consistently never goes astray. If God shows him a dream to solve his problem, then he should regard this as God having given him a preview of his paper. Indeed he has no other choice. One who is offered guidance by God to this extent, but who even then fails to accept His guidance would be committing an unpardonable crime. God will not accept any excuse from such a person and he will be deprived forever from establishing any contact with God.

THE FORM OF *TAZKIYAH*

Worship is an external manifestation of the spirit of *tazkiyah*. If the spirit of *tazkiyah* is produced within one, in the real sense, then inevitably one will become God's worshipper.

There is no visible form of *tazkiyah*. Had there been a fixed form of *tazkiyah*, man would think, consciously or unconsciously that, by observing that form, he had completed the course of *tazkiyah*. In this way, he would become content. But the feeling of contentment in this matter is very harmful. It is essential for the attainment of *tazkiyah* that one should always have a certain feeling of inadequacy. Such a feeling makes one continuously strive to undergo the process of *tazkiyah*, whereas any feeling of contentment blocks the incentive to make unremitting efforts.

Tazkiyah and the Islamic way of worship are closely interrelated. Neither can be separated from the other. No one can say that he has completed the process of *tazkiyah* and is therefore no longer required to perform the acts of worship ordained in Islam.

But this does not mean that the performance of the form of worship in itself is sufficient to serve the purpose of *tazkiyah*. The correct position is that worship is an external manifestation of the spirit of *tazkiyah*. If the spirit of *tazkiyah* is produced within one, in the real sense, then inevitably one will become God's worshipper.

Worship cannot be separated from *tazkiyah*. But full

emphasis should be laid upon producing the spirit of *tazkiyah*, rather than upon the external form of worship. It would be true to say that, without worship, the claim to have attained *tazkiyah* is false. But it is also a fact that the outward form of worship cannot automatically produce the spirit of *tazkiyah*.

IJTIHAD IS NOT PERMISSIBLE IN WORSHIP

Rituals such as repeated loud recitations of Quranic phrases were not practiced in the religion handed down to us by the Prophet. Exercising *ijtihad* in the matter of worship is both unscholarly and unacceptable.

A religious scholar once visited a well-known Sufi hospice, where he found that people were engaged in loud recitation (*zikr biljehr*) and other such rituals. On observing this, the scholar cited a tradition of the Prophet which said that “anyone who invents anything in this religion which is not in it stands rejected.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2697)

The scholar said that these Sufi rituals were not prevalent at the time of the Prophet and his companions, therefore, they would be regarded as innovations (*bid’ah*). The Sufi replied that what is forbidden in the Hadith is innovation in religion (*ihdath fil-amr*). It does not forbid innovation for religion (*ihdath lil-amr*), and all the practices of *sufism* are of the nature of innovation for religion.

This explanation of this tradition is unacademic. If we consider its exact wording, it has no basis in the Hadith. That is, something that has been added to the religion the Prophet has bequeathed to his people is expressed as ‘what is not in it.’ In such a case, the problem is not that of a change of preposition; the real problem is whether or not the religion that we received from the Prophet of Islam contained what now presents itself as an addition of later times. It is an established fact that rituals such as repeated loud recitations of Quranic phrases were not practiced in the religion handed down to us by the Prophet.

Religious scholars are agreed on their stand that there can be no guesswork in religious worship. That is, no *ijtihad* will be engaged in in the matter of worship, in which domain any inference or argument will be held valid only when it is based on the religious texts, the Quran and Hadith. Exercising *ijtihad* based on anything else is, from the religious point of view, both unscholarly and unacceptable.

TAZKIYAH: A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

Tazkiyah is a continuous process. When a believer discovers the truth, thanks to the awakening of his conscience, every event or experience in his life becomes a point of reference for his purification.

A’isha, the wife of the Prophet of Islam, says of him: “On every occasion, the Prophet of Islam remembered God.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 373) This tradition shows the prophetic way of purification, that is to say that the

Prophet purified himself on all occasions. This shows that *tazkiyah* is not the name of any short training course, but is rather a continuous process. When a believer discovers the truth, thanks to the awakening of his conscience, every event or experience in his life becomes a point of reference for his purification. This enables him to receive spiritual nourishment on a daily basis. In this way, this process of *tazkiyah* continues till his last breath. Just as physical energy is generated by constant nourishment, so also is *tazkiyah* achieved by constant effort. There is the general impression, however, that a brief training course is all that it takes to attain a state of *tazkiyah*. That is, it is just like receiving religious education in a madrasa within the limited frame of a short-term prescribed course of study. But the truth is that this is an underestimation of *tazkiyah*.

Tazkiyah, a cumulative process, and not the result of any fixed practice, requires an awakened mind. It is attained through an unflagging intellectual process and not by engaging in any temporary course of study.

TAZKIYAH AT EVERY MOMENT

Tazkiyah is not the recitation of some particular words or phrases at fixed times. It is continuous process when a believer discovers the truth, and every event or experience in his life becomes a point of reference for his purification.

There is the general misconception that *tazkiyah* is a temporary course of action or, that to achieve it, some particular words or phrases have to be recited at fixed

times. But this ritualistic form of *tazkiyah* is unnatural: nothing can be achieved by resorting to such short-term methods.

The truth is that, just as one inhales oxygen at every moment—there being no temporary way of inhaling, — *tazkiyah* too is a continuous process. The real *tazkiyah* is that which continues at every moment. For instance, in this couplet by a Persian poet:

Bar mazaar-e-ma nay cheraghe nay guley
Nay par-e-parvanaraqsad
Nay sadaibulbule

(I being a poor man, there is no lamp, no flower on my grave, that is why no fly hovers around my grave, no nightingale chirps at my grave).

When a couplet like this comes to mind, you should first think how great a state of ignorance the poet is in. He is thinking of the lamp and the flower at his grave. But the real problem is that, after death, man reaches another world, the demands of which are different from those of the present world. In that world certain superior qualities will be required, over and above those possessed in this world. Furthermore, there will be no time for preparation in the next world. There we shall find only the result of today's action: there will be no opportunities to take remedial action.

The result of such revised thinking will be that this couplet, which people recite purely for enjoyment, will teach the individual a great lesson. He will start preparing himself for

developing such a personality as will bring him success in the world of the Hereafter. With this mental reorientation, he will start thinking about what he will undergo after death, instead of what the fate of his grave will be.

TAZKIYAH AND MODESTY

Tazkiyah can have its effect only on a modest person. Modesty enables one to accept the truth and frees one from psychological complexes. Only a complex-free soul can succeed in attaining the goal of *tazkiyah*.

No crops can grow on barren land. Requiring favourable soil for their growth, they must grow on fertile land. So also does *tazkiyah* require favourable soil from which to grow. And that favourable soil is modesty. The quality of modesty greatly facilitates the attainment of *tazkiyah*. On the contrary, arrogance is unfavourable to its attainment. An arrogant person can never attain the goal of self-purification. The most significant feature of modesty is that it causes a person to feel that there is something lacking in him.

The result of this feeling is that when the truth becomes evident to him, he accepts it without any reservation. He receives it in an unbiased way and soon discovers that this truth can compensate for his shortcomings. Thus, he accepts the truth as if it belonged to him. This quality is the spirit, or essence, of *tazkiyah*. The case of an arrogant person is quite the opposite. The thinking of an arrogant person is

that he already has everything and need not take anything from anyone. For this reason, he is not able to accept advice from others. He rejects the message of the reformer. This attitude becomes an obstacle to his taking to the path of *tazkiyah*.

The truth is that *tazkiyah*, a continuous process, can have its effect only on a modest person. Modesty enables one to accept the truth and frees one from psychological complexes. Only a complex-free soul can succeed in attaining the goal of *tazkiyah*.

TAZKIYAH AND INTROSPECTION

Without introspection, no one can become a purified personality. Introspection leads to intellectual development, which is a guarantee that the process of *tazkiyah* will continue.

Tazkiyah is not a one-time course. That is, it is not possible to take a course for a temporary period and become a permanently purified person. The truth is that purification is a continuous process, which lasts for a lifetime. *Tazkiyah* is an act of introspection, in which one has to monitor one's own actions. One who is desirous of *tazkiyah* must be careful about his speech and actions at every moment. With total objectivity, he must repeatedly engage in self-reappraisal. This process of introspection is set in only in one who repents and does introspection. This present world—a testing ground—has been created by the Creator in such a way that at every moment man is beset by trials.

Repeatedly faced with the demands of the self, satanic temptations may lead him to do something undesirable; and unfavourable circumstances, coupled with a bad environment, may cause him to fall a prey to evil influences. All such failings run counter to *tazkiyah*.

Man should be so sensitive in this matter that, on each such occasion of temptation, he immediately becomes alert to the immanent dangers. One purifies oneself and then does one's utmost to re-purify. Re-purifying oneself on such occasions is *tazkiyah*. But without introspection, no one can become a purified personality. Introspection leads to intellectual development, which is a guarantee that the process of *tazkiyah* will continue to take place.

INTROSPECTION AFTER MAKING A MISTAKE

Thinking born of introspection is the greatest source of *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can always be achieved by inner self-appraisal, rather than by some external activity.

Introspection is a major source of *tazkiyah*. Introspection awakens the human mind, it jolts the human personality, it gives the individual the incentive to reform himself. In this way introspection leads one to intellectual and spiritual development.

For instance, suppose someone said something which hurt you, you were provoked and you reacted negatively. Later, you became repentant and engaged in introspection, which led to your thinking that by having behaved in this way, you

were developing a negative personality, such as would have a deleterious effect in the life after death. Such a negative personality would, indeed, render one incapable of gaining entry into Paradise.

You came to realize that the culture of the people of Paradise would be that of peace; only those would be accommodated there who had the capacity to live together in love and peace. This being so, one who develops a personality which is intolerant, easily provoked and downright unfriendly will be held ineligible to enter Paradise and will be deprived of happiness and success for all eternity.

Such thinking will prove to be revolutionary and you will become your own watchdog. You will become extremely keen to reform yourself.

Thinking born of introspection is the greatest source of *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can always be achieved by inner self-appraisal, rather than by some external activity.

HOW TO ENGAGE IN INTROSPECTION?

When man discovers his total powerlessness, the feeling of helplessness is necessarily born within him. It is this feeling of helplessness which compels man to engage in introspection and it is in this discovery that the real secret of *tazkiyah* lies.

The real source of self-purification is introspection, that is, thinking about oneself, analyzing one's words and deeds, or in other words, becoming one's own judge, by

thinking against oneself and assessing oneself objectively. And no *tazkiyah* is possible without such introspection.

The most powerful feeling in man is that of egoism. This feeling is so intense that every person lives with the notion that he is all in all. This is a form of self-glorification. This kind of attitude should be anathema to seekers of *tazkiyah*. What man should do is develop in himself anti-self thinking, so that he may stand up to criticism. This feeling was so intense in Umar ibn al-Khattab that he said, ‘May God bless the man who sends me the gift of my shortcomings.’ (*Sunan al-Darimi*, Vol. 1, p. 506)

This introspective mentality is born out of a discovery—that of one’s own helplessness. The seeker of *tazkiyah* must discover the reality that his sense of ‘I’ exists only at the level of his own senses, or feelings. It doesn’t exist in reality; he has no power over anything outside of his own feelings. He exercises no power in the matters of his life and death, the life support system, the divine court, etc. When man discovers his total powerlessness, the feeling of helplessness is necessarily born within him. It is this feeling of helplessness which compels man to engage in introspection and it is in this discovery that the real secret of *tazkiyah* lies.

HADITH: A SOURCE OF TAZKIYAH

If the individual deepens his understanding of the hadith and conceptualizes the background to it, this will be like being in the presence of the Prophet. And studying the traditions in this creative manner is undoubtedly the greatest source of purification.

A scholar once said: “Any person who has a collection of Hadith in his house, is as if in the presence of the Prophet who is in conversation with him.” (*Mirqat-ul-Mafatih Sharh Mishkat-ul-Masabih*, Vol. 1, p. 25)

The above-mentioned saying is not only about what the Prophet had to say but, by implication, it also indicates a form of companionship with the Prophet.

None of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam recorded in the Books of Hadith are purely abstract in sense. Indeed, every saying has a special background. That is to say, the Prophet on different occasions faced a variety of situations and, in accordance with the demands of each situation, he gave people advice. In this way, each saying of the Prophet of Islam relates to particular sets of circumstances. All the sayings of the Prophet are of topical relevance.

If the individual deepens his understanding of the hadith and conceptualizes the background to it, this in itself will be like being in the presence of the Prophet. He will perceive that he is not only reading the sayings of the Prophet, in a book, but is also reading between the lines of the Prophet’s sayings and thus mentally refreshing himself about their background. If the reader of the hadith is enthusiastic

about it, he will feel as if he is actually experiencing the companionship of the Prophet. In this way, there will be a manifold enhancement of his understanding of the Hadith.

On reflection, it will be realized that the reader of the Hadith is not just a reader: he is more of a 'listener' seated along with the companions in the presence of the Prophet of Islam. This is one of the creative ways of studying the Hadith. And studying the tradition of the Prophet in this creative manner is undoubtedly the greatest source of purification.

PROPHETIC PRAYERS

Prophetic prayer is meant to awaken one's consciousness. Only by continually thinking over them we may develop such a personality as lives in thoughts of God.

Many traditions have been recorded in the books of hadith, which tell us that the Prophet used to recite certain words of prayer at certain times. These words are generally known as *masnun dhikr*, or *masnundua*. Generally, it is believed that these words recited by the Prophet are the greatest source of *tazkiyah*, and that one should learn them and keep reciting them on certain occasions in order to achieve the ends of *tazkiyah*.

However, this is not true. These words uttered by the Prophet are in actual fact a reflection of the feelings or states of mind of the Prophet. The truth is that the Prophet

of Islam, because of his high levels of realization, used to be constantly preoccupied by thoughts of God. On different occasions this inner feeling found expression in words. Today, those who study books of Hadith only know the words of the Prophet: they stop short of knowing his feelings or states of mind. This is why they take the words to be all in all. Subscribing to this concept of prophetic prayers is to underestimate the words of the Prophet.

In its reality, prophetic prayer is meant to awaken one's consciousness. Then it is only through the continual thinking process thus initiated that we may develop such a personality as lives in thoughts of God. This is, as it were, the first prerequisite for learning from the prayers of the Prophet. After this the words of prayer uttered by him will be of great importance so far as the development of a spiritual personality is concerned. Without this preparation, repeating the words of the Prophet, rather than *following* the words of the Prophet in the real sense, is nothing but empty repetition.

People, consciously or unconsciously, regard the prayers of the Prophet as having been couched in sacred words, which possess mysterious qualities. But this is not true. The truth is that the prayers of the Prophet tell us of the states of the Prophet, rather than being just words in the simple sense.

TAZKIYAH AND DUA

Prayer is an expression in words of the feeling which is produced after a helpless man discovers the Almighty God. Praying to God (*dua*) is a proof that the process of *tazkiyah* is at work. There is no *tazkiyah* without prayer, and vice versa.

What is prayer? Prayer is an expression in words of the feeling which is produced after a helpless man discovers the Almighty God. The prayers of the Prophet are also an expression of these feelings for the Almighty God. They are not just another name for a set of words uttered by the Prophet on certain occasions. The Prophet's prayers are, in actual fact, spiritual discoveries, far from a mere utterance of a set of words.

According to a *hadith qudsi* (the *hadith* in which the Prophet says that God says so and so), the Prophet observed: "I am with the expectations of My servant, so he ought to have good expectations about Me." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 16016) What is this hope or expectation? It relates in actual fact to man's discovering certain attributes of God, and then on the basis of this discovery, having good expectations of God: that is, he seeks goodness from God.

For instance, the Quran says: "He has given you all that you asked of Him." (14:34). This verse provides a point of reference to man who may invoke God's blessings thus: "O God, I was not even aware of my needs in the life of this world that I should have asked You for those things. You on Your own arranged for all my requirements to be met in my

worldly life. Now, in the life Hereafter, I ask You to provide me with all the things I require in the next world.”

This kind of prayer always comes to one’s lips after a great psychological turmoil. Another name for this psychological storm is *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* and prayer are interdependent. *Tazkiyah* will always be followed by *dua*.

Praying to God (*dua*) is a proof that the process of *tazkiyah* is at work. There is no *tazkiyah* without prayer, and vice versa.

CONSCIENCE: A GUIDE TO *TAZKIYAH*

The conscience serves as a divine teacher and a guide to *tazkiyah*. The moment one is able to overcome one’s ego, one’s conscience will be able to play its natural role.

Man is endowed with a natural faculty called the conscience, which serves as a divine teacher and a guide to *tazkiyah*. Conscience guides man on all occasions, albeit wordlessly—do this, don’t do that, this behaviour is in accordance with *tazkiyah* and that behaviour is against *tazkiyah*. The former will help in developing a purified personality while the latter will defile your personality.

But experience shows that the majority of the people don’t allow their conscience to act as a guide to *tazkiyah*. What is the reason for this? The reason is that everyone is given another faculty, which is the opposite of conscience, and that is the ego. Man often comes under the influence of the self, or Satan, He does not let the conscience work for him. The voice of the conscience can be heard on all occasions,

but the ego suppresses that voice and renders it ineffective. It is essential for a seeker of *tazkiyah* to be abreast of this reality, so that he awakens his power of thinking, and nullifies his ego on all occasions. The moment one is able to overcome one's ego, one's conscience will be able to play its natural role and one will be able to traverse the path of *tazkiyah* without any deviation. The exercise of nullifying the ego or reducing it to zero has a decisive role to play. But no one can perform this task for another. One has to do it oneself; the moment one's ego is awakened, one should become alert and by exercising one's will power set one's ego at naught.

THE NEED OF A GUIDE

A guide is essential for the attainment of *tazkiyah*, but the importance of the guide is practical rather than a matter of creed. God grants special help to those who have to perform this role.

In principle, the path to *tazkiyah* for man is to reflect upon the Quran and to study the Hadith in order to find guidance from the lives of the prophets of Islam. This is the basic source of *tazkiyah*, and its importance will last for all eternity. Besides this, there is also a practical way of attaining *tazkiyah*, and that is to find a living guide, thus benefitting from his learning and experience. When a guide is found, he ought to be accepted as such unconditionally. Making conditions before accepting a guide only sets up a hurdle in the path of *tazkiyah*.

When anyone says that he has accepted someone unconditionally, this does not mean that he has entered into this arrangement with blind faith. It only means that, as a result of the development of moral consciousness, two human beings have come together on the same wavelength. This is a case of intellectual affinity, rather than a case of blind faith. When two human beings reach the core of truth, they naturally enter a state of intellectual commonality. They become, as it were, intellectual “twins”.

A guide is essential for the attainment of *tazkiyah*, but the importance of the guide is practical rather than a matter of creed. The importance of a guide, in actual fact, relates directly to the general *Sunnah* of God. This *Sunnah* has been described in the following verse of the Quran: ‘It is We who distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and raise some of them above others in rank, so that they may take one another into service.’ (43:32) This verse shows that it is not the way of God to bestow on everyone the qualities required for a guide. It is the way of God to give leadership qualities to particular persons and others are required to follow them. This is the natural system of life according to the way of God.

The case of a religious guide also relates directly to this way of God, for God grants special help to those who have to perform this role. The duty of *tazkiyah* seekers is to recognize them, and receive guidance from them in order to achieve their objective. Those who fail to do so will be treated as failures in this test of nature.

There is nothing mysterious about this. It falls within a

known and natural sphere and can be understood upon reflection. What is received from a religious guide is not something mysterious in nature: it is the same as what in general terms is called a training course. A religious guide is a living guide rather than a sacred personality in some mysterious sense of the word.

THE METHOD OF TAZKIYAH

What is required for *tazkiyah* is willpower. One who aims at self-purification should be willing to do whatever religion requires him to do, whatever the cost at the practical and psychological levels.

Many attempts have been made to describe a number of methods of *tazkiyah*. Lists of these methods have also been prepared. But the truth is that there is no list that can be prepared for the method of *tazkiyah*. This is because no list, however long it may be, can be complete. No list can cover all the methods of *tazkiyah*, and later experiences will prove that that “long” list was also less than complete. The truth is that *tazkiyah* relates not to some list but is the product rather of man’s own will and intention. If man were indeed serious about *tazkiyah* and wanted to attain it honestly, he would certainly succeed in this. But if man is not totally serious about it and shows no eagerness about attaining it, then no amount of writing or speeches will suffice for his self-purification.

It is a unique quality of man that he is able to find justification for every mistake he makes. He is always able to find beautiful words to portray his faults as virtues and his mistakes as right action. This being so, no reformer or well-wisher can bring about the *tazkiyah* of this kind of person. To attain *tazkiyah*, one must take a conscious decision about oneself. This decision should be so firm that one remains steadfastly true to it and makes no excuses to renege upon it.

What is required for *tazkiyah* is willpower. This should be so firm that it remains unaffected by any temptation or any fear of damage to worldly interests.

The will must be resistant to any form of pressure. One who aims at self-purification should be willing to do whatever religion requires him to do, whatever the cost at the practical and psychological levels.

TAZKIYAH: RE-ENGINEERING OF THE MIND

For human reform, it is essential to de-condition his mind, i.e., re-engineer his mind to make him capable of seeing reality "as it is", and thus form accurate opinions.

The mindset of the people differs from age to age. One accepts something only when it is in accordance with one's way of thinking. This is what is called the addressing of the mind. Just as making concessions to the human mind is necessary in other matters, it is likewise necessary in the matter of *tazkiyah* as well.

In ancient times thinking was traditional but the modern age is that of scientific thinking. To bring about *tazkiyah* in people of the present times, it is essential to speak to them in a way that addresses their minds. The source of *tazkiyah* in present times is exactly the same as it was in ancient times. However, there is a difference of approach between the two—that of manner of speech and reasoning. In ancient times the traditional ways were effective for people of that age, but, in present times, for effective *tazkiyah*, it is essential to change the style of speech. Only then will it be possible for the modern man to understand the importance of *tazkiyah* and adopt it in his life.

For instance, in ancient times, the word “purification” or ‘reform’ of the self was used. This word could address the ancient traditional mind.

However, the modern man can understand this subject better if we change our wording or mode of addressing the subject. That is, we have to consider that every person, for various reasons, is a case for the conditioning of the mind. For the purpose of a human being’s reform, it is essential to de-condition his mind, i.e., re-engineer his mind to make him capable of seeing reality “as it is” and thus form accurate opinions. To address people’s minds, according to this style of *tazkiyah*, it is essential for the guide, or teacher, to possess a vast knowledge of both ancient and modern learning, without which the task of *tazkiyah* cannot be effectively performed with the modern man.

THE BUILDING OF A POSITIVE PERSONALITY

The search for truth or the discovery of truth are both the acts of a positive personality. A positive personality serves as the proper soil in which to grow the noble urge to search for the truth, and through sound thinking, ultimately reach the stage of discovering the truth.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a well-known democratic thinker of France. He was the upholder of the rule of the people rather than the rule of monarchy. He begins his famous book, *Social Contract*, with this sentence:

Man was born free, but I find him in chains.

But man is faced with another, perhaps more serious problem, and that is, conditioning. All men and women are influenced by their immediate environment. Because of this, their minds become conditioned, as a result of which they are deficient in right thinking. A person is not therefore able to think realistically. In view of this problem, we need to rephrase Rousseau's dictum: Man was created on the pattern of divine nature, but I see him psychologically conditioned.

When a child is born out of his mother's womb, he appears to be the embodiment of innocence. It seems as if an angel has taken the form of a human body. At the time of birth, man's mind is pure. His thinking is as natural as it ought to be.

But man is a social animal. He has to spend his whole life in society along with other people. Because of this, he

continues to receive external influences at all times. This is known as conditioning. This influence goes on increasing until a time comes when he becomes conditioned to the ultimate degree.

When one reaches adulthood, i.e. the age of maturity, every man and woman must make an effort to understand this conditioning, and by de-conditioning one's mind, one should take oneself back to the natural state in which one was born. Instead of being an artificial person, one should become a man or woman whose nature is in its pure, pristine state.

The conditioning of the environment acts as an artificial veil over the real man's eyes. The human personality is like an onion. Inside the onion there is a kernel-like structure of the size of a pea. Over this internal 'kernel', there are a number of external covers wrapped around it. When one removes these covers one-by-one, the inner 'kernel' will be revealed. The same is true also of a human being. Because of the environment, the human personality becomes shrouded in artificial veils. Once these are removed, one's real personality will come into the open.

De-conditioning is another name for removing the external veils covering the human personality. For one who is a seeker of truth, it is incumbent upon him to remove all the artificial veils by means of de-conditioning so that his real personality may come to the fore.

According to religious teachings, as a human being is God's special creation, he is born with a divine personality. As to his inner existence, he is a perfect, complete personality. The essential condition for eternal success is that a person

must first of all guard the personality he was born with and that he should strictly adhere to the natural state in which he has been created by God. De-conditioning is another name for this struggle entailed in self-building.

The search for truth or the discovery of truth are both the acts of a positive personality. It is, in actual fact, a positive personality which serves as the proper soil in which to grow the noble urge to search for the truth. And it is a positive personality which, because of its sound thinking, ultimately reaches the stage of discovering the truth.

THE PROCESS OF DE-CONDITIONING

One must de-condition his conditioned mind in order to purify it. The only way of purification, or de-conditioning, is to repeatedly remind himself of death and to reflect on the purpose of life in the light of the Quran.

Tazkiyah, a continuous process, goes on day in and day out. When it does not happen in this way, there is a Hadith which describes the result of this: "The heart becomes covered with rust, just like iron when it comes in contact with water." A question was asked: "O Prophet! What is the way to purify or clean one's heart?" The Prophet replied, "Remembering death often and studying the Quran." (*Shu'ab-ul-Iman*, Hadith No. 1859)

This tradition of the Prophet tells us of a psychological reality. That is, in the context of the society he lives in, man has repeatedly to undergo such experiences as produce

negative feelings within him, for instance, anger, hatred, violence, revenge, etc. Man ought to bury these feelings instantly, for, if he fails to do so, they will become a permanent presence in the human mind, and a time will come when it will be almost impossible to eliminate them.

There are two major parts of the human mind, the conscious and the unconscious. It is quite natural for negative feelings to first of all enter the conscious part of the mind. If such feelings are not immediately cast out from the mind, they gradually reach the unconscious part of the mind, from where it becomes difficult to eradicate them. Man should always remain vigilant about this. At all times he should keep converting his negativity into positivity. That is, he must de-condition his conditioned mind in order to purify it and keep it free from pollution. The only way of purification, or de-conditioning, is to repeatedly remind himself of death and to reflect on the purpose of life in the light of the Quran.

THE METHOD OF DE-CONDITIONING

For de-conditioning one has to accept the harsh criticism of others or become a harsh critic of oneself. Those who always want sweet polite words from others, and those who always make concessions to themselves will never be able to de-condition themselves.

Everyone is born in an environment which exerts an influence on him. This is a process of conditioning. This is

true of everyone without exception. And it is a problem for everyone, because such conditioning causes one to deviate from nature. That is why it is essential that everyone decondition himself and return to his original nature.

There is only one way to decondition oneself and that is by introspection. This entails rigorously continuing to engage in the act of self-reform. There are two ways to do this. One is to tolerate the harsh criticism of others, that is, accepting with an open mind any adversarial evaluation of one's thinking and conduct without taking this to heart, one should engage without delay in one's self-reassessment.

Another method of deconditioning is self-criticism. That is, one should look at himself like an enemy. He should assess himself morning and evening. He should keenly feel his mistakes and then he should introspect. He should engage in a merciless hammering of his ego. In no matter should he make concessions to himself. Instead of blaming others, he should always first blame himself. He should become such a severe critic of himself, that it is as if he is trying to put an end to himself.

These are the only two methods of de-conditioning oneself. Either one accepts the harsh criticism of others or one becomes a harsh critic of oneself. Those who always want sweet polite words from others, and those who always make concessions to themselves will always remain in a conditioned state, and will never be able to de-condition themselves.

DISTRACTION: A DEADLY HABIT

Life is a straight path. One who keeps to this straight path will reach the destination of success. Distraction is the only thing which can act as an obstacle in this journey.

Life is a straight path, and one who keeps to this straight path will be bound to reach the destination of success. Distraction is the only thing which can act as an obstacle in this journey, that is, distraction by things, which are not related to the straight path, and which cause one to deviate from the straight path. The Forbidden Tree in Paradise was in fact a sign of such distraction. In the very beginning, man was told that he was settled there for the purpose of putting him to the test. There will be many “Forbidden Trees” in life which will be sources of distraction. If you can save yourself from the deviation caused by these “Forbidden Trees”, you will certainly be successful in reaching your destination.

There are many forms of distraction. If a person gives serious thought to this, he will be able to understand that he is becoming distracted and can save himself. But the worst form of distraction is that which becomes a habit in one’s daily life. Once a man is addicted to this, he starts doing that same thing without thinking about it and it becomes a part of an unconscious process.

In present times, many new addictions have found a place in one’s life. People, for example, are addicted to the internet, the telephone, the mobile phone, Facebook and so on. People have become so addicted to all these things that they

cannot live without them. Such habits have progressively caused great deprivation to a person. God has granted an individual a mind to think of important things, discover and understand important realities but everyone is too busy with the cell phone and so engaged in trivialities that one has no time to devote to more important issues.

SAVE YOURSELF FROM DISTRACTION

The greatest obstacle in the path of *tazkiyah* is distraction. A seeker of *tazkiyah* should make it his supreme goal; keeping himself totally away from all things related to distraction.

One principle of success in this world is to abandon one thing in favour of another.

It is human psychology that man cannot focus on two things at a time. If he focuses on one thing, his mind will be diverted from another. This same principle applies to *tazkiyah*. Also, one who wants to engage in self-purification will necessarily have to totally abandon all things irrelevant to *tazkiyah*.

The greatest obstacle in the path of *tazkiyah* is distraction. It is essential for the seeker of *tazkiyah* to make *tazkiyah* his supreme goal; to keep himself totally away from all things related to distraction. Concentration is essential for *tazkiyah*, one who does not have the capacity to concentrate will certainly fall far short of the attainment of *tazkiyah*.

Everything has its price and *tazkiyah* too has its price.

That price is keeping oneself away from all kinds of distraction, for instance, family programmes, friendship culture, the love of food, clothes, the craving for fame and wealth and other temptations in life.

All such things for a seeker of *tazkiyah* amount to distraction. Anyone who wants to purify himself must distance himself totally from all such things.

Tazkiyah gives man a noble character and enables man to be deserving of the angels' company. *Tazkiyah* brings man close to God. Without this man is like dry wood; whereas with *tazkiyah*, man becomes a green tree. *Tazkiyah* is not something mysterious: it can be equated with an awakening of the consciousness of faith.

TAZKIYAH AND KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge provides a wide framework for developing one's *tazkiyah*. Through knowledge, which is like a booster, one discovers new aspects of increasing *tazkiyah*. Study increases the capacity to think in man and derive the food of realization from things at a deeper level.

According to one point of view regarding the method of *tazkiyah*, the company of a Sufi who has attained the state of realization is a must, because just one glance from such a person is considered enough to bring about a change in the human psyche. But this point of view cannot be substantiated by either the Quran or the Hadith. According

to the Quran and the Hadith, *tazkiyah* can be attained only by man's own reflection and introspection. If one has developed right thinking, by studying the relevant books and by observation of nature, one will derive lessons which will help one in purifying one's personality.

Chapter 35 of the Quran mentions mountains in which there are streaks of various shades. Then the verse goes on to say, "Only those of His servants, who possess knowledge, fear God." (35:28). This verse shows that the knowledge of mountains or natural events should create fear of God in man. That is to say, the source of fear is learning. The more learning one acquires, the more one will be able to understand the wisdom in God's creation.

Study increases the capacity to think in man. Study enables man to derive the food of realization from things at a deeper level. For instance, everyone inhales the air for the oxygen it provides. It is thus possible for everyone to be thankful to God for this. However, a person who has any knowledge of modern discoveries about the respiratory system, will be a thousand times more grateful, and thus his *tazkiyah* will also develop to a much greater degree than one who doesn't know of these discoveries.

The fact is that knowledge provides a wide framework for developing one's *tazkiyah*. Through knowledge, which is like a booster, one discovers new aspects of increasing *tazkiyah*.

TAZKIYAH: A PSYCHOLOGICAL ACT

Tazkiyah is performed at the psychological level, to develop one's conscious mind to such an extent that it may convert negative thoughts into positive thoughts, it may have glimpses of the Creator in His creation and may discover spiritual aspects in material events.

The attainment of *tazkiyah* is not possible through any kind of verbal repetition, neither is it related to any kind of physical exercise. *Tazkiyah* is wholly a psychological act and can be attained only at that level.

A psychological act means an act at the intellectual level. The human mind is at the centre of all kinds of human development. It is in fact the mind which is the deciding factor in shaping the human personality. The non-purified personality and the purified personality are both products of the mind.

It is a positive intellectual development which is actually required for *tazkiyah*. That is, one has to develop one's conscious mind to such an extent that it may become discriminating, it may convert negative thoughts into positive thoughts, it may have glimpses of the Creator in His creation and may discover spiritual aspects in material events.

It may reject Satan's temptations, it may rise above the temptations of the self, it may distance itself from fruitless actions, it may make out its real well-wishers, it may accept advice, even if that be against its nature, it may develop anti-self thinking, and be able to set the goal of spirituality for

itself, rising above material goals. One who thinks along these lines will become hereafter-oriented.

All these developments take place at the psychological level, being the result of deep thinking. One who cannot engage in deep thinking will never attain high levels of *tazkiyah*. The process of *tazkiyah* can be initiated only in one who is capable of deep thought. *Tazkiyah*, in fact, is another name for psychological purification. First of all, *tazkiyah* is performed at the psychological level and only then is it possible for *tazkiyah* to be achieved at the level of the whole human existence.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Tazkiyah means possessing a positive psychology, and having no propensity to complain. A person who engages in positive thinking lives in the companionship of the angels, and it is a fact that *tazkiyah* cannot be attained without the help of the angels.

Four thousand years ago, Prophet Ibrahim settled his wife Hajar and his son Ismail in the desert of Arabia and returned to Syria. Later, when Ismail grew up he married a woman of the Jurhum tribe. After some time had elapsed, Ibrahim visited them and found only Ismail's wife at home. The woman complained of living in very difficult conditions. Ibrahim asked her to deliver the following message to Ismail, "Replace your doorway."

Ismail later divorced his wife and married another woman. After some time, Prophet Ibrahim came back to meet his family. Ismail was away and his new wife, rather than have any complaints or grudges was thankful for everything. On hearing this, Prophet Ibrahim said to her, “When Ismail comes home convey my message to him, ‘Retain your doorway.’” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

Prophet Ibrahim had settled his family in the desert, so that in this natural environment a new generation would arise which would take up the mission of monotheism and spread it throughout the world. This incident concerning Prophet Ibrahim shows that the individuals required for this great task must above all have the quality of possessing a positive psychology, and have no propensity to complain. This shows what is of the utmost importance in the process of *tazkiyah*: that man cease to complain and give utterance to grievances and that he become a positive thinker in the full sense, in spite of having every cause for complaint. Negative thinking is a killer of *tazkiyah*, whereas positive thinking is the most essential condition for *tazkiyah*. A person who indulges in negative thinking becomes subject to Satan. On the contrary, a person who engages in positive thinking lives in the companionship of the angels, and it is a fact that *tazkiyah* cannot be attained without the help of the angels.

TAZKIYAH: A SOURCE OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Faith initially brings us into the fold of Islam, then *tazkiyah* helps in the development of this faith. If initially, one's faith is in the form of a seed, it will keep growing and assume the form of a fully-grown tree—*tazkiyah* is the Islamic name for this intellectual process.

Tazkiyah literally means purification. In the extended sense it means growth. In this respect, *tazkiyah* means intellectual development.

The mind is not something stagnant, it is ever-growing, like a tree. It is this process which is called “adding faith to their faith” (48:4) in the Quran. Adding faith to faith means development in consciousness, which is another name for intellectual development. The real faith is one which does not stagnate, but grows continuously in its conviction about God.

How does *tazkiyah* or intellectual development take place? The path to this is contemplation. Contemplation is in itself a continuous process—contemplating the Quran and Hadith, the life of the Prophet, the lives of the Companions, the various human disciplines, the universe, the earth and the heavens. There is also the kind of contemplation which takes place during serious discussions. In this process of contemplation, new ideas emerge, deeper meanings come to light, new aspects hitherto unexplored of different events and realities are discovered, etc.

For one who possesses true faith, every study and observation will become a means of divine discovery; every experience will bring him closer to God. If initially, his faith is in the form of a seed, it will keep growing and assume the form of a fully-grown tree – *tazkiyah* is the Islamic name for this intellectual and spiritual process.

Faith initially brings us into the fold of Islam, then *tazkiyah* helps in the development of this faith.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERACTION FOR *TAZKIYAH*

The printing press, one of these modern means of communication, has made it possible to learn about *tazkiyah* on a continuous basis through reading material such as books and magazines.

Companionship is a very helpful means of attaining *tazkiyah*. In ancient times, social meeting, face to face, was the sole way of having companionship.

In the present age, people may be living at great distances from each other, so that companionship may appear to be out of the question. Yet it is still possible for the *tazkiyah*-seeker to have the benefits of his guide's companionship through tele-counselling, which is more immediate than communicating by means of letters or books, as was formerly done. If anyone is a seeker of *tazkiyah* in the real sense, the new channels of communication will serve as a viable alternative to actual companionship.

The printing press, one of these modern means of communication, has made it possible to learn about *tazkiyah* on a continuous basis through reading material such as books and magazines. These have to be seriously studied if the *tazkiyah*-seeker is to become really familiar with the subject. From the Quran itself (96:4), we come to know of the importance of this method of learning from the written word, that is, imbibing the spirit of religion through books.

In one respect, the importance of study is not less than that of companionship. Indeed, the consistent study of books enables one to think deeply on the subject. Yet, although the study of books is of great benefit, interaction is still essential for *tazkiyah*, because that facilitates a fruitful exchange of ideas. That is, one must keep in touch with the religious guide and seek guidance from him in all matters. This contact can be made through direct meetings or through other means of communication. Such contact is necessary on a daily basis; occasional contact will not serve the purpose.

THE CRITERION OF *TAZKIYAH*

The aim of *tazkiyah* is attachment to God. Making God one's sole concern brings about a total revolution in man's psyche. Modesty grows within him, he becomes a man cut to size.

What is the criterion of *tazkiyah*? It is that one becomes so in tune with the Islamic way of thinking and the Islamic way of life that one feels that one is being guided by the

voice of one's own nature. Without any hesitation one should be willing to accept this, even if it runs counter to one's cherished desires.

The real aim of *tazkiyah* is attachment to God. This is the whole truth. To put it another way, *tazkiyah* enables one to focus so totally on God that one become free of all other considerations, save devotion to God. *Tazkiyah* enables one to make God the centre of one's attention in the complete sense.

Making God one's sole concern is no simple matter. It is akin to bringing about a total revolution in man's psyche. One who experiences such a revolution takes God as the Giver in the full sense, and regards himself as the taker in the full sense. His thinking becomes God-oriented: his feelings are centred entirely on God. His words and deeds reflect the divine culture. Modesty grows within him, he becomes a man cut to size. His heart is full of well-wishing instead of hatred for others. Instead of becoming haughty and insolent, he becomes modest.

His attitude to others is submissive rather than insolent. In all matters, he owns up to his own mistakes rather than blame others. He begins to prefer remaining silent rather than be talkative. Instead of occupying the front seat, he prefers to take the back seat.

Before uttering a single word, he gives thought to whether his words in the presence of God will be accepted or rejected. In private, he is as cautious as he is in public.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF REALITY

Tazkiyah is the result of the awakening of such consciousness as enables man to attribute everything to God; every experience becomes a means of bringing him closer to God.

By the highest standard of humanity, man should be able to accept the reality or truth. This is very important for every human being. And the discovery of reality must result in its acknowledgement. If someone is unaware of the reality, he will be reckoned an ignorant person. If after the discovery of reality, a person fails to express it publicly, this amounts to living by double standards or being hypocritical.

This is no simple act. It is, in fact, a development of the human personality along the right lines and *tazkiyah* is only the other name for this development of the human personality.

There is nothing mysterious about *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* is the result of the awakening of such consciousness as enables man to attribute everything to God; every experience becomes a means of bringing him closer to God. It is through these experiences that a personality develops which may be called a purified personality.

The truth is that the whole matter is one of right or wrong attribution. Wrongly attributing events to anyone other than God is to pollute one's soul. This is to deprive oneself of the opportunity to purify oneself. On the contrary, when one attributes events to the true Creator, one emancipates and

uplifts one's soul. By availing of all such opportunities, one develops one's personality by purifying one's soul. *Tazkiyah* cannot be attained in a vacuum; it comes about in the course of the everyday events of life. What is required for *tazkiyah* is an awakened mind, rather than some mysterious action performed in seclusion.

THE SEEKER OF TAZKIYAH

For the attainment of *tazkiyah* its seeker should be totally serious in his quest, welcome criticism just as he welcomes praise; be ready to accept the truth without any preconditions.

It is necessary for the attainment of *tazkiyah* that the seeker of *tazkiyah* be totally serious in his quest. This means that his mind should be prepared, that he should be very keen to learn, be free of all kinds of prejudices, be a complex-free soul, have the ability to see things as they are, be capable of rising above personal predilections, and have the ability to stand up to criticism, or should welcome criticism just as he welcomes praise; he should be ready to accept the truth without any preconditions and readily concede his mistakes. Finally, he must see things from the right angle.

Two parties are involved in the process of *tazkiyah*—the teacher and seeker. The role of neither is 100%: both have to perform 50% of the task. The role of the teacher is that of a guide in the real sense. He should have understood the subject so thoroughly by a deeper study of the Quran and

the Hadith that he is able to explain it in the best possible way.

In this matter the other half role is to be played by the seeker. The seeker must be fully capable of acceptance; he must come out of his conditioning to understand the message; he must be able to rise above his fixed mindset and be able to give importance to the truth and not to “who said it”. One who has all these qualities can successfully follow the path of *tazkiyah*.

TAZKIYAH: A MEANS OF REACHING GOD

Tazkiyah aims at thoroughly purifying man of negative feelings. The moment one detaches oneself from things other than God, one instantly feels that one has come close to one's Creator. One begins to experience the presence of God.

Man is the creation and God is his Creator. As such, it is human nature that he should come close to God to the ultimate extent. But various things, such as pride, negative thinking, etc., separate man from God. *Tazkiyah* aims at thoroughly purifying man of such negative feelings. The moment one detaches oneself from things other than God, one instantly feels that one has come as close to one's Creator as it is humanly possible to come. One begins to experience the presence of God all around one.

The level of nearness to God depends on the level of personal realization of God. For instance, everyone is in need of innumerable things to survive in this world. But no

human being is the creator of all these things. Someone else has bestowed them upon mankind, and God is undoubtedly that Best Bestower. God, the Supreme Being, is the only Giver. It is undoubtedly due to God's unilateral blessings that man can exist in this world. If – even for a moment – this chain of blessings were broken, man would no longer be able to sustain himself.

When an individual discovers God as His Benefactor, then quite naturally a fountain of love for God wells up in his soul. Then he becomes the embodiment of the reality described thus in the Quran: “Those who believe love God most.” (2:165). The Quran enjoins self-prostration as being necessary for nearness to the Creator: “Prostrate yourself and come closer to God.” (96:19)

What is this self-prostration? It is, in fact, the obeisance made by one who is filled with the love and fear of God: with these intense feelings, he falls prostrate before his Lord—this kind of prostration is as if a divine ascent (*mi'raj*) for the believer.

TAZKIYAH: AN ACT OF PREPARATION

Tazkiyah means preparing oneself with regard to the Hereafter, that is, developing in oneself those qualities which will benefit one in the Hereafter.

In the present material world, everyone is in need of some employment. Everyone wants a good job. That is why everyone prepares himself professionally to meet the

demands of the job market. One who fails to do so will be a failure all his life.

The same is true of the world Hereafter. But its exigencies are of a much more pressing nature. The world Hereafter is a world of divine activity of a very high order. In the Hereafter only that person will succeed who readies himself spiritually in this present world with the thought of the Hereafter in his mind. One who fails to prepare oneself appropriately in this world will be a failure in the Hereafter.

All this relates to competence. One type of competence works in this world, while another type of competence will avail in the Hereafter. In this world, a source other than God may work but, in the Hereafter, monotheism alone will be of any avail. In this world making one's own self one's sole concern is advantageous but, in the Hereafter, it is making God one's sole concern which will be of benefit. In this world, looking at things from the material angle is profitable but, in the Hereafter, only looking at things from the spiritual angle will be of any use. Materialism (interest-based thinking) benefits one in this world but, in the next world, only a man of principle will succeed. In this world dishonesty apparently works, whereas in that other world it is only honesty which will work. In this world, giving importance to immediate interests works but, in the next world, it is only giving importance to other-worldly interests which will be of any avail.

Tazkiyah means preparing oneself with regard to the Hereafter, that is, developing in oneself those qualities which will benefit one in the Hereafter. The way of *tazkiyah*

is to activate one's thinking. One way to do this is to identify such incidents in your life when you were going to be plunged into some great trouble but you were saved by the special succour of God. Such tragic incidents take place in the lives of all, but are subsequently forgotten.

It is a must for the seeker of *tazkiyah* to recall such incidents repeatedly in order to refresh his mind of how, when he had reached the very brink of destruction, he was saved by the special intervention of God. He should keep remembering every graphic detail of these incidents and beseech God thus: "O God, You have repeatedly saved me from the horrible consequences of my actions in the life of this world. In the same way, save me from the horrible punishment of hell in the hereafter."

Another approach to this matter is to remember your shortcomings, your mistakes and awaken in yourself a feeling of repentance. If you feel that in any matter you were 99% right and you were wrong by only 1%, then on such occasions, you should forget the 99% and exaggerate the 1% to the point where you begin to feel that you were 100% wrong. This will awaken the feeling of repentance in you. You will shudder in the fear of God and will turn to Him in prayer and seek His forgiveness.

There is nothing mysterious about *tazkiyah*. It is a known process, that is, thinking repeatedly about all aspects of self-purification. *Tazkiyah* is always the result of an intellectual awakening, rather than the result of some mysterious miracle. The more one thinks about this matter, the more one will be able to attain a state of self-purification. *Tazkiyah*

is a conscious process in the full sense. And hoping to achieve it without undergoing this conscious process is just wishful thinking. It will never become a reality.

WHAT IS INTROSPECTION?

Introspection is a way of discovering one's mistakes. An individual repeatedly makes mistakes and deviates from the straight path of truth. When a person discovers the starting point of this deviation, he can easily reform himself.

According to a tradition, the second Caliph Umar Faruq observed: "Reckon yourself before being reckoned, measure yourself before being measured." (*Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah*, Athar No. 34459) This adage enshrines a very important principle for self-reform. If a person adheres to this principle, it will ensure his reformation and his purification.

What does introspection mean? Introspection in fact is a way of discovering one's mistakes. An individual repeatedly makes mistakes and deviates from the straight path of truth. It is discovering this point of deviation from the truth which is called introspection.

When a person discovers the starting point of this deviation, he can easily reform himself but remaining in error for a long period of time makes it almost impossible to rectify one's mistakes. That is why a person must be very careful to mend his ways sooner than later.

The reason is that, in the beginning, being in error is a matter of deviation. Later on it becomes a matter of conditioning. At the time of the first deviation, a person's conscience alerts him to his wrongdoing. But if he fails to reform himself with this initial warning, this deviation from the truth gradually ceases to be alien to his thinking and ultimately takes a permanent place in his unconscious mind. When this happens, rectifying of one's mistakes becomes almost impossible.

INTROSPECTION: THE BASIS OF TAZKIYAH

Man is the only creature who has the capacity for conceptual thought. Man is his own engineer or maker. Introspection, self-appraisal, reforming oneself, not giving justification for one's faults play a role in man's personality development.

There is a saying of Umar Faruq, "Introspect yourself before you are subjected to introspection." (*Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah*, Athar No. 34459) Introspection is the basis of *tazkiyah*. It does not come about through a training camp. No formal course can serve this purpose, nor will any repetition of certain words be of any help. The only way to *tazkiyah* is through introspection, that is, self-appraisal, or reforming oneself, and by giving deep thought to how *tazkiyah* is to be attained.

Man is the only creature who has the capacity for conceptual thought. Indeed, man is defined as an animal capable of conceptual thought. You can shape wood, and you can

mould iron, but man himself is not so malleable. Man is his own engineer or maker. If man is unwilling to submit to the influence of others, there is no one who can shape his personality. This is why introspection plays a role in man's personality development, or his *tazkiyah*.

The role of a teacher is solely to provide a strong incentive for engaging in *tazkiyah*. He should develop the thinking in man that, if he does not engage in self-purification and reform himself, he will be forever ruined; he has to undertake *tazkiyah* himself and whatever he has to do should be done today without waiting for tomorrow.

Man tends to find justification for all of his faults; he always finds some words to prove that he is in the right.

It is necessary for one who wants to purify himself to root out this mentality once and for all. But this can be done only by the individual concerned, and not by anyone else.

TAZKIYAH AND REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH

The remembrance of death produces a sense of urgency in man. It makes him extremely concerned about *tazkiyah*. He will try to attain *tazkiyah* from every aspect before death overtakes him.

For the process of *tazkiyah* to go forward, the remembrance of death acts as a very powerful spur.

The remembrance of death produces a sense of urgency in man. Death reminds him of the fact that he cannot afford to

procrastinate in his striving towards *tazkiyah*, a task which has to be undertaken today itself, for nobody knows for certain whether tomorrow will be the day of death or of life.

The concept of death reminds man of the moment when he will die, and that afterwards he will face a very grave situation. This moment of death has been described thus in the Quran: "The Day when mankind will stand before the Lord of the Universe." (83:6) This will be the day when angels will take man before God. God, who knows everything, both open and hidden, will take him to account for all his words and deeds on earth. According to one tradition, man will on that day stand before God and his feet will not move until he has answered all the questions God will ask him.

Remembering death means remembering the most delicate moment of man's life. He must keep thinking about the time—which is certainly going to come—when his eternal future will be decided.

Such thinking must certainly produce an upheaval. It is a fact that one who thinks about death in this manner will be extremely concerned about *tazkiyah*. He will try to the ultimate extent to attain *tazkiyah* from every aspect before death overtakes him, for then he will have reached a point where there is no time left for reform.

RABBANIYAT: ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

Rabbaniyat means one's inner personality may acquire godly qualities by becoming immersed in thoughts of God and the Hereafter. This level of spirituality is produced after an intellectual revolution rather than by renouncing the material world.

I was once asked to explain the concept of spirituality in Islam and what, from the Islamic viewpoint, the method was of attaining spirituality. I said that the word 'spirituality' (or *ruhaniyat*) began to be used later in the history of Islam. In the Quran the word used for it is *rabbaniyat* (3:79), meaning the virtue of being God-oriented.

It is generally believed that there is only one way of finding spirituality and that is through renunciation. But that is not true. What we achieve by renouncing the world is not spirituality but mysticism (*rehbaniyat*) and, according to a tradition mysticism is not desirable in Islam. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 25893)

Ruhaniyat or *rabbaniyat* means one's inner personality may acquire godly qualities by becoming immersed in thoughts of God and the Hereafter. This level of spirituality is produced after an intellectual revolution rather than by renouncing the material world. This is an act of intellectual rather than physical renunciation. According to the Quran, the way to this intellectual renunciation is *tawassum*, meaning the learning of lessons. Such spirituality can be found through an intellectual awakening which in the Quran is called abundant remembrance of God (*zikr-e-kaseer*) (62:10).

This abundant remembrance of God is not simply a matter of repeating words. It is, in fact, an intellectual act of seeing God's signs in material things and learning lessons related to the Hereafter from material experiences. This spiritual or divine aspect is hidden in all worldly things. Spirituality enables one engaged in material or worldly activities to see the divine signs. Spirituality can be attained neither by renouncing the world nor by the repetition of certain words. Spirituality can be attained only by one who has the intellectual ability to convert material provision into spiritual food.

SPIRITUALITY WITHOUT INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Spiritual progress needs to be made through intellectual activity. Spirituality is a sublime state of realization of the truth. It has nothing in common with some vague state of ecstasy.

Spirituality has always been a subject of interest. It is known by many names. For instance, mysticism, meditation, sufism, etc. For thousands of years great activities have been engaged in to attain spirituality. But these activities have not yielded any real results. Despite all man's efforts and struggle, what has been gained is ecstasy rather than the intellectual development which was desired from these activities.

The truth is that since ancient times people have come to

believe that the human mind is the centre of thinking, while the human heart is the centre of emotions and feelings, and because spirituality has come to be regarded as deriving from emotions and sentiments, people always believed in heart-based spirituality. Because of this supposition, the theory was developed that a person's heart was the source of all spiritual treasures. And by awakening these feelings and emotions hidden in the heart, one could attain spirituality.

But, in present times, scientific research has found this supposition to be baseless. Now it has been learnt with certainty that the only centre of thoughts and feelings is the human mind. As far as the heart is concerned, it is only a muscular organ which keeps up the circulation of blood by contracting and dilating.

This is why, for several thousand years, what man has found as a result of great spiritual struggle, is merely ecstasy rather than any intellectual development. This kind of spirituality, in fact, is an unreasoning form of emotionalism rather than any spiritual development in the real sense.

As we know, ecstasy is another name for rapture, whereas the greatest evidence of man's spirituality is that he possesses a mind which is capable of thinking. Indeed, if spirituality is to be given credence, it must be found to exist at the level of the mind. Just as all the material progress made in human history has resulted from harnessing this thinking faculty to superior ends, so also spiritual progress needs to be made through intellectual activity.

Spirituality is, in fact, a sublime state of realization of the truth. It has nothing in common with some vague state of ecstasy. It follows that true spirituality is that state which can be attained at the level of the mind, rather than at the level of the heart.

Due to a lack of awareness of this reality, man has largely remained deprived of true spirituality throughout the entire human history. What he regarded as spirituality was not spirituality. It was due to this lack of awareness of the truth on his part that he failed to progress towards true spirituality. There is no tragedy greater than this in all of human history.

WHAT ARE THE MEANS OF ATTAINING *TAZKIYAH*?

The real means of attaining the ends of *tazkiyah* is for man to reflect on the signs of God, activate his thinking, and through continuous reflection, discover the deeper realities of things.

Traditionally, some things are considered to be the means of attaining *tazkiyah*, such as, supererogatory prayers, recitation of the Quran, prophetic prayers, meditation, companionship, taking lessons from the lives of the “saints”, etc. According to this thinking, *tazkiyah* is like a fixed course, or something to be learned from a manual. However, the truth is that there is no fixed course for

attaining *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can be attained only through a living act. The real means of attaining the ends of *tazkiyah* is for man to reflect on the signs of God, activate his thinking, and through continuous reflection or pondering, discover the deeper realities of things. This discovery is spiritual food for a person who is a seeker of *tazkiyah*. For instance, suppose you see a bird. This reminds you of this saying of the Prophet that the hearts of the people of Paradise will be like the hearts of birds. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2840)

You later begin to think about yourself—whether or not your heart is like that of the bird; whether or not your heart is free of all negative thinking like that of the bird; whether or not you are free from greed like the bird; whether or not you are as harmless as a bird; whether or not you follow the law of nature, just as the bird does. Such thinking is the essence of *tazkiyah*. Without such introspection, no one can attain *tazkiyah*.

In its reality, *tazkiyah* is an act of spiritually developing one's own self. In engaging in self-purification, one has to become one's own teacher and has to purify oneself. Sitting in the company of another or listening to someone else's preaching cannot in itself be effective for one who aspires to *tazkiyah*. Initial guidance can be provided by another person, but taking it to completion is a task one must achieve oneself. In the process of attaining *tazkiyah*, if the share of the other person is 1% then one's own share is 99%.

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

Spiritual progress is another name for a spiritual awakening in one's internal personality. It is an intellectual journey which takes one from materialism to a world of meaning.

What is spiritual progress? Spiritual progress is another name for a spiritual awakening in one's internal personality. Material food makes one's physical body healthy. Similarly, the spiritual existence of a person becomes healthy through such refinements as are called spiritual divine food. (*The Quran*, 20:131)

It was July 16, 2004. It was a very hot day in Delhi. The light went off for a long period in the afternoon. The ceiling fan stopped. I sat in my room in that heat of July. For a long time I stayed in this condition. Finally the light came back on and the fan started functioning.

It was a sudden experience. The moment the fan started rotating the body cooled down. It seemed as though the hour of distress had come to an end and comfort had been restored. At that time, I was reminded of two traditions of the Prophet of Islam in which it is spelled out that the world for a believer is a place of great difficulty or distress. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2956) But when the believer leaves this world after death, he will find himself all of a sudden in the gardens of Paradise. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 4262) The difficult worldly life of afflictions will all of a sudden

come to an end, and exactly at the same time the phase of comfort of the afterlife will begin.

When I had this experience, the latent spiritual feelings hidden in nature were awakened. A material event had transformed into a spiritual event. These words came to my lips: "May God do the same for me when the time comes for me to leave the world." Then it should be a moment when all of a sudden it is akin to leaving a period of affliction and entering into a period of comfort.

Spirituality is indeed an intellectual journey, a journey which takes one from materialism to a world of meaning. This journey takes place at the internal level. Others are not apparently able to see or understand this journey, but the traveller feels it deeply. Spirituality makes one a human being. The person whose life is devoid of spirituality, is no different from the animals.

***TAZKIYAH*: SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT**

The source of *tazkiyah* is divine provision and not human provision. It is the result of that process which is directly established between God and man through a psychological relationship. *Tazkiyah* is a blessing which man receives from God.

The body requires physical food. When it receives its food, it becomes healthy. Similarly, the soul requires spiritual provision. When the soul is provided with such food, it

becomes healthy. This process is called purification of the soul and this healthy soul is called a purified and cleansed soul.

According to the Quran, the food for the soul is in thinking. (3:191) At every moment certain incidents take place in the life of a man. These incidents appear at the level of society, history, the universe, etc. Thinking about these incidents or events and deriving lessons from them, is food for the soul. One who develops his consciousness to such an extent that he sees the glory of God in the events which take place around him, and for whom these events become a means of remembering God, has obtained the divine provision for his soul. His soul will continue to receive this healthy nourishment until he finally leaves this world to be ushered into the Divine Presence.

The most important source of *tazkiyah* is the lessons one learns to take from every happening. The ability to learn lessons is the basis of *tazkiyah*. This is the soil from which *tazkiyah* grows. Trying to encourage its growth at any other place is like trying to grow a green tree on a rock. The source of *tazkiyah* is divine provision and not human provision. It is the result of that process which is directly established between God and man through a psychological relationship. *Tazkiyah* is not achieved through any intermediary between God and man. *Tazkiyah* is a blessing which man receives from God.

THE MORE EFFECTIVE WAY TO ATTAIN *TAZKIYAH*

The only way to attain *tazkiyah* is for man to make himself so intellectually aware that he can develop in himself the ability to learn lesson, then every experience and every observation will become a stepping stone to *tazkiyah*.

One method of attaining *tazkiyah* is to formulate certain principles in an abstract way, put them in writing and ask others to read them. This may be one way to achieve *tazkiyah*, but the more effective way is to relate those principles to some situation. One form of this second method requires a living spiritual guide. Another method is for one to develop his thinking to the point of discovering on his own the element of *tazkiyah* in every experience or observation, and then making that experience or observation a part of his thinking.

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, a Companion of the Prophet, once said that even if the Prophet saw a bird flying in the air with outstretched wings, he would give them some lesson in the realization of God. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 21439) This is an example of imparting education in *tazkiyah* with reference to some situation.

The fact is that there is no abstract method of effectively achieving *tazkiyah*. The only way is for man to make himself so intellectually aware that he can develop in himself the ability “to learn a lesson” (15:75).

He may relate the situation confronting him to *tazkiyah* and then learn a spiritual lesson from it. In everyday experiences, we have the stuff of *tazkiyah*. Learn to see daily experiences from this standpoint, then every experience and every observation will become for you a stepping stone to *tazkiyah*.

PARADISE FOR THE PURIFIED SOUL

Paradise is only for the individual who purifies himself.
Purification means abandoning a life of unawareness
and leading a life ruled by the conscience.

According to Chapter 20 of the Quran, Paradise is for one who purifies his soul in this present world and reaches the world hereafter with a purified personality. This reality has been clearly described in many verses of the Quran. Attainment of Paradise will be based on individual merit rather than on personal affiliation to any community or group.

Paradise, therefore, is only for the individual who purifies himself. Purification means abandoning a life of unawareness and leading a life ruled by the conscience. The believer has to save himself from anything which comes in the path of truth, and when he faces any hurdles, he must not resort to expediency. When desires arise within him, he must crush them, and when he is overtaken by arrogance, he should be able to overcome his overweening pride.

Tazkiyah means purifying the individual of unfavourable elements, so that he may reach the point of perfection in a favourable environment. This was a very important task given to the prophets.

A prophet makes the greatest possible efforts to prepare human beings whose hearts are free from the love of all else except the love of God. He strives to bring into existence such souls as are free from complexes and are worthy of receiving the divine provision from the Universe, which God has reserved for true believers.

Purification is the principal condition for entry into Paradise. Without purification, one can never gain entry into the eternal heavenly abode.

TAZKIYAH AND SACRIFICE

The price for attaining *tazkiyah* is abstaining from everything that goes against achieving this goal. A frivolous mentality and *tazkiyah* do not go together. Sincerity is a guarantee that a man will certainly reach the stage of *tazkiyah*.

The attainment of *tazkiyah* is no simple matter: it always requires some sacrifice, which is psychological rather than physical in nature. This sacrifice is to completely renounce, for the sake of *tazkiyah*, those things that run counter to acquiring *tazkiyah*. It is a principle of nature that in order to achieve something, one has to let go of

some other thing. This principle is as important in the case of *tazkiyah* as in any other case.

One of the things to rid oneself of is bad habits. Due to environmental influences, every man and woman becomes accustomed to certain habits which are detrimental to the attainment of *tazkiyah*. It is absolutely necessary for a seeker of *tazkiyah* to totally rid himself of such habits. Some of these habits include speaking excessively without thinking, busying oneself with the demands of one's family, taking a lot of interest in eating and clothes, pursuing the culture of entertainment, speaking to others of someone's negative points or shortcomings, going shopping and on outings, spending extravagantly instead of limiting oneself to one's needs, having superficial tastes, becoming angry at criticism and feeling happy when praised, being greedy for material things, not restricting oneself to one's needs and preferring affectations to simplicity.

Everything has a price and there is a price for attaining *tazkiyah*, viz. abstaining from everything that goes against achieving this goal. A person who wants to attain *tazkiyah*, but is not ready to give up all that which prevents one from attaining *tazkiyah*, is certainly not serious in his quest. *Tazkiyah* can never become a reality if the seeker is of a non-serious temperament. A frivolous mentality and *tazkiyah* do not go together. A person who is serious in his pursuit of *tazkiyah* will himself realize which things are favourable to *tazkiyah* and which are not.

His sincerity will compel him to pursue whatever is favourable to *tazkiyah* and totally refrain from anything which goes against it. Sincerity is a guarantee that a man will certainly reach the stage of *tazkiyah*.

PARADISE: THE PURPOSE OF *TAZKIYAH*

Human life is a journey of realization, extending from this world to the Hereafter. In this world, this journey takes place on a very limited scale. In the Hereafter this journey will know no limits if one has proved to be a deserving candidate by purifying his soul.

Chapter 39 of the Quran describes the people of Paradise thus: “Those who fear their Lord will be led in groups towards Paradise. When they reach it, its gate will be opened, and its keepers will say to them, ‘Peace be upon you. You have done well, enter Paradise and dwell in it forever,’ and they will say, ‘Praise be to God who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us the inheritors of this land, letting us settle in the Garden wherever we want.’ How excellent is the reward of those who labour! You shall see the angels circling about the throne, glorifying their Lord with praise. And judgement will have been passed in justice on all and it will be said, ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe!’” (39:73-75)

The invocation, ‘Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe’ is a part of the first chapter in relation to this present world, while in this Chapter 39, these words relate to the world of

the Hereafter. This shows that what is truly desired of man is that he should lead a life of remembrance and glorification of God. What is desirable in this world is equally desirable in the next world. The actual aim of *tazkiyah* is to bring into existence such purified souls as may glorify God and become a part of the life Hereafter.

One task assigned to man in this present world was to bring civilization into existence—a task performed by man on a very large scale. This journey of civilization began from the Stone Age and was taken to the heights of the electronic age. It gained enormous momentum with discovery of the laws of nature. But what, in effect, happened was that a right was mixed with a wrong. After overcoming the forces of nature, man became insolent and established a despotic system; he encouraged anarchy in the name of freedom; he promoted nudity or semi-nudity in the name of fashion, and so on. That is why on the Day of Judgement God will select righteous people who will be given the opportunity to establish a divine civilization. This is the reality which finds expression in this verse of the Quran: “My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.” (21:105)

It is a fact that human life is a journey of realization, which extends from this world to the Hereafter. In this world, the journey of realization takes place on a very limited scale. On the contrary, in the Hereafter the journey of realization will know no limits. However, this journey may be successfully undertaken only by one who has proved to be a deserving candidate by having purified his soul. The Quran tells us that God’s words are so innumerable that even if the seven

seas were doubled and all these seas were turned into ink and all the trees of the world were turned into pens, even then the ink would not suffice to write down all of God's words. The Quran expresses it thus: "If all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas added to it, the words of God would not be exhausted." (31:27)

This is not simply a statement but a command by God Almighty to be followed by believers. This means that believers ought to discover the words of God and thus continue discovering God's wonders and increasing their realization of His power. The first verse of the Quran, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe," is the beginning and not the end. This verse announces the beginning of the journey of realization in this world. At another place this verse appears with reference to the world hereafter: "It will be said, 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe.'" (39:75)

This second verse tells us the ultimate stage of realization, which will continue for all eternity in the most favourable environment of the Hereafter.

In the first stage of realization the scientists of the 19th and 20th centuries have played a very great role in providing a scientific framework for the realization of God.

As we learn from the Quran, in the life hereafter, the believers will be supported by the angels in their journey of realization: "We are your companions in this life and in the Hereafter." (41:31)

TOWARDS SPIRITUAL CIVILIZATION

The aim of *tazkiyah* is to find virtuous souls who will gain entry into the world of Paradise, the spiritual society. And it is these people who will build an eternal spiritual civilization.

It is desirable for a person to strive to discover the signs of God hidden in nature and to acknowledge God at the elevated level of God-realization. In this way, he brings into existence a Godly or divine civilization. In the present world, he has been given freedom for the purpose of being put to the test. But by misusing this freedom in this present world, he establishes a civilization which is non-spiritual in nature. But God wants a spiritual civilization: very soon this world will come to an end and will be replaced by a better world. (*The Quran*, 42:36)

It is in this world, called the Hereafter that it would be possible, according to God's desired plan, to bring a high level of spiritual civilization into existence. Here it would be possible for an elevated level of God-realization to be attained. According to the will of the Lord, an ideal society will come into existence. It will be a perfect world where it will be possible for one to achieve fulfilment in every respect.

The aim of *tazkiyah* is to find virtuous souls for this spiritual society or heavenly civilization of the future. *Tazkiyah* means that such upright individuals be prepared for this heavenly society as are well-adapted to living in this ideal world, whose thinking, conversation, habits, and tastes in every

respect have that sublime character which is desired in the Hereafter for life in Paradise.

The present world has been created in order to prepare such individuals and it is this preparation which is called purification. This purification is brought about by one's own reflection and introspection. In that way, what we are going to experience in the society of Paradise is being experienced again and again in this present world. On this subject, the angels are preparing a person's record of his relations and his dealings with others, and what kind of response he has given in different situations, heavenly or non-heavenly, spiritual or non-spiritual, right or wrong, responsible or irresponsible. It is on the basis of this record of those who have given the desired response in this present world that candidates for Paradise will be selected.

It is these selected souls who will gain entry into the world of Paradise. And it is these people who will build a spiritual civilization. This is a process which will go on and on forever. Just as there is no limit to the words of God (31:27), similarly, there is no limit to this process of building a spiritual civilization.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FINAL DESTINATION
TOWARDS THE NOBLEST COMPANION

LOVE: A TWO-SIDED MATTER

God's love for a person is like a divine gift, and the love for God by God's servant is a matter of gratitude and acknowledgement. This is the key to entering Paradise.

There is a long tradition recorded in the books of Hadith, one part of which is: "The Prophet of Islam once observed that God would not cast anyone in the fire whom He loved." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 13467)

This Hadith has nothing mysterious about it. The love mentioned in this hadith is two-sided, not one-sided. This means that one who, upon reflection, realizes God, the Creator, who discovers God as the Benefactor, will become endeared to God. All his emotions and feelings will attach to God.

When one reaches this state as a result of conscious realization, he will take God as the sole object of his love. Subsequently, when such a man becomes a beloved of God, this will be a guarantee that, on Doomsday, God will never cast him into the fire.

There is nothing mysterious about becoming a beloved of God. This is a natural happening. When someone so attaches himself to God that he comes to love God more than anyone else, he becomes deserving in the eyes of God, and God showers His mercy upon him and saves him from hellfire in the Hereafter.

God's loving a person stems from his divine mercy, making man's love of God its own reward. God's love for a person is like a divine gift, and the love for God by God's servant

is a matter of gratitude and acknowledgement. It is this gratitude and acknowledgement which are without doubt, the key to entering Paradise.

SALVATION IN THE HEREAFTER

Paradise is so great that no individual or collective action of any human being can become a key to entry into it. One who so esteems Paradise that he regards himself as totally undeserving of it, will gain entry into Paradise.

The Prophet of Islam addressed his daughter thus: “O Fatima, save yourself from the fire of Hell. For I have no power to do anything for you in this matter.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 204) Similarly, according to another tradition narrated by Hazrat Ayesha, the Prophet observed: “No one’s action can take one to Paradise, not even mine. I also can reach Paradise only by God’s mercy and forgiveness.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6467)

Entry into Paradise is not a simple matter. To gain entry into Paradise will be a matter of final success in the Hereafter. This great event will take place only by God’s decision, which is an expression of His Power. Paradise is for those who acknowledge God, that is, for those who will enter Paradise in full acknowledgement of God. This perfect acknowledgement must be real acknowledgement and not just lip service.

This feeling of complete acknowledgement can take shape in man only when he attests to the fact that he can gain entry

into Paradise only by God's mercy. When he says: "O God, I do not deserve this at all. It is an extraordinary blessing that You gave me Paradise in spite of my being totally undeserving." The truth is that Paradise is so great that no individual or collective action of any human being can be its price. One who so esteems Paradise that he regards himself as totally undeserving as compared to Paradise, is the one who will gain entry into Paradise. No action on the part of man can become a key to entry into Paradise. The open sesame to Paradise lies in man's discovery of his total unworthiness.

MAN'S FUTURE

Paradise will not be given to anyone purely on the basis of the quantum of his good deeds. It will be given by the mercy of God Almighty. Only those who attached no value to their actions will be enveloped in God's mercy and gain entry into Paradise.

The study of human beings tells us that man is a pleasure-seeking animal. Man's ability to enjoy things is almost unlimited. There being pleasure in thinking, pleasure in speaking, pleasure in seeing, pleasure in hearing, pleasure in eating, pleasure in touching, pleasure in companionship, means that man has an immense capacity for enjoyment. It is a great experience for man to be able to savour pleasurable occupations.

But in the life of the pre-death period, man is not able to savour things to the full. The limitations of the present

testing ground is the real obstacle to man's enjoying these pleasures to the full. Naturally, in spite of having the capacity for pleasure par excellence, no person in the present world is able to achieve fulfilment.

According to religious faith, the place for this fulfilment is the world after death. Now the question is, who is that person, who will have the opportunity to experience fulfilment in the next world? If strict conditions of action were applied, no one would be able to meet this. No one will have it purely on the strength of having done good deeds. This means that in spite of being a pleasure-seeking animal, human beings will be eternally deprived of the enjoyment of pleasures.

The answer is that Paradise will not be given to anyone purely on the basis of the quantum of his good deeds. It will be given, rather, by the mercy of God Almighty. The preferred ones are unique people who, despite having done every kind of good deed have actually attached no value to their actions and expect that it will only be when God's mercy envelopes them that they will gain entry into Paradise.

THE BLESSING OF OLD AGE FOR MAN

When a man reaches old age and comes face to face with death, his thinking changes and he becomes cut to size. Old age gives man an opportunity to become a realist.

There are two periods of life—youth and old age. Before reaching the stage of old age, a man has energy, and is

so filled with the spirit of adventure that he regularly overestimates his own capabilities. For him this is a romantic period of his life, for his thinking is not realistic. It is a sign of his immaturity.

When a man reaches old age, his thinking begins to change, for, having come face to face with the realities of life, he is now cut to size. His whole point of view on life has had to make an about turn.

Nature or the Creator wants man to come out of this artificial or immature phase of life, stop thinking superficially and start thinking realistically and deeply. This stage can be arrived at only through introspection. There is no other, better way. The Creator desires that man should fulfil his divine destiny. And this can be done only when he cuts himself to size on his own. Looked at from this point of view, old age is a blessing for man.

The most important thing in life is for man to shed his illusions and start thinking in terms of reality. He must think and live as a realist. Old age gives man an opportunity to become a realist. The message of old age is: "O man, if you wasted your youth because of ignorance, now in old age be more serious about things. Whatever you failed to do in your youth, try to make amends for that in your old age. Youth was the age of being a loser, when you failed to avail of your first chance. Now, with the maturity which old age brings, avail of the second chance by planning your life anew, so that you may make a success of it."

OLD AGE: PRIOR NOTICE OF DEATH

When an awakened man reaches old age he realizes that death is certain, he has to face the divine court in the Hereafter and be held accountable before God. The most unfortunate person is one who attains old age, but remains negligent of the Hereafter.

Chapter 35 of the Quran says: “Did we not make your life long enough to take warning if you were going to? The warner did come to you.” (35:37) There are several traditions, in the books of Hadith like in Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6419, in which it is mentioned that the man who has had a long life is left with no excuse for not paying heed to the divine message when he stands before God. At first, there is childhood then there is youth, and finally there is old age. Old age is the last period for any person in the present world. Because the stage that comes after that is that of death and not any other stage.

Old age is, therefore, the prior notice of death. In old age, all the organs of the body become weak and some organs of the body stop functioning. These events tell us that the time of death has come near. This is a compulsory reminder of death. Old age puts a human being at the edge of the grave. If a man’s mind is awakened, he will start thinking on reaching the old age that now the time is fast approaching when his death is certain and he will be held accountable before God. Acknowledgement of this shakes a man up. It forces him to think of the Hereafter. Indeed old age tells man that his journey in the present world will soon be over. He is going to enter into the next stage and shall have to

face the judgement of the divine court. Undoubtedly the most unfortunate person is one who has attained old age without heeding what it signified, thus remaining in a total state of negligence, even dying in that state.

COMPLETE DEPRIVATION

Death, a state of complete deprivation, means departing from this world and entering the eternal world of the Hereafter. Those who make this reality their supreme concern and lead righteous lives will be held deserving of gaining entry into Paradise in the world Hereafter.

“Every human being is bound to taste death” (3:185). This verse of the Quran gives a serious warning to everyone. The fact is that death is no simple matter for anyone. Death means departing quite finally from one world and entering into another world.

According to the Quran, in the present world, all things in the heaven and on the earth have been subjected to man. (45:13)

In the present world, man apparently has everything he needs to live his life. But in the world of the Hereafter in which he will find himself after death, he will be totally deprived of everything—his family, his friends and all his wherewithal. This will be as serious for him as a fish being taken out of water and cast into the desert.

This is a very delicate and serious matter which every man and woman should take seriously. Everyone should think in

terms of this grave reality, and should plan his life according to it. Everyone should sleep at night with this thinking and should get up in the morning with the same thinking. Everyone should make this reality the focus of his attention. Everyone should strive to live with it and die with it. Only those who make this reality their supreme concern, will be able to lead righteous lives in this world and will be held deserving of gaining entry into Paradise in the world after death.

PREPARING FOR TOMORROW

The opportunities of the present world are not meant totally for attaining worldly benefits. They exist to enable man to do such noble work as will be beneficial for him in the Hereafter like engaging in dawah work. Wise is he who pays due heed to the issues of the Hereafter.

There is a verse of the Quran which tells us that “truly, you love immediate gain and neglect the Hereafter.” (75:20-21)

When a person is born into this world, he sees that everywhere there are different types of opportunities for him. He becomes impatient to grasp these opportunities, just as an animal is affected by seeing green grass. He wants to derive the maximum benefit from these opportunities.

This is the biggest mistake made by almost everyone. The opportunities of the present world are not meant totally for attaining worldly benefits. They exist rather to enable man

to do such noble work as will be beneficial for him in the Hereafter. For example, if someone possesses wealth it is not meant just to let him fulfil his desires. Certainly he will elevate his status in the society and will live according to the highest standard. But the right use of his wealth is to keep as much of it as he requires for his needs, so that he may spend the rest of it for God's cause. For example, he may use it to engage in dawah work.

The present world is temporary, and the Hereafter is eternal. But the strange thing is that man puts in all his efforts in this temporary world of progress and prosperity, but neglects the matter of the eternal life of the Hereafter as he thinks that it is never going to become a reality. Wise is he who pays due heed to the issues of the Hereafter.

GOD-FEARING PEOPLE

Those who lead their lives in fear of God's judgement, will receive their record in their right hand, and be safe from a life of fear in the Hereafter. Those who lived without fearing God's chastisement will receive their record in their left hand, and live in eternal deprivation.

Chapter 84 of the Quran tells us that on the day of Judgement, people will be given entry into Paradise on the basis of good deeds. "Those who performed good deeds on earth will be given their record in their right hand. On finding that, they will thank God and they shall return to their people joyfully." (84:7-9) These are the

people who, according to the Quran, lived in their family “full of fear of God’s displeasure” (52:26).

Those who lead their lives in fear of God’s judgement, will be safe from a life of fear in the Hereafter, and they will lead their lives with their families who also performed good deeds in Paradise without any fear or sorrow. On the contrary, those who lived in the world without fearing God, without fearing the chastisement of the Hereafter will be given their record in their left hand, and then they will be sent to hell where they will have no happiness.

The Quran tells us that if a person leads a virtuous life in this world, if he makes himself deserving of a high place in Paradise, he will find that his people will also be upgraded and they will be ushered into high levels of Paradise. “To those who have attained to faith We shall unite their offspring who have also followed them in the faith, and We shall not let any of their good deeds go unrewarded.” (52:21)

There are two ways of leading one’s life in this world. One is to lead a life of concern when living amongst one’s family members, thinking of the Hereafter. This is the way to find a place in Paradise in the Hereafter. Those who live in this way, are the ones who in the Hereafter will be given entry into Paradise which is a world free of grief where they will enjoy a life without fear and without sorrow.

On the other hand, those who lead their lives amongst their family members as if they have no fear of the Hereafter, not thinking of the Hereafter, and are not afraid of God’s chastisement, who enjoy the life of this world, will be deprived of the enjoyment and happiness of the next life.

Whereas those who lead a life of fear of God's punishment, can hope for a life free of fear in the Hereafter.

OLD AGE: PREPARATION FOR DEATH

One who reaches old age, but does not get the sustenance of God-consciousness is undoubtedly an unfortunate person. The consequences of this are everlasting regret.

It is mentioned in the Hadith that it is a matter of regret if a man reaches the age of sixty but fails to enter Paradise (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6419). Age here is not the issue but rather the deep reality beyond.

The deep reality is that, the greater the age, the more the experience. Yet in spite of more experience, one who does not do acts deserving of Paradise, is undoubtedly ill-fated, in that he may be brought to the gate of Paradise, yet will fail to go through it.

It is a known fact that, everyone has only a limited lifespan in this world. From the moment a man is born, his countdown starts. The journey of life is actually a journey towards death, so when old age comes, it is like a half-death experience for him. Old age is something near death. It reminds man of death every morning and evening.

This being so, the individual should remember that when he reaches old age, he should reflect more and more upon death, and the situation after death. He should bring this reality repeatedly to mind that, before his death, he finds

himself in a condition of power, whereas suddenly, after death, he will find himself in a condition of helplessness.

It is the demand of this feeling that his heart be soft. He should be afraid of God's grip and prepare himself as much as possible for the Hereafter.

One who reaches old age, but does not get the sustenance of God-consciousness from his old age is undoubtedly an unfortunate person, for the consequences of this are nothing but eternal ruination and everlasting regret.

DEATH: THE GREATEST MEANS OF REFORMATION

We should remember death often. Death will make one completely helpless. This aspect of death is the greatest means of reform for man in this world.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam said: "Remember death often." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 4258) But it is strange that death is the thing which is seldom thought of in people's lives. The reason could be that man's DNA contains each and everything except for prescience of the event of death. But there is no need to include death in the DNA for it to be remembered. On a daily basis, people keep dying and this incident happening every day should be enough for people to remember their own death. They should not be oblivious of their eventual death, even for a moment.

Death is like a frontier. On the one side of death is the present world which can be likened to a green garden.

On the other side of death is the world of the Hereafter which is like a desert. At the time of death what happens is that all of a sudden man leaves the present green world for a limitless expanse of a desert. He suddenly finds that now he can never return to the green garden of the world. Beyond is the vast desert where nothing exists to support life.

According to a Hadith, the event of death suffices as a reminder to man. (*Shu'abul Iman*, Hadith No. 10072) This means that if man continues to remember death, this alone will be sufficient for his reform. The truth is that the remembrance of death, in the terminology of the carom board, is like a master stroke which revolutionizes man's whole life.

In the present world, man lives on the strength of various supports. All these supports make man oblivious of the reality. It is death which reminds him of the day which will come when all these supports will no longer exist. The moment of death will make him helpless. This is the aspect of death due to which death has been described as the greatest means of reform.

WHAT IS DEATH?

Death is not the end of life. Death is the beginning of a new stage of life. A wise person uses present opportunities to prepare himself so he can be found eligible for Paradise in eternity.

Death is a grave reality which every man and woman has to face. No matter whether one is big or small, powerful or weak, there is no exception to this general rule.

What is Death? Death, in short, “is a compulsory exit from this world and a compulsory entrance into the next world.”

Life is a journey and death is the end of this journey. Death means that man will emerge from the present world and enter into the world of the Hereafter. This admission is for all eternity. Returns are possible from other journeys, but the journey to death is such that it is not possible to return to the previous world. This aspect of death is so serious that, in the words of the Hadith, it is going to demolish pleasures of every kind. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 4258) One who remembers death as a reality will start living in the Hereafter in this life itself.

Death is such an event that the individual suddenly becomes alone. His house, his family, his companions, his business, his fame and greatness—everything suddenly gets separated from him. He goes to a place where he is completely destitute and helpless.

Furthermore, he had the opportunity in this world to use his resources to make a world for himself, but, after death, all these resources will leave him. If he wants to make a new plan for his life again and re-build his life, it will not be possible to do so in the Hereafter. Death is not the end of life. Death is the beginning of a new stage of life. It is a wise person who uses present opportunities for what is to come tomorrow.

WHAT IS THE MEMORY OF DEATH?

Those who prepare for life after death will spend their lives in the hereafter in the atmosphere of happiness. Those who were not able to do so will live in eternal deprivation.

What does it mean to remember death? It actually means death-oriented planning. That is, making advance preparations so that we may face the situation after death. Thinking on the subject of death is just like thinking about life.

When a child is born, the planning of his life immediately begins. He is enrolled in such a course of education as will guarantee him a good job. This is true also of death. It is the demand of death, too, that man should prepare himself for it, so that he could achieve a good place for himself in the stage of life after his death.

Thinking about death means that man should reflect on the stage of life after death. He must train his mind based on this reality, he must develop qualities which are going to work for him in the life after death, he must develop such a personality as may lead to his success in the aftermath of death.

If a person cannot get a good education in the present life he is always full of regret for the rest of his life. He keeps thinking that if he had had a good education, he could have got a good job. This is the case on a larger scale of the post-death period.

Those who prepare for life after death will spend their lives in the hereafter in the atmosphere of happiness, and those who were not able to do this will always rue it. The regret

of the world in comparison to the regret of the Hereafter will be unspeakably painful as compared to the regret of the present world.

THE TEMPEST OF DEATH

Death is the greatest teacher. If we take lesson from death, our whole behaviour will be set right, we will become alert to all that is most important in relation to life and the afterlife.

One day, when someone who had come to see me, knocked at my door. I was reminded of the fact that similarly one day, the angel of death will knock at my door, and without my permission, he would enter my home. He would not even need the door to be opened for him. By unilateral decision he would suddenly reach me and take my soul and leave.

There are two things in the present world that come entirely without prior permission. Neither can we stop them from coming nor can we have any prior intimation about them. They are death and earthquakes. While the earthquake shakes the earth, death impacts man. But the truth is that death is more dangerous than any earthquake. The earthquake shakes the physical world but death comes to a living person. The destruction caused by an earthquake relates to today, while the destruction of death relates to tomorrow. The most serious aspect of death is that it is not the end of life; it is the beginning of a new life. Man reaches a world after death where he is all alone and totally helpless. According to a hadith, "Wise is he who in worldly matters,

keeps control over himself and makes his target of action such matters as pertain to the life after death". (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2459) Death serves as reminder of this reality: it is the greatest teacher. One who can take this lesson from death, will find that his whole behaviour will be set right. He will, to the ultimate extent, become alert to all that is most important in relation to life and the afterlife.

THE BIGGEST MISUNDERSTANDING

Death reminds us that while in the pre-death period, we receive all these things as a matter of universal distribution, but in the post-death period we will receive things on the basis of selective distribution. Then some will have all things and some will be completely deprived.

In the present world, man has everything which is necessary. This situation is misleading. Everyone takes these things to be his by right, thinking this will never change. But the reality is quite the contrary.

The fact is that all these things have been given to man temporarily and only for the purpose of putting him to the test. He will get all these things during the test period, but after that, all of a sudden they will be taken away from him. It is death which terminates this period.

The person will remain the same after death, but everything will be taken away from him. The human being is a needy creation. He needs many things to fulfil his desires. God created all these things for man.

But there is a difference between the pre-death period and the post-death period. In the pre-death period, man has

received all these things as a matter of universal distribution, but in the post–death period this situation will drastically change. The principle of selective distribution will be followed at that time. And then some will have things and some will be completely deprived. Death is a reminder of this serious event. More than a lakh people die every day in the world. Those who die are saying in a silent language that we are going to the second period of life after coming out of the first period of life. This time is also going to come upon you. We lost our opportunities. Be careful and do not lose your opportunities. We cannot come back to this world again. One day that moment will come in which you will lose the present opportunity. Know this reality, and make a plan for your life accordingly.

JOURNEY TOWARDS AN UNKNOWN GOAL

Every day I feel that I am sitting on an invisible plane heading towards the Hereafter. Soon it will be announced that our plane has landed at the airport of the Hereafter. As we disembark from the airplane we will be faced with the strange new world. This is a reality.

In November 1984, I received a unique type of invitation. This invitation was apparently from the convenors of a conference, but it did not contain the necessary details. It was just a first class return ticket with Delhi-Casablanca–Delhi written on it. When I received the air ticket, Casablanca was at that time an unknown name for me. I did not know anything about Casablanca. I was quite hesitant about this journey. But when the date came, I went to the Delhi airport and took my seat in the airplane, feeling rather uneasy. The

airplane started flying high in the sky. Weird kinds of thoughts started coming to my mind. I did not understand where the airplane would land and where I would go from there.

The airplane continued to fly and eventually the announcer announced that our plane would soon be landing at the Casablanca airport. All the passengers disembarked from the airplane one-by-one. In the end, I got up from my seat and walked slowly out of the airplane. I was in a strange situation at that time. There was no one to receive me at the airport. (For details see: Al-Risala, January 1985, pp. 30-31)

This incident often comes to my mind. I feel as if I am sitting on an invisible plane. And that plane is constantly moving, heading towards the Hereafter. Suddenly, the time will come, when it will be announced that our plane has finally landed at the airport of the Hereafter and that passengers should disembark from the airplane and move out. When I will come out, the world before me will be absolutely strange. There will be no companion or anyone else. None of my own people will be there to welcome me. What a strange time is about to commence, for me and also for others.

A STRANGE FORGETFULNESS

Death is a great revolutionary concept. But no one entertains the remembrance of death, so no revolution takes place in people's lives. Consciously or unconsciously they think, that he is very far away from the Angel of death, and so there is no need to have any fears.

While giving his verdict in a case, the judge, addressing the accused said, "Tomorrow at 6 'o clock, you will be

executed." The accused started laughing. The judge asked: "What made you laugh?" The accused replied: "Sir, I sleep till 8 in the morning." This is a joke, but in general people adopt the same line of thinking concerning death, both men and women, the poor and the rich, the old and the young.

People have the same strange way of looking at death. Every day and everywhere, people are dying. Everyone sees that yesterday there was a person who was alive, but today he has left this world. Such incidents should serve as reminders to people that their time can also come at 6 the next day, but everyone, like the accused, indulges in the belief that he sleeps till 8—so how can the Angel of death take his soul?

Everyone is living in some secure fortress. Some think that living with their families is a very secure arrangement, some think that it is their popularity that matters, others think their wealth will save them and yet others think their post is a safe refuge. Everyone thinks, consciously or unconsciously, that he is very far away from the Angel of death, and so there is no need to have any fears.

Because of this self-concocted psychology, no one thinks about his own death. In no meeting or gathering is there any discussion on the subject of death. No one is afraid of the concept of death. There is no one for whom the concept of death becomes such an obsession that he loses interest in the fulfilment of all his pleasures. There is no one for whom the concept of death has disturbed his comfortable life. There is no one whose peace of mind has been taken away or for whom the remembrance of death has made it impossible for him to sleep at night. The concept of death is a great revolutionary concept. But no one entertains the remembrance of death and that is why no revolution takes place in people's lives.

PLEASANT BEGINNING, PAINFUL END

In this world everyone works hard to make money, only to give easy money to his unworthy children and then leave the world one day. He takes nothing to his grave but his good deeds.

A certain Muslim of my acquaintance worked very hard at his education, and acquired a law degree from a well-known college. Next, he passed the course of chartered accountancy with distinction. Soon he got a very good job of chief accountant in an Arab country; there he made a lot of money. He later came back to his own country, where he began working as a builder in a big city. He earned a lot of money and bought several properties. In the words of the Quran, he was engaged totally with amassing wealth, but at the age of 65 he died all of a sudden. He left the world empty handed. On hearing his story, I thought that in present times this is more or less true of everyone. In this world everyone has a hard life, makes money, only so that he may give easy money to his unworthy children and then leave the world one day.

This is like a painful end to a pleasant beginning. Everyone more or less has the same story to tell. Literate or illiterate, religious or irreligious, almost everyone apparently regards himself as successful, but death brings this lesson to all, that everyone is a deprived person. This state of affairs is the tale of 'from success to deprivation.' This painful situation continues because the dead never come back to this world, to make people aware of the reality of death and life. After death man becomes aware of this reality but this aware man never comes back to the world. The living man is unaware of the reality and this unaware man cannot discover the reality

by asking about it from the dead. Human history is another name for this double-sided deprivation.

THE COMEDY OR THE TRAGEDY

Every man's case is just the same: successful life, eventual death and facing the unknown. Successful is one who realizes this reality, and makes himself deserving of eternal Paradise.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (d. 1964) was the son of a wealthy father. It was said of him that "Nehru was born with a silver spoon in his mouth."

Jawaharlal Nehru achieved much fame and success in his life. But after 1962 he was a victim of disappointment and in the same state, he died suddenly at the age of 75 years. He left this world in such a way that, except for his own material existence, everything else had left him.

This is the situation more or less of every human being. Everyone may be born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but everyone dies helplessly without any spoon in his mouth.

This is the biggest tragedy of human life to which every man and woman should give thought. Every man's case is just the same—a successful life, eventual death, starting with great expectations and ending with disappointment. Every man and woman's story is a comedy at the beginning and a tragedy at the end. The successful person in this world is the one who knows this reality and plans his life with a deeper sense of reality. This is the secret of success of all men and women in the present world. This is the criterion by which a person's success or failure will be determined.

UNAWARE OF THE FUTURE

A tradition states: "One who will love the world, will harm his Hereafter, and one who will love the Hereafter will harm his world." We must prefer the eternal world to the temporary.

People in this day and age are uniformly aware of the present but unaware of the future. These two states sum up the story of all human beings of today. In this regard, there is no difference between the religious man and the irreligious man.

This state of affairs in its nature is something new. In previous times also man was impatient, but the impatience of man in previous times was limited. In present times due to tremendous new resources, the result is that, only one thing has become one's target or goal. Everyone spends all his energy on the acquisition of wealth. Then, all of a sudden, death comes to each and every person. And, leaving behind all his wealth and earnings, man heads towards his unknown destination. This unknown destination is the future of every man, but no man or woman is concerned about this future.

Man has to face two kinds of future. One is the immediate future which is related to the life before death. And the next distant future is related to the life after death. And the question of the immediate future is temporary, whereas the question of the distant future is an eternal one.

There is a Hadith which says: "One who will love the world, will harm his Hereafter. And one who will love the

Hereafter will harm his world.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 19697) So you must prefer what is eternal to what is temporary. The truth is that life is the name of priorities. The right priority leads man to success and the wrong priority leads man to failure.

DEATH, REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH

Remembrance of death makes a man cut to size, making him modest. Then one lives in total helplessness, acknowledges and accepts others and surrenders before the truth.

Death without doubt is the greatest problem for everyone. Death is like an earthquake for the individual. Earthquakes strike on the land, while death strikes at the individual. Just as man has no control over the earthquake, similarly, man is not able to control death. Just as an earthquake comes without prior warning so also does death come without prior warning. Just as it is not possible to reverse the earthquake, so also it is not possible to turn back death. Man in the face of the earthquake is totally helpless. Similarly, man too, in the face of death, is totally helpless. Man has no personal control either over the earthquake or over death.

While death puts an end to one's life, the remembrance of death can cause the elimination of the ego. The ego is man's greatest quality. Yet it is this very ego which becomes the cause of all evils in man. It is due to this ego that such

a personality is formed in a person as may be called self-centered. It is this self-centered personality that creates the feeling or the sense of one's own greatness, and the result of this sense of self-centeredness is that all those negative qualities are engendered within a person which can be described as pride, jealousy, oppressiveness, violence, revengefulness and more.

If one remembers death it can be the killer of all such negative feelings. One who has a living consciousness of death in the real sense, and who discovers the reality that he has to die one day and that after death he has to appear before the Lord of the World, he becomes a man cut to size. Such a man becomes modest to the ultimate extent. The feeling of personal greatness will disappear from such a person. Then he will start living with the feeling of total helplessness. He will start acknowledging and accepting others. He will surrender before truth, instead of trying to make the truth surrender before him.

THE EXPERIENCE OF DEATH

We should prepare for our Hereafter in this world itself. We can only reap the consequences of our previous actions in the Hereafter. There will be no prospect of a new beginning there.

Nine-time Wimbledon champion Martina Navratilova was regarded as the greatest female tennis players of all time. When she was 55, she went to a doctor for a medical

consultation. After being examined, she was told that cancer had spread throughout her lungs and it had reached the secondary stage. Describing the doctor's diagnosis, she said: "It was such a shock for me. It was my 9/11."

She said this because death had started appearing close to her. But the stage after death, is more difficult than that. Death, in the words of the Quran, is total severance from the world (2:166). After death, man arrives in another world, which from every angle is very different from the present world. After death, two serious realities are suddenly laid bare. One is that, it is not possible to return now to the pre-death period, where one had made a world of one's own. Secondly, one cannot make another world for oneself in the post-death period. This realization will bring man eternal disappointment and eternal regret, and no experience is as distressful as eternal despair and remorse.

In the present world, if one chance is lost here, one gets a second chance by which one can transform one's lost chance into success once again. This is not possible in the Hereafter. Receiving another chance in the Hereafter is just not possible. The first chance or the second chance or the third chance are the possibilities only in the present world. The next world is completely different from the present world. One can only reap the consequences of one's previous actions in the Hereafter, without there being any prospect of a new beginning. We should, therefore, prepare for our Hereafter in this world itself.

THE LESSON OF DEATH

Death announces that man's existence is in the power of Someone Else, God. As long as He wants, He keeps man alive in this world and when He wants, He brings death to that person.

Jyoti Basu died on January 17, 2010. At the time of his death he was 96. One of the great leaders of the Communist party, he served as the Chief Minister of West Bengal for twenty-three years without a break. The cause of his death, as declared by the doctor, was multi-organ failure.

The body that man has been granted in this world is a living factory of a perfect nature. Many systems are simultaneously at work in it—the system of thinking, the system of seeing, the system of hearing, the system of digestion, the system of the pulsating of the heart, the system of breathing, the system of keeping the body continuously in motion, etc. All these systems function in a totally co-ordinated fashion, and only then is it possible, for a person to exist in this world as a living entity.

For instance, if the memory does not work, a man cannot recall anything. If the sight does not work, then a man goes blind. If the hearing does not work, a man cannot hear anything. If the speech system does not work, a man becomes dumb. If the system of digestion does not work, a man cannot remain healthy. If the system of motion does not work, a man becomes paralyzed. If the system of breathing does not function, a man can neither inhale nor exhale. If the system of the heart does not function, a man's very survival will become impossible.

Death announces the reality that the different systems of man's existence are in the power of Someone Else. As long as He wants, He keeps man alive in this world and when He wants, He brings death to that person. On a daily basis, about one lakh deaths take place in this world. They give us news of the utmost importance. But it is very strange that, the living have no conscious knowledge of the importance of this news.

THE LIVING CONCEPT OF DEATH

Death is a compulsory expulsion from this world. The Angel of Death takes a person from the present world compulsorily to another world. Successful is one who has developed a personality that is worthy of being accepted in the Hereafter by God.

My younger brother, Abdul Muheet Khan, who was an engineer, died on January 31, 2010. At the time of his death in Faizabad (U.P), he was about 75 years old. During my long life I have seen thousands of people dying or have heard of their deaths. But the death of my brother was a totally new experience. It brought to me a new concept. If I have to name it, I will say it is the living concept of death. I pondered on how I had this new concept of death. We were six brothers and sisters. After the death of my younger brother, it came to me all of a sudden that all my sisters and brothers had died except for me. Now I was left all alone. This feeling gave me a jolt. I thought that up till yesterday my sisters and brothers had been in this very world where I

live. And now they have died one-by-one. Finally, of the six brothers and sisters, I am all alone. They have left this world to reach another world. They can neither see me nor can I see them. Death has permanently separated my sisters and brothers from me.

What is death? Death is a compulsory expulsion from this world. In the present life, everyone builds a new world for himself—home, property, business, children, relations, popularity, a social circle, post, social position, etc. On the basis of all these things everyone has a world great or small, within the compass of which he spends his days and nights. He regards this as his own world. But, all of a sudden, the time of death comes and the Angels take him out of this present world compulsorily and take him into another world, where he has nothing except his own existence. The event of death is understandable only to one who has a living concept of this reality. Successful is one who has developed a personality that is worthy of being accepted in the Hereafter by God Almighty.

BEFORE DEATH, AFTER DEATH

The present world is a testing ground. Death puts an end to this period of trial. After death, a man enters a new world where he will deal with the consequences of his own actions.

In the whole of human history, man's most serious instance of forgetfulness is the inevitability of death. There are very

few people to be found in this world who are not culpable of this grossest form of negligence.

The present world is a testing ground. It means that in the present world, whatever man possesses has been given to him as a means of testing him. Death puts an end to this period of trial. That is why when one dies, all these things meant for testing man are suddenly taken away.

After death, a man suddenly enters a new world. It will be a world of dealing with the consequences of his own actions. Earlier, where man lived with things meant to test him, after death, he will have to live with the result of his deeds in the world he left behind him. Life before death is a temporary matter, hardly lasting 100 years, but life after death is eternal.

There are a lot many possessions in the life of the person before death. All these things are automatically to be acquired as soon as he is born. That is why man takes these things for granted. He cannot imagine that all these bounties will suddenly be taken away from him. After death, man will suddenly find himself in a situation where he is absolutely alone and destitute.

Thinking seriously about this dire reality is the greatest issue for human beings. But people go on living in an uncaring condition. Eventually they die and suddenly leave this world. The following tradition applies to such people: The Prophet Muhammad said, “He wondered that those who should be running away from hell are sleeping and those who should be striving to attain such a precious thing as Paradise are sleeping.” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2601)

A BREAK IN HISTORY

The stage of life before death is both the first and the final chance for every person to prove oneself deserving of Paradise. But, people spend this time accumulating worldly comforts and luxuries for themselves, to eventually live in a state of eternal deprivation after death.

One of the rules of government service is that if a government servant remains absent without his leave having been approved, the government has the right to make his case that of a break in service. A break in service means his seniority will be affected. He will lose all the rights and benefits of service, and will return to the state where he was on the day one of his appointment. Despite all his past years of service he will forfeit all his rights to promotion. Thus, a break in service means a reduction in his employment status.

This principle applies to all men and women, only on a larger scale. This second general principle may be called a break in history. If anyone who has made a history of his deeds, finds all of a sudden that that history has been erased, it will be as if he has returned to a state of having no history.

In this world everyone stands on the history he has created out for himself. One is born here, then he gradually grows up. He receives different kinds of opportunities, by availing of which he makes a history of his own in terms of home, property, family, circle of friends, popularity, power, wealth, treasures, etc. These are all the supports that sustain him throughout his life.

He thus has a history of his own; it becomes his identity. He knows himself through it. This happens with every man and woman. Everyone carves out his history by striving unceasingly. And he stands on it.

But no one is given the opportunity to live for long with his history. Within a period of a hundred years the moment called death suddenly arrives. Death comes to everyone. It is irrevocable. And all of a sudden, he is separated from the stage of life before death and he is taken to the stage of life after death.

The arrival of death may be called a break in history. This event in history affects every man and every woman. By expending all their energy, all men and women make a world of their hopes and desires.

Every man lives in a world of his own making. Then all of a sudden death comes and he is compelled to leave this world and reach a world for which he had made no preparation. He leaves the world of his own making behind and the world in front of him is an eternal desert for which he had made no preparation. One who lived with the feeling of possessing everything suddenly enters a stage of total deprivation.

The stage of life before death is both the first and the final chance for every man and every woman. Subsequently, he is not going to be given another chance. One who has used this chance only to provide worldly comforts and luxuries for oneself will be compelled to live in the stage of the life after death in a state of total deprivation. For death will separate him from his past history and he will have no opportunity to make a new history for himself after death. One should

avail of this one chance to prove oneself deserving of eternal Paradise in the Hereafter.

How strange it is that man is losing the only chance he has today and how horrible it will be when man is in a total state of deprivation tomorrow and it will not be possible for him to save himself from it!

RETURN NOT POSSIBLE

The present world is a world of action; there is no reward to be meted out here. The next world will be the world of reward, and there will be no opportunity for action for anyone.

When I see people laughing today and caught up in all sorts of entertainment, I am shocked. I am shocked to see people laughing and amusing themselves today. Heightened sensitivity makes the hairs on my body stand on end. I start thinking how strange an end they are going to be faced with, while blissfully unaware of it they are laughing at this moment. Very soon they are going to face the dreadful end. They can never save themselves from it. What was required of them was to remain silent and try to find some strategy to save themselves from this horrible end.

This end is death. Everyone who is born into this world has to die. No one can save himself from death. Neither is he able to end his own life. After being born, everyone has become eternal. He has an eternal existence. Everyone has to live, even after death.

After death, all of a sudden everyone will find himself in such a world from which return is impossible. In this next world, man's state will be such that he will have no return ticket to come back to this present world. The present world is a world of action; there is no reward to be meted out here. The next world will be the world of reward, and there will be no opportunity for action for anyone. This is the fate of every man and woman and no one can change this fate.

Living in this present world, we must first of all know what the creation plan of our Creator is. Why has the Creator created this strange world and why has He created man with such unique capabilities? People's present state is due to their unawareness of this creation plan. They think that they are not going to face another end. If man knows that he is a traveller on a long journey that he has to undertake in this present world and then enter into the next world in the Hereafter, the whole map of life will be transformed.

DEATH: A REMINDER

Life is a period of action and death is the time to appear in the court of God. We should take the life of this world as a preparation period and make ourselves deserving of Paradise.

Death is not only the cessation of life for the person who dies, it is also a reminder for the survivor. When a person dies it seems that one who used to speak has fallen silent,

but his silence is an announcement in itself. It declares: The time has come for me, and now this time will come for you too. Get ready, therefore, for this eventuality.

It is normal that when a man has completed one year of his age, the next year of his age begins and his birthday is celebrated at that time. But the more correct way would be for that day to be considered as the day for remembering death.

The fact is that where age is concerned, for all men and women there is a constant counting down. All that each birthday tells you is that one year of your life has been reduced. People celebrate their birthdays as happy occasions, but when we look at the fact of the matter, it is quite the contrary. Every birthday serves as a reminder that the time of death is even closer, that one more year that one had for the preparation for Hereafter has been reduced.

One aspect of death is that a man has passed away from the present world. Another aspect of death is that a man has died without his desires having been fulfilled. It is a sign that the present world was not a world for fulfilling one's desires. The only world in which to fulfil one's desires is the next one. Wise is he who understands this sign and, taking the life of the present world as a preparation period, makes himself deserving of the next world.

Life is a period of action and death is the time to appear in the court of God. This is a very serious matter for every human being, and it shows wisdom to grasp this fact and make it one's supreme concern.

HAPPINESS ONLY IN THE HEREAFTER

The Creator has created the present world only for action. Happiness and comfort are only for God-fearing men and women, in the Hereafter.

Charlie Chaplin the famous British film star (1889-1977) was a comedian, who used to make people laugh with his antics. But Charlie Chaplin himself was unhappy on the inside. Despite all the material objects and comforts he possessed, he did not find happiness in his life.

It is said that once a man visited a psychiatrist and said to him, "I am very depressed. Can you advise me as to how I can be happy?" The doctor advised his patient to go and see Charlie Chapline's movies. The visitor said that he himself was Charlie Chaplin. "I make others laugh, but inside my heart is crying."

Charlie Chaplin was a comedian, but by the time he was 88 and death was near, he had become a tragic figure. The man who had made others laugh, once commented on his own condition: "I always like walking in the rain so that no one can see me crying."

This is the story of every man and woman in this world. People are stimulated to laugh, but they do not get any pleasure from inside. People tell stories of their success, but on the inside they are of a defeatist bent of mind.

The fact is that there is no happiness reserved for anyone in the present world. The Creator has created the present world only for action. Happiness and comfort are only and only in the Hereafter for God-fearing men and women.

AFTER DEATH

A study of human DNA informs us that there is one thing missing in it, that is, information of the death of the person. This is a declaration by nature that man is an eternal creature. Man's life continues after death. With the concept of the Hereafter everything falls into place.

Death is an undesirable event for everyone. Everyone wants to live for a very long period, but all of a sudden, he dies. It seems that man was on a journey, wanting to travel a very long distance, but before reaching his destination, death, unilaterally, put an end to his life.

How does this happen? This is the question asked by every man and woman. Everyone wants to know how it happens. What is life? And what is death? Why is it that man wants to live longer, but long before his sojourn is over, without his permission having been taken, he has to accept the decision of death?

When we ponder upon this matter, the first clue we find is in the modern discovery of DNA. As we know, DNA is stored within everyone. Everyone's DNA is like a complete encyclopaedia of his personality. But when this DNA is decoded we learn that it is a hundred times greater than the largest encyclopaedia. Every great or small aspect of one's personality is there in everyone's DNA.

But it is very strange how one aspect of the human personality is absent from one's DNA. If we study the DNA of any human being, we can find out everything about him, yet there is one thing which is not possible to know, and that

is when this person is going to die. This is a declaration by nature that man is an eternal creature. He is not going to die. Man's life continues, in the real sense, for death is not going to put an end to one's personality.

Now let us consider another aspect of the human personality, and that is that of all the living creatures it is man alone who possesses the concept of tomorrow. All other creatures live only in the present. No creature has the concept of tomorrow. Thanks to their limited consciousness, all creatures are as if born today and in today itself they will come to an end. But man—exceptionally—is one creature who clearly has the concept of tomorrow.

To come to a correct opinion in this matter, to keep one aspect in view is necessary. As we know, man has been born into this world with unlimited ambitions. But along with this, there is the other reality that everyone dies in such a manner that his desires are not fulfilled. This being so, everyone's case is that of unfulfilled desires. If we look at the general system of the universe, this is not in sync with the other things in existence. In this vast universe, no other creature besides man is faced with this problem.

This state of affairs tells us what the answer to this problem should be. Human desire should be fulfilled just as the desires of other creatures are fulfilled. For this to happen, the present world will be followed by another world where man will be able to have total fulfilment of his desires.

One extremely important aspect of the human being is that by nature, man possesses a mind which can conceive of justice. In this world man naturally wants all verdicts to be

based on justice. The virtuous should be rewarded for their good deeds and the evil should be punished for their evil deeds. This is the demand of human nature.

Human nature also wants there to be an afterlife where this demand for justice may be answered, because in this world it is not possible.

When we think of in terms of these questions, we find that the Hereafter is an entirely real concept, that is, when we believe in the concept of the Hereafter, we find the final answers to all these questions. Then everything falls into place.

AN EXPERIENCE OF DOOMSDAY

Man builds a life for himself in this world. Death ushers him into another world where he is totally alone and deprived of all resources. Wise is one who makes the necessary preparations for death in advance and makes himself worthy of Paradise in the Hereafter.

When one evening late in November 1984, my plane landed at the Casablanca airport, I was alone. The experience I had of that visit was a strange one. I had been invited to participate in a conference, and an air ticket had been sent to me, but I did not have the address of the venue of the programme. Nor did I have any contact number for the conference organizers. When I came out of the plane, there was no one to receive me. I wanted to make enquiries from the people at the airport, but found that everyone spoke only French, and understood neither

Arabic nor English. For some time I felt I had become a displaced person. There was no one to help me. I had no place to stay and no arrangements seemed to have been made for me. I felt so alone and helpless. It all seemed very strange.

I anxiously ran around here and there, without finding anyone to help me. I eventually emerged from the airport, still baffled about what I should do and where I should go.

After a while, I saw a man walking on the other side of the road. He crossed the road and came up to me, and started talking to me in Urdu. He told me that he was a Pakistani Muslim and was doing a job there. He listened to my tale of woe and sympathized with me. He knew French and took me to the police post at the airport. He talked to the officials in French and was told that they had no information about this. However, they were able to tell me that there was a conference going on in Casablanca's hotel "Safeer". Then the Pakistani Muslim said that he could drop me at the hotel Safeer. He did so and then left me to my own resources. I still felt bewildered but as soon as I entered the hotel, I met some people from the conference who knew me. They told me a room had been reserved for me. They gave me the hotel card and took me to room number 1207.

The experience I had that day gave me a foretaste of doomsday. After man is born in this world, he lives with his parents and relatives. He finds himself living in a world where he has been provided with a complete life support system by nature. He builds a house for himself and constructs a world that meets all of his necessary requirements.

Everyone lives a free satisfactory life in this world he has made for himself. But suddenly something very serious happens. It is the event of death. Death separates man completely from the world he has made for himself, and ushers him into another world where all those things among which he was living his life and which fulfilled all his needs, are taken away from him. His friends and relatives are separated from him. In this other world too man is totally alone, deprived of any resources he could fall back on.

The situation in which I found myself in 1984 was an earthly experience which showed me an image of the world to come after death. At some time or another such an image of the next world is shown to everyone so that he may be alerted to what the situation will be after death. Wise is one who heeds this forewarning and makes the necessary preparations for it in advance.

THE BUILDING OF THE PERSONALITY

Some people strive for material success in this world, while others lead God-fearing lives, make the Hereafter their goal and strive to build their own personality. God-oriented personalities are destined to achieve an eternal place in Paradise.

Consider the entrepreneur who goes into business. He achieves success by the power of money. All his work gets done and his desires are fulfilled. If he wants a home for himself, he buys a good house. He wants transport so he purchases a good vehicle in the market. If he wants a good

education for his children he ensures this by spending enough money on it. In short, from the worldly point of view, he becomes a totally successful man.

Such experiences lead people into thinking that it is money which is everything in this world. Make money and you can get everything. This thinking has been expressed in these words by a Persian poet:

*Ae zar tu khuda nahin va lekin bakhuda;
Sattaru-o-uyub wa qaziul-haajaati*

(O Money, you are not God but, by God, you can hide all shortcomings, all lackings and you can fulfil all needs.)

On the other hand, there is a person who fears God, who leads a God-fearing life, who makes the Hereafter as his goal or destination. Such a person also builds a world, but in his case it is the building of his own personality, which is an internal thing. It is not visible or tangible like material things; but, without doubt, the building of one's personality is a greater achievement than the building of the world.

The building of the world is done in the life prior to death and being material in nature, whatever constitutes it remains in this world itself. At the time of death when one who has occupied himself with material things goes on to the next stage of life, he cannot take any of his worldly things along with him. On the contrary, those who build godly personalities within themselves are never bereft of them. They remain with them externally. When such people die they enter the next stage of life with this personality intact. This godly personality serves

as an open sesame to Paradise. Because of this personality they achieve an eternal place in Paradise. And there is no success greater than this for any man.

THE BUSINESS OF BREATH

Death informs every living person that just the way someone has died, one who is still alive will also die. The message of death is: "O people, prepare yourselves for the future, because finally what is about to fall to your lot is your future, and not your past or your present."

A certain person, known as Mullaji, lived in our vicinity in Delhi. He bred cattle and sold milk. He had a Hindu friend who was a businessman. The Hindu friend had an iron business. One day a buffalo died. When Mullaji met his Hindu friend and told him that one of his buffalos had died, the Hindu iron trader said: "Mullaji, you have a business of breath. Breath may stop anytime." That is, a buffalo is alive only so long as it is breathing. If it's breathing stops then the buffalo's life will also come to an end. These words were uttered by the trader about Mullaji's business; but in reality, this is true of every living person. The iron trader should rather have said: 'Mullaji, the case of both of us is just a matter of breath, it may continue or it may stop.'

As we know, there are different types of systems in the human body which are essential for life. One of which is the respiratory system. This system is indispensable to human life. This system goes on functioning so long as the person is

alive. If this system stops working the person will die within a few minutes.

When a person dies, his breath stops at that very moment. The moment a man's respiratory system ceases to work properly or stops functioning, a strange type of voice may be heard, called the death rattle. This sound goes on for a few minutes. Almost immediately death follows. The truth is that, the death of another person is a reminder of one's own death. Every death tells every living person that in just the way someone has died, one who is still alive will die too. Every death says: "O people, prepare yourselves for the future, because finally what is about to fall to your lot is your future, and not your past or your present."

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH

According to Islam man has been created as an eternal being, with his life-span divided into two phases: the temporary period of life before death is a preparation ground and the eternal period of life after death where one reaps the reward for one's actions.

The dictionary defines death as the permanent cessation of life. This dictionary definition of death presents a negative picture of death. It reminds us that man may have been born as a complete man but his life is brought to an end after a very limited period of time. Then all his desires are obliterated and it becomes impossible for him to come into existence once again.

As compared to this definition, Islam presents a positive concept of life according to which death marks the second phase of human life. According to Islam, man has been created as an eternal being. Then his life-span has been divided into two phases—life before death and life after death. The period of life before death is a preparation ground while the period of life after death is that in which one reaps the reward for one's actions. According to this creation plan, man ought to regard the period of life before death as a preparatory period and must spend all of it in preparation for the second phase. For the phase of life after death is only for reaping the reward for one's actions and not for further action.

The event of death is indeed a message for life. The message is: what you have to do, do today itself—in the life before death, because no one will be given time for preparation in the afterlife.

THE REALITY OF LIFE

We are not here in this world to 'Enjoy the good things in life.' We are here to realize God and develop a God-Oriented personality which can be held deserving of inhabiting Paradise.

A special function was held in the Parliament Annexe, New Delhi, on the evening of September, 26, 2008. It was organized by the Foundation for Amity and National Solidarity in the main Committee Room. On this occasion,

this big hall was packed to capacity with a highly educated audience. According to the programme, the famous journalist Mr. Khushwant Singh (1915-2014) was given an award for his services. This award was given to him by the Lok Sabha speaker Somnath Chatterjee. On this occasion Mr. Shinde said that Mr. Khushwant Singh's ideology was 'Enjoy the good things in life.' I was invited along with ten members of the CPS to attend this programme. Our members distributed *dawah* literature in English to the people gathered there. This included the pamphlet, 'The Reality of Life' that explained that life is not for enjoying the good things of life in this world, but for preparing our personality so that we can be held deserving of gaining entry into eternal Paradise in the Hereafter, where we will be able to enjoy a good life for all eternity.

The concept of life presented in this pamphlet was quite contrary to that of Mr. Khushwant Singh, which briefly put, was 'Enjoy good things in life.'

Khushwant Singh was the chief guest of the programme. He is about 95 years old at the time. He was not able to walk straight. He needed the support of two men to walk on to the stage. He sat there with no sign of joy on his face. He was a picture of sadness. When he was introduced with that formula of life presented in his writings, 'Enjoy the good things in life,' he seemed mutely to convey that this formula of life was no longer applicable in this world for, ultimately, one became so weak that one was unable to enjoy anything at all.

The reality of life is: 'Prepare your personality so you can enjoy good things in the life to come in eternal Paradise.'

This is not just a story of one person, this is the story of the whole history. In every age, man has had the condition that he wants to build a palace of happiness for himself but in the end old age comes and thwarts all his plans.

Here man must reconsider his thinking. But man does not do so, finally his life comes to an end in despair. Although if he could reconsider his thinking, it is quite possible that his life will change from a tragedy into a comedy. Let one's life end in hope, not in despair.

EVERYONE IS A TRAVELLER TOWARDS DEATH

People are engaged in the celebration of life. Death ultimately ends all such celebrations.

Wise is one who regards the life before death as a temporary journey and devotes one's full time to the preparation for the life after death in the next eternal world.

According to a news item in the Times of India of 9th October, 2008, the British TV star, Jade Goody, was at the peak of her professional career when all of a sudden in August 2008 just as she was preparing to appear in the Indian version of the British reality TV show Big Brother, she was diagnosed with an incurable illness, that is cervical cancer. She cancelled all her professional appointments saying that while most people planned their weddings,

she had to plan her funeral. She said, "I want people to cry over me."

This is the story of every man and woman. People are engaged in the celebration of life. But the ultimate end of all such celebrations is that death overtakes them before their completion and they are transferred from this world to the next world. Given this state of affairs, what every man and woman must do is to regard the span of life before death as a temporary journey and devote his or her full time to the preparation for the life after death.

People celebrate their birthdays, whereas each birthday is only an announcement that one year of one's life has passed. In such a situation every passing year for every man and woman should serve as a reminder of death. While there is no certainty of one's next birthday, the approach of death is certain. The wise man is one who never forgets this greatest of all realities known as death and prepares for life after death in the next eternal world.

EXPLANATION OF A DECEASED PERSON

The real status of death is total detachment for every departed soul. The deceased person is all alone and deprived of all that life had provided him within this world. Wise is one who understands this reality and prepares for success in the eternal life in the Hereafter.

It is the custom that when a person dies, eulogies about him are published in magazines and journals in his memory. Large meetings are held in commemoration to

dwell upon his greatness and achievements. Such events are highly misleading. What actually has to be faced after death is that the deceased person leaves behind him all the marks of his glory at one fell swoop. Death brings him into a world where he is all alone and deprived of all that life had provided him within this world. From the present point of view, this is the correct angle from which to look at the departed person. But all the eulogists, both writers and speakers, do not explain the present state of the deceased person's life. They speak only of his past life, in spite of the fact that the deceased person has been completely disconnected from his past.

The real status of death is total detachment for every departed soul. The meaning of death is that, man has lost the first chance of his life (in this world) and as far as the second chance is concerned, that is never going to be anyone's lot. In fact, all deaths should remind us of this serious aspect of life. But that is the aspect which is neither explained in writing nor in speeches.

After reading of and hearing about the deceased person's virtues, we have the impression that he is still the embodiment of those virtues, although that is not at all the case. Speakers and writers give the impression that he was a man of great stature but the dead person is now actually bereft of all grandeur and finds himself in a state of frustration and helplessness.

Wise is one who understands this reality and prepares for success the life in the Hereafter while one has a chance in this world.

BEYOND THIS LIFE

Everyone is facing impending death. Wise is one who prepares for the Hereafter, where one will have to face the consequences of one's actions.

Man apparently has a perfect existence. But in reality his is only an imperfect existence. Man has eyes but cannot see without the aid of external light. Man has ears but he cannot hear without the medium of the air around him. Man has feet but he cannot walk without the balance given by the force of gravity. Man has a mouth but without food from the external world, he cannot fulfil his need for food.

Now let us think of a time when you are fully alive with the same existence, but you find yourself deprived of all the external wherewithal necessary for your survival. You have eyes but you have no external light by which to see. You have a mouth but all food is absent. You have feet but the earth which would give you balance by its gravity does not exist. Furthermore, you are left all alone. Everyone else has abandoned you.

This is not a supposition. This state of affairs is going to be faced by every man and woman after death. All men and women will inevitably have to face this reality. Anyone who is alive today will certainly die one day and then, after death, he will find himself in a world which will be as described above.

This coming day is hurtling towards everyone. It must be the top priority for every man and woman to learn of this impending day and prepare for it. When that day comes it

will be a point of no return. Then man will surely have to face the consequences of his actions. He can never come back to relive his life in this world. From the moment of one's birth, the countdown begins for all men and women. No one knows when this countdown will reach the final number.

A REMINDER OF DEATH

The death of everyone comes about directly by the command of God. Man must develop the self-awareness about death, and prepare himself for the post-death period.

One day, I started thinking about my contemporaries—those who were born in my time, whose paths crossed mine on my life's journey and with whom I used to walk side-by-side. I thought of Mr. A while he was still alive, but today he is no longer in this world. Mr. B, Mr. C, Mr. D, Mr. E,—all of them have departed this life. In this way, I kept remembering one by one all those who had known me. Now all those people are dead. Even in the last few days, I got the news that Mr. Y had also died. I fell into deep thought. These words came to my lips: "The countdown has reached the last but one number."

Then I thought that this did not apply to me alone. The fact is that this applies to every man and woman. Everyday people are observing how those around them are dying. Moreover, everyone receives the news of death through the

media, even about those who are far away. But the strange thing is that people do not think of it in connection with themselves. Neither men nor women seriously consider that in the same way they too will very soon die. They think about the issues of life before death all the time, but they do not feel the need to think about the issues after death.

The reason for this is that all men and women are controlled by their DNA. Every act whether great or small, is carried out under the guidance of DNA. The fact of the matter is that regarding life, everything is encoded in detail in everyone's DNA. The only thing which is not thus encoded in the human DNA is the cause and time of death.

We come to know that all things are present in the DNA code, which is constantly being decoded, but death is unrelated to DNA.

The death of every human being comes about directly by the command of the Creator. This is the reason that the time of death is different for everyone.

What man must do is develop the self-awareness about death. He needs to disassociate himself from his DNA. Only if he did this would he be able to grasp the reality of death. By doing this it would be possible for him to understand the seriousness of death. He would be able to prepare himself for the post-death period while still in the pre-death period.

Man is an eternal being. DNA affirms his eternity. But according to the creation plan of God, man's entire life has been divided into two periods—the pre-death period and the post death period. According to this creation plan, the

brief pre-death period is for the purpose of testing man and the longer post-death period is for him to receive his eternal reward on the basis of his actions.

At this time all men and women are living with the concept of 'right here, right now.'

They are living a present-oriented life. Had they been aware of the true situation, their life's map would have been changed. Then they would make the coming day their greatest concern. Everyone would start leading a future-oriented life. The present-oriented life is based on the compulsions of the material world, while the future-oriented life is based on the principles of preparations for the eternal world. Those who are aware about this reality will be successful while those who are unaware of it will be failures.

STRIVING WITHOUT ANY DESTINATION

In the present temporary life you will be provided with your need unilaterally, for the purpose of a trial. The principle governing the next life is: what you sow you will reap. No one will have the opportunity to compensate for not having done good deeds in this life.

Everyone has increased his needs exponentially. Everyone wants to fulfil his boundless desires. Everyone thinks that he should possess all things which add up to comfort and luxury for himself and his children. This means a mad rush after materialism. But what is the result? Everyone

becomes very conscious that his desires have not been fulfilled. The fulfilment he yearned for was found to be unachievable. All men and women live with a feeling of deprivation. Their days and nights keep passing in this way, until finally their edifice of desires comes crashing down under the impact of circumstances. If circumstances do not cause this crash, death will certainly come at its appointed time and will compel everyone to accept its merciless decision, just as those who came before them accepted this decision willy-nilly.

People expend all their energy in acquiring the things of comfort in this temporary life before death, whereas the real need is to prepare oneself for the eternal life after death. The life before death is a life of trial. This being so it is God's responsibility to provide everything for everyone, so that he may be put to the divine test. But so far as the matter of life after death is concerned, God does not take the responsibility for it. In the life after death, everything will depend upon man's deeds in this world.

The principle that governs the present life is that even if you do not do anything, you will be provided with your need unilaterally. But what happens in the next life is totally different. The principle of the next life is that what you sow you will reap. It is very strange that people are striving to the utmost to improve their present lives but when it comes to the next life, they are totally oblivious of what needs to be done. In the present life, if we have not done something today, tomorrow, by doing more work, this gets compensated for. But in the next life, no man or woman

will have the opportunity to compensate for not having done good deeds in their previous lives.

WHEN THE VEIL WILL BE REMOVED

In this world we only get one chance to prepare for Paradise. If we avail this opportunity, we will find a place in eternal Paradise. If we fail to do so, we will not get another chance.

Today all the realities are in the unseen world. The time will come, when the veils will be removed and all the realities will be laid bare. But when this happens the opportunity for action will come to an end. What man wants to do, he will not be able to do. Man will want to return, but he will not be able to return.

When Adam committed a sin in Paradise, he had to leave Paradise. But, even after this error, Adam was granted a second chance, that is, by doing better deeds, he could once again re-enter Paradise. This was a special favour shown to man's first generation. But for man's later generations, there is no second opportunity.

For later generations of human beings, the law of God is that in this world they will have only one chance for action. If they fail to avail of the first chance then, they are not going to be given another chance. They have got only one chance. They either use this one chance or lose it. If they grasp this opportunity, they will find a place in Paradise in their next life. But if they fail to do so, they are not going to get another chance.

It is essential, therefore, that all men and women who come into this world must be very prudent about this. They must value every single moment of this life more than a thousand years. They must make the Hereafter their greatest concern. They must all plan their actions wholly with regard to the future rather than with regard to the present. After a deep study, they must try to understand the creation plan of the Creator, and plan their lives accordingly.

THE HAPPINESS WE ALL LOOK FOR

According to God's creation plan, the life before death is to make oneself a deserving candidate for Paradise. And the stage after death is of finding Paradise as a matter of merit. Paradise is the world of happiness which every soul has sought all along in this world.

I once visited a place in Rajasthan along with a friend, one Maulana Taqi Ameeni (d. 1991). We went to meet a family living in a farmhouse far away from the hubbub of city life. They could live there because the husband had inherited a substantial amount of wealth from his father.

He married a girl of his own choosing and then the couple started living in this farmhouse. Apparently this abode offered a beautiful world, but the man and woman who lived in it, presented a picture of utter sadness.

Both of them married as they had pleased and then started living a happy married life in this farmhouse. Maulana Mohammad Taqi Ameeni and I stayed there, for a night and a day. But during our stay, I did not even once see the

husband and the wife talking to each other. This farmhouse which had earlier been the cradle of happiness, now looked more like a graveyard of depression.

I have seen many such people in my life, some Muslims and some non-Muslims. They were people who had earned a lot of money by dint of hard work, but once having acquired wealth, they found that there was no happiness for them in mere material things.

Some marry to please themselves but very soon realize that marriage is a thankless responsibility, far from being a life of happiness. Some dedicate their whole lives to politics, so that they may reach the seat of high political power. But after achieving this political power, they find that happiness had already deserted them. A certain individual's target was a grand and spacious house, but by the time the house was ready, his face had started wearing a desolate look.

The most unfortunate aspect of the present world is that, human beings so often have to face tragedy. Great writers have written thousands of novels in every language. These novels realistically represent human emotions, yet the strange thing is that a comedy in any language is seldom popular. All the really popular novels in the world have been tragedies.

The reason is that every human being lives with the feeling that he has not been able to find the happiness that he desired. That is why tragic novels touch the human heart, while comic novels fail to do so.

It is a very strange aspect of human life that the first half of it passes with every human being in pursuit of happiness,

while the other half of it passes in the realization that despite getting all objects which are supposed to produce happiness, he has not been able to build the world he desired.

History tells us that the present life of human beings is not meant for creating a world of happiness. The purpose of the present life is for man to do such good deeds as will make him worthy of finding the desired world of happiness in his eternal life after death.

The stage of life before death is that of making oneself a deserving candidate for Paradise. And the stage after death is that of finding Paradise as a matter of merit. This means gaining entry into the world of happiness in the next world which every soul has sought all along in this world.

THE FINAL END

Everyone born into this world is destined to leave the world forever. The present world is for preparation and the next eternal world is the place to reap the rewards of our actions. It is the World Hereafter which makes human life meaningful.

Emperor Aurangzeb Aalamgir's (d. 1707) daughter Princess Zaibunnisa Begum (d. 1701) was born in a palace and was brought up in a royal environment. Finally, she became ill, and after much suffering, she died in Delhi at the age of 62. Before her death she had composed a couplet in Persian to be inscribed on her Tomb:

*Bar mazaar-e-maa ghareeban nay chiraagh-e-nay guley
Nay par-e-parwana raqsad, nay sada-e-bubulay*

This means that on a poor person's grave there is no light, no flowers, and that is why, on my grave, neither does a fly come to dance, neither is the voice of the nightingale heard.

Whether we see death as our final end or not, all men and women have to meet this end. Everyone born into this world is destined to leave the world forever in utter helplessness. This end is destined for everyone, whether he or she is born into a wealthy family or in a family possessing political power or born into a poor family.

Was man born to lead a life of failure and then be obliterated from the face of this world forever? This concept goes against both reason and nature. The truth is that to understand the meaningfulness of life, it is essential to see the present world along with the Hereafter. It is the world Hereafter which makes human life meaningful. Without believing in the Hereafter, human life becomes wholly meaningless. This concept of the Hereafter is axiomatic. It is not a baseless supposition and needs no proof. Without belief in the Hereafter, the present world cannot be meaningfully explained. The concept of the Hereafter gives man a purposeful goal. Without belief in the Hereafter, the life before death is as meaningless as life after death.

According to the creation plan of God the present world is for preparation and the next eternal world is the place to reap the rewards of our actions.

THE THANKS GIVER AND THE DENIER OF GOD

In the present life, God's Angels are continuously preparing a record of man's words and deeds. Based on this record, one who is a thanksgiver, will gain entry into Paradise, and one who is a denier and does not acknowledge God will be deprived of Paradise forever.

The time prior to death is a testing period. After death will be the time for receiving the reward commensurate with the results of one's test. This test, referred to in the Quran (76:7), tells us who is a thanks-giver and who a denier, who lives a life of acknowledgement and who lives a life of ingratitude. Thanksgiving is, in fact acknowledgement and denial is, in fact, ingratitude.

In the Hereafter, when all human beings are presented before their Creator, their eternal future will be decided according to the record of their past deeds. In the court of the Creator, some will be declared thanks-givers while others will be declared as deniers, that is, those who did not acknowledge God. This decision will be based on what deeds one did in the life before death.

The greatest fortune a person may have is that in the stage of life after death he gains entry into Paradise. This entry into Paradise will not be based on anything mysterious. According to the Quran, it will be based on thanksgiving, or acknowledgement of God.

In the life of the present world, God's Angels are continuously preparing a record of man's words and deeds.

According to this record, one who is a thanks-giver, will gain entry into Paradise. And one who denies God or does not acknowledge God will be deprived of Paradise forever.

The thanks-giver has a well-integrated personality. This personality may be called a godly (Rabbani) personality, although it is built by man himself. The more one develops his consciousness, the more he will be able to develop his godly or spiritual personality. Such a personality is formed through living consciousness rather than as a result of wishful thinking or some mysterious procedure.

THE TIME IS SET

Everyone lives in this present world for a limited period of time. When their time of test has expired, God's Angels compulsorily evict the person from the planet earth. Wise is one who has availed of the present life of test so that he can receive the reward of eternal Paradise.

There is a saying which goes in India: "qabza sachcha, daawa jhoota" that is "possession is true, claim is false." That is to say that the case of one who occupies a place is stronger than the case of the owner. But in America, it is quite the contrary. The principle of America is: 'Claim is true, Occupation is false', that is the rightful owner will be regarded as the real owner and one who is a tenant or occupant may be evicted by law. Generally speaking, in India, once a person comes to occupy a house or a piece of

land, it is next to impossible to evict him by law. But this does not happen in America.

Once I went to the United States and stayed in Los Angeles with one of my friends. They had another home which they had temporarily rented out to someone. When the time was up, the tenant was asked to leave, but he was not willing to do so. Then the owner of the house sent an application along with the necessary papers to the police station. The police reached the house, now illegally occupied by the tenant, and ordered him to leave immediately, otherwise he would be arrested. The tenant then quietly left.

This incident reminded me that, in another particular matter, the same is true of everyone. Everyone lives in this present world for a limited period of time. Later on, everyone will have to necessarily leave the earth. Once the time of his stay has expired, God's Angels will come and compulsorily evict the person from this place, that is earth.

If anyone wants to continue in his position on earth, it can never be possible. Man's stay in the present world is for a limited period of time by the will of the Lord. When this period expires, then what will happen has been mentioned in the Quran in these words: "For all people a term has been set: and when [the end of] their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they advance it." (7:34)

THE UNAWARENESS OF DEATH

People remain unaware of death, becoming aware of it only when the Angel of Death comes and by taking away their soul, forces them to enter into the post-death world. Wise is one who awakens from his slumber and prepares himself for gaining entry into eternal Paradise.

People are dying every day. Every day human beings hear the news of death, but it is strange that no one thinks of his own death. He knows about the deaths of others, but he does not see himself as one who must eventually die. He remains completely unaware of his own death. What is the cause of his lack of awareness? The fact is that one who is knowledgeable is so because of his thinking. Knowledge flows from man's thinking. You cannot be aware about what you do not think about.

Man is able to focus only on immediate compulsions because of his limitations. The human condition is such that people are engaged in worldly relations at all times. All they can think about is their personal matters.

This being so, human unawareness goes to the extent that even when people see a dead person in the graveyard, they continue to think about their worldly affairs. At present, the use of mobile phones has increased the unnecessary engagement of most people. Every man has to face death. But the consciousness of death can only come to one who can think of death by detaching himself from worldly affairs. The thinking of people is specifically limited to their

worldly affairs and relations. The issue of death does not penetrate their consciousness at any time. This is the reason that all men and women remain unaware of death, even when they see people dying every day. They become aware of the event of death only when the Angel of Death comes and by taking away their soul, forces them to enter into the post-death world.

We need to awaken from our slumber and prepare for gaining entry into Paradise.

DEATH, A UNILATERAL MATTER

In the world before death, man was in possession of life supports. In the period after death, those who made themselves deserving will find all these things in the later period of their life after death, only in larger measure, as a reward. Others will live in eternal deprivation.

An earthquake always comes unheralded and unsought. An earthquake is so definitive an event that human beings have no power over it. The same is true of death. Death always comes unannounced and on its own terms. It is irreversible. This aspect of death is the most serious one. It demands that man should be ever ready to face up to it. When death comes upon one all of a sudden, one finds oneself all alone. Before death man lived among many things—home, family, friends and supporters, as well as the whole world of nature, which is ever-present to fulfil all his needs at every moment.

After death, all of a sudden man feels that, although his existence remains just like as it was before, everything outside of his existence has abandoned him. When he looks before him he finds no one. When he looks behind him, he sees no one. When he looks to the right and left, he finds silence everywhere. He feels that here except for his own helplessness there is nothing.

In the world before death, man was in possession of so many things. But all these things were just meant to be temporary life supports. They were meant only for his life before death. In the period after death, no one is going to find such things ever again. But those men and women who have made themselves deserving will find all these things in the later period of their life after death, only in larger measure, as a reward. But without having been meritorious no man or woman is going to find all these things which are necessary for survival in the life Hereafter.

AN EVENT OF DEATH

Everyone has to prepare death. The time for action exists only in the life before death. Thereafter, there are only the consequences of one's actions. Wise is one who prepares for the Hereafter, so he can be held deserving of eternal Paradise by God Almighty.

Every man and woman has to face death. Someone will die today and another tomorrow. Death is the most horrible problem of every human being. The meaning of death is: "Total detachment from the present world."

Death means that a man's own existence remains with him but everything else is taken away from him—house, family, partner, provision, his history. Finally everything suddenly disappears and will remain separated from him forever.

The reality is that death is the biggest issue for every man and woman. Every person has to think about what will happen to him after death. Every person has to prepare for that day when he will be leaving the present world, and then behind him will be the world which he has left forever, and ahead of him the world from which it will not be possible for him to return. This moment is going to come to every man and woman, without exception. This is the issue which every man and woman should reflect upon the most. Furthermore, in the life time, after that, it will not be possible for the person to act again, to re-establish a new future for himself. The time for action exists only in the life span before death. The consequences of one's actions cannot be altered. Wise is one who learns today about what is going to come to him after death, because knowing about it after death will be useless. The man who knows this reality before death can be called a knower in the real sense. After death, everyone will be aware of this reality, but that will be of no use. This is the biggest problem facing every human being.

THE CATACLYSM OF DEATH

Remembrance of death causes a revolution in man's thinking. For this to happen something shattering has to take place. That man is fortunate for whom this explosion takes place in this world itself, so he can remember death often and change himself before it is too late.

There was once a wealthy man who told his servants to make up his bed as he wanted to go to sleep. When the servant did so he found that the bed was very soft and very comfortable. And because he was very tired, he just felt like lying down and going to sleep on that bed. And he did just that. When his master came back to his room and saw that his servant was sleeping on his bed, he became angry and shouted at the servant, "I told you to make up my bed, not to sleep on it!" At this, the servant said: "Sir, remember the time when you will face death and you will be confined to a dark grave instead of this soft bed." These words of the servant were like a cataclysm for the wealthy man. He trembled just listening to these words, and he started thinking of death a great deal.

From then on, the subject of death so dominated his thoughts that in spite of having absolutely everything, he started living as if he had nothing. He started thinking of death being more real than life. He started leading a very simple life and finally he died early.

The remembrance of death, the greatest reality, causes a revolution in man's thinking. But for this to happen, something shattering has to take place. Obliviousness of

death is such that nothing less than an explosion will work. This explosion may be material as well as intellectual.

That man is, without doubt, an unfortunate person in whose life such an explosion takes place and he is not able to remember death often and neither is he able to change himself.

That man is fortunate for whom this explosion takes place in this world itself, so he can remember death often and change himself before it is too late.

THE GREATEST CONDITIONING

A tradition states that one should remember death often. This means we have to de-condition ourselves, remove our unawareness of death and re-plan our life based on reality.

All human beings have to die. But no one remembers this fact. What is the reason for this? All men and women are standing on the verge of death but go on leading lives of unawareness.

The real reason for this phenomenon is conditioning. When someone is born, he is born into a complete world to live in. This world stays with him at every moment. Wherever he may be, at home or on a journey, in every situation he leads his life in a worldly continuum. This continuity keeps conditioning him at all times and unconsciously man comes to believe that he and the world are complementary to each

other, that he is not going to leave this world nor is the world going to be taken away from him.

All this happens unconsciously. This is called conditioning. Due to the continuous flow of events, this conditioning becomes so ingrained that no man or woman is able to think that a time might come when he or she will be separated from the present world and the present world will also leave him or her one day. This is why, even standing on the verge of death, people are totally unaware of this reality.

There is a tradition which says one should remember death often. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 4258) This does not mean that we have to keep repeating this word again and again. It means that we have to stem the influence of our conditioning by giving a great deal of thought to death. We have to de-condition ourselves on this subject. This de-conditioning will be possible only when man gives deep thought to this matter and re-plans his life based on reality.

THE DEATH EVENT

One who is truly aware of death will think of death more than he thinks of life. Wise is the one who sees his own death, and prepares for eternal Paradise.

Death is undoubtedly the most familiar thing. But the event of death is the most unfamiliar thing. Take any person,— you will not find him speak seriously of death. What is the

reason for this? It is because death is just an external piece of news for people. It is not people's personal experience. People are dying daily. Death is certainly a personal experience for those who die. But what happens in practice is that the person leaves this world as soon as the personal experience of death comes to him. He does not return to this world again to tell us of his experience. Man's weakness is that, consciously or unconsciously, he takes the news of death as a distant thing. He does not take any such news as a personal experience. For example, the news of the harm caused by smoking does not prevent anyone from smoking. He decides to stop smoking only at the time when he personally experiences the harm of smoking.

This is a deadly weakness from which every man should save himself. Wise is the one who awakens his consciousness so much that the death of others makes him see his own death. The news of death proves to be shaking him in the same way as the man's personal experience of death shakes him to the core.

One who is truly aware of death will think of death more than he thinks of life. Then he will be more serious about death than about life. Any mistake related to life only causes temporary harm but making a mistake about death will cause eternal harm to the person concerned. One who knows this reality will be serious about death to the utmost extent.

DEATH: A PERMANENT REMINDER

One who learns the reality about death will begin to remember death often. Realizing that the life prior to death was meant for action and the life after death was meant for receiving the consequences of his actions, he will start preparing for his Hereafter.

What is death? Death is the time and place for total helplessness to come face to face with Omnipotence. Before death, one who regarded himself as free, will after death, all of a sudden, learn that his freedom was not his own: this freedom was rather granted to him by another Being, God Almighty. Death all of a sudden will tell him that the life, prior to death, was meant for action and the life after death was meant for receiving the consequences of his actions.

Death is a gate through which man must pass and after passing through it, he has to hear the final judgement of the Creator of the Universe. No court exists in which he may appeal against this judgement.

Death means leaving one world for another world. In the previous world, one had received everything for the purpose of being put to the test. In the next world, whatever one will receive will be as a result of the test. Where, in the previous world, everything was given to him without his having deserved it, in the next world he will receive things only if he had made himself deserving of them.

According to a Hadith, the Prophet once observed: "Remember death much." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No.

4258) This means that death should become a permanent reminder for man. It is as if when someone were injured physically, he would feel the pain all the time, and if he felt the pain all the time that would become a permanent reminder of the mishap for the person.

Similarly, one who learns the reality about death will begin to remember it all the time. The remembrance of death will remind him of the Hereafter, and the remembrance of the Hereafter will remind him of all the things which are related to the life after death.

THE STAGES OF THE JOURNEY OF DEATH

The concept of death gives a new revolutionary meaning to life. Death is not simply the end of life, it is the beginning of new eternal life. This realization revolutionizes one's thinking. Death becomes a great reformer in the life of a person who remembers death often.

Man inhabits the planet called earth. This planet earth is continuously in motion. At all times it is moving at the speed of a thousand miles per hour. It is as if man is also on a journey at every moment. Man is thus a traveller, who is on an unceasing journey, whether he wants it to or not.

Where is man heading to on this journey? According to the Quran, everyone who is born on this planet earth is going from life to death, from death to the day of resurrection, from resurrection to be judged in the divine court.

After judgement in the divine court, he has to head towards his final destination. This final destination will be either eternal Paradise or eternal Hell.

On this journey, man has the power to face either to the east or the west, the north or the south. He has the power to change his direction, but as for the stages of his journey, or the final destination of the journey he has no power to change these. The stages of the journey and the final destination of the journey have been laid down by the Lord of the Worlds.

The concept of death invests a man with a new revolutionary sense. It also gives a new revolutionary meaning to life. Death is not simply the end of life. It is the beginning of a new eternal life. The concept of death resembles an intellectual earthquake. This concept of death thus enables man to become serious to the ultimate extent about how his life will end. It is as if death has a reforming role. In this respect, death is without doubt a great reformer for every man.

THE TIME TO COME

The concept of death is an extremely positive phenomenon. It gives man the incentive, without wasting a moment's time, to make the Hereafter one's sole concern and prepare for it. Success or failure depends upon one's performance in the life prior to death.

The time is fast approaching for everyone when neither will he remain in this world, nor will this world be with him. His family, his friends and acquaintances will have

deserted him, and he will not have all the things he had in his life in this world.

This time which is to come is the moment of death. Death will take man out of this world, where he had everything, and he will be taken to a world where he will have nothing. On that day, the rich will become poor, the powerful will become powerless. On that day all his friends will have left him.

The Angel of Death, never comes with an appointment. He comes all of a sudden. Wise is he who regards his everyday as his last day.

This time to come is racing fast towards man. Any morning or evening or night death can come upon him. This would not be the end of life, but would rather be an entry into a new stage of life.

This is without doubt the greatest problem for every human being. Every man and woman must think more and more about this than anything else. In the stage of life to come, the person who has merit is successful. And the person who has no merit is a failure. Success or failure depends upon one's performance in the stage of life prior to death and not in the stage of life after death.

The concept of death is in no sense negative. It is an extremely positive phenomenon. The concept of impending death gives man the incentive—without wasting a moment's time—to prepare for his Hereafter. He should make the Hereafter his sole concern.

WHY BE OBLIVIOUS OF DEATH?

People are busy fulfilling the demands of this world, being forgetful of death. Forgetfulness of death is forgetfulness of the Hereafter, ignoring which we face eternal deprivation.

Thinking about how near we all are to death and how seldom we think about it, I recalled a young student, who was not prepared for the forthcoming exams. His parents reminded him daily about the exams. They would sternly say: "If you fail in the exams, your future will be ruined and you will not be able to achieve anything." This reminder by the parents was so effective that he shut himself up in his room and started preparing in earnest for the exams.

In this incident, I saw the parallel in how people are oblivious of death. Their obliviousness of death is because of their being oblivious of the Hereafter. All men and women are engaged in fulfilling the demands of this world. All the time they think of the harm and losses of this world. This is why the concept of death is not alive in their active memory. Had their minds been focused daily on the situation they would face after death, they would have paid serious attention to the most serious issue of being made to appear in the court of God. Then they would never be oblivious or ignorant of death. They would become far more serious about death, even more serious than the young student had become about his exams.

The general condition of people is that they give a great deal of thought to their lives before death, but they do not

think at all about life after death. This is why every time they mention the things of this world, they do not mention the issue of the Hereafter at all. This is why people have become indifferent to death. Nothing reminds them of death. Not even others' deaths. They see others dying but they do not give any thought to their own death. The truth is forgetfulness of death is also forgetfulness of their future. Death is like an earthquake. Whatever opportunities man has must be seized before the earthquake, for after the earthquake no one will have the opportunity to do anything.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH

The personality of one who remembers death will be transformed in every respect. His thinking will become totally Hereafter-oriented.

What is the remembrance of death? The remembrance of death is when you are able to think with complete consciousness that this living existence of yours will be all of a sudden taken away from this present world, then you will be sent to another world, where everything you have here will be taken away from you. You will be all alone in that world. You will not even be able to speak to your friends and relatives. And you will have nothing to support you. When this feeling comes to you in keen awareness, that will be the remembrance of death.

The remembrance of death is not a thing of the past, a distant matter. The remembrance of death means to come to grips with the horrible experience which you shall have to face in

your life. The remembrance of death should be so part and parcel of your thinking that you lose interest in this world. Every night you should feel as if there will be no morning. Every day when you wake up, you should feel that this very morning will be the morning of doomsday. Every morning you should feel that that very evening will be the evening of doomsday. When you are in this state and you start feeling that at every moment you are standing at death's door, when every occasion becomes a reminder of your own death, you can regard yourself as having remembered death.

This is the reality which has been expressed thus in a Hadith: "Remember death very often. This will demolish pleasure." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 4258) Pleasure in this Hadith is a word which includes all desires, all feelings. One who remembers death in the real sense will, without doubt, face an earthquake in his life. His personality will be transformed in every respect. His thinking will become totally Hereafter-oriented. After thinking of death, if one leads a life as he had done earlier, it would mean that he has not truly remembered death.

THE INKLING OF DEATH

One who remembers death, by God's special succour, gets to know of it in advance, and prepares for it. Wise is he who remembers death often and prepares himself for the end.

One who is extremely sensitive about death, one who remembers death, often gets an inkling of death in

advance, and prepares himself for it. This is a special form of succour granted by God to such a person.

To those who are oblivious of death, to those whose lives are unencumbered by any remembrance of death, the end comes all of a sudden, without any prior notice. Then death takes them away from this planet, where they were blessed with the life support system, to a place where there is no propitious life support system and from where their return is just not possible. Now, all of a sudden, they find that they have to live there in that inclement place forever.

They will call out, but there will be no one to rush to answer their call. They will open their eyes, but they will find no scenes worth seeing. They will weep and they will cry, but there will be no one to wipe their tears or to give them solace. They will want to flee from that place, but there will be no destination to which they can go. They will look towards their right, they will look towards their left. They will look towards their front, they will look towards their rear, but there will be no one present to help them, not even those they took to be their friends and companions in this world. They will suffer from hunger, but they will not find anything to eat. They will feel that they have left behind whatever they had in the world. Now in this new place, there is no possibility of making a new world for themselves.

This horrible state of affairs will be the fate of every man and woman. Every man and woman will finally reach a place from which there will be no possibility of return. Wise is he who in the matter of death becomes so sensitive that,

even before death, he has a presentiment and then prepares himself for the end.

LIFE AND DEATH

Wise is he whose mind is alert about death, whose life is Hereafter-oriented and whose actions are planned in accordance with what is beneficial for him in the period after death.

What is life? A journey towards death. What is death? A leap towards an uncertain future. One who realizes this reality will undergo a revolution in his thinking. Both life and death will become meaningful to him. His days and nights will not be subservient to his desires, but will be subservient rather to the will of His Creator who has established the system of life and death. He will start living not for himself but for God. He will live in this world but will become like a creature of the Hereafter.

One who knows only this life, knows nothing. One who knows the stages that he will face after death is truly the knowledgeable one. For the entire span of life is but a brief moment. The ultimate experience to be faced by man is the experience of death. Life is a journey which is ultimately going to reach the stage of death. Death is not the end of life, but is rather the beginning of a very long stage of life.

The actual importance of life is that it is a period for prior preparation to face the crucial moment of death. The right thing for man to do is to understand this reality of life. He

should not engage himself in worldly matters to the extent that he forgets the stages he has to face after death.

Man must live in this world in such a way that when he is faced with death it comes to him like something that he already knows, a recognisable event, rather than an accident which all of a sudden he is confronted with and for which he had made no prior preparation.

Wise is he whose mind is alert about death, whose actions are planned in accordance with what is beneficial for him in the period after death, whose life is Hereafter-oriented rather than worldly-oriented.

SUDDEN DEATH AND DOOMSDAY

Death is the Doomsday for the individual. Everything will have deserted him. Everyone must reflect upon this reality. Everyone must prepare for this day more than anything else.

Two things will dawn on man all of a sudden—death and Doomsday. This is the gravest problem all men and women are faced with. These are the events which man must give the most thought to and about which man must be concerned more than anything.

It is customary for anyone coming from outside to first make an appointment, or to knock at the door to seek permission to enter. But death or Doomsday is not in need of any permission. The Angel of Death is an angel who can come to anyone at any time without seeking prior permission in

order to take man's soul to a world from where it is not possible to return.

Death, in other words, means going to a world after abandoning everything, going to a world which is void of everything. One who has lived amidst his own people all of a sudden reaches a world where there is no living being around him.

Death is the Doomsday of the individual, when finally, all those circumstances prevailing in this world will come to an end. The whole present world, all of a sudden will be reduced to nothingness. All of a sudden all men and women will find themselves in such a situation where neither is there anything behind them nor in front of them. Man's existence will be perpetuated but everything else he had will be absent, everything will have been abandoned. Everything will have deserted him. Every man and woman must reflect upon this reality more than anything else; every man and woman must prepare for this day more than anything else.

FINDING AND LOSING

"What a magnificent world they built to leave." This is the story of every human being. Man must realize that death is inevitable. He should strive to build a paradisiacal personality in himself in this world itself, which will accompany him after death.

In the first half of the 20th century the British government was at its peak in India. In those times the British built

New Delhi, some examples of its buildings being the Viceregal Lodge, Parliament House, India Gate and other large government buildings. There was a whole network of broad avenues, parks, etc. This world in New Delhi was so distinguished in those times that it came to be regarded as a political Taj Mahal.

Sometime after this political Taj Mahal had been put in place, a French leader visited India. Highly educated, he knew that the democratic revolution had dawned in the world and, like other empires the British Empire, too, was going to come to an end. He expressed his feelings about this in these words: "What a magnificent world they built to leave."

This is the story of every man in this world, with the sole difference being that some build small palaces, while others build bigger palaces. Whether great or small, no such palace can be kept by its builder. The fate met by the magnificent political Taj Mahal built by the British was that of the British rulers having to leave it on August 15, 1947. This is the fate destined for every man and every woman in this world. Everyone is going to face that time, inevitably, when he will leave the "palace" he or she has built, and will leave this world all alone. This event takes place every day before our very eyes, but no one pays any heed to it. Everyone is living as if what happened had to happen to someone else; it is not going to happen to him.

One may or may not give verbal expression to this truth but it is a fact that in this matter all men and women regard themselves as exceptions, although the reality is that in this matter no exception will be made for any human being.

OLD AGE, DEATH

Man should remember death at every moment. He should be prepared to die at any time. He should introspect as to what preparation he has done for the life after death.

Man is born into this world as a baby, becomes an infant, and then he reaches adolescence. Then he grows old and finally within a period of a hundred years, he dies. It happens with all men and women—compulsory aging after adolescence and afterwards compulsory death.

This is the story of every individual. The following expression describe the case of every man and woman born in this world: “What a magnificent world they have built to leave.” This is the story of everyone in this world, with the sole difference being that some build a small castle for themselves and others build a big castle. The British had to leave their magnificent “political Taj Mahal” on August 15, 1947.

The same end awaits all men and women. Certainly the time is going to come for everyone when, all alone, they will have to leave this world, leaving their castles behind them. This happening takes place before us each and every day. But no one learns anything from this. Everyone—rich or poor, ruler or ruled—is living as if whatever has happened with others will not happen to them. Man appears to be invested with powers. But as regards death he is totally powerless. Just as an earthquake comes all of a sudden governed by the unilateral laws of nature, similarly, death, too, comes

from the Creator on a unilateral basis. Man has no say in this matter.

This state of affairs demands that man should remember death at every moment. He should be prepared to die at any time. He should be engaged all the time in introspection as to what preparation he has done for the life after death, and what he has in store for his journey after death. People write their life's diary but what is more important is to write the diary of death. Everyone should record in his diary as to what he thought today about death.

For instance, on hearing of someone's death, I was reminded of my own death. When I witnessed that person's last rites and I saw his body being lowered into the grave, I was reminded that one day I, too, would be buried in the same way.

One who sees his own death in the death of others is the truly living person. A living person does not wait to undergo a fatal experience in order to learn a lesson from it. The truly alive person is one who learns lessons from the experiences of others.

THE JOURNEY TOWARDS DEATH

Life before death is very brief, while the life after death will continue for all eternity. Death is a one-way journey. Wise is one whose life is Hereafter-oriented and whose goal is Paradise.

When one is born into this world, a journey soon begins, taking him through various stages, until he finally reaches

death's door. What is on the other side of this door? No one has any prior knowledge of this. It can be known only after passing through this door of death.

All those who are alive and walking on this planet earth, will finally, enter this gate of death. But this entry will be like a leap into the darkness. No one knows what will happen after death. Those who believe in the life of the hereafter are just as ignorant of this as those who do not believe in the Hereafter. The former may theorize positively about it; whereas the latter will just make false suppositions about it.

But the most crucial matter to be grasped by all men and women is that the life span of life before death is very brief, while the life span after death will continue for all eternity. Therefore, anyone who hopes for the best for himself must think about this matter more than about anything else. This should be the most important subject of reflection for that person.

The gravest aspect of this passage through the door of death is that after entering, it will not be possible for anyone to return. This will be an entirely one-way journey. This aspect of the end of life makes death a very grave matter.

It is of such gravity that man should think more and more about life after death. He must be more and more sincere about death than about life itself, at whatever the cost.

DEATH FOR EVERYONE

Everyone is going to take a fateful leap into the other side of death. Wise is he who learns this reality in advance, controls his desires and works for the life after death, and the unwise is one who follows his desires and pins all his hopes on God, without any preparation.

An old man once lamented that life for him was reduced to nothing but a waiting period for death. I replied that life is a wait for death for everyone, although most people are unaware of this reality. In this matter, the difference between the weak and the strong is only that the old accept the reality compulsively, whereas the healthy and strong can learn of it only when they reflect upon it. For the old, death is a compulsive discovery; for the young, death is a discovery consciously arrived at.

An American businessman did business with great success all his life. Finally, when he reached 90 years of age, he felt that his body and mind had both become aged. Now the next stage for him was only death. He expressed his feelings thus: "I am going to take a fateful leap into the unknown."

This is the fate destined for everyone born into this world, whether weak or strong, rich or poor, white or black, educated or illiterate, powerful or powerless. Everyone is going to take a leap into the other side of death, even those who do not believe in the life after death. Wise is he who learns this reality in advance. It is this reality which has been thus expressed in a Hadith: "The wise man is one who controls his desires and works for the life after death

and the unwise man is one who follows his desires and pins all his hopes on God.” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2459)

THE GREATEST UNAWARENESS

Death without doubt is running towards everyone. For one who is deeply conscious of death, life will be the herald of death. Wise are those who become aware of this sudden onslaught of death and make full preparation before death actually comes.

The dead have left this world—this reality is known to everyone. But there is something of which many people are unaware and that is that they too have to die one day. They too are going to face the same fate as that faced by others. It is strange that people see others die every day, yet they exempt themselves from this happening. It is as if everyone is silently agreeing that others had to die and they have died but that death is not going to come to them.

This lack of awareness is most fatal. This is that strange unawareness which is known as the ostrich habit. Whether or not anyone thinks about death, death without doubt is running towards him.

Death is like an earthquake at an individual level. The earthquake comes without any warning. Similarly, death too comes without prior announcement. Everyone is helpless in the face of an earthquake. Similarly, everyone is helpless in the face of death. Death comes all of a sudden. Like the earthquake it shatters man's castle of illusions. Man may

want to prevent the approach of death, but he will never succeed in doing so. Death is governed by its own laws and proceeds without man's consent. This situation demands that man should be extremely sensitive about death. He should feel every night that the next morning he may not see the light of day. Every night when he goes to bed, he should feel that his eyes may not open again in this world. If man is thoroughly conscious of this fact, he will be shaken to the core. Life for him will not mean living in the simple sense. It will rather be the herald of death. Fortunate are those who become aware of this sudden onslaught of death and make full preparation before death actually comes.

THE GREATEST QUESTION

God is the Creator and Sustainer of the World. God has created man as an eternal creature and divided his life into two parts, a small part before death to test him, while the major part lies after death, where he will receive the reward or punishment for his actions.

Man comes to this world equipped with an excellent mind and an excellent body. Therefore, the first thing one must think of is how he came into being. Then, the world in which he finds himself is an exceptionally favourable one for him to survive in. On earth he finds that he can live in comfort. There is the sun which continuously gives light and energy to him. The earth has fertile soil in which all kinds of crops can grow. There is abundant water, which is essential for

sustaining life. The planet earth has air which unceasingly provides him with oxygen.

The earth inhabited by man supports him in numerous ways. There is a life support system of a very high order. Without this it would have been impossible for man to survive or make progress. It is a fact that man has been granted so many blessings that it is impossible to count them all. Only some of these blessings have been discovered by science. These too are so immense in number that even if someone studied them all his life, he would not be able to learn about all of them.

This situation poses great questions which no man or woman can overlook. Man's own astonishing existence and the beautiful world around him compel him to ponder upon how all this came about.

We have to ask these questions: who made me? Who has created this world? Who created this most meaningful life-support system and gave it to me? Everything in this world is a great blessing and everything is silently giving a call and inviting us to ponder over this matter and discover who the Giver of all these blessings is.

There is another very grave matter linked to this question and that is the ephemerality of human existence. Man is born with the most precious faculties. He possesses a miraculous mind. He wishes to achieve limitless progress by making use of his extraordinary talents. Human life appears to have an eternal character but, within less than a hundred years, while man is still on his life's journey, some

unknown power intervenes and takes him away and sends him to another world.

Why this happens is an extremely serious question. And it certainly needs to be answered. Any man or woman who is serious about his life can never rest content without knowing the answer to this question. It is only the right answer to this question that can give a proper explanation of the present life. Moreover, the answer to these questions will tell us what should be done to make life meaningful and successful in the real sense.

Such questions have been objects of reflection throughout human history. Many great minds have devoted themselves to finding answers to them. The answer which has satisfied the minds at a universal level is that there is a God of this world, He is its Creator, its Lord, sustaining the entire world with His almighty powers; and then that this world has been created under a special creation plan.

According to this plan, man is an eternal creature. But the Creator has divided human life into two parts, a small part of which is placed in the stage of life before death, while the major part of it is placed in the life after death. Death does not mark the end of life, rather the entry into another world so that man may spend the rest of his life in eternal environs.

SUCCESSFUL LIFE, UNSUCCESSFUL END

The life of all super-achievers can be described thus: 'successful life, unsuccessful end.' This is because man has unlimited desires, but God has placed their fulfilment in eternal Paradise. Successful is one who devotes his present temporary life to make himself deserving of eternal Paradise, where all his desires will be fulfilled.

A typical individual from the Western world had the sole ambition of making more and more money. He believed that he could find all the happiness in life through money. He made lots of money. He built a palatial house for himself. He accumulated all sorts of comforts and luxuries. But he failed to find real happiness. Finally, he reached old age. He became physically weak and bed-ridden. During the last days of his life, he recorded these words in his diary: 'Now, I am 90 plus and bedridden. My story can be summed up in these two words— successful life, unsuccessful end.'

This is the story of all those who are called achievers or super-achievers. Those who have achieved great successes are able to find very little happiness in this world and finally they leave this world in a state of frustration. There is no exception made for any man or woman in this matter.

One of the well-known names of the Indian super achievers is that of Lata Mangeshkar. Now she is more than 90. She was able to have everything in life that is desired by people— wealth, fame, popularity, awards, titles, etc. She shopped in international markets and bought as much jewellery as she wanted. She has everything that worldly people desire. But

having reached the final stage of her life, she feels that she has failed to find what she wanted.

In 2007, Lata Mangeshkar was interviewed by Ms. Sudeshna Chatterjee. This interview was published in the New Delhi edition of Times of India in its Supplement: Times Life, on September 30, 2007. According to this report, in spite of all her successes, Lata Mangeshkar lives in a state of dejection. This interview is titled “My dreams have never got fulfilled.”

The interviewer asked Lata Mangeshkar if God were to ask her what would be her greatest desire at this stage of her life, what her reply would be? She promptly said: ‘I would like to leave this world.’ (Supplement: *Times of India*, New Delhi, September 30, 2007, p. 3)

In this story of the failure of successful people is hidden a great lesson for all men and women. It is that the happy life, to achieve which they devote their whole lives, is not at all achievable in this world.

The existence of desire, but the absence of the fulfilment of desire indicates a great and important reality. It is that what man wants to find in the pre-death period, has been placed by God in the post-death period. In such a case the greatest wisdom lies in man making himself deserving of success in the world after death. He should devote all his energy in this present temporary life to the preparation for his eternal life.

Man by birth is an idealist. But in this present world everything is far from ideal. This is the actual reason for all

tension. Whatever man achieves by devoting all his energy to it, always appears to fall short of his desired ideal.

To know the difference between the desire and the object of desire is the greatest wisdom. One who knows this difference will engage in the realistic planning of his actions and then he will reach the destination of success. Such a person will never suffer from tension.

THINK, THINK, THINK

Man is sent to inhabit this world not by way of reward, but as a matter of trial. God has granted this freedom only to find out who makes proper use of his freedom and leads a principled life and who misuses it. In the eternal period after death man will be awarded reward or punishment, according to the record of his life on earth, in Paradise or hell.

If a living man appeared all of a sudden from a cave, all the beholders would regard this as astonishing. Everyone would start thinking about how this could happen. The birth of a child out of his mother's womb is also of the same nature—astonishingly strange. People know a child comes out of the mother's womb but they don't think about it as anything out of the ordinary.

What is the reason for this difference? The reason is that a baby coming out of the mother is an everyday experience. People have become used to it and that is why they take it

for granted. They do not give it a second thought. If they were to think seriously about this, they would discover the existence of the Creator in the event of man's birth. When they see a living, conscious man, walking, seeing, listening and speaking, they would feel that every man is a living sign of the Creator. Every man would appear to be a living introduction of his Creator.

Similarly when man is born on this planet earth, he finds a complete life support system already in existence. This life support system is so complete that it fulfils all the requirement, both great and small, of man without his having to pay any price for it. Right from the earth to the sun, the whole planetary system is uniquely subjected to man's service.

Then the day comes when, all of a sudden, man dies. Man's nature is such that he wants an eternal life, but within a period of 100 years all men and women have to leave this world forever, against their will.

Anyone who is born on this earth undergoes two major experiences. First, the experience of life and second, the experience of death. If man were to think seriously about these events, he would certainly discover two great truths—that is, man is sent to inhabit this world not by way of reward, but as a matter of trial.

Man feels himself free in this world, but he is granted this freedom only so that God may find out who makes

proper use of his freedom and who misuses it, who leads a principled life, and who leads his life without adhering to any principles.

If man were to reflect seriously, he would discover the reality that death is in fact the day of his appearance before the Creator. Man, in reality, is an eternal creature, but his life span has been divided into two parts—the pre-death period and the post-death period. The pre-death period is for man to be tested and the post-death-period is for his being awarded reward or punishment, according to the record of his life on earth.

Man today finds himself in this world as a living, conscious being. This living and conscious existence is a permanent one. Death is the day when this living and conscious being is taken away from this temporary world and is transferred to the next permanent world in the same living and conscious state.

This moment of death is sure to come for every man and woman. It will unimaginably be the most serious of moments. In the life span after death, this present human being will leave all his resources behind him. The world behind him will be the world which he will leave forever and ahead of him will be the world where he is to live eternally, bereft of all resources. The wise one is he who prepares himself for this day.

ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE

After death, everyone enters an eternal life. In the Hereafter everyone will suffer eternal consequences of the actions they performed in this world, either in Paradise or hell.

In the present world everyone makes mistakes but he finds that, on each occasion, he is able to rectify his mistakes and save himself from their evil consequences. This happens with everyone. It is a daily experience either in one's own life or in the lives of others.

The result of this general experience is that man tends to feel that mistakes or errors can be compensated for. Consciously or unconsciously, this thinking that mistakes are not fatal in the absolute sense takes a greater and greater hold. Mistakes temporarily do result in some harm but, sooner or later, these mistakes are made up for. Life once again comes back to normal. The result of this situation is that man tends to suppose that what happens in this world will also happen in the same way in the hereafter. He thinks that regarding the consequences of mistakes what ensues in this world will also ensue in the next world. It is this misconception which is expressed in these words: "The fire is not going to touch us, and [even if it does], it will only be for a few days!" (2:80)

This creates a serious problem for every man and woman. In this world, every man and woman must think with an open mind and must discover the real nature of all matters relating to the hereafter. Every man and woman must know

that what takes place in the hereafter is totally different from the happenings of this world. After death, everyone has to enter upon an eternal life from which no return will be possible, where man will be all alone, where there will be no way of making amends. After entering into the world of the hereafter everyone has at all events to suffer the consequences of his actions in this world. When man enters the life of the world hereafter, he will land either in eternal Paradise or in eternal hell.

WEALTH IS NOT ENOUGH

The present world is not devised for the purpose of man fulfilling all his desires. Being limited, it is designed solely to meet man's practical needs, so that he may devote himself to the noble divine cause and be held deserving of God's eternal Paradise in the Hereafter.

Bill Gates is known as the software giant. He has no advanced degree from any prestigious institution. He was studying in Harvard University but he left it without completing his education. Yet, by 1999, this Harvard dropout had been the wealthiest person on the planet for years, being worth more than 100 billion.

He made great progress in computer technology, so much so that he came to be called the computer king. But all this material progress could not give him mental peace. Then he turned to the field of philanthropy for his activities. He established an institute called the 'Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation' and gave away half of his wealth to this institute. On June 27, 2008 when he was 52, he announced his retirement from the computer business. Now he has decided that he will spend the rest of his life in the field of health and education and will maintain only formal relations with his company.

The truth is that material things or material progress cannot give man real peace of mind.

The present world is not devised for the purpose of man fulfilling all his desires and attaining fulfilment in the full sense.

The present world is a limited world. It is designed solely to meet man's practical needs, so that he may devote his energy to some noble divine cause and as a result be held deserving of God's eternal reward in the Hereafter.

EPHEMERAL PERIOD, ETERNAL PERIOD

Everything in this present world is deceptive: it shows the ephemeral things artificially in an eternal light. Successful is one who regards the present world as a temporal phase and prepares himself for the eternal phase, in the hope of inhabiting eternal Paradise.

During a student's life one's thinking is different from that what it becomes after the completion of his education and when he finds a good job. In the first stage, he lives as if he is a traveller, while in the second stage he lives as if he

has reached his desired destination. In the first stage, he takes everything as being of a temporary nature while in the second stage he takes everything as being a permanent part of his life.

The same is true in a vaster sense of human life. Man has been granted an eternal life which has two parts to it: pre-death and post-death. In the pre-death period, man lives in the temporal phase of life. In the post-death period he reaches the eternal stage of life. If this reality exists in man's consciousness, it will suffice for his reform. The present world is called the world of *fitna* (trial) in religious terminology. This means that it is a deceptive world. Here everything in one respect or the other is playing a deceptive role, that is, showing the present ephemeral world as a form of permanent world, introducing the temporary things of this world as being permanent. Fani Badauni, an Urdu poet, faced certain experiences which made him realize that the present world is unreal. Here everything which appears pleasant is only of a temporary nature. He wrote a couplet in which he expressed himself in these words:

*Fareb-e-jalwa aur kitna mukammal aye maaz Allah
Badi mushkil se dil ko bazm-e-alam se utha paya*

(O God the mirage of splendour is so perfect, with great difficulty I have managed to detach myself from its attraction)

The truth is that everything in this present world is deceptive. It shows the ephemeral things artificially in an

eternal light. Successful is one who regards the present world as a temporal phase: one who regards this phase as an eternal phase of life is a failure.

THE DESTINATION OF MAN

According to God's creation plan, the desired world of man lies in post-death period in Paradise. The pre-death period is only a selecting ground. Those who qualify themselves in this pre-death period will be held deserving of inhabiting the desired world of Paradise.

Man wants a secure world for himself. But the events of the Tsunami in December 2004 in Indonesia and the Himalayan Tsunami in Uttarakhand in 2013, etc., tell us that man has in effect been given a world that is insecure. Man wants an unlimited life for himself. But the event of death reminds him that he has been given a limited lifespan in this world. Man desires a world of ideal happiness, but different kinds of accidents tell man that he can only find a level of happiness which is far below his desired ideal. Man exceptionally possesses the concept of "tomorrow", but in practice, he is aware only of "today". Man has unlimited potential, but before he is able to use even one per cent of this potential, he has to leave this world.

Why is this so? The answer to this question lies in human nature itself. While all the animals only live for today, on planet earth, man is the only creature who possesses the concept of "tomorrow". This is nature's answer to this question.

The answer is that what man is looking for in his 'today', exists in his 'tomorrow'. What he desires to find in his 'present' has been situated in his 'future', according to the creation plan of the Creator. According to this creation plan, man's life is divided into two parts: one is the pre-death period and the second is the post-death period. The desired world of man has been deemed for the post-death period. The position of the pre-death period is that of a selecting ground. Those men and women who qualify themselves in this pre-death period will be held deserving of inhabiting the desired world of the post-death period. Paradise is the name of this desired world.

An event like the tsunami serves as a warning that man cannot build a Paradise for himself in this present world. Although the earth is very beautiful, it is so vulnerable and suffers from such limitations that it cannot be turned into a heavenly abode. Our earth is an initial introduction to Paradise, but not Paradise itself. We need another world for the building of Paradise, a world which is unlimited, free from all kinds of fear. A perfect world is needed for Paradise, whereas the present world is imperfect in every respect, and a perfect Paradise can never be built on an imperfect earth. Man by his very nature is desirous of Paradise. But the concept of tomorrow that man uniquely possesses tells us that Paradise is achievable only in the world of tomorrow and not in the world of today.

Realizing this fact is without doubt the greatest wisdom. Those who build their lives focused on tomorrow are successful while those who build their lives focused only on

today are failures. The present world is a thoroughfare for man: it is not man's final destination. The journey of man in this world finally leads him to the door of death through which man must pass. On the other side of death's door, there is either eternal Paradise or eternal hell. There is no third place where man can take up his abode after death. This state of affairs is so serious that once man becomes aware of this reality, he will think more of death than of life; he will be concerned more about the Hereafter than about this world.

BUILDING OF THE HEREAFTER

The actual task to perform is not the building up of the world, but the preparation for the life after death in the Hereafter. In the stage of life before death, one should make oneself deserving of eternal Paradise in the Hereafter.

In present times, we find all men and women busy with something or the other. They are so busy that they have no time to listen to anyone. They spend all their time and money on reaching their desired goals. What is this goal which keeps everyone so busy? It is only one—improving their worldly life more and more, building their worldly future. But death contradicts this worldly ideology. Everyone's final destiny is to die sooner or later.

He leaves the world he built for himself entirely behind him. All alone, by himself, he departs for another world without any preparation.

All men and women, who are born into this world, start thinking in worldly terms in the way they find people thinking around them. They become engaged in all the worldly activities in which all other people had engaged themselves in before them. Due to this state of affairs, material thinking has become a matter of historical continuity. Material thinking has become such an integral part of cultural tradition that it has become almost impossible for any man or woman to think beyond it.

This is the point on which man is actually being tested. To achieve real success, man has to bring himself outside this framework of historical continuity. Leaving aside the traditional culture he should form his opinions on the basis of reality. Those who do so will immediately discover that what is of actual importance is not the building up of the world but the preparation for the hereafter. The actual task for every man and woman is to prepare for the stage of life after death. In the stage of life before death, they should make themselves, deserving of being held successful in the eternal life span after death.

ONE'S OWN FUNERAL PRAYER

Attending a funeral prayer, one should feel that he were saying his own funeral prayer. He should remember his own death at every moment. Remembering death is a characteristic of a sensitive person, while failing to do so is the shortcoming of an insensitive person.

When a Muslim who lived in Delhi died, he was buried in a local graveyard after his funeral prayer was performed. Maulana Mohd. Zakwan Nadvi was present at this funeral prayer. When the prayer was about to start, a Muslim who had to join in the prayer, asked Zakwan Nadvi, "Is this an obligatory prayer or a sunnah prayer?" Zakwan Nadvi replied, "It is your own funeral prayer." The man was shocked. Then Maulana Nadvi explained to him that saying the funeral prayer is not a ritual. It is rather a reminder of a serious reality—that we are all going to die, just like the person who has already died. The truth is that the true funeral prayer is said by one who sees his own death in the death of the deceased person. Then he thinks that what has happened to the dead man will also happen to him. One who thinks like this, when he stands up for funeral prayer, should feel as if he were saying his own funeral prayer; that what has happened to the other person is going to happen to him tomorrow.

Death is not going to come to one person. The event of death is inevitably going to overcome every man and every woman. Furthermore, death does not come after an announcement. It overtakes man all of a sudden. And, when the time of death comes, no one has the power to turn

it away. Death is an inexorable and unchangeable reality, for one man as well as for another. Man ought to think of his own death at every moment. One who is so oblivious of this stark reality that even seeing another's death does not remind him of his own, can be likened to an insensate stone. Apparently, he is a human being but he is as devoid of human qualities as a statue made of stone. Remembering death is a characteristic of a sensitive person, while failing to do so is the shortcoming of an insensitive person.

TIME IS UP

Life is a state of trial, and death means sending man to the next world where he will reap the reward for his actions. The moment man's trial is over, God's angel comes and announces in a silent language: 'Your time of action has come to an end. Now you have to die and appear before your Creator and Lord to account for your actions.'

Students were taking an exam in a school. They were bent over their desks answering their question papers. Finally, the time fixed for the exam was over. Immediately the invigilator present in the room announced, 'Stop writing. Time is up.' The case of the vaster life is the same as what happens in the examination hall. Every man or woman is in a big hall taking their respective exams. Everyone has a fixed time. The moment this time is over, God's angel comes and announces in a silent language: 'Your time of action has come to an end. Now you have to die and appear before your Creator and Lord to account for your actions.'

The experience of sitting in an examination hall that students

have is an example by which they can understand the matter of life's test in a vaster sense. Life is a state of trial, and death means sending man to the next world where he will reap the reward for his actions. The life before death is, in actual fact, a testing period and life after death is the period when the results will come out. One who leads his life wisely in this period of testing will have a better result in the next stage of his life. Those who are ignorant of these facts will experience nothing in this next stage, but remorse and frustration. The attitude of the student in the examination hall should be adopted by us throughout our entire lives. Everyone has to make efforts to answer the test paper given by God correctly so that when the time of the exam is over and his result is out, good tidings of success will be in store for him rather than an announcement of failure.

LIFE AND HEALTH

A successful man is one who regards everything as a gift of God and thinks more of death than of life. One who does not acknowledge God and is oblivious of death fails in the test. Eternal Paradise awaits the first type of people and eternal Hell awaits the second type.

Dr. Shehzad Ali of Meerut (U.P.) died on February 6, 2009 at the age of 45. When I met him for the first time, he appeared quite healthy but later he developed cancer.

In spite of treatment, the disease only became aggravated. Finally, he was bed-ridden. During his last days he was reduced to a bag of bones. His digestive system had so

deteriorated that he could not even take simple food. Even drinking water had become difficult for him. In those days when anyone came to see him, he would say, 'Don't think about me. Think about yourself. Thank God that you have a healthy body. Thank God that you can eat and drink and walk on the earth. All these things are God's blessings. He can take away all these things and then you will be left without anything.'

Man has been granted a healthy body. When he is born, he is already in possession of this healthy body. He therefore takes it for granted. He never stops to think that this healthy body is wholly a gift from God. So in acknowledgement of this gift, he should surrender himself to God. The same is the case with life. As long as man is alive he thinks that his life will last forever. He never thinks of his death. This is undoubtedly the biggest mistake.

Herein lies the test for every man and every woman. A successful man is one who thinks more of death than of life, who regards everything as the gift of God Almighty. This is the man who is successful in the test. On the contrary, one who does not acknowledge God and is oblivious of death is the one who has failed in the test. Eternal Paradise awaits the first type of people and eternal Hell awaits the second type of people.

THE NEWS OF DEATH

Old age comes only to jolt man out of this moral lethargy and make him start his preparation for the final journey. He should then think about the afterlife, and plan his life after death.

There was a 75-year old man who had always enjoyed good health, but now he had fallen ill. This illness was in actual fact the news of approaching death but he imagined that with treatment, his health would improve. He began to approach different doctors and go to different hospitals. When he had spent all his money, he borrowed money for better and costlier treatment. But he failed to regain his health. Finally he succumbed to his illness. This is not the story of just one man, but all men and woman.

Old age comes to tell man that his end is near. Then when he becomes ill, this is to hammer home this point, to awaken him from his slumber. Thus old age, followed by ailments, comes only to jolt man out of this moral lethargy and make him start his preparation for the final journey. He should then think about the afterlife and plan his life after death.

But man does not learn any lessons from events. Old age and illness remind man of death. But instead of thinking about death, he thinks about treatment. He runs after doctors and goes to hospitals, finally to die one day in despair. Thus what he gets in return is not health but death. This is a fact of life which man sees daily around him. But no one derives any lesson from this. Everyone turns a blind eye to reality. It is only death which will open his eyes. But the opening of eyes after death will be of no avail to any man or woman.

PARADISE OR ILLUSION

Man is not able to enjoy the wealth he earns because he devotes his entire life to making more and more money, till death approaches him. The Quran explains this reality thus: 'Greed for more and more distracted you [from God] till you reached the grave'. (102:1-2)

Kareena Kapoor, a famous Bollywood film star, earns in crores for her acting. A report published in the Times of India (March 29, 2009) informs us that for one advertisement contract she was paid Rupees 6 crore. When asked what she would do with that amount of money, she replied: 'I will buy myself a home in Greece.' The report also says that Kareena has also bought a home in Bombay. But she said, "I spend most of my time in studios, so I have no time to enjoy my new home."

When new opportunities have opened up in present times most people have used them to earn more and more money. But experience tells us that the greater the wealth, the greater the problems. Man is not able to enjoy the wealth he earns because he devotes his entire life to making more and more money. Finally, the time comes when he has to abandon everything and leave for a world where he will be bereft of each and everything he ever possessed. He will not have even the opportunities which would enable him to build a life of luxury. He will face deprivation all around him. How strange is the beginning of man and how strange is the end of man. This is the reality which finds expression in chapter 102 of the Quran: 'Greed for more and more distracted you [from God] till you reached the grave'. (102:1-2)

AIRPORT OF THE HEREAFTER

When life's aeroplane lands at the airport of the Hereafter some will be stopped for questioning, while others will be welcomed by the angels and be led into Paradise. One should seriously reflect on this, and strive to be held deserving of eternal Paradise.

Once when leaving an airport along with a number of other passengers after completing the necessary procedures, I saw that some of the passengers had been prevented from leaving. They were told to wait for special checking. The Airport authorities had received some confidential information about them and that is why they had to treat them with suspicion. This scene at the airport reminded me of a verse of the Quran: 'Stop them there for questioning.' (37:24) On reflection we find that the course of life is also similar. The earth, which man inhabits, is travelling in its orbit at the speed of 1000 miles per hour. It is as if we are aboard an aeroplane which is heading towards an airport at a great speed. This is the airport of the hereafter. A time will come when all human beings will land at the airport of the hereafter. Here some people will be stopped for questioning. On the other hand, there will be some blessed, fortunate souls who will be welcomed by the angles saying: 'Peace be upon you. You have done well, enter Paradise and dwell in it forever.' (39:73)

This state of affairs is going to be faced by all human beings. The timings of worldly journeys are known but the timing of the journey of the hereafter is not known. It can come upon one at any moment, and when life's aeroplane lands

at the airport of the hereafter some will be stopped for questioning but others will be welcomed by the angels and will be led into Paradise. This is undoubtedly the greatest thing on which every man and woman should seriously reflect, and they should lead their lives accordingly. This time will come without any announcement and then no one will have any opportunity to go back to the world he has left behind.

THE PEOPLE OF PARADISE

According to a tradition of Prophet Muhammad in Sahih al-Bukhari, "The people of Hell will be mostly the arrogant and the people of Paradise will be from the weak."

There is a long tradition recorded by Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, from which we learn that: "The people of Hell will be mostly the arrogant and the people of Paradise will be from the weak." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No.4850)

What has been said in the Hadith, is not something mysterious, but explains certain experiences in human history. It is a fact that God created many strong personalities, that is, such people as had great capabilities in both mind and physical prowess. Due to the exigencies of their being tested, they were, in addition, given full freedom. Lamentably, they misused their freedom and became arrogant and insolent. They, thus, became deserving of Hell. On the contrary, there were others who were born with weak personalities. They, too, had full freedom due to the exigencies of their being tested. But due to their weakness, they remained modest and

to compensate for their weakness, they remembered God more and more.

This was because, practically, there was no other choice for them. In this way, due to their weakness, such qualities developed in them as enabled them to gain entry into Paradise. However, in this, exceptions were also possible. For instance, although Umar Farooq was born with a strong personality, his faith made him an extremely modest person. Moreover, it is possible that some may be extremely weak physically, but as to their minds, God may make them strong personalities to the ultimate extent, so that in spite of having weak personalities, attainment of high realization may be possible for them.

TOWARDS THE NOBLEST COMPANION

A verbal expression of the internal feelings of a true believer: "When the time to depart from this world comes, I want to be near to God Almighty, in the company of angels and nobler companions. Let this journey for me become from a lower to a higher level of being."

Chapter 66 of the Quran tells us that when the king of ancient Egypt issued an order for his believing wife to be executed, she prayed thus to God: 'My Lord, build me a house in nearness to You in Paradise.' (66:11) This is a prayer coming from the lips of a true believer. This prayer found expression in prophetic words from the lips of the Prophet of Islam when he breathed his last: 'My Lord, the Noblest Companion.' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4463)

Both these prayers are similar in nature. The first prayer is in the words of a believer and the second prayer is in the words of a prophet.

Both these prayers in actual fact are an expression of the feelings of a believer in relation to death. This means that when the moment of death comes to a believer, his feelings may take the form of a prayer of this kind. At that moment the feeling of a believer should be: "When the time to depart from the people of this world comes, I want to be near to God Almighty. When I have to leave the company of human beings, I want to be blessed with the company of angels. When death separates me from my people, let me not be left all alone but let me find the blessing of a nobler assembly in the company of God. Let my journey of death become a journey from a lower to a higher level of being." This prayer is not just a set of words. It is a verbal expression of the internal feelings of a true believer. The desire of a true believer is that the next stage of life should be far better than the present one. He wants the blessings of God which he had in this present testing ground, to be given to him in the world after death in the far higher form of God's eternal blessings. He desires death to become a means of leaving this imperfect world and entering the perfect world of the Hereafter.

LOVE *of* GOD

In this book, the author enlightens the reader about the love of God and how every human being can experience this subtle emotion for their Creator. While stating unequivocally that the strongest human feeling is that of love, the author informs us through his study and experience that we can find true satisfaction only when our deepest love is directed toward a Being that rightfully deserves this finest of human emotions.

Faith in God does not mean to have blind belief in a supreme being, rather it is to have strong affection for a Being whom one has discovered as one's creator, sustainer and greatest benefactor. We can experience nearness to our Creator at the psychological level when we remember Him in solitude, call out to Him in gratitude and engage in worship.

The peace we experience in moments of closeness to our Creator provides spiritual upliftment and meaning to life. This relationship of love with God revolutionizes a person's character. He is full of well-wishing for his fellow human beings, whom he sees as God's family.

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