



An Anthology of **Inspirational Writings**

Compiled by
Dr Shehzad Saleem

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Point 1: Causing Any Wrong

I saw this man shopping at the store. He grabbed a can of milk but when he pulled it out from the shelf, another can was forced out of its place slightly. It was still secure but he readjusted the position to put it back in its place. The other day I saw him throwing some rubbish into a bin. A tiny piece of paper that I could barely see, fell on the floor. He picked it up and carefully put it back into the bin. This time I managed to see his face. It was as bright as a full moon. I immediately recognised that he was a man who was striving in the path of his Lord. He considered it a big crime to be the cause of any wrong, no matter how minor and ignorable it might be.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 2: Helping Others

One of the greatest opportunities that God provides to people who seek to gain His approval and improve their spirituality is the occasion when someone needs help. A person who is interested in purifying his heart looks out for these opportunities like an enthusiastic hunter. Such a person will not let go of any opportunity like this because he/she knows the value of such opportunities. However, the important point is that since such a person sees these opportunities as catalysts for purification, he/she does not consider them as favours to others or something even worthy of mention to others. The rules of engagement for a person in the path of purification are totally different. When people thank a person in this path for helping them, he/she feels embarrassed, thinking, "I should be the one thanking them for

providing me with this opportunity, why they are thanking me?!”

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 3: Be Calm

Patience, being calm and cool are some of the most important elements of a healthy soul. These are in fact some of the ingredients of a state of heart that in the words of the Qur’ān is called ‘Sakinah’. One way to practice this in our daily life is to control our attitude towards ‘waiting’. For example, next time that you are alone in a lift, try not to follow the sign that shows you the number of the floor that is passed, you have pressed the button and you know it will stop, just wait for it. You decide to read a book for 15 minutes, set an alarm clock to alert you in 15 minutes. Then keep reading the book and do not look at the clock till it actually rings. You are discussing a subject with a friend, see if you can control yourself not to interrupt him while allowing him to interrupt you. These are only a few examples in our daily life when we can change a waiting situation to an opportunity to improve our Sakinah.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 4: Offending or Offended?

In Point 1, we wrote that “he (i.e. a person in the path of Tazkiyah) considered it a big crime to be the cause of any wrong”. One of the most damaging “wrong” deeds from a Tazkiyah (purification of soul) perspective is to unjustly cause annoyance or offence to another human being. A person in the path of Tazkiyah seeks peace for his soul but that is impossible

until people around him are at peace with him. We read in books about great pious people who travelled long distances or took drastic measures to get to a person whom they thought they may have annoyed or wronged, to ask for his forgiveness; at the end of the endeavour, they would often find out that the concerned person did not feel offended in the first place. There is a narrative reported from the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) that a believer is the one from whose hands and tongue, other people are safe.

This however, has another side to it as well. A person who is interested in Tazkiyah not only makes sure that he does not unjustly annoy or offend any one with his behaviour or statements, but he also finds it against the premise of Tazkiyah to get annoyed or offended by others easily. While such a person tries his best to react appropriately to any unjust behaviour, he also becomes concerned about his own self when he experiences feelings of annoyance or offence. He will spend some time investigating his inner self when that happens, trying to figure out whether his ego or selfishness may have contributed to the feelings of annoyance or offence.

Looking from the above perspective, one may come to understand one of the applications of an advice of wise men that states that every one is happy with a believer while he is unhappy with himself.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 5: Spiritual Sensitivity

Dark clothes do not show dirt easily, even if the person wearing them roles around in mud, the dirt may not be readily noticeable; in contrast, white clothes easily reveal any dirt on them. Even if there is slight dirt around a person wearing white clothes, it easily finds its way onto them and shows itself. The darker the clothes, the more insensitive they are to dirt, whereas the brighter the clothes, the more sensitive they are, just like the human soul!

A person who is trying to purifying his heart soon notices that, just like the white clothes, his heart has also become more sensitive. As he makes progress in this endeavour, he gets ever more sensitive to things that may pollute his soul. For such a person, the “don’t do” list is much longer in contrast to the one not too concerned about purifying himself. While for the latter, only religiously illegal acts (‘Haram’) are in the “don’t do” list, for the former, anything that he considers unworthy of a human being (as God’s deputy and servant), is in that list. Such a person does not allow his eyes to focus on everything that they see nor does he allow his ears to pay attention to all that is uttered in his presence; he is very cautious about what he says and does not allow his mind to concentrate on every thought that arises in it. This person protects his soul extremely delicately, like the one who protects his new white clothes when walking down a muddy path.

More purification demands more protection, just as brighter clothes demand more protection from dirt. This is Taqwa and God says, “Verily, the best of you before God is the one who has more Taqwa” (49:13).

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 6: Take a Break!

Patience, focusing, pausing the train of never-stopping-wasteful-thinking and being humble are some of the essentials as well as outcomes of a purified heart. It would be nice to be able to engage in an activity that brings out and improves all these qualities while being enjoyable for you and your loved ones at the same time.

Play with children! However, don’t play with them like an adult, pretending that you are playing while continuing your wasteful thinking and giving them less than half of your attention. Rather, play with them as one of them! Get excited about what excites them and compete for what they are competing for. Let go of your adulthood for a while and enjoy

the simple, yet passionate world of those whose hearts have not yet been polluted with the experiences of adulthood.

You can mix this exercise with tip number one about “waiting”. Set the alarm to ring in say, 15 minutes and then devote that time to the kid(s) you are playing with. Do not look at the clock every now and then to see when the 15 minutes will pass; the alarm will let you know.

This is perhaps one of the few Tazkiyah Points that makes your kids happy as well!

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 7: Measuring Spiritual Purification (1)

‘Measurement’ is not always easy, especially if what is measured is intangible. How can we measure the degree of our Tazkiyah in the path of God? It is easy to think that we are very good, or very bad in terms of Tazkiyah, however this is all very subjective and does not give us any real perspective on our strengths and weaknesses. In fact, we can use some measures in order to assess how “good” we really are in this. Two of these are as follows and Insha’Allah, the next Tazkiyah Point will cover two more:

1. How keen are we in doing our prayers? Do we find our prayers boring or are they enjoyable? What are the things that occupy our minds while we pray? Perhaps, a clue to improving our spirituality is in recognizing these things. The extent to which we enjoy our prayers and look forward to them can be an indication of how much we have managed to purify our soul in the path of God.

2. As Muslims, we know a lot about concepts like trusting in God, leaving things to Him, etc. One of the main points of all worship we do is to be good at these. How do we perform in practice when we come across an apparently worrying or stressful situation? Do our actions indicate that in reality, we do not really believe in someone up there who takes care of things

for us, or do they indicate a true belief in a being looking after us? These situations are the best opportunities to look right inside our heart (our spirit), to get an idea of how far we have come in the path of Tazkiyah and to diagnose weaknesses in our beliefs and actions, aiming to do our best to rectify them.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 8: Measuring Spiritual Purification (2)

Point 7 described two possible ways to “measure” one’s success in spiritual purification (Tazkiyah) and promised to provide two measures in the subsequent Tazkiyah tip. So, here are the 3rd and the 4th measures:

3. How do we spend our time when we are alone? Let us imagine a very close friend that we cannot wait to be alone with, as his/her company is so enjoyable. Do we enjoy the company of God when we are alone with Him and no one else is there to interrupt? In fact, do we even realize that He is there and we can never be alone? It seems quite easy to be mindful of God and to get engaged in His remembrance when we are in the company of others. In the best scenario, this is because being in the company of God fearing, or at least God-aware people, encourages us to remember the Lord. In the worst scenario, this is because we like showing off. However the real test and therefore the real measurement tool is when we are alone and have some time available to spend as we wish. In that situation, do we spend the time in disobeying God, or do we spend it in ignoring him? Or do we spend at least some of the available time “with Him”?

4. How much of our spiritual energy is spent on dealing with “anger”, “taking offence easily”, “worrying”, “jealousy”, “being suspicious of others”, “being pessimistic” and so on? Each of these is an indication of a defect in our soul and deserves special attention. The person who is in the path of Tazkiyah has such a big heart, such a clear thought and such passion to move on in this path that he will rarely become angry for a personal reason

and will hardly become offended by a fellow human being. Likewise, he does not go to extremes in worrying about and over-analyzing his worldly affairs, for he appreciates the purpose of his life, he is aware of the fact that he is a servant of God and that everything happens under the control of the One who knows everything and is all Wise.

For such a person, feeling jealousy is one of the most shameful and disappointing weaknesses that requires immediate rectification. The beauty and peace that arises due to being in the path of Tazkiyah brings about a generally positive and optimistic spirit to the person that it never allows him to be suspicious of others. In addition, others find it to be a pleasure to be around him due to his enjoyable personality and in particular his optimistic (but not unrealistic) perspective of life and the affairs of life.

Each of the above mentioned spiritual defects could be significantly influential in damaging a person's efforts in the path of Tazkiyah. On the other hand, the degree to which a person has been successful in avoiding these spiritual defects is a fair indication of his or her success in Tazkiyah.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 9: Have Some Discipline

Interruptions in plans, running out of time and being late in meeting deadlines as well as other time related pressures of hectic life of today can affect the one striving in the delicate path of Tazkiyah (purification). After all, how can a person maintain his peace of mind and integrity while concentrating on his Tazkiyah, if his mind and soul are continuously under pressure of catching up with time? It is easy to invite people to calm down and to shower them with some routine and cliché advice like, 'trust in God ... it is all going to be okay at the end ... just do it instead of being stressed about it ...' etc.; however, the reality is, that tasks need to be completed before their deadlines and a human being, no matter how elevated his spiritual level may be,

does get stressed when things are messed up.

The best way of dealing with this is to prevent such a situation from developing as much as possible, by bringing discipline (Nadhem) in our daily affairs and by observing the discipline rigidly. We need a discipline that dictates to us about when to sleep and when to wake up, when to eat and when to have fun, when to go for shopping and when to visit a friend etc. No doubt, there may be times when there is no alternative but to break the discipline but, with a bit of practice, persistence and more importantly, by convincing those who we interact with regularly to respect our discipline, we can minimise such interruptions.

We read in the life stories of people who were known for their efforts in the path of Tazkiyah, that they had so much discipline in their life that their friends and families would adjust their daily tasks according to their activities, as if, they had a human clock handy! Working through the path of Tazkiyah without bringing some discipline to our daily lives is like hanging washed clothes outside to dry when it is raining; so much effort, yet so little result!

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 10: To Care

I asked him if he knew about the situation in Libya and the fact that many had been killed in the demonstrations, he replied, “Yes, I have heard some news”. I asked him, “What do you think about it?” He just shook his head. I asked him if he had any suggestions for helping people in Libya and North Africa in need of shelters, food and medicines. Again, he just looked at me and only offered a smile. Seeing my puzzled face, he said, “My dear brother, I am so busy with my inner struggle for purification that I do not have any time to spare, in fact, I do not even consider it appropriate to get engaged in these worldly matters!”

Later on when I was by my self, I felt saddened by the thought that his Tazkiyah was so different from the one that the Qur’a#n

referred to, the one which the Last Prophet, peace be upon him, practiced and promoted. I wish that he knew that when one makes another human being happy while having the right intentions in the heart, that action results in a magical effect on the Tazkiyah (purification) of his soul.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 11: Effect of Haram Food

It is of course a fact that we are responsible only for our own actions and not for the actions of others. When we happen to have the pleasure of consuming food at some one else's home, the food served to us is Halal and allowed to us, even if we know that it is made from illegitimate and Haram money. However, from a Tazkiyah point of view, our interest should go beyond whether the food is Halal or Haram. We need to be wary of any possible effects of products of Haram money on us, even if we are consuming them as a guest. The experience of people, who have done well in the path of Tazkiyah shows that taking care in what we eat and where we eat it, is very important. Such people, for instance, would be reluctant to eat in a home where, they know that the host does not care about paying Zakah just out of arrogance, or makes money unethically.

It needs to be emphasized that technically speaking, the food that is made out of Haram money by some one else is not Haram for us. However, the advice of those who are advanced in the path of Tazkiyah for people striving to purify their souls is that due to the potential adverse effects that it might have on the soul, they should avoid such food. Obviously, this tip refers to a clear and definite Haram money being used for food, not a guess, suspicion or an assumption.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 12: Benefiting from Moments of Being Alone

Human beings are very complicated creatures. When in presence of others, our feelings and actions are quite different than when we are alone, specially with regard to our relationship with our Lord and with our soul. We some times feel more comfortable and enjoyable when engaged with our Lord while being among others. At other times, we find it awkward and not very effective. It is not the purpose of this short tip to explore the mechanism of feelings of human beings when they are amongst others as opposed to when they are alone. In fact, such exploration might not lead to any definite answers any way.

It is however, enough to appreciate that normally, when it comes to our relationship with our Lord and understanding our own soul, we are in a better situation to assess ourselves when we are alone. Yes, it is in interaction with others that our strengths and weaknesses are usually revealed, yet, it is in our own lone times that we come to notice and hopefully, appreciate them better.

The moments when one is alone are precious times for the one who is interested in being better in the path of his Lord;

- These are the moments that such a person will use to reflect on his personality, being totally honest with himself, and to address his own soul, talking with it, criticising it and advising it openly, seriously and passionately.

- The glory of being lonely gives such a person a chance to realistically assess his soul and his relationship with his Lord. In Tazkiyah tip 8, being alone was referred to as an opportunity for measuring our success in spiritual purification. For instance, if we feel we enjoy prayers better when we read them while others watching us then this is a loud alarm that something is seriously wrong.

- These are the moments during which such a person can be sure that – in connecting with his Lord - he is not showing off or putting up a face for others. It is during these moments that he can talk to his Lord with no one intruding.

It is always good to be around others and to have others around us. We do not propagate isolation and seclusion. It is however, important to value the price of our lonely moments and to make sure we are having them occasionally. After all, it was during their private and lonely moments that the most purified individuals in the past received revelations from their Lord. We will not receive any revelations, but we can for sure, receive His blessings.

One last point:

It was mentioned above:

“These are the moments during which the person can be sure that – in connecting with his Lord - he is not showing off or putting a face for others.”

Question:

“So is it really impossible to show off and put a face when we are alone?”

This will take us to Point number 13:

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 13: Self Deception

In Point number 12, we wrote: “These (i.e. moments of being alone) are the moments during which the person can be sure that – in connecting with his Lord - he is not showing off or putting a face for others.” A question was then raised: “So is it really impossible to show off and put a face when we are alone?” and we promised that this will be addressed in Tazkiyah Tip 13.

The sad reality is that the answer to the above question is, “No”. Often our understanding of showing off (Riya) is that this

only applies when we show off to others. While showing off to others is the worst kind of showing off, perhaps the most tricky showing off and the one that is more difficult to avoid is “one showing off to oneself”.

The following example might help appreciate the point:

Brother X has done his best to make sure he remains humble in front of others and that he never talks too much about himself. He tries not to even do what he ordinary does (in terms of non-obligatory worship) when with others, in a fear that it might result in showing off.

This is all good so far, but read on:

Brother X is now very “proud” of himself, thinking that he has managed to be better than what others know about him and that he can manage to be so humble in front of others. In other words, brother X is using “being humble outside” as a tool to become “arrogant inside”! He is still suffering from the arrogance that he was tried to avoid by being humble, only the type of arrogance is different!

In a broad sense, we all have three personalities:

- A. The personality that we allow others to see
- B. The personality that we allow ourselves to see
- C. The personality that we really have

In the moments of loneliness, the first of the above does not apply, however the second one applies even more forcefully. The problem is that a person needs to be very strong and brave as well as ruthless to himself in order to realize and appreciate - within his own personalities - the existence of personality B and its difference with personality C. There comes a point in the path of Tazkiyah that little progress is possible if one cannot realize the difference between B and C in himself.

Personality C can only be noticed if we can do a regular, acidic reality check. One of the ways that we can achieve this is by doing a rigorous examination of our feelings, actions and strength of belief by reviewing our behaviour and reactions to different events in and aspects of our life (this is sometimes

referred to as 'Muhasiba'). This itself can be done during our moments of loneliness. Examples (other than the one that was illustrated above) are:

- The feeling that my belief is strong: Where is it coming from? Has my subconscious made me forget about those situations where I realized that my belief was not that strong after all?

- My perception that I enjoy my prayers: Do I really enjoy my prayers or do I merely think I am enjoying them since this is how I like to feel about them?

- The emotional feeling that I manage to get when I think about my relationship with God: Is this a real feeling or do I simply project that by dramatizing myself as a hidden precious thing? In other words, do I really cry as the result of my fear/love of my Lord and my shortcomings as his servant OR, do I cry simply because I am thinking "look how good I am and no body knows!"

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 14: Life Challenges as Tools for Purification

Every person experiences occasions during his or her life time where he or she is suffering, struggling, worrying or mourning or is under pressure in some other way due to circumstances. In most cases, the pressure starts at a point, reaches its peak and then gradually starts to get lighter and then perishes. If we consider the start of this process to be point A and the end of it to be point B, what is really happening is that the person is carrying this pressure along from point A to point B. Now, what we are trying to explain here can be best described and illustrated with a typical example of such a journey from point A to B:

Zayd is diagnosed with a disorder of his blood system on Monday (this is point A). He has given a blood test and is now waiting for the results that are expected in about a month's time (that will be point B). No matter what Zayd does and how he

takes this, he needs to take a journey from point A to point B. Now, Zayd can do this in two ways:

1. Zayd has started the journey from A to B. He is extremely worried. Every day and in fact, every hour he imagines being diagnosed with the most terrible disease that could ruin his life and all his ambitions. He sometimes tries to forget it and think positively but many times, he just loses it. He sometimes thinks optimistically and sometimes pessimistically but in both cases, the basis of his thoughts and the evidence and assumptions he bases them on are not that reliable.

2. Zayd is smiling. He is happy and honoured to be given an opportunity to challenge his soul and use the occasion to become a stronger believer. He puts all his trust in God, not meaning that he is sure that God will cause all the tests to return negative (although he prays for that to happen), but meaning that he is sure that whatever happens to him, God has intended it for him and that, it is for his best, even if he cannot fully understand it. He prays more, reads the Qur'an more and tries to make his relationship with his Lord stronger in these days where he needs more of His help and support. He is using the opportunity to recognize the weaknesses in his belief and personality and to try to tackle them with the help of God. In the process he also becomes a role model of faith for his closed ones.

Zayd in both the above scenarios will eventually reach point B. However, what is important is not what he finds at point B, but what he gained or lost in the journey from points A to B.

Zayd in the first scenario is damaging his nerves, is allowing himself to suffer more than he was supposed to suffer and in the process, he also makes his near and dear ones worried and nervous. When he reaches point B, from a spiritual point of view, he is at best the same Zayd but one with less energy and nerves. If the test comes back positive, that may prove to be the breaking point for him.

Zayd in the second scenario has a totally different perspective in his sight. To him, this is a journey that is supposed to improve his spirit; the blood test and the wait is only the outer face of this journey. When he reaches point B, he is not the same Zayd; he is a better Zayd from a spiritual point of view because he has successfully managed to complete the challenge. If the test comes back positive, that will simply be the start of a new challenge for

him, and a new journey from a point A to a point B.

Zayd in the first scenario is literally frustrating his soul and nerves in each of the A to B journeys.

Zayd in the second scenario is using these A to B journeys as a ladder for his spiritual advancement.

Zayd in the first scenario is a servant of his own emotions, that in turn are servants of ad hoc events and circumstances of life.

Zayd in the second scenario is a servant of his Lord, therefore, all events and circumstances serve him in his endeavour to serve God.

Zayd in the first scenario has lost his way.

Zayd in the second scenario is in the path of Tazkiyah.

The above is only an example. As stated at the start of the article, any type of pressure can be a journey from A to B. Working hard to get good results for exams, going through a period of unemployment, tolerating difficult family circumstances, struggling to make ends meet, not knowing where to live and settle and many other examples that we see in our own lives or the lives of those around us, are all instances of making a journey from point A to point B.

It is for us to decide how we make that journey.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 15: Reading the Qur'ān

We know that reading the Qur'ān during the Tahajjud prayer and before the time of the morning prayer is very much recommended. It is understandable that due to our daily routine work, not many may be able to do this regularly. It is highly recommended that, if not regularly, we at least do this a few days per week or month. However, there is another thing we can do on a regular basis that can hardly intervene with our daily routine work:

Reading the Qur'ān after the morning prayer, before going to work or returning to bed is a very effective tool for Tazkiyah. It is not necessary to read a long portion of the Qur'ān, even a few verses will do which may take only a few minutes, but of course, something that does need the person to sit down and spend a little time before leaving his prayer mat. The most important thing is to do this regularly.

Amazingly and strangely enough, when we want to do this, at least at the start, we may sometimes feel a mysterious resistance in our soul against it and something from within seems to discourage us from doing this (which might take only less than 5 minutes altogether). Could this be a sign that this is such an effective thing to do that Satan and/or our own weak soul will do all they can to stop it from happening?

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 16: Tips for the Month of Ramadaan

For some, month of Ramadan is a month of refraining from eating and drinking between dawn and sunset.

For some, it is the month of reading more Qur'ān and more prayers and supplications plus the above.

For a few, it is the month of gaining a sustaining and higher level Taqwa plus the above to help with purification of soul (Tazkiyah).

According to the Qur'ān, only the latter group are aiming for what is really the aim of fasting in the month of Ramadan (2:183).

Here is a collection of some practical tips that might help us in getting closer to the latter group:

1. Having a plan:

We are living in a very busy world where we can easily find ourselves engaged all the day and quite tired during the night. In this busy life the month of Ramadan passes very fast and before we know it we will reach the day of Eid. It is very wise to have

some plans to determine and decide what special things we want to and we can do during this month and that how best we can accommodate them in our busy life schedule.

2. It does not matter if you cannot fast:

Many people might not be strong enough or healthy enough to fast especially if they are living where the summer daytime is extremely long. There are also those who might need to be in travel during all or part of the month of Ramadan. Sometimes people think that if they do not fast, then the month of Ramadan is not for them and they cannot get any benefit from it. This is wrong. One who has a genuine excuse for not fasting can still take benefit of the month of Ramadan. Majority of the points that are given in this article are equally related to those who cannot fast. In fact, having more energy than those who fast, they may even do better in adopting some of these points!

3. Cleaning any anger and hatred towards others from our heart:

To attempt to increase our Taqwa for the sake of Tazkiya while having a grudge and anger in our heart against a fellow human being is like trying to fill up a broken bottle with water. We need to do what it takes to erase any anger and hatred towards others from our heart.

4. Deciding what increasing Taqwa means for us and setting it as an aim for our month of Ramadan:

This tip is deliberately underlined to indicate its importance and the fact that it is the core requirement for those who want to attain more Taqwa in the month of Ramadan. If we want to really aim for the real objective of the month of Ramadan, then we need to carefully study our soul (Muhasiba) in an attempt to recognize its weaknesses. This can be anything: becoming angry easily, offending others, getting offended very easy, being lazy in our prayers, becoming worried very easy, having a bad behaviour with others, not minding about the rights of others, eating a lot, sleeping a lot, wasting too much time, etc. No one knows can tell us better than us what these weaknesses are. We will then decide that in this month of Ramadan we want to eliminate or improve (not all but) one, two, or only a few of these weaknesses. If we manage to use the opportunity of the month of Ramadan to take the selected weakness/es out of our

system for good, then by the grace of God we have managed to meet the real aim of the month of Ramadan.

This point is really the backbone of the idea behind this article. It therefore deserves some elaboration. There are a few points that can help with the above:

1. Starting the month with repenting (tawbah): Since we want to get rid of some bad habits and practices in this month it makes perfect sense to start the month and in fact enter the month after offering a repenting prayer. This simply means to perform two rak'ah prayers and then to ask God to forgive us for that or those habit/s or practice/s that we are now determined to throw out of our system during the month of Ramadan and for good.
2. Praying to be successful in our repentance: Obviously, we have general requests in our prayers plus specific requests for others and ourselves. However beside these, we also need to specifically ask the Almighty to help us with our decision and determination to get rid of that/those selected weakness/es, as discussed above. Even when we read the Qur'ān, while learning and benefiting generally from it, we will see if we can get any inspiration or guidance from the Qur'ān with regard to this challenge that we have decided to face.
3. Controlling and monitoring: In order to be successful in our determination to remove one or more of our weaknesses, we need to closely and carefully review our performance every day to see whether we are doing well, whether we need to adjust a few things to assist with our aim and whether we need to correct and rectify any shortcomings in our progress towards the aim.
4. Fasting not just in eating: The best way of thinking about how to get rid of some of the weaknesses of our sole is to consider 'avoiding them' as part of our fasting. Fasting from food and drink means refraining from eating and drinking during only a limited time of a day in the month of Ramadan. Fasting from what we have selected to correct in ourselves in the month of Ramadan does not have any limits

and will become part of our personality by the end of the month of Ramadan, so it will never end.

5. Doing proper Tahajjud:

We know that the prophet (pbuh) has advised us that if we cannot do the Tahajjud during its real time, then we can do it after the 'Isha prayer. We also know that during the month of Ramadan, traditionally many Muslims take this offer and do their Tahajjud prayer after 'Isha in congregation (Jumu'ah) and that is what gradually was called Taraweeh. Point number five is that let us do proper Tahajjud at least during the month of Ramadan. That is, reading it individually after midnight and preferably in its best time i.e. the portion of the night that is closer to the time of dawn (Sahar). During our Tahajjud, if we like, and if we have not memorized much of the Qur'ān, we can hold the book in our hands and read from it. We can determine how many verses or pages to read in every rak'ah before doing the last three ones. We do not need to aim to finish the Qur'ān by the end of the month and we can be flexible and sometimes read only short Surah of the Qur'ān if we are too tired or need to wake up early the day after. Note that this does not suggest that participating in Taraweeh prayer is wrong.

6. Praying for others:

It is better if we always start our prayers to God by glorifying Him and counting His blessings in our life, then asking general and specific goodness and help for all and then for those close to us in particular our parents, kin and friends and only then for ourselves.

7. Giving charity:

Giving a bit more than normal as charity during this month can have a tremendous effect on us.

8. More attention to the quality of our prayers:

We need to use the month of Ramadan to give special attention to the quality of our daily prayers. The key effect of the prayer is manifestation of one of the sentences that we read repeatedly during every prayer, that is, "Only you we worship and only you we seek help from". Some of the points in this article on the following website can help here: How to Improve Our Daily

Prayers.

9. Reading the Qur'ān while pondering upon the meanings (Tadabbur):

Reading the Qur'ān without pondering over its meanings is still helpful but is nowhere near the way that we are supposed to read the Qur'ān. There is no need and no obligation to read the Qur'ān in haste aiming to finish it in the month of Ramadan. Reading the Qur'ān should be in the form of dialogue, in that, we read the message of the Almighty and then we reflect on it by our 'mind' and 'heart' and where appropriate 'tongue' (like praying for heaven when we read its description, seeking God's mercy when we read the description of hell, thanking God when we read about His blessings, etc.).

10. Talking to God:

Every prayer and every narrated supplication is talking to the Almighty. While these are very rewarding, we should also develop the ability and the habit of talking to God on our own initiative as well. We should be able to talk with Him in private and to say whatever we would like to say to our Lord and Creator. We do not need to worry about what to say and how to say as He is the most merciful and kind and He loves us more than a parent loves his/her child. We do not need to think of a special way of doing this, we can simply open our heart and talk. We might find it difficult at the start but once we get used to it we will be able to enjoy it and see the benefit. Nothing replaces the happy and peaceful feeling of a servant of God who is shedding tears of joy while talking with his Lord where no one else can see him.

11. Ponder over God's names:

There is a reason that God's attributes are mentioned in the Qur'ān. Pondering over these attributes and thinking about them and their effect on us have a great influence on our soul. Calling God and praying to Him by these names (like, for instance Basir – All Seeing, Aleem – All Knowing, Hakeem – Wise, ...) can help a lot in putting us on the right spiritual direction.

12. Reminding oneself about death and making it a well-established fact in our heart:

It is easy to 'know' that we will die someday and as a Muslim,

it is also easy to 'know' that there will be a hereafter (Akhira). What is difficult is to establish the concept in our heart in a way that it positively affects our relationship with our Lord, with others and with ourselves. If we remind ourselves as appropriate about death and Akhira and its implications, this might help with establishing the concept in our heart. The aim is not to be sad or disappointed, but to be motivated enough to prepare for what will certainly happen, which will also help us to have a happier life in this world.

13. Do not go to extremes at the time of Iftaar:

The point of fasting is not to postpone the amount of the food that we were supposed to eat only to have it all in one go during Iftaar (and perhaps adding even more to make it more pleasant!). Iftaar is for us to break our fast so that we do not fall in hardship. There is absolutely no problem with enjoying the food and having what we like to have. However, we need to make sure that we do not go to extremes. After all, how can we have a good pondering over the Qur'an and a good Tahajjud after the midnight and all the other things we want to do for our spirituality if we have filled our stomach with so much food that we can hardly move or stay awake?

14. Take care of the tongue!

We did discuss getting rid of bad habits and practices in point 4 above. The tongue of human being however, is such a naughty phenomenon that it deserves a special tip of its own. We will find that during the month of Ramadan, controlling our tongue will become very relevant in attaining Taqwa. We, of course need to talk with our family, colleagues and those around us, however, especially during the month of Ramadan, there is no harm if we also experience periods of silence to keep ourselves immune from the potential problems that our tongue might bring us. We are specially advised not to get involved in arguments in this month.

15. Don't miss opportunities to help others or to be kind to them:

We sometimes use fasting as an excuse to lay back. We should not allow this to take away opportunities where we may be able to help a fellow human being or where we can gain many rewards just by being kind.

16. Understanding Islam better:

During the month of Ramadan there can be times that we like to spend for the cause of fasting yet we are not in the mood of offering more prayers, etc. In other words, we might need a break from our ritual worshiping while still longing to do something related to religion. In this case, a good break will be to learn more about Islam from its original sources and from those who have learned it from its original sources. Having a correct understanding of Islam will help us with being better Muslims.

17. Thinking about ourselves:

The last point described one way of having break from our ritual worshiping while we still like to do something related to religion. Another thing we can and we should do is for each of us to think about him/herself. This means reviewing one's life so far, thinking about the person that one has become, the strength of one's belief, one's priorities, the way one wants to spend the rest of the life. Overall, this means reflecting on one's life so far to see where one is heading and whether any adjustments or redirection is needed.

18. I'tikaaf (seclusion):

The idea of I'tikaaf is to distance ourselves from the busy day-to-day life and to devote some special time to improve our relationship with our Lord by means of worshiping, reading the Qur'aan and thinking about God and us. The preferred way of doing this is to stay a few days during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan in a mosque. However, if this is not possible for us, we can at least choose to stay for a shorter period in a mosque. Even staying between two prayers can be considered as I'tikaaf. It is important to note that we do I'tikaaf to have some private and quality time with our Lord and not to spend it chitchatting with people.

19. Seeking Laylatul Qadr (the Night of Destiny):

There is a reason why we have not been informed about the exact date of Laylatul Qadr by a divine source. If the point were to simply hit the correct night like hitting a target, then we would have been told exactly when that night was supposed to occur. Instead, we have been advised to 'seek' it during the odd nights

of the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan. May be the point is to prepare our heart and make it so powerful that we would get benefit we are seeking any way, even if we do not know which night is the night of Qadr and even if we unintentionally miss it.

20. Do not commit Haram:

The most important precondition of all that is mentioned in this article is to not going even near what is made Haram for us. There is no place for Taqwa if Haram is still in the play.

21. Encourage the family:

It will help and create a helpful environment if we encourage our family members to join in the plan of attaining Taqwa in the month of Ramadan. As appropriate, we may choose what things to do together and what to do individually. Each (doing things together or individually) have their own benefits.

22. Being aware of showing off:

We need to be very careful not to show off in doing any of our acts of worship. For instance, if we find that a prayer feels more enjoyable when we are doing it in front of others then that means we are really enjoying the show off element of it rather than the prayer. If we do something, which is apparently for God, but in reality, it is to show off, whether fully or partially, we are only using the name of God as an excuse to serve our own ego.

23. Aiming to have a real Eid:

We will and we should Insha'Allah celebrate Eid because that is when Muslims (who are healthy enough to do so) have managed to follow their Lord's instruction to fast during the month of Ramadan. However, on a personal level, Eid is complete when we manage to meet the objective of this month, that is, to be able to jump on a higher level of Taqwa. By the end of the month if we were successful in eliminating those weaknesses we selected to work on (as in point 4) and if we have managed to throw them out of our system for good then we will have a very good reason (on a personal level) to celebrate the Eid.

The above points are by no means the only things that we may do to get the most out of the month of Ramadan. Obviously, every individual has his/her own ways of improving his/her Taqwa as well.

May the Lord help us to value the month of Ramadan the way it deserves and to follow the path of His best servants during this month.

It is narrated from the Prophet (sws):

مَنْ لَمْ يَدَعْ قَوْلَ الزُّورِ وَالْعَمَلَ بِهِ، فَلَيْسَ لِلَّهِ حَاجَةٌ فِي أَنْ يَدَعَ طَعَامَهُ وَشَرَابَهُ

The one who does not leave false (bad) talk and deed (in the month of Ramadan), (should know that) God does not need him to leave his food and drink.” (Bukhari 1903)

Point 17: Breaking Free

Some times it helps to break some of our not always constructive habits, to ensure that we do not depend on them. For a start, why not turn off the TV for a week, or if you are not in control of the TV in your house, just decide that you will stay away from it for a week. This is not to imply that watching TV is necessarily against Tazkiyah. The point however, is that if we find during this ‘rehabilitation’ period that it is difficult not to watch TV, and it seems like we are not sure how to use our time in the absence of the TV, then this means that we have made the TV one of our life requirements. It is this aspect of the TV (and any other kind of entertainment that per se, cannot be considered Haram) that might go against our endeavour for Tazkiyah.

One may read the above paragraph again, this time replacing the word ‘TV’ with ‘music’, ‘internet’ (where it is not related to our job), (for younger friends) ‘games’, ‘texting’ and any other technological tool that has indiscernibly become an indisputable part of the every day life in our era.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 18: Body and Soul

From one perspective, a human being can be seen to be comprised of a soul and a body. Although the nature and the function of each of these faculties are mainly different, they do seem to affect each other. In particular, it seems that the way we manage and maintain our bodily needs has some direct or indirect effects on our soul. There is a well known recommendation from many pious religious figures that we should avoid eating excessively. The general advice is that in principle, we should only eat when we feel hungry and that, we should aim to not make ourselves completely full.

A full stomach hardly allows a mood required to generate a spiritual experience through worship and meditation. An excessively full stomach makes the person lazy and not keen to take benefit of any constructive opportunities. To give a more tangible example, it will certainly be more difficult to wake up for Tahajjud (night prayer) or morning prayer if we go to sleep in a state where we can hardly breath, due to the amount of food we have consumed.

This is not an advice to adopt the practices of those who go to extremes in controlling their desires. This is simply to say that if we make our stomach a graveyard for animals, we cannot then expect our soul to be able to easily soar close to the pinnacles of spirituality.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 19: Nice Company

People who are on the path of Tazkiya while having the Prophet (sws) as their role model, are amongst the best company that a person can have. They are not too serious, they are not difficult to talk to, they do not look grumpy. They bring pleasure and joy with them and when they leave, people miss them. Those

who knew the Prophet (sws), knew him to be the best possible company one might have (not only because of him being a prophet, but also because of his wonderful personality).

The more purified the heart, the more space it creates for others.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 20: Dynamic Repenting Versus Static Repenting

The repenting of the one who is on the path of Tazkiyah is a progressive repenting. Every time he repents, he is repenting from the past state of the heart to reach a better state. With each repenting, he gets better in Tazkiyah. In contrast, when a person who is not taking Tazkiyah seriously repents, he usually repents from the same sin or the same state of heart. Each time he repents, he corrects himself and goes back to the same starting point again. While the former moves upwards every time he repents, the latter simply repents in his effort to not go down further.

Both types of repenting, if sincere, is valuable and commendable. Both involve feeling pity for the shortcomings, a feeling of guilt and asking the Almighty for forgiveness in a most passionate manner. However, the difference between the two is like the difference between a wave in an ocean and a ripple in a pond. The latter may rise an inch or two at most whereas the former can reach the sky. Sometimes there can also be an issue with the second type of repenting. Repenting from the same sin over and over may be due to not perceiving that sin as something serious. This means committing that sin gradually becomes something normal for the person and therefore his repenting will be nothing beyond saying a few words. In other words, he does not really repent, he remains merely a sinful person who happens to say the words of repenting in between his sins!

A person who performs this second type of repenting is called a 'Ta'ib' (the one who repents) whereas a person who is involved in the first type of repenting (that is, a progressive

repenting), is known as a 'Tawwab' (the one who repents continually). God particularly likes those people who are Tawwab (Qur'ān, 2:222).

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Point 21: Inside-Out or Outside-In Attitude to Purification?

I am a better person when I am in the company of people who know me, less of a good person when I am in the circle of my own family and worst when I am alone.

Normally, this scenario happens when a person is not yet fully successful in improving his personality and soul. What such a person needs to do is to apply the same consciousness and inspiration in his private life that he feels when he is in the company of people who know him.

The situation above is not perfect, but not a disaster either. However, sometimes we tend to accept the fact that we demonstrate better personality in the company of those who know us and that this personality changes and sometimes, completely vanishes when we are alone. This situation is far from perfect and is in fact, a disaster. It is disaster because it manifests a feature that is specific to the hypocrites. In this situation, the person is proud of the version of himself that is known by people and he almost completely ignores the version of himself that appears when he is on his own. What he does not appreciate is that the version in front of others is only a fake version, it is not him. It is in fact, the version that appears later in his solitary times that is his real version. Such a person gradually becomes a hypocrite himself; One who not only deceives others but also deceives himself.

The true effects of Tazkiyah appear in an inside out direction rather than an outside in direction.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

22. Patience in Worship

We normally advise each other to patience when it comes to facing life difficulties. There is another context in which patience is important, and that is worshipping God.

When we hear the advice of the pious servants of God to pay more attention to the quality of our prayers and that a good prayer can make you taste the sweetness of communicating with the Lord, some complain that they are trying their best, yet do not see any differences in the quality of their prayers.

While there can be many reasons why this might be the case, an important point to consider is that we need to have patience in our acts of worship as well. We should not expect quick results (although many times quick results do come). Worshiping is like cleaning our heart and polishing it. Sometimes it takes more than a few cleansing to make it shine. This means not to get frustrated if we do not see the results that we are looking for soon. We need to keep doing what we are doing and keep asking God to help us and bless to get better. One day insha'Allah that warm and sweet feeling of connecting with the Lord will come.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

23. Theory Versus Practice

There seems to be a misunderstanding or in fact a problem with many of us. We attend lectures and talks, we attend classes of the Qur'ān, and when the speaker talks about the importance of Akhlaq (morals) and the fact that we should remove bad morals from our system, we nod our head to show our agreement and appreciation of the speaker.

However, when we get out from that place and enter the next part of the life that day (family, work, friends' gathering, etc.) we seem to forget all this advice and our agreement with it.

In fact the word 'forget' is an exaggeration. It even seems that

we tend to isolate our thoughts and feelings in the religious talks like the above from the rest of our life. We somehow feel that these talks are very good but practically we do not treat them like anything that might be relevant to our every day lives.

We hear about the importance of throwing away anger. We appreciate it when we hear it. However as soon as we get into the car we target others with our anger. We hear about the fact that a person who is in the path of Tazkiyah should not allow himself to be easily offended, we nod our head in confirmation when we hear this, but in a matter of a few minutes after hearing it we get easily offended by some innocent statements from a friend.

In other words, we theoretically appreciate the advice, but practically behave as if we never heard it. A person who is interested in Tazkiyah always practices what he/she theoretically appreciates.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

24. Just Like Brushing Your Teeth

Have you ever felt the need to brush your teeth after having too many sweets and chocolate? Do you notice the feeling of heaviness and impurity in your mouth, and the great fresh and clean feeling you get when you brush your teeth?

The same happens to our soul. After too much engagement with the worldly affairs and too much involvement with the day to day roller coaster of emotions and feelings, even after having so much fun enjoying the company of friends or entertaining ourselves, that feeling of heaviness and impurity comes. Reading the Qur'ān, reading prayers and saying some Zikr will do the same thing here that brushing your teeth does in the above situation.

However, what if we do not feel that heaviness and impurity in our soul after so much worldly affair? Just like we may not feel the heaviness and impurity in our mouth after having so many sweets and chocolate. What might be the reason?

For the example of the mouth, the reason most probably is that we do not regularly brush anyway, so we have lost the sensitivity that makes us want to brush.

For the example of the soul, just replace the above sentence with the relevant words!

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

25. Bad Days

One who is trying to be a better person and a better servant of God should always look to become better and better as the days pass. However, the reality is that we are all human beings, and our feelings and even our spiritual mood can easily be affected by our environment, by our health and even by a variety of processes that are going on in our body.

We should accept the fact that some times we may not be in our normal mood and therefore do not find enough energy and motivation to do what we normally do in our endeavour to serve the Almighty. We should not blame ourselves and get disappointed in these periods of Bad Days. We should not even try to resist and fight them. We should just do the minimum requirement during these days till they pass. Hopefully and God willingly we will see that, as we become better, we get to the stage where even these Bad Days do not affect our routine acts of serving God, but till then, we just need to live with them.

There are however two points:

- We should not allow our Bad Days to stop us from doing our obligatory religious acts or prompt us to commit sin. If any of these happen then it is not merely the Bad Days that are influencing us, Satan is also involved. Whatever happens, we should always do the minimum requirement, that is observing the obligations and avoiding sins.

- Bad Days should naturally be followed by Good Days in a rather short time. If our not-in-the-mood days extend to more

than a week then most probably we are not facing Bad Days, but we are facing laziness or lack of discipline or control. In that case we need to get back to the control.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

26. Use the Names

We all know that God has certain Names but we often do not pay enough attention to the use of these Names in our daily life and in our spiritual purification. It is important to appreciate that God's Names are not merely conventional titles, they are in deed pointing to some of the most important attributes of the Almighty. Each Name of God and each combination of His names have specific implications in our life. Some examples are as follows:

- All-Hearing & All-Knowing (Sami' - Alim):

How can we commit any sin, or behave in a way that we know God does not like, if we are aware that God is seeing us and knows what we are thinking?

- Wise (Hakim)

How can we 'lose it' and become hopeless and confused when something unexpected and damaging happens to our worldly affairs, if we appreciate that there is a Wise creator and designer who is behind every thing and under His domain there is a reason or a wisdom in every thing that happens?

- Protector (Wakil)

Why should we feel worry and insecure in our daily life if we really consider the Almighty to be our Protector?

- Of-Returning - Merciful (Tawwab - Rahim)

How can we lose hope if we commit sin, when we know that God is merciful. On the same note, how guilty we should feel when we insist on our sins and misuse the mercy of our creator?

On the other hand, how can we be arrogant and ruthless

towards others when our creator is merciful towards us?

We need to get benefit of the Names of the Almighty. By continuously reminding ourselves of these Names, sometimes even uttering them and praying with them, we will be able to establish their meanings in our heart. In this way we will benefit from them not only in our worldly affairs but also in spiritual purification.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

27. Always Clean

The law is that one needs to be in the state of physical purity by ablution (Wuzu) when one wants to pray. This is of course all that is expected in terms of when to have ablution.

However, through experience, it has been noted by many that staying in the state of physical cleanness has a tremendous effect on reminding a person of his status as a servant of the Almighty. This of course does not mean to 'hold it in'. It means refreshing ablution when it is gone even if the time of prayer has not arrived yet.

Then when the time of prayer arrives the person has a choice to pray on the basis of his state of cleanness from ablution that he had before, or to refresh it even if he is still in the state of cleanness. The former is of course allowed while the latter is preferable.

I need to emphasize that this by no means is a legal demand and should not be treated as such. This is fully a voluntarily extra effort to remain in the state of cleanness (as far as ablution concerns) all the time. If you started doing this and felt that it is bothering you then just forget it. Keep doing it only if you enjoy it.

Let me finish with a story:

This pious man always used to keep himself in the state of physical purity. Once while he was walking towards a lake with his disciples he had to stop and answer the call of nature. Afterwards he performed Tayammum. His disciples reminded him that the water (the lake) is only a short distance away. He replied: Can you guarantee that I will live enough to reach it?

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

28. The Real Point

We all face situations in our life where we need to pray for ourselves or those who we care about. At times we feel that our prayer has been answered. At times we feel it has not been answered. Sometimes we think it has been answered and then later we think we were wrong. At times we wonder why a prayer has not been answered, much later we are thankful that it was never answered. Some other times we feel disappointed that we prayed and we did not get what we prayed for.

This writing is not to discuss why we feel some prayers are not answered. Another important point has motivated this writing:

We know that we are given life in this world to be challenged (tested as some say) so that we can improve ourselves through spiritual purification. This covers all the aspects of life and all the daily affairs including the situations where we feel the need to pray for a request, the prayer itself, and our reaction to what we perceive as an answered or unanswered prayer.

The following example may illustrate what this means:

My uncle is sick. He is in hospital. I love him a lot and am praying for his recovery day and night. After a few weeks I may face the situation where I think my prayer has been answered (i.e. my uncle is recovered) or the situation where I think my prayer has not been answered (i.e. my uncle

passes away).

The above is only a very limited perspective of what is going on. What really goes on (based on our religious beliefs) is as follows:

- My uncle's sickness is a challenge for me so that I can improve my patience and trust God's wisdom
- All the worship and prayer that I do to ask for my uncle's recovery contributes towards my spiritual purification
- My perception of whether my uncle has been recovered or not provides me a new challenge

Looking at it from this perspective the clever ones among us are those who, while passionately praying for their requests, do not forget that there is a bigger picture and a higher level of inquiry here, that is, spiritual purification. I am praying for my uncle, but what I am 'really' doing is to use the opportunity to further purify my spirit. At the end of the day, if my uncle survives today he and myself will die some day later. What really matters is that we both have a good place to abide forever in the hereafter.

To pray for some one we need to talk with God humbly and we normally do some acts of worship before or after the prayer. Our prayer may be answered or not (according to our perception) but this 'talking with God', our 'requesting' attitude and the act of worship are all contributing towards our spiritual purification.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

29. From Word to Meaning

When we say supplications we try to load their meanings in the mind and then to establish their implications in the heart. If we do this right while paying attention to the fact that God is present and listens to our supplications, after much practice we gradually develop a reflective mechanism in our system.

What this means is that after a while when we say a

supplication or even when we hear it (e.g. Alhamdulillah - Gratitude is for God) it automatically loads its meaning to our mind and establishes its implications in our heart.

In this way we will be able to experience strong spiritual inspirations when saying or hearing a supplication, including the verses of the Qur'ān.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

30. To Understand

In our prayers to God we normally ask for forgiveness and to be among the successful in the hereafter. We also ask God to help us or others with our/their worldly affairs.

This is all good!

One of the important points about spiritual purification is that a better understanding of God's relationship with us provides a better opportunity for purification. This is while more purification allows a clearer thinking about God's relationship with us. Note the word 'understanding' is used here and not the word 'knowing'. While the latter is about theoretical knowledge, the former is about an insight that helps us to practically expose ourselves to a wider and more in-depth understanding of the Truth.

In our prayers, we can also ask God to give us a better understanding of His relationship with us.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

31. Don't is More Important than Do

Many of us are often not bad in doing recommended acts of worship. However when it comes to NOT doing sinful or

disliked acts not many of us show much strength.

It is important to understand and appreciate the priorities when it comes to spiritual purification.

Which one is more important:

- To read lengthy Tahajjud prayers every night
- To avoid a sinful act

I think any one with basic knowledge of religion agrees that the latter is more important. This of course does not mean that till the time we commit a sin we should not read Tahajjud prayers. What this really means is that sometimes Satan deceives us by engaging our mind with the thought of good things that we can do or we are doing and in this way making us totally neglectful of the bad things that we are involved with and the fact that we need to avoid them.

As a traveler in the path of purification, if we have one eye on the good things that we can do, we need to have both eyes on the bad things that we need to avoid.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

32. Adjusting Our Perspective

I remember when I was a kid, there were these images that you could buy. When you look at the image you wouldn't see anything meaningful, but with a bit of patience and refocusing your eyes, suddenly you could see an amazing picture of a nature or a building that appeared to be in 3D.

One of the features of the hereafter that the Qur'ān describes is that in that time our visions are sharp (therefore we will be able to see the reality of things). It is in that day that a person realizes that when he unjustifiably took something that belonged to an orphan he was in fact eating fire. Just as the person who follows God's guidance in this world will realize what a strong light and pleasant company he has produced for himself in the hereafter.

If we can try to change our focus and perspectives in this world we will be able to see at least a blurry image of some of the real values in this world.

It is with this different perspective that one who helps a person also says 'thank you' to him.

It is with this different perspective that a person may go to distances to make his mother happy with him.

It is with this different perspective that what is normally considered as a difficulty by one person, will be seen as a great spiritual opportunity for another person who is facing the same situation.

Just like for that image from my childhood, all we need is to change our perspective.

One way that most of the times work for changing the perspective is to remind ourselves of our death and the hereafter.

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

33. Strength of Our Prayers

We often wonder how strong and effective our prayers are.

One way of assessing the effectiveness of our prayers is to see if there is a negative relationship (correlation) between our prayers and our longing for the materialistic aspects of the world.

Don't get me wrong! I am not saying that the materialistic aspects of the world are necessarily bad or useless. We all have responsibilities and we are all human beings who need to live comfortably and there is nothing wrong with making sure that from the materialistic perspective we are fine or even more than fine.

However there is a fact that desire for materialistic aspects of life does not help a lot with our longing for spiritual purification. A good prayer not only adjusts our desire for materialistic aspects of the world, but also cleans up any dirt that our natural (or sometimes unnatural) worldly efforts may have brought to our hearts.

Accordingly, in assessing the effectiveness of our prayers, the following criteria may help:

- Does my prayer stop me from evil thoughts and intentions?
- When I have been involved with worldly affairs for a long time, do I feel that I need to pray to refresh my soul? (just like when I have had too much sweats and feel longing for a toothbrush).
- Do I feel spiritually fresh after a prayer?
- Do I feel the difference between a prayer that is done on time and one that is done much later than its start time?
- Do I look forward for the next prayer?

If our answer to the above contains more 'Yes' than 'No', then we can hope that we are seeing indications of effective prayers. As our 'Yes' answers become stronger we can hope that we are getting better in offering effective prayers.

A wise man once said: "If you want to see how strong your relationship with God is, see how much you enjoy your prayers".

(Dr Abdullah Rahim)

Avoiding Sexual Attractions

Question: It seems from your columns that the real object of Islam is to have a purified soul. However, the question is: From where should I start? I can break any idol, but so far as sex and women are concerned, I can never get out of this stuff. I am a doctor who prays regularly; I know when we dissect a breast, there is nothing down there but merely fat tissue; sometimes we are supposed to remove this fat to bring relief to the patient if it becomes cancerous. The vaginal vault contains many such

bacteria as can't exist anywhere else. Sexually transmitted diseases are horrible to look at. But despite all this knowledge, for the last 15 years, I have been trying to ignore sexual attractions and suppress my sexual urge and have used every possible measure to curb it, but, truly speaking, I have failed. Although I have never made physical contact with women, yet I have really spoilt my mind, eyes and ears like anything. Marriage seems a long way off since I have three older sisters yet to be married. Please give me some advice on how to tackle my problem.

Answer: A sincere desire to overcome a problem is the first step towards solving it. Your sincerity will, Insha Allah, one day open the doors of success to you if you keep on trying to solve the issue. So do not be over awed or feel dejected. Also, bear in mind the fact that Islam does not require that a person suppress the sexual urge for it is in the instincts; a person is only required to keep it within bounds and satisfy it in the right way.

Today almost every person is exposed to intense carnal attractions. The opportunities for evil to waylay a person have increased manifold and it seems to be extending its tentacles from all sides. So long as marriage is not possible for you, the best thing is to divert your attention as much as possible through healthy entertainment and constructive activities. Here are some tips that might help you:

1. Fasting is a very affective to curb the sexual urge. So if you can keep fasts at intervals suited to your life and routine, this will hopefully help you a lot. Try keeping at least three consecutive fasts each month. During fasting, remind yourself that you are abstaining from food and sex for Allah's sake, and keep deliberating upon the words of this prayer: 'Lord for you I have abstained from this desire (for food). I could not have abstained without the strength you gave me. My Lord I am your humble and frail servant. Give me the strength to abstain from that desire as well, for I fear your wrath and seek your mercy'.

2. Another measure to control the sexual urge is to look for constructive activities; in particular, those that involve physical effort. One such activity, which usually works wonders, is getting involved in social and public welfare activities. Providing community service through one's well-placed contacts is one

way to start with for example. Being a doctor, you can start voluntary medical service, together with some of your colleagues, for the poor and needy around you. And you can even go to the nearby villages for this. Similarly, many other things can be thought of.

3. Try to develop a strong relationship with the mosque. Besides going there for prayer, just spend some time there in between prayers when there are few people around. You will find a very special type of serenity and calmness during these times which will positively affect your spiritual being.

4. Develop the habit of visiting a nearby graveyard once a month. Just roam around there for a sometime and you will find yourself attached to the next world -- which is a strong way to divert your attention from carnal pleasures.

5. Although this may not be advisable for health reasons, at times you can relieve yourself through masturbation, which will at least give you temporary relief and save you from indulging in something grave.

(Asif Iftikhar)

What if He is?

Zaid: 'Have you read much?'

Khalid: 'Not much. But I have thought much.'

Zaid: 'You'll not be offended by my questions?'

Khalid: 'I hope not.'

Zaid: 'You might find them rather unconventional – and quite provocative.'

Khalid: 'A good question is a sign of intelligence. But not just any question. The greatest fool can ask more questions than the wisest man can answer.'

Zaid: 'Are you calling me a fool?'

Khalid: 'No. What I am trying to say is that a question hurled as a criticism usually fails to give you the other person's

perspective. If the desire to seek the truth is genuine, one can learn from a fool; if it is not, one often comes back with little information and no wisdom even from a wise man.'

Zaid: '(He smiles): Are you calling yourself a wise man?'

Khalid: 'You have come to me, I have not come to you. If I am not a wise man, then either your intention to learn is not serious or you are not wise.'

'If you wish to learn something that is truly important to you, you must be careful in the choice of the person you select for consultation. You don't go to just any Tom, Dick and Harry for diagnosis of an ailment or for a medical prescription. You go to a person you think is competent. And then you listen to what he has to say. You show him respect. Similarly, when you seek knowledge and truth, go to the person you think is capable. And show him respect, if you wish to learn. Only after you have understood what he has to say should you begin thinking about the flaws. First learn, then evaluate, then criticise. For though knowledge leads to greatness, it begins in humility. The seeker of truth is always humbled by his thirst. He genuflects in prayer to gain knowledge from the most ignorant person even though he endeavours to go to the most wise.'

'I am most certainly not the wisest man around. In all probability, I am not even wise. But since even a fool may have some words of wisdom, I may be of service to you. However, if I feel that you are discussing only for arguing, questioning only for ridiculing and criticising without learning, then, I am afraid, I shall not be able to go on. For one thing is certain: if you are not a student, then I am not the teacher – even if I have something to teach.'

Zaid: 'Okay. You've made your point. But if during the discussion, I feel that you are not giving me my time's worth, I walk out.'

Khalid: 'Fair enough.'

Zaid: 'Okay. Question number one: Who do you think is more important in the history of nations: a philosopher or a leader?'

Khalid: 'Both have their place.'

Zaid: 'But in the final analysis, which of the two makes the difference?'

Khalid: 'Let me ask you a question to answer this one: Why do you think the U.S. waited so many days to get the approval from

the U.N. for a strike against Iraq in Desert Storm?’

Zaid: ‘International community pressure.’

Khalid: ‘And what were they pressurising it with? Guns? Economic sanctions?’

Zaid: ‘No, that’s not the point. Maybe the U.S. thought that the strike would be detrimental to its economic interests.’

Khalid: ‘You mean the U.S. thought it would face an oil embargo from the Arabs, who, with their mighty army, obviously didn’t need America? Or, perhaps, it thought that after the war, all the contracts for reconstruction would go to Pakistan. Perhaps, it also feared that Saddam Hussein’s defeat would make the U.S. lose respect. And quite obviously the fact that after the Gulf War the U.S. was able to avert the S&L crisis is absolutely of no relevance here.’

Zaid: ‘Okay, okay. So what’s the point.’

Khalid: ‘No point. Just the question: What stopped the U.S. for so many days? Why did it want to get the U.N.’s approval?’

Zaid: ‘Beats me. You tell.’

Khalid: ‘To my mind, among other reasons, one very, very important one was moral justification.’

Zaid: ‘So?’

Khalid: ‘The philosopher provides the leader with that.’

As I said, both have their place.’

Zaid: ‘But moral justification can be given for the most ignoble of deeds.’

Khalid: ‘True. All the more need for moral values.’

Zaid: ‘But those who succeed usually don’t give two hoots for moral values – especially leaders. And those who care, usually bite the dust.’

Khalid: ‘Yet moral values are important to most people.’

Zaid: ‘Oh, come on! You don’t believe in the tooth fairy as well, do you?’

Khalid: ‘Tell me what kind of person you think is the most difficult to kill?’

Zaid: ‘The Head of a State.’

Khalid: ‘Like Zia-ul-Haq? Or Bhutto? Or J.F. Kennedy?’

Zaid: ‘Who then?’

Khalid: ‘A child.’

‘An innocent child.’

‘For most part of our history, that has been the most difficult

murder – stymied by moral values.’

Zaid: ‘Have you read Machiavelli’s *The Prince*?’

Khalid: ‘The little treatise in which he says to the Medici prince to whom it was dedicated: “May you assume the task with courage and in the hopes inspired by a just cause...”?’

‘Inspired by a just cause?!’

Zaid: ‘Yes, but the means....?’

Khalid: ‘Yes, and his own paragon of those means, Cesare Borgia, was successful?’

Zaid: ‘If his measures failed, it was only “by the most extraordinary malignity of fortune”.’

Khalid: ‘And what about Hitler?’

Zaid: ‘What about Lenin?’

Khalid: ‘What about the U.S.S.R.?’

Zaid: ‘At least, he was successful. Stalin and he, they lived like God.’

Khalid: ‘And died like Him?’

Zaid: ‘Yes. Your God has been living clinically ever since the dawn of logical positivism.’

Khalid: ‘If you call living in the hearts and minds of the majority of the people in the world for most part of history – before and after you logical positivism – living clinically, then hats off to you.’

‘Just go through Larry King’s book on prayer and you’ll find out how many of the most powerful and well-known people believe in God. If from Morocco to Indonesia, the majority don’t eat pork, it’s because their religion still is a very, very important basis for their decisions. In contrast, speaking pragmatically, your logical positivism isn’t exactly alive and kickin’.’

Zaid: ‘Yet, the most successful are those who do not let moral values and other such unverifiable or unconfirmed notions stand in the way of economic political and social gain. And usually the suckers left holding the bag are those soft-hearted and soft-headed Psalm singers who put their trust in values.’

Khalid: ‘Yes, but what about the fact that the collective adherence to moral values is indispensable for the prosperity of a nation. If everyone’s a thug, how will the country progress?’

Zaid: ‘Everyone isn’t.’

Khalid: ‘So what are you saying.’

Zaid: ‘That only a few have that superior intelligence. Only a

few have the sense. They are the leaders. They are Machiavellian Princes, for they hold and wield all the power. People like Lenin... people like me.'

Khalid: 'So what you are saying is that these "leaders", as you call them, have the right to hurt people for their own gains.'

Zaid: 'Only when they stand in their way. Lenin didn't go about killing everybody. Only those who stood in the way.'

Khalid: 'Like about five million in the first few years of his rule?'

Zaid: 'The Law of the Jungle. Survival of the Fittest.'

Khalid: 'And the fittest would include Hitler?'

Zaid: 'No, He failed. "Success" as he himself put it "is the sole earthly judge of right and wrong".'

Khalid: 'And what exactly is success?'

Zaid: 'To me, it's power – power through economic, social and political gain. But otherwise, anything that gives you satisfaction.'

Khalid: 'Anything?'

Zaid: 'Anything. Provided you can get away with it.'

Khalid: 'Rape? Seduction? Serial-killings.'

Zaid: 'Maybe. If you can get away with it.'

Khalid: 'If you can get away with it.'

Zaid: 'Yep, if you can get away with it.'

Khalid: 'So, in case you got satisfaction in sleeping with your mother – and both of you could get away with it – you would have no moral qualms in doing so?'

Zaid: (Silence)

Khalid: 'Would you do it?'

Zaid: 'I don't believe that would in any way give me satisfaction.'

Khalid: 'The Ceteris Paribus here covered that bit. By the way, I hope you know that this is just a hypothetical.'

Zaid: 'Yes.'

Khalid: 'So would you?'

Zaid: (Silence)

Khalid: 'Would you?'

Zaid: 'Yes.'

Khalid: (Silence)

'And the same goes for seduction, murder, etc.'

Zaid: 'Yes. Ceteris Paribus.'

Khalid: ‘Ceteris Paribus.’

‘By the way, can you declare all that in public?’

Zaid: ‘Why should I? I am not stupid. This knowledge is for the select few. Morality is the yoke with which the likes of me harness the masses. I’ll always uphold moral principles in public.’

Khalid: ‘Excellent! So, at least you’ll admit that deep within you are a coward and a hypocrite of the lowest order.’

Zaid: ‘These are subjective terms. Unverifiable empirically. They don’t mean anything to me.’

Khalid: ‘So in your opinion, the likes of Mother Teresa, Sir Thomas More, and Father Damien were essentially stupid.’

Zaid: ‘Yes.’

Khalid: ‘What guarantees do you have?’

Zaid: ‘Sorry?’

Khalid: ‘What guarantees do you have in life?’

Zaid: ‘I am sorry, I don’t understand.’

Khalid: ‘What if, right after you leave my home, you have a complete and permanent paralysis? That can happen, can’t it?’

Zaid: ‘Yes, it can.’

Khalid: ‘Then, what would you do, if it did happen?’

Zaid: ‘Somebody would take care of me, I suppose.’

‘Somebody in my family.’

Khalid: ‘But why should they take care of someone – something rather – who cannot possibly afford them any material benefit ever? Aren’t they as intelligent as you are?’

Zaid: (Smiles)

‘Maybe not.’

Khalid: ‘What if there is no one. Just no one to take care of you as such. You are just fed somehow. Charity or something. But just that. What then?’

Zaid: ‘Well, I guess, then I am finished.’

Khalid: ‘And you admit that the possibility of such a disaster – or of something less or of something more – does exist, and that there are no absolute guarantees in life?’

Zaid: ‘Yes.’

Khalid: ‘Then what does your immense confidence rest upon? At least, I know whatever happens in this world to me, I’ll be more than compensated in the next one if I remain steadfast in my principles – moral principles.’

Zaid: ‘My friend, my “confidence”, as you put it, rests upon

probability. Ever heard of it? Just because of a remote possibility of some misfortune, I cannot throw away my life in the name of moral principles, especially those laid down by others.'

Khalid: 'What about those who are facing such misfortunes? What compensation in your opinion do they have? What should they live for?'

Zaid: 'That's not exactly my problem. Besides, with advancement in science, we'll be able to take care of most of them.'

Khalid: 'What about those who'll die much before that 'imaginary advancement' of science that will be a panacea for all unhappiness and suffering including the fear of losing perfect happiness if ever one achieves it?'

Zaid: 'I've told you that's essentially not my problem. Life is harsh. Some win, some lose. Even some Roman nobles had to commit suicide to save their own selves from dishonour.'

Khalid: 'So that's it, huh? When the going gets tough, you chicken out. Ever heard of perseverance?'

Zaid: 'Again subjective terms. I could put the whole thing as: When life is not worth living, you bail out. Ever heard of euthanasia?'

Khalid: 'All right, so you have all the answers. We'll carry on this discussion later. First let's have some tea.'

Zaid: 'That, presently, is the greatest need of the hour. (He laughs).

Khalid: 'Here you are.'

Zaid: 'Thanks.'

Khalid: '(Just when Zaid is about to take a sip) whoa, wait a minute. My servant tells me there might be poison in this tea. Don't drink it.'

Zaid: 'What?'

Khalid: 'Yes. That is what I've been told.'

Zaid: 'B-but why are you taking yours.'

Khalid: 'Because there is no poison in it.'

Zaid: 'And there is in mine?'

Khalid: 'There is that possibility.'

Zaid: (Stares at Khalid)

Khalid: 'Why are you not taking your tea?'

Zaid: (Stares incredulously at Khalid). 'You yourself said there might be poison in it!'

Khalid: 'But you said you felt like having tea.'

Zaid: 'Don't be funny. I can't risk my life for a trivial pleasure.'

Khalid: 'You don't think it's wise to risk losing a long-term benefit for a short-term benefit.'

Zaid: 'That's one way to put it.'

Khalid: 'What if there is a God?'

Zaid: 'Sorry?'

Khalid: 'Don't you think that the possibility of eternal damnation is a greater risk than whatever this short life of ours has to afford? What is fifty or sixty or seventy year's of life in comparison with eternity. Besides, worshipping God does not mean giving up living or giving up life or giving up the good things it has to offer – except in some exceptional circumstances.'

Zaid: 'Hey, you make me look like a bad guy. I am not necessarily that bad. I don't get satisfaction in killing people or in seducing girls.'

Khalid: 'I know, but in making personal satisfaction rather than God as the deal-breaker, you give one who might want to go to that extent the perfect excuse, and very little to hope for to one who might want to sacrifice his all for the sake of a nobler ideal.'

'The point is very simple. You might be fulfilling a number of responsibilities, but it seems that in your aversion to accepting them as an obligation, you negate a fundamental principle of knowledge: In life, we make decisions on the basis of existing knowledge, which we inherit from our predecessors, and continue to do so until our faculties of reason and understanding disprove something; for these faculties cannot be regarded as the final source of knowledge in themselves. When I see a vehicle approaching, I get aside on the assumption that it will hit me and on the assumption that getting hurt in such a way is not good. Both the assumptions could be incorrect, but until they are proved so, I base my decision on them. In a laboratory, I might be able to do otherwise – that too for a short period of time –, but in life I can't. I regard murder as bad, I wear clothes when I go out, I look after my parents when they are old and unable to give me any material benefit, I use principles and concepts of science and technology –, all on the same basis. For instance, I take a pill on my doctor's prescription until it is proved harmful. Knowledge, therefore, does not lead from confusion to more confusion but from certainty to more certainty.'

‘Belief in God has existed in the majority of human beings right from the beginning. There have been polytheists and monotheists in almost every era just as there are now. Belief in God and in a system of accountability for our actions and attitudes in life has always been there. The exceptions to this have never been able to prove the belief incorrect, for there is nothing in our understanding or reason that can negate this belief.’

‘And then there is this point about possibilities. I’ve tried to tell you that life seems meaningless and debased without God. That is the consequence of imagining that He is not there. But what if He is there? What if He holds you accountable for denying all the inherited knowledge without anything in your reason or understanding to justify that denial? Are the paltry pleasures of this ephemeral life a reasonable basis to risk eternity?’

‘I swear by all the knowledge passed on to man by man and by the holy and blessed lives of the Messengers of God and by the Divine guidance they gave us and by my conscience and my intellect that not only does the existence of God demand that He be worshipped; even the possibility of His existence entails that. If it is difficult to believe in God, it is impossible not to believe in Him.

Zaid: ‘All I can say is that from a pragmatic point of view, I don’t have any problems right now. I’ll decide what I have to do when I see Him.

Khalid: ‘Well, then we shall see – when you die and when I die.’

Zaid: ‘Right. We shall see.’

‘Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.’ (The Qur’ān 24:35)

‘Deaf, dumb and blind; they will not return.’ (2:18)

‘And how can you deny God; you were without life then he gave you life, then he will make you die, then he will bring you to life again, then to him will you return again. (2:27)

(Asif Iftikhar)

A Man's First Foes

The funny thing is that we all know it. Sooner or later, we find it out. Yet, most of us choose to close our eyes to it. Perhaps because our immense desire to find a paradise right here cons us into believing otherwise. But, deep down, we know it. That life is rarely how we want it to be. That it's never perfect. That the true heroes in life usually look more like Anthony Quinn than Cary Grant or Rock Hudson, and that the villains are not always all evil and ugly-faced, and that the good guys don't always win and the bad guys don't always lose, and that crime often pays, and that the luring and delicious hate often helps more than the compromise we call forgiveness, and that love is not always rosy and selfless, rather, more often than not, it is a window-dressed mundane need, and that happiness is often treacherous, sorrow often faithful, justice often elusive and oppression often pervasive, and that 'troubles don't come in neatly labelled packages from which we can take our pick but in wholesale where we have to take what we get', and that no matter how hard we pray, no matter how hard we try, no matter how innocent or deserving we are, we can still get hurt, and that life, with its strange and wicked sense of humour, has this sinister tendency of not only playing the practical joke of shattering our dreams just when we are about to realise them but also of backing on us just when we need it most, and that there are no absolute guarantees, and that in the end it's every man for his own self, and that, finally, each one of us is alone in his fight, for there are so many feelings and thoughts we just can't share with anyone, and that in the fight, we often lose even when we win, for the winner and the loser both die in the end, and life does not afford perfect happiness to either.

And yet, we continue to dream. Perhaps because in all the madness of this wild jungle, it is our dreams that keep us sane. They do serve a very useful purpose indeed. They give us a reason to love and forgive and help and hope and try. They give us a reason to move on, a reason to live. And a reason to be human. Three cheers for them dreams! And for those who dream good dreams, and spend their lives for them even when they

know that only a few or perhaps none will be realised, for in their vision, and in their effort, and in their sacrifice, the way is paved and life is adorned with grace and sublimity.

These daring and courageous entrepreneurs of dreams are however quite different and apart from the tenacious money-lenders and the reckless and avaricious speculators. For it is one thing to live for dreams, and quite another to live in them. For one who spends his life for his dreams is not the same as one who wastes his or others' for them.

For instance, to many religion still means abandoning life or at least the best it has to offer. That is one extreme. To others, it means beautifying life: embellishing it with the realisation of the dream. That is the other extreme. And then there are the struck-up, pseudo-intellectuals to whom life and survival entail abandoning religion itself: abandoning the ultimate dream. To them survival, comfort, progress, power, pleasure and satisfaction constitute the goal. To them life is the end in itself. Few are those to whom struggle itself is the goal – the struggle for truth, the struggle for realisation of the dream –, to whom life is a means to an end and not the end in itself, to whom achievement and realisation are at best by-products of having made the effort. To them religion does not mean either abandonment or achievement. It means service. It means being able to say in the end 'Lord, I tried'. At best: 'Lord, I tried as much as I could – with all my heart and all my mind and all my soul', and at least, 'Lord, though barely, I did try'. It is these few who are the truly successful. For to them success is not in success but in the endeavour. They are the ones who dream the true dream and make the true effort. They are the ones to whom God is the way as well as the destination; for with just the beginning of their endeavour, the goal is achieved; for their endeavour is their goal. They are the ones who win even when they achieve nothing; they are the ones who reach the destination even when their journey ends abruptly with just a few steps. They are the princes among men, for they are the servants of the Emperor of the worlds.

Yet these dreamers of true dreams are 'dream-busters' too. For in dreaming the true dream, they shatter the false ones. In striving for truth, they expose falsehood. In building a new world, they risk destruction of the old one. In spreading love,

they encounter hate. In making and demanding sacrifice, they invite animosity. And, as time has often shown, their first foes are usually they of their own household.

And though these champions of truth never seek to be persecuted, just as they never seek to persecute, persecuted they are. And when they are, they do not falter: for they know that the ultimate test is neither in dreaming the dream nor in making some effort but in enduring till the end. Love after all is not for the faint of heart. Love is for the courageous. For those who have courage: the courage to seek the truth, to accept it, to submit to it, to defy the world for it, and to defy their own and their own selves for it. And in that search, in that acceptance, in that submission, in that defiance, often a man's first foes are they of his own household.

That has always been the story. For as long as man-made love laws have been defied. 'The laws that lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much'. Yet, there have always been men and women who have done it. For the sake of love and for the sake of truth. Men and women who have broken the long-standing rules. And have paid the price. For love is as cruel as it is beautiful. Aye, it is as fond of gore as it is of roses, for true love often entails sacrifice of every other love.

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's first foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

(Matt. 11:32-39)

The story is still the same. And as relevant today as it was when it first began. And more ironic in nations as ours when it involves someone in the upper strata of society. Someone from

amongst the elite and affluent. For instance take a boy who is brought up by the gods on Mt. Olympus, and like all his brothers and cousins is supposed to join the big ones in Islamabad after taking his CSS exam or going abroad for higher studies or joining a foreign bank or setting up an industry. But he does nothing of the sort. He refuses to be among them. He refuses to be like them. He defies the laws of Olympus. He chooses to forsake his divinity for the sake of his love. For the sake of truth. He chooses to be mortal. He chooses to serve rather than to achieve. And to forsake all love for true love. And for that abomination, he is reviled and ridiculed and finally ostracised.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matt. 5:11&12)

But sadly such is the frailty and failing of man, and such is the fabric of our neophobic society, and such is the malady of luxury and comfort to which our elite are addicted, and such has been the character of the people in this land of Indus that more often than not the boy, after fighting the waves for a while, ultimately succumbs. If not to the malediction and apathy, then to the weariness that life itself brings to a man with dreams. The menacing weariness with which the strong and muscular yet incongruously delicate arms, long accustomed to the respite of a comfy bed in an air-conditioned room after battling a storm, are ill-suited to grapple; for many a brave man, who is afraid of nothing, is nevertheless afraid of being nothing. It is not the tall, beefy monsters that scare a man but the uncountable creepy and malicious vermin in fighting which a man sees his life frittering away in insignificant trivia: the insolent, stubborn clerks in a government office; the exalted, out-of-reach, equable and unconscionable civil servants; the Labyrinth of a tax office and its Minotaurs of personnel with their salivating greed and malevolent smiles; and then, papers, papers and papers. 'Bring this document, bring that document. Come tomorrow. Come the day after tomorrow. Come next week. And then the next. And then next year and the year after. Until you are old and decrepit and senile. And then go to the pension office. And bring another certificate. A certificate showing that you were alive a month ago.

No, a certificate that you were alive a week ago won't do. A month ago. Keep smiling. Be Pakistani and buy Pakistani' while the unscrupulous scum of wise guys do the honours of buying Pakistan. And then the electricity bills, gas bills, telephone bills, income-tax, property-tax, wealth-tax – and detailed scrutiny. If you don't work very hard and get rich, congratulations: see the second schedule. If you work hard and earn more, pay more tax. If you don't earn more, even if you work harder, then say hello to detailed scrutiny in which a thorough gentleman will sniff all over you to find if anything is wrong with your financial anatomy and will continue to do so until you can prove yourself innocent. And then medical expenses, children's school fees, new shoes for Junior, new dress for papa's girl – thank God, no new mama for kids --, gifts for relatives, social visits, car repairs, that accursed inflation, which has even made simple love unaffordable, and that ghastly unemployment, the very thought of which turns blood cold, and then standards, standards, standards. Family standards, social standards, professional standards. 'He was not here on my wedding. He was not here on my father's Chehnam. He didn't congratulate me on my baby's teeth'. 'He's nice but he's rather gauche, He doesn't have finesse. He doesn't have aplomb. He doesn't have class. He's honest, but he doesn't know how to dress. God, he wears Bata shoes. Oh Lord, oh Lord, the Walimah reception was at his house, not at a five-star hotel. Oh Lord, oh Lord. The ring he gave her was so cheap, and you know what? He drives a second hand car. Oh Lord, oh Lord.' 'Look Mr whatever your name is, we want perfection. Our organisation is a paragon of perfection. Anything less than that is a sin here. We want supermen, not men. A master's degree from a reputed American university with five years of experience at a multinational ab initio and excellent English. Alternatively, avuncular blessings from high places – not necessarily in Heaven – or no scruples. Or both. If you haven't got the stuff, well try Zakāt Fund or SMEDA or find a cave'.

With twenty-four hours in a day, two hands, a broken heart and a shattered mind, a guy succumbs. Yep, No man can serve two Masters. A fortiori, more than two.

In the case of an Olympian girl, the story is somewhat of the same nature. If in the boy's case it begins with 'Tut, tut, the poor father. He worked so hard for his son's future. And look, the

stupid, no good bum does not want to become a CSP. He wants to study religion and be a teacher or a writer or a research scholar. What a scare! And the mother, the poor dear, what dreams she had! The unfortunate little thing. Oh what a pity! Oh what a pity! Her sisters have been so lucky really. Now look at that nephew of hers. He's doing so well. So what if the father-in-law has an unsavoury past. He's so rich and powerful. And he says he has repented of his sins after Hajj this year. And the boy too, he has become so good. No longer chases after girls. And the other nephew, you know, is in a foreign bank. Draws such a huge salary and has excellent perks. And personally dear, I don't believe interest has been forbidden by the Qur'ān. It's usury instead. And this boy, he so nice. All his friends drink, but his mother says she's sure he doesn't. And what has this boy become? A fanatic, fundamentalist mullah. 'Oh Lord, oh Lord.' 'Now listen son, a piece of advice from your father. Don't throw away your life for these dreams. Alright, it's good to dream these dreams once a while. But honestly son, they are picnic stuff, not your daily dinner and lunch. And look at your mama. She'll never be able to hold her head up high. What will she tell her friends? That her son is an insignificant nothing? She'll die of a heart attack', and so on, in the girl's case, it is something like 'Oh Lord, oh Lord, as if it wasn't enough to have looks of that kind, and now this Hijab. Do you want to look like a Māl? Don't you want to look like Kate Winslet or Michelle Pfeiffer? [Yeah, don't you ever try looking like 'Āishah or Khadījah or Fātimah (rta)]. No one will marry you. You'll die an old maid. No one will take care of you when your Mama dies [despite the obvious intention of Mama not to die anytime in the near future]. Do you want to marry a mullah in the mosque with a large beard, a belly to match and a large repertoire of unintelligible, guttural, anathematising sounds?

The rest of the story is almost the same. Troubles, troubles, troubles. Standards, standards, standards. Lofty ideals and lofty dreams: All sacrificed at the altar of the god of petty things.

So what's the moral of the story? And besides, who cares! Yeah, who cares? Life goes on. A new tranche of loans has been promised. The rich are still rich, the poor still poor. Everything is alright. Yes sir, everything is just alright.

Except that your sister was raped a few days ago. And your mother was sneered at by lecherous punks. And your old and

helpless father just watched as the cold hearted hoodlums beat your brother to death in their cold hubris. And you did nothing. You were busy. Busy in petty things. In solving petty problems. In meeting petty standards. In worshipping the god of petty things. In Kashmir, in Kosovo, and in many other places, this did happen. And you did nothing. You were in your office, at a wedding party, in a meeting, at a Chehnam, in a hotel, in a seminar, in a restaurant, in your bed – sound asleep.

You did nothing.

Because you didn't care.

Yes, you made many verbose speeches, attended many splendid seminars, staged many vociferous rallies, wrote scholarly dissertations and incendiary articles, grovelled before your ex-masters known as the international community, and won accolade from your cronies and patrons for your ceaseless lachrymal garrulity.

But you did nothing. Because you really didn't care.

And so nothing happened. Nothing changed.

For change requires love or fear. And you had neither.

You had petty problems.

In your petty problems, you had forgotten that freedom, leadership and honour are not granted; they are won. With valour and sacrifice. Ever since the valour and sacrifice of your forbears won you your freedom, you had been becoming more and more a slave of luxury and comfort and false pride. Inebriated with ease of existence and bloated with your vain vanity, you lost the ability and the desire to achieve or lose and the will and the audacity to make the effort. You had become content with just 'being'. And in that contentment and in that complacency, you, as an individual, imperilled your own salvation and, as a people, lost your glory and your place in the comity of nations.

But I should have forgiven you for all these failings and overlooked all your mistakes, had it not been for one unforgivable wrong you did to me.

You did not goad me on. You did not let me go.

Even though I was your last chance. Even though I was your future.

And though you wanted it to be bright and comfortable, you did not let it be glorious. Though you wanted to embellish it, you did not let it become beautiful. For to make it glorious, I needed

to be dauntless, and, in fearing for me, you gave me fear of small things. To make it beautiful, I needed to love, and, in loving me with possessiveness, you did not let me love with abandon. In giving me everything, you took away everything. And this you had no right to do. For though it was you who brought me up amongst the gods on Olympus, I was not just your son. I was not just your daughter. I was amongst the sons and daughters of the Ummah. It is for that reason I damn and curse Olympus despite all the privileges it has afforded me. There is not doubt that I needed those privileges. And I still need them: the language, the manners, the facilities, the connections, the protection and the opportunities – all are blessings that I am grateful to God and to your for, for though God, who knows our weaknesses and frailties well, has made ‘effort’ our target, yet He, in His infinite and unfathomable mercy, has targeted our effort towards achievement. The lacuna, however, was the support, the moral encouragement, the pat on the back that I needed from you to live out the true meaning of my creed. Instead, I received opposition of all kinds. Yes, you passed on the dream to me – through your lip-service and token respect – which too are fast becoming extinct –, but, not only did you never really support me in actually living my life for realisation of the dream, you also did your best to muffle my call with your love and your consternation. If you had backed me, I might have moved mountains and vanquished all mine enemies. But you became my first foe. And with your success in stifling the flame in my bosom, or at least in containing it, you failed me.

Yet, I concede that the fault was not all yours. For in the final analysis, it is every man for himself. Each one of us has to fight his own fight. And much to my dismay, I soon discovered that it was I who was my greatest foe.

‘First melted off hope of youth
Then fancy’s rainbow fast withdrew
And then experience told me truth
Ay, mortal bosoms never grew

‘T was grief enough to think mankind
All hollow, servile, insincere
But worst to trust my own mind
And find the same corruption there.’

I know it is my own frailty that has militated against my

success more than anything else. If I had overcome my shortcomings, if I had been able to reign over my own self, nothing else would have mattered.

So I say this: I shall not blame anyone for my failures anymore. Not my forbears or my parents or my wife and children or my society or the state. I shall blame my own self. I shall accept the responsibility and shall try to make amends. In that endeavour, my children shall be my hope. I shall endeavour to pass on the dream to them, but I shall not pass on the petty fears. I shall try to enhance their understanding but shall not strive to shape it. I shall give them my love but shall not harness them with it.

And though I shall also try to arm them with all the magic of Olympus, I shall never impose its standards on them. I shall never force them to worship false gods.

I shall not wage a war of attrition against them for my personal gain or my false pride. I shall not let them succumb. And in doing all this, I hope I shall be able to rekindle the light in my own bosom and ensure me my salvation. And though I have most certainly been unable to be a good member of the Prophet's Ummah, in doing all this, I hope at least my children, in their endeavours to earn God's pleasure and in their struggles in His way, will find that those of their own household are not their first foes but their first stepping-stone.

The courage to be weak,
To see himself,
His weakness
And to accept it
In front of everyone

The strength to change,
To move on
Against the tide – all alone
The strength to demolish
That which he had built
In many long years
With his own hands
In great pain and with great love

And the strength to dream
Once again
The strength to build again,
To demolish again
And to dream – yet again

The ambition to achieve
Nothing
The ambition to make the effort
And the heart to see that
As achievement

The courage to lose
And to see that
As triumph
The courage to bear
Persecution, banishment
And the power to take revenge
By forgiving
And loving
And giving

The gift of giving
Himself
Without letting anyone know
And of smiling -- alone

(Smiling Alone, Asif Iftikhar)

(Asif Iftikhar)

Why Religion?

Something happened once, something that changed everything: I began to think. It was the best thing that ever happened, it was the worst thing that ever happened. I became more certain than I was ever before, I became more uncertain

than I was ever before. I came to know that I could know, but was not sure whether I should know. I conquered a thousand fears and faced a thousand more. Between this confusion and certainty, I asked myself a thousand questions, and a voice within me began to answer...

...why am I? I know I am: I exist. But so does a dog. The dog serves its master. A very useful animal, this. (But whom does the dog's master serve?)... a tree -- yes, yes, very useful indeed. The dog's master gets his apples from the tree. Very tasty, and useful too: you know, an apple a day keeps the doctor away. The dog guards my house, and the apples make me grow strong. Strong. Why? For what? What am I supposed to do with my strength, with my prowess. There are so many things I could do: fly aeroplanes, build huge buildings, compose music, build up a business empire, outwit others, conquer nations..., but I want to do more. I want to have power over the elements, over the sun and the moon and the stars... over life and death. "But...", the voice within me began to speak. And though I would have hushed its whispers, I could not deny the fact to which it was alluding. "Yes, yes", I sighed, "I know, I die". Suddenly, tears came to my eyes. I began to cry. "But why?" I cried out. Why indeed? I could have done so many things. I could have defied the stars. By Jove! I could have made a new universe! I could have been God! But alas! I die. Is that it then? Is that my destiny? Billions and billions of stars, billions and billions of processes, billions and billions of years of evolution -- and not a single thing I know of that came even close to matching the beauty, the intelligence and the excellence that I have --, and then, speaking of myself as an individual, out of millions of spermatozoa, one wee, little spermatozoon became -- would you believe -- me. Which one of the other cells could have been another Einstein or an Edison or a Newton or a Marx, I don't know. Give me time, and I'll be another Newton, another Einstein, another Marx. Yes, I have said it before, and I shall say it again: Give me time, and I'll be God. "But...". Ah! woe betide this "But"! Woe is me due to what follows this "But": but I fall sick, but I become old, but I have accidents..., and the unkindest but of them all: I die. Am I then just a combination of molecules which by some strange chance developed into a thinking being? If so, then my existence is the greatest tragedy on the face of this

earth, then nothing means anything anymore, then nothing exists except darkness:

No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe.¹

In bygone days, I would have found solace in the words of the philosophers of the West. Ol' Bertie Russell, for example, used to sound very convincing. But not any more. Conquest of happiness by serving humanity -- Bah! Humbug! Well, its nice to make little sacrifices for others, especially when one is certain of recompense not always in the form of money. (One likes to be applauded by others: "There's a kindly man", "You know Mr so and so? He's really a nice fellow", "Three cheers for Mr so and so", and all that. It feels good). But why the hell should I stick my neck out for something which is not even going to be appreciated by anyone? Why should I sacrifice my all -- my life -- for the sake of nobler ideals? For the society? Be like Father Damien² or Albert Schweitzer? No way man! No way! Stupid fellows, these. A mention in the list of notable people for one and a Nobel peace prize for the other. Bullsh --! Hey fellas, both of them are soil now, vegetables at best. And people talk as if they were somewhere up there, still enjoying all the applause and recognition. What superstitious nonsense! How unscientific! The best defence could be that they got satisfaction from their work. Well, maybe. But you see, gettin' kisses from lepers and bites from malaria carrying African mosquitoes isn't really my conception of satisfaction, if you know what I mean. Maybe I get more satisfaction from seducing young, innocent girls than from mosquito bites. What's wrong with that? You know, love 'em an' leave 'em, James Bond style. Agent 007. Or maybe I get my kicks from killing people. What's wrong with that? The society? Who cares for the society! As long as I can outwit the society -- may be even make a few small sacrifices (as I explained earlier) to make people think I am a nice guy -- I suppose I can continue to have my fun. In Mario Puzo's novel, *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone's girlfriend tries to convince him into taking up an honest man's career. She asks Mike what would happen to a society if everyone thought like he did. Take up an honest career to be kicked in his ars- for the rest of his life by people not even half as competent as he, only to receive a floral wreath and a few

words of praise on his funeral? No sir, Ol' Mike is the intelligent type. He kills a couple of guys and becomes the most powerful Mafia chief in New York. Nice work Mike!

If death is my destiny, then this short span of life is all I have. In this short span, I can, if things go my way, be a god -- but only for a very short time. Nothing, nothing, therefore, is more important than that ephemeral divinity of mine. I know if everyone thought like that, there would be chaos and disorder in the world. The world would be hell. But what care I? I'd be gone by the time disorder affects my life. And if things started going wrong, I could always shed a few tears to invoke the mercy of those soft-headed and soft-hearted Psalm singers who, I think, would not become an endangered species in my lifetime at least. I'd be the meanest, the most ruthless, the most clever person that ever was for as long as possible. And if things didn't work out, I'd always have the option of committing suicide: no use prolonging misery for a noble cause, no need to 'do perseverance' when an easier alternative exists. In any case, life is meaningless, if death is its destiny. For beyond death is darkness. Nothingness. As far as I am concerned, ultimately everything is meaningless, for anything I achieve ultimately passes into nothingness...

..."Unless..." the voice within me said. "Unless what?" I cried out. "Unless death is not the end, but the beginning. Unless life is not a reward but a trial. Here ye O man, you cannot even conceive of nothingness. Your whole being repels the idea of a meaningless life. I swear by the billions of stars and by the billions of processes that went into making thee, and by the billions of processes which still go into making thee, and by the billions of spermatozoa of which one spermatozoon became thee that thy life is not meaningless. It cannot be. Kneel down, thou fool, and prostrate thyself before the One -- the Lord of the worlds, and know the meaning of life...

...Life is not a reward. Nor is it punishment. It is a trial. 'Tis thee know full well, and yet ye ask foolish questions":

"But the fact is that man is well-aware of himself even though he puts up his excuses." (75:14-15)

If this world were not a trial, then your existence, O man, would be the greatest tragedy on the face of the earth. A child is

born poor and another rich. For a poor man his poverty is a trial of his perseverance. For a rich man his wealth is a trial of his compassion and concern for others. It is because the Hereafter exists as the reward (or punishment) for man's deeds and attitude that sacrifice for nobler ideals has never been regarded as foolishness by his intuition and greed and selfishness have always been regarded as evil despite the obvious material benefit they afford.

Fear ye then your Lord. And be not afraid of being afraid, for it is fear which conquers fear. And a fear which emanates from love is not bad. Know ye not the parable of the brave man who fell in love with a woman and said to her one day, "I fear that enemies of our love will kill thee. Art thou afraid?", the woman asked. "Yes", replied the brave man "I am afraid because I love thee". Don't ye O man fear losing that which ye love? Fear then losing the love of thy Lord, for there's no greater loss than that. In that fear is wisdom. Know ye what wisdom is? Wisdom means to sacrifice a temporary benefit for the sake of a better and permanent one. Know then that this life is neither permanent nor better and that which follows it is not only permanent but also much better than anything you can imagine. And remember God ye cannot be -- neither in this world nor in that one, for ye come from that which gushes forth. Be then ye thy Lord's servant, for in humility shall ye find thine greatness. For verily the dog, whose master thou art, is more worthy of being thy servant than thou art of thy Master. For ye created neither the dog nor that which it devours. And thy Lord created thee and thy dog and that which ye eat. And thou dost much less for thy Master than thy dog doth for thee. But if ye fear Him, ye can have your salvation. And if you get it, you will find it the greatest reward -- better than anything you can imagine and everlasting:

"Nay [behold], ye prefer the life of this world; but the Hereafter is better and everlasting. And it is this which is in the Books of the earliest [revelations] -- the Books of Abraham and Moses." (87:16-19)

Ye say, "why am I?" Thou art to serve thy Master.

"And I have created not the jinn and men save that they worship Me." (51:56)

This is the meaning of life. Learn therefore how ye can serve Him. Read the Book. Read in the name of thy Lord -- the Lord of the worlds, who in His infinite and perpetual mercy made this world a trial that justice be done. Ask him to show ye the right path.

The voice within me had spoken. And it had spoken well. I opened the Book and began to read:

“This is alif laam meem. This is the Book. There is no doubt in it. Guidance to those who fear God.” (2:1-2)

I read and I understood. And I said: I shall do Thy will, my Lord. When I shall be unable to run fast, I shall run slowly. When I shall not be able to run slowly, I shall walk. When I shall not be able to walk, I shall crawl. But move in Thine way, I shall! In my sacrifice shall I be rewarded. In losing shall I gain. In persecution shall I rejoice. In perseverance shall I grow. In humility shall I be great. And in my sacrifices shall values be preserved. And in preservation of values society shall prosper, for end of values means the death of society. Yes, everything -- everything from the greatest of objects and ideas to the smallest of particles -- has meaning now. The billions of processes shall not go waste. Everything is there to help me to move towards my destiny -- which is not soil; it is an everlasting life of bliss where every moment shall be better than the preceding one and my happiness shall be complete and enduring. This is beautiful, this is perfection. So imperfect, yet so perfect. So incomplete, yet so complete. This is me folks -- Man.

I knelt down and prostrated myself in gratitude, and began to pray in fear and in hope:

“Our Lord! call us not to account over our forgetfulness and mistakes; our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord! lay not on us a burden greater than we have the strength to bear. Blot out our sins; and grant us forgiveness; and have mercy on us. Thou art our Lord! help us against those who stand against faith.” (2:286)

Darkness now was no longer visible. There was light. That of

my voice within and that of the Book. Light upon light:

“Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.” (24:35)

References

1. Milton, Paradise Lost, Book I.
2. (1840-89), Belgian missionary who, witnessing the sufferings of the lepers confined on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, obtained permission to take charge, and remained there helping the lepers until he himself died of leprosy.
3. (1875-1965), Alsatian medical missionary. After publishing learned works, he resigned a promising European career to found at Lambréné in French Equatorial Africa a hospital to fight leprosy and sleeping sickness and made it a centre of service to Africans. Nobel peace prize 1952.
4. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." (Matthew, 17:24)
5. "Has there not been over man a period of time when he was nothing [worthy of being] mentioned? Verily We created man from a drop of mingled sperm in order to try him, so We gave him the gifts of hearing and seeing. We showed him the way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful [rests on his will]." (76:1)
6. See The Qur'ān (21:35)
7. Allusion to Bertrand Russell's erroneous conception that all religions are bad as they are based on fear.

(Asif Iftikhar)

A Believer's Day

A Muslim gets up early in the morning with these words on his lips: "O Allah, I thank you for enabling me to sleep and for enabling me to wake up." He cleanses himself and proceeds to the mosque for *Fajr* prayers so that, in communion with his believing brothers, he could acknowledge God's majesty and his

own servitude to Him. Then he sets out for his worldly business. During the day he says three more prayers: *Zuhar*, *Asar*, and *Maghrib*. To be able to say each of these prayers, he leaves aside his work and stands before his God, thus confirming that in his scheme of life his God receives top priority.

When hungry, he takes his meals and when thirsty, drinks water, and is overwhelmed with gratitude. He thanks God for the water that He has made available for him to quench his thirst and for the food that has enabled him to overcome his hunger. When he experiences success, he attributes it to God's graciousness and thanks him for the ability to achieve it. If he meets with failure, he acknowledges his ineptitude and asks God to help him. When he deals with another person, he does so, wisely and kindly, realising that God is watching him and that He will one day hold him accountable for all his dealings. As night takes over, he winds up his worldly assignments, cleanses himself once again, says the last prayer of the day and goes to sleep. Before falling asleep, he prays, "O God, in your hands is my life and death. Please forgive me and let me enter the cool shadows of your mercy."

Thus concerns of God dominate a believer's life; he works out the plan of his life always keeping his God in mind, without ever ignoring Him.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Allah u Akbar

When man makes an object, he breaks it down into its various parts, making each separately and then assembling them into a whole. On the contrary, God's technique is completely different, when He raises a tree or creates a human being. He brings it out as a complete unit right from the beginning. The entire tree or the full man come out from one seed or drop. It is an utterly unique, inimitable way. Indeed, such a process shows that in this existence there is Someone superior to man -- Someone Whose

plans are superior to man's.

The sun is more than one million times larger than the earth. The earth is four times as large as the moon. These heavenly bodies are in a constant state of motion. The moon circulates around the earth from a distance of two hundred and fifty thousand miles. The earth on the other hand rotates from a distance of ninety million miles in two different ways: in its own orbit as well as around the sun. Similar is the case of all other heavenly bodies, which follow their schedules of movement with extreme precision at distances that are mind boggling. These arrangements help in creating the day and night; they also help in designing the system of time; likewise, thus they contribute in enabling man to arrange his life. This system has been functioning with great precision for thousands of years without any alteration. This is evidence to the fact that there is Someone out there Whose power is unimaginably immense. These signs of God show that the Maker of this system is very knowledgeable and powerful. His planning is perfect. If that was not the case, it would have been impossible to find such continuity, consistency and synchronisation in this world. God's world is full of His signs. However, a sign is an argument that is a subjective rationality and not a dagger that strikes and needs no further proofs for its existence. An argument appeals only if there is willingness in the one who seeks the truth and who is willing to acknowledge its validity, whether it goes with his own interests or against them.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Benevolence

Benevolence (*Ihsan*) has been emphasized over and over again in Islamic teachings. The Qur'ān says:

Indeed Allah ordains justice and benevolence. (16:90)

Benevolent behaviour is considered a natural response of a

believer to the spiritual realization of the tremendous blessings he receives from his Creator without being entitled to them. In other words, a true believer is prepared to give to others, over and above what he owes to them on the principle of justice to express his gratitude to God for having done the same to him on a much larger scale. The Qur'ān, when urging the believer to spend in the way of God, says:

And spend [to earn the pleasure of Allah] out of the means of sustenance that We have provided you with. (63:10)

It must, however, be clarified that benevolence is a bonus-value which in order to be valid, must always succeed justice. Otherwise 'benevolence is likely to undermine benevolence'. In other words, benevolence starts from the basis that justice has already been done. If an employer, for instance, treats his own employees badly and keeps them underpaid (i.e. contravenes the spirit of justice), no matter how much he may spend for others in avenues of charity, his behaviour would be unacceptable to God.

It is not always easy to draw a clear line of demarcation between justice and benevolence. When an attitude of benevolence is urgently needed to alleviate the hardship of the needy, the act of benevolence should be considered binding and, therefore, counted as a requirement of justice. Parting with 2.5% every year from the savings of legitimately earned wealth to cater for the needs of others (*zakat*) may appear an act of benevolence from the point of view of the giver, but it is no more than simple justice (requirement of justice), if one considers the need and deprivation of fellow human beings. Likewise, parting with one's savings to help meet the need of another person through an interest-free loan, although apparently an act of benevolence is involuntary as far as restriction on demanding interest is concerned. Thus, such an apparently voluntary virtue, if neglected, would violate the requirements of Islamic justice that have been made involuntary for the believer in Islam. This clear demarcation of justice and benevolence precludes the possibility of the two ever overlapping practically, since the role of the latter emerges only where the domain of the former ends. In the apparently 'grey areas', the intensity and urgency of the needy, the possibility of the potential helper's ability to come to his aid, and his own circumstances would decide whether an

action or lack of it related to justice or to benevolence.

* These or similar words have been repeated at least eight times in the Qur'ān. See 2:254, 4:39, 13:22, 35:29, 65:7, 36:47 & 57:7.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

The Spirit of Islamic Law

The Qur'ān, in general, criticizes the behavior of some People of the Book, and says that the arrival of Jesus (sws) was meant in the divine scheme to instill the real spirit of the law among the Jews who had reduced Torah to a 'collection of lifeless injunctions and spiritless rituals'. It mentions the behavior of a Jewish community who lived by the seaside (7:163). They were required to honor the restrictions of the Sabbath by not getting involved in any worldly engagements. It so used to happen that 'on the day of their Sabbath, their fish did come to them openly holding up their heads but on the day they had no Sabbath, they came not'. It was too tempting a trial for some of them. However, in order to preserve the apparent sanctity of the Sabbath and yet to achieve their objective, some of them contrived a clever strategy of preventing the fish from disappearing on Saturday so that on Sunday, the day following the Sabbath day, they could catch them. Despite their lame attempt to preserve the apparent form of the law of Sabbath, however, they were condemned to punishment because the spirit of the law – to stay away from all worldly dealings on Saturdays in order to worship God – was totally lost.

Another reference in the Qur'ān to a religious subterfuge contrived by a people to serve their worldly objectives is to the practice of intercalating a month (*Nasi*) by the pagan Arabs (9:36-7). They were required by their religious traditions to honour the sanctity of four months by enforcing complete halt to active hostilities against each other. The requirement was meant to enable pilgrims to visit the House of Allah in Makkah from all

over Arabia. However, since the calendar was based on the lunar movement, it necessitated the shifting of months from one season to another. That was not acceptable to the business-minded people of Makkah, because pilgrims were an important source of business revenue for them. They inserted a thirteenth month called *Kabisah* after every three years to ensure that the months did not move around different seasons in different years. In short, instead of openly rejecting the arrangement of the lunar months, they resorted to a clever manipulation by retaining the apparent form of the law. The Qur'ān has, however, condemned the whole exercise by calling it 'an addition to disbelief' (9:37).

The reason why religious subterfuges have been condemned by the Qur'ān as additions to disbelief is that while simple disbelief is an open rejection of faith, such subterfuges are a cunning way of defeating the purpose of the Divine Law without taking the blame for rejecting it. In other words, those who indulge in it, attempt to deceive God by pretending to follow the apparent form while defeating its real spirit.

There have been examples in Muslim history too whereby religious subterfuges have been resorted to in order to retain the legal form of injunctions while trying to defeat their spirit. It is said, for instance, about a certain individual well versed in religious law that he used to transfer his wealth to his wife's name after eleven months, and similarly back to his name after the same duration, to escape the obligation of paying the annual religious tax (*zakat*) on his wealth. Indeed *zakat* is, legally speaking, annually payable on the wealth one owns. That, however, is just a legal condition. The real objective God wants to achieve through its imposition is amelioration of the state of the poor and material sacrifice for the sake of God by the payer. The individual referred to managed to defeat both the objectives, although in the eyes of the worldly law, he was not guilty.

The question of the spirit of the law has been employed by Muslim jurists to legislate in areas which have not been dealt with in the Qur'ān and *sunnah*. The process of *itihad* based on analogy (*qiyas*) employs this principle. It entails observation of the real basis of an Islamic injunction, and determines if the same basis is present in another arrangement. If in the opinion of the jurist, the basis in the original injunction is similar to the one in the later development, the jurist would declare on the basis of

qiyas, that the same verdict holds true for both.

There is no general agreement on the bases ('*illal*) of many Islamic injunctions. It is, however, generally agreed that there could be more than one basis for a certain Islamic verdict. The one reason which is considered to be the predominant basis of a relevant injunction is called '*illah*' while other less significant ones are called *hikmah*.

Irrespective of the difference in terms, however, both '*illah*' and *hikmah* are concepts which are based on the spirit of law. It is the real spirit of the injunction that is attempted to be captured and, on that basis, other areas of human activity are brought within the purview of Islamic law.

There is a difference of opinion of significant consequence amongst the four earlier schools of Islamic Jurisprudence with regard to the spirit of the law. The Malikites and Hambalites determine the validity or invalidity of a contract, apart from the obvious factors, on the grounds of whether it was inspired by proper motives or not, its apparent legitimacy notwithstanding. On the other hand, the Hanafite and, to a lesser extent, the Shafite schools of law consider that it is not the function of the courts to investigate what stands behind apparently genuine transactions, or to unveil their real inspiration. The obvious consequence of the latter's principle was that a range of carefully contrived legal stratagems (*hiyal*) were developed which allowed the spirit of Islamic law to be flouted despite adherence to the apparent form in the lands where the latter schools of *fiqh* had more influence.

In this writer's opinion, our scholar's must do away with this approach. The spirit and form of a directive are equally important and each must be given the weight it deserves.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Condemnation of Accumulation of Wealth

An important guiding principle mentioned in the Qur'ān to

regulate the economic life of Muslims is to create an equitable Islamic society in which wealth should not be allowed to circulate among the rich of the society alone. After announcing that the wealth Muslims have obtained by way of *fay*¹ belongs to Allah and His Prophet (sws), the relatives of the Prophet (sws), the orphans, and the needy and the wayfarers, the Qur'ān says that this has been done so that 'it (wealth) may not concentrate in the hands of those who are rich among you' (59:7). In other words it is one of the objectives which the Qur'ān wants to see achieved. Instead of allowing wealth to remain concentrated in a few hands, it should be made to flow in society as widely as possible, so that the distinction between the rich and the poor can be narrowed as far as is natural and practicable.

If this verse of the Qur'ān is carefully considered, on the one hand, it sanctions the existence of rich people and, on the other, it definitely disallows them from continuing to increase their share of the total wealth of society. In fact, if the true spirit of the verse is followed, their share should, if anything, gradually fall in a society which regulates its affairs according to Qur'ānic guidance.

Islam definitely recognises natural economic differences among human beings. However, according to the verse under consideration, those differences should not be allowed to be the basis of further expansion of the gulf between the rich and the poor. To put it simply, any system which results in the rich getting richer because of the peculiar nature of the system, and which allows the poor to remain poor cannot be Islamically acceptable. Islam believes in striking at the roots of inequality rather than merely alleviating some of the symptoms. If, in an economy all segments of the society experience economic improvement but the poor much less than the rich, then, according to the spirit of the verse, such a situation is less unacceptable. Therefore, if the effects of any two economic policies for the eradication of poverty are similar, it is necessary to prefer the one which reduces income disparity.

It needs to be understood that there is a difference between economic progress of an individual attributable to his hard work and intelligence, or good fortune and progress by virtue of a position of advantage offered to him by the favourable customs

1. Wealth accumulated by soldiers during wars

and laws of the society. Whereas, generally speaking, there can be no objection from the Islamic point of view to the achievements of a person in the former case, undue advantage in the economic race in the latter case would never be acceptable to the letter and spirit of Islamic teachings.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Ever fallen Ill?

A temporary loss of health is one of the great blessings God has enabled his servants to experience. When one falls ill, all worldly engagements involuntarily come to a standstill -- engagements about which man normally imagines that they are unavoidable. Man comes to realize that, after all, he is not indispensable to the world, nor is the world indispensable to him. While a person is ill, he does not enjoy the food he normally does as a healthy person. It gives him a reason to thank God for the numerous blessings He has made available to him, as also the accompanying abilities with which he can properly benefit from them.

When illness gets more acute, one gets a real feeling of rubbing one's shoulders with death. Thus one realizes that death is a serious possibility. It is this experience that actually enables one to recognize genuinely the folly of one's over-involvement in unnecessary worldly pursuits. The weakness of one's body and the acuteness of illness all help in bringing home the fact that when the time comes to depart from this world, no one will come to the rescue of the departing soul. This near-death experience is needed by all of us. And indeed it comes to our service on a fairly regular basis. How very unfortunate then, that, despite going through such an experience, we still find our worldly life so absorbing, that we do not spare time to ponder seriously about our life-after-death?

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Experiences, Questions, Analysis

After my experiences with some devout Christians that I had while I was in Britain for my studies, I have come to the conclusion that religious Muslims and religious Christians both demonstrate the same behaviour.

I stayed in Britain in Lampeter, a small university town in North Wales. A milk vendor would move from house to house to drop milk bottles at the doorsteps of his customers. The gentleman would always wear a broad, genuine smile on his face. I saw him several times and on all occasions I saw him with his familiar, impressive smile. One day, I decided to visit him to find out what could be the reason behind the overwhelmingly beaming face he had. I also had another agenda in mind: to introduce him to the teachings of Islam. On meeting him it transpired that he was a Born-Again Christian. He mentioned to me that prior to his spiritual rebirth, he had indulged in various kinds of sins. However, one day, he had an experience wherein the Holy Spirit visited him, and cleansed him inside out in a way that he no more felt tempted to sin. He had become a completely transformed person. He started going to the church regularly, and did all his work with a view to please his Lord. He was particularly impressed by Mr DiPartisan, the priest of his church, who used to deliver regular sermons on Sundays. I am a witness to the fact that Mr DiPartisan was a particularly impressive speaker.

His story reminded me of the spiritual experiences of many people back home who met with, and were later helped by their respective spiritual leaders in going through similar experiences that helped them to transform their lives. The spiritual experience narrated by the Born-Again “special-smile man” and many of our *tasawwuf*-inspired Muslims are strikingly similar. My question is: why should Muslims consider the smiling milkman to be misguided and the smiling *sufis* guided, when their experiences of transformation are the same, spiritual and non-rational in nature? Is it just because of the fact that the

members of one group were born Christians, and therefore they were misguided, and the other group members were born Muslim and therefore, by virtue of that, they were guided?

Now take the other experience: While in Britain, I was regularly visited by Mr and Mrs Elsworthy, a retired couple in their sixties, who would take the advantage of their visit from their village to the church in Lampeter on Sundays to come to my place to try and preach evangelism. Mrs Elsworthy would be the one who would preach, and her husband would invariably weep on being emotionally touched by the effective description of his Christian faith by his wife. Mrs Elsworthy once said to me: “Khalid, how could it be that a good person like you could stay away from benefitting from the all-embracing mercy of Lord Jesus?” Her persuasive urging used to be extremely sincere. I would keep responding to her presentations by putting across my views based on the Qur’ānic teachings. At some point, however, I realized that we were heading towards nowhere. I presented this difficulty before them thus: “I believe we have reached an impasse: you keep mentioning your understanding from the Bible and I keep talking about my views from the Qur’ān. While I believe some part of the Bible to be from God, you do not believe the Qur’ān to be from Him at all. How can we reach any common understanding unless we resolve this issue? I would suggest that you pray to your God during the next week and ask Him if the Qur’ān too was His book, He should open your hearts for its guidance. I would do likewise for the Bible.” They agreed to my suggestion. When they visited me the next time, Mrs Elsworthy started the proceedings by apologizing that she was unable to pray to God in the previous week the way she had promised, because as soon as she made the intention to do so, the Holy Spirit reminded her that praying for the purpose of seeking guidance from outside the Bible was against the commitment she had already made to God.

I thought to myself that such a suggestion was unlikely to be from God and His angel. My God tells me that if somebody claims to have been gifted with a better truth than the one I have, I should be open to listening to it. The Qur’ān tells the Prophet (sws): “Ask them: [If your claim to truth is correct] then bring forth a book that is straighter than these two books [i.e. the Torah and the Qur’ān], I will be the first to follow it.” (Qur’ān; 28:49)

The thought of the Elsworthys continues to bother me when I think of their sincerity towards their faith on the one hand, and their complete confidence that nothing other than the Bible could be a source of guidance from God on the other. If I should consider them misguided despite their sincerity, why then should I consider many Muslims guided who are equally convinced that their religious point of view is correct, and that any view different from theirs is sheer misguidance? We come across many Muslims who are initially inclined to be convinced that some other point of view is correct but, just as the Elsworthys were cautioned by the Holy Spirit, are warned by their religious leaders not to seek guidance from any source other than the one they are already attached to. In fact, I must admit that I have come across devout Christians like the Elsworthys who were more tolerant than many devout Muslims who would react far more aggressively at the mention of religious views different from theirs.

God is not biased against, or unfair towards, any human being. He would judge all humans according to the merit of their performance. He has made a firm vow that He has created this world, and is running it, on the principle of justice (Qur'ān; 3:18). Like Muslims of today, some of the Jews and the Christians of the earlier days (and of the contemporary times too) believed that their judgment in the God's court of justice would not be based on merit. The Qur'ān clarified this misconception by saying this: "It is neither [O Believers] your wishful thinking nor that of the people of the Book that would matter: Whoever would do evil shall be made to account for it and he would not find [in the hereafter] anyone, besides Allah, neither a friend nor a helper", (4:123). To sum it up, it is not who one is, or by what religious group one is identified with, but one's performance and attitude which shall count for one's final judgment at the time of accountability before God. The Qur'ān says: "Indeed those who believe [in Islam], and the those who became Jews, and Christians, and the Sabeans, whoever [from amongst them], believed in Allah and the Day of Judgment and did good deeds, for them would be a reward before their Lord: they shall neither have any fear [of the future in paradise] nor shall they have any grief [of the past]", (2:62). Of course, all good people, when they are presented with the teachings of the genuine messengers of

God, are motivated to accept them. However, no good individual can be blamed for not accepting a message from God if it was not presented in a befitting manner that the individual was convinced that it was from His Creator.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

How Faith is Acquired and Strengthened

Faith is the confidence of an individual that there is a certain reality out there which cannot be seen. That reality could be a living existence, the definiteness of a principle, or an understanding that a certain individual is gifted with supernatural powers.

Islamic teachings require an individual to have faith in its teachings. But, how does an individual acquire faith in the right manner according to Islam? Although there could be many answers to this question, the possible answers can be divided into two categories for the sake of brevity and clarity: i) Faith is acquired and strengthened through constant exposure to Islamic teachings and this process is supported by reassuring experiences; ii) it is acquired and strengthened through critical reflection on the accepted teachings and this process is supported by reassuring experiences.

In the case of faith of the first category, the faithful is given an opportunity to hear Islamic messages from his elders and what is generally made available to him by the society, he gets the opportunity to listen to the same views repeatedly, and his experiences in life further substantiate the veracity of the views that were given to him by his elders and society. In many cases, people acquiring faith through this process are influenced by some individuals who add to their confidence in their faith because of their strong and charismatic personalities. A combination of these factors enables an individual to acquire and strengthen his faith: family's and environment's influence, a conditioning of the mind through listening to the same views

over again and again, influence of personalities who are idolised, and reassuring experiences in the form of spectacular coincidences that cannot be explained, save through the confident answers provided by faith.

The accompanying feeling one gets through acquiring such faith is that of satisfaction and solace, as also of confidence in the ultimate success for the individual in what he does. However, as a consequence of this feeling, and to safeguard it from all threatening influences, he feels it necessary that no critical examination of his practices and the accompanying ideas be conducted. Thus all thoughts challenging his faith are considered devilish, the questioning mind is deemed misleading, and the people who possess religious ideas different from one's own are considered worthy of condemnation. The outward reaction of the individual towards dissenting views can be anywhere from aggressively violent to a seemingly mellowed, tolerant one, depending upon the individual's own personality and his group's policy in responding to such situations. However, the basic internal motivation for the response always stems from the same source: a strong feeling that dissenting views are a threat to one's faith and therefore are to be discouraged.

Viewed from this angle, adherents to almost all faiths, howsoever diverse they may be in comparison to each other, have a similar approach. Exceptions, of course, are always there to prove the rule. A large number of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and people belonging to other faiths follow the same pattern.

The other way of acquiring faith, which I believe is the truly Islamic way, is the one in which an individual is gifted with faith by God through a journey which takes him through the realms of both sincere intellectual reflection, and moral and spiritual uprightness to the right path, a path which may not always lead an individual to absolute truth in this world. It is a constant movement from relative darkness of ignorance, towards relative light of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. The process involves constant, honest probing. No amount of dissent is ever resented in this path. Dissenting views are not just tolerated, they are respected. The reason is that the individual knows that like him, all others are going through the same journey of intellectual and spiritual improvement. It is simply not allowed to an

individual to question the sincerity of intentions of anyone else. Reassuring experiences in practical life are an important factor in this journey of faith as well. However, all such experiences are subservient to the intellectual scrutiny undertaken by the individual's mind. The individual travelling on this path is acutely aware of his own limitations. He therefore can never afford to look down upon other fellow humans as inferior or condemnable. He would certainly have clear ideas of what is right and what is wrong. However, those ideas would be accompanied by the awareness expressed here in the words of Imam Shafi'i: "I am convinced about the veracity of my opinions, but I do consider it likely that they may turn out to be incorrect. Likewise, I am convinced about the incorrectness of the views different from mine, but I do concede the possibility that they may turn out to be correct."

A faith acquired through this process would always be open to debate, because the one adhering to faith through this process would be confident that what he has acquired is either the truth, or has been accepted with the confident assumption that it is one. In case that assumption turns out to be incorrect, the individual would be even better off by accepting a better version of truth. In a debate of dissenting views, he would therefore always be in a win-win situation. His approach would be to politely insist that his understanding is the ultimate version of truth, and in case it is not, he would demand to be shown a better version of it so that he too may benefit from it.

A Muslim who acquires his faith through this second approach is always respectful of people belonging to all other faiths, whether they belong to sects different from his own within Muslims, or whether they are non-Muslims. He would always look forward to meeting people belonging to other faiths to let them know what he thinks is the right path leading to God. While he would do so, he would continue to remain open to ideas coming from the other side. It is this openness of attitude which would enable him to grow in confidence, and faith, in his point of view, because he knows that despite the fact that he has allowed his faith to be challenged, he has always found those challenges wanting in substance.

This approach is thus radically different from the first one where a faith once acquired is jealously safeguarded from

external threats through emotional attachment to it. Thus the first approach follows the pattern of constant brainwashing through listening to the same emotional messages over and over again, given by people who have already been selected by the individual as his spiritual leaders. The individual belonging to the second approach acquires and strengthens his faith through a regular process of critical examination of his views through an open-minded exposure to all views different from his.

The following verses of the Qur'ān show that God, the author of the Book, wants His believers to follow the second approach:

Allah becomes the protecting friend of those who want to believe; He brings them out of the darkness of ignorance towards the light of faith. (2:257)

Ask them, [if they claim that they are on the right track]: “Bring forth a book which is straighter than these two books [– Torah and Qur'ān –], I [– the prophet –] will follow it [in that case], if they are really truthful.” However, if they don't respond to your demand, then be sure that they are after their vain desires. (28:49-50)

Not all these people are alike. From amongst the people of the book are those who stand in the night time, reciting the verses of God while prostrating. They truly believe in God and the Day of Judgment, they encourage goodness, admonish evil and take lead in doing acts of virtue; such are the righteous people. Whatever good they will do is not going to go waste. And God is aware of the pious people. (3:113-5)

Indeed those who believe [– Muslims –] and those who are Jews, and the nasara [the rightly guided Christians], and the Sabeans, whoever [amongst them] believes in Allah, the Day of Judgment, and does good deeds, for him there is going to be reward before his Lord: They will neither have any fear of the future nor sorrow of the past. (2:62)

How do they [these Jews] make you [O prophet] their judge when they already have the Torah with them which contains the verdict of God, and even then they turn away from it?

[When they come to you for judgment despite that] they are indeed not believers. (5:43)

Indeed the worst of the beasts in the eyes of God are those people who are deaf and dumb, in that they don't use their intellect. (8:22)

And when it is said to them: "Follow what God has revealed", they respond by saying: "We shall only follow what we have seen our elders doing." Is it that they would still follow them if their elders neither knew anything nor were they rightly guided? (2:170)

And the entrants into the Hell would say: "Had we been listening or understanding [properly what we were told], we wouldn't have been amongst the dwellers of Hell. They will admit their faults. Curse would be on the dwellers of Hell." (67:10-11)

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Is God and Intellectual Reality?

We do not see God, but we do observe this world. History has recorded the story of the manner in which we have dealt with it for the last five thousand years. We have observed it from widely different angles. The Bedouin of deserts, and the unsophisticated tillers of soil had their share of intimately observing this world. So have the modern scientists and astronomers such as Swedenborg, Herschel, Hubble, and Einstein from their specialized status in discovering the laws of nature. We saw this world even when our imagination suggested that a slightly taller structure would literally shake hands with the sky; we are still watching it now when we know that some of its stars are so distantly placed from us that their light takes billions of years to reach us.

There was a time when we fancied our sun to be no more than a big ball, which, if it were to somehow cool down and descend toward us, could be conveniently employed for our benefits. Our modern enlightenment has enabled us to know that its distance from Pluto, a planet, for example, is four billion and six hundred million miles. We also know that this system is only a small part of a large galaxy which has billions of suns, and that this galaxy is just one of millions of spiral nebulae.

This, then, is what we know as yet. We do not know what more knowledge is in store, still eluding us for want of further scientific probing. Throughout this long period of mankind's stay in this world, we have always heard the silent verdict of our intuition, that all this arrangement, despite its vast expanse and grandeur is a creation, our intellect unequivocally endorses this verdict. Efforts to form a contrary opinion notwithstanding, human intellect have always ended up with the same conclusion. The findings of the latest research are, likewise, no different. Man is, consequently, forced to confirm that this world is undoubtedly a creation, no more and no less than that.

We conclude from the above that if this world is a creation it should definitely have a Creator. A common rebuttal of this argument, based on the question of identification of a Creator of this creation is clearly illogical, for we do not argue that everything should necessarily have a Creator. On the contrary, we assert that every creation should indispensably have a Maker, and because we accept this world to be a creation, Someone should have made it. Everyone should, therefore, submit willingly to this verdict of our intellect.

We readily yield to this verdict which is unanimously endorsed by our intuition as well as by our intellect. Our entire existence, in fact, is a clear testimony to it. Nothing within or external to us can challenge this contention. We, therefore, believe that the existence of God is an unquestionable reality which no reasonable person can afford to deny.

Reality does not appear through our observations and experiences only. We also, at times, infer from evidences of objects and events to arrive at conclusions. A modern physical scientist has rightly remarked that reality is always reality, whether discovered directly or through reasoning. The major part of man's best scholarly achievement is based on this process. He

unhesitatingly affirms those facts which he has discovered through logical reasoning, just as he affirms those which he has observed directly.

As the Qur'ān invites man to believe in the unseen facts, it was but logical that it should have adopted the process of intellectual reasoning to convince its readers. It first draws the attention of man to the reality which exists in their intuition. It informs him that the Powerful and Wise Being who unquestionably exists beyond the domain of his senses was never unknown to his intuition. The Qur'ān then draws the attention of man's intellect to the visible aspects of this world. It presents for his consideration the various expressions of nature, both within himself and external to him in his surroundings, which lie within his observable reach. It says:

Your God is one God; there is no God save Him, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Lo! in the creation of the heavens and the earth; and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to man, and the water which Allah sends down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and in the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth are signs for people who ponder. (2:164-165)

It then implores man to use his intellect and accept the consequential outcome towards which these expressions inevitably lead, for it is only befitting for him to submit to truth.

This is the same process which modern science has adopted to prove many of its claims. The Qur'ān employed it in a period when the startling achievements of our times were unknown. Modern science was, no doubt, fortunate in discovering the process which is the only way of appreciating unseen realities. It is, however, unfortunate in ignoring the reality which emerges most prominently after adopting this process: the existence of God. We do not know how long it will take to overcome this contradictory attitude.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Never Forget Your Poor Relatives

A young, poor friend of mine came to see me from a place some seventy kilometers from Lahore. He had informed me on the phone that morning about his arrival. Incidentally, I had a particularly busy schedule that day and I was not keen about the visit anyway. I therefore asked him not to come. He had probably dropped the phone before I could complete my sentence. He arrived later in the day and made it into my office despite my best efforts. I did not greet him politely, although I did inquire about his welfare and that of his family. He informed me that the '*khoka*' (kiosk) business that he had started recently was doing reasonably well. He asked me to help him out financially to enable him to install a simple water-pulling motor to ease the water crisis his family was facing. He said that he also needed money to get a simple toilet installation within his house to make things easier for his aging mother. The total amount he requested to get both jobs done was Rs. six thousand. I had the amount with me but I refused to oblige him because I had not liked the way he came to Lahore without prior permission. He, therefore, had to go back, unsuccessful in his mission. I realized later that my attitude had been very inappropriate. The way I behaved with him was completely against the spirit of Islamic teachings. I did make some attempt to seek forgiveness from God.

Two days later, as I was coming back from downtown, a car made an attempt to overtake mine from the wrong side. It was an old, huge machine and the driver, it seems, was unaware of the large size of the vehicle he was navigating. The result was that, on overtaking, some part of the front portion of my car's body could be seen hanging on the back of that 'sixty year old monster'. It all happened so swiftly that I could neither follow the car, nor was I able to note its registration number. On my return home, I immediately contacted my mechanic who advised me to get the car repaired as soon as possible. The job was done within twenty four hours. When I asked for the bill, his response was shocking: It was exactly rupees six thousand. I felt as if God was right in front of me, telling me this: 'do you think I Myself

could not have helped My servant who came to you from a far off place, asking for that amount? I have enough resources at my disposal to take care of all My creations. I just wanted to provide you with the opportunity to help My servant out in his trouble with the resources I had Myself provided you with. It was not he who came to you; it was, in fact, I, your God, Who came to ask for help. And you rejected My request. That is why I deprived you of the exact amount you refused to give to my servant. Do not ever try to imagine in future that what you have belongs to you. It is all due to My blessings. Avail them within decent limits. But do not forget to share them with your fellow human beings who I have given less just to test their and your faith in Me.' I was really embarrassed. It is amazing how God is able to control every part of His creation in such a subtle way that while on the one hand we are under the impression that we are taking our own decisions, but the truth of the matter is that in reality, God is completely in charge, doing whatever He wants to:

And Allah has full power and control over His affairs; but most among mankind know it not. (12:21)

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Prevent Evil from Spreading

Travelling by an otherwise comfortable bus service plying between Lahore and Islamabad, I had an uncomfortable time facing constant disturbance through involuntary 'consumption' of filthy songs and indecent dialogues of films/dramas that were 'entertaining' the passengers. The hostess, whose duty was to make the passengers feel comfortable, conveniently ignored the mild protest I made to her. I had to endure the five-hour long agony, making vain attempts to fight the Satanic messages. On leaving the coach, I took two decisions: first, I will not travel on this service again, and, second, I shall report the matter to the higher officials of the bus service. I got the opportunity of immediately implementing the latter decision on reaching my

destination. The passenger's lounge of the bus service had a complaint book. I availed the opportunity to freely express my feelings of disgust at the experience I had gone through. I also warned the officials that if the policy I was complaining against would continue, I and my like-minded friends would never use the service again. While writing the protest, I was convinced that apart from gaining spiritual satisfaction that I was discharging my religious duty, there was no real possibility that my protest would effectuate any change in the policy of the service.

Sometime later, when I needed to travel again, I used the same bus service, completely forgetting that I had made a resolve not to avail it. I was pleasantly surprised to notice that although the 'facility' of songs and films/dramas was still available to the passengers, those who were not interested in getting 'entertained' were spared from being disturbed by it. Earphones were provided to the passengers so that the voice of the system went selectively to only those passengers who opted for it. I am not sure whether my written complaint had anything to do with this change, but it did strengthen my confidence in the act of controlled protest.

Commercial organizations pursue their business interests when they make attempts to meet their perceived customer needs. If committed Muslims make officials of these ventures realise that they are in danger of losing considerable customer patronage if they continue to follow their un-Islamic policies, they would most certainly be forced to rethink their business strategies, if only for commercial reasons. In order for the protest to be effective, however, its message should be clear and directed only towards relevant authorities. Messages similar to the one I had delivered need to be given to the owners of general stores and other retail outlets also, who display magazines with obscene covers. The revenues generated by these journals are normally a very small component of overall sales proceeds of these outlets. However, the trend of spreading vulgarity is accelerating at a rapid pace, apart from other reasons, through these retailers, because good Muslims - who form a decent chunk of the overall customer population - seem to be indifferent to this threatening menace.

Preventing evil from spreading (*Nahi 'anil Munkar*) is a necessary part of a believer's list of Islamic obligations. Let us, therefore, make a serious attempt to do our best to check evil

from increasing. There are good reasons to believe that our sincere efforts would bear fruits in the society. Even if they do not, we will have an excuse to present to our Creator that we did try our bit to check evil from spreading. The Qur'ān informs us about the example of a few God-fearing people who used to urge others not to commit sins. When they were discouraged by some others from doing *Nahi 'anil Munkar* because of, what they thought, the apparent futility of the exercise, the rightly guided people defended their strategy thus:

[We are doing so because] we want to have some excuse [to present] before your Lord and, who knows, they might become God-fearing [as a consequence of our efforts]. (7:164)

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Rescuing Our Near Ones from Hell

The Qur'ān says: "O you who believe, save yourselves and your families from the Fire whose fuel will be men and rocks, over which will be appointed stern and severe angels as wardens who would never disobey what God would command them, and would do what they will be commanded." (66:6)

Any person, who believes that the Day of Judgment is bound to come, would do everything possible within his means to save himself and his family from the fire of hell. Consequently, whenever he finds any of his close ones deviating from the right path, he makes an attempt to guide him back. His effort would at least be equal in sincerity to that of someone trying desperately to rescue a loved one from the flames of a fire. The fear that his attempt would earn for him the displeasure of others would not deter him from pursuing his objective. Indeed, temporary unhappiness of some relatives and friends is far easier to face than the accountability in the hereafter if this responsibility is avoided. The Prophet (pbuh) had warned thus:

Each one of you is a shepherd, responsible [to God] for [the conduct of] his herd. (*Muslim, Kitabul-Imarah*)

Love and sympathy for others, if carried too far, make an individual lazy and unmindful about religious matters. Emotional attachment to the religion of God, as a result, gradually drops to a level where open violations of God's injunctions even by one's wife and children fail to move him to take corrective measures. He deceives himself by thinking that time would reform them gradually. There are many who instead of reforming their kin, spare no efforts to justify their faults. This highly unbecoming attitude is adopted even by those who have taken up the task of reforming the entire society.

The obvious reason why people do not take up the responsibility of reforming their near ones seriously is that they fail to realize that true love does not demand individuals to meekly overlook the irreligious conduct of their family, and to allow the possibility of being swallowed by the flames of hell as a result; it requires, instead, that they should be dragged away from it, even though the process necessitates some discomfort. Anyone who remains unconcerned at the un-Islamic behaviour of those close to him is, in reality, being callous, instead of loving, allowing them to move closer to the wrath of God.


The Qur'ān warns us that many people would find themselves along with their families in an unenviable fate on the Day of Judgment. It says:

You would see them brought before the fire, abject in disgrace, looking stealthily. And those who believe will say: 'Indeed losers are those who have failed themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection.' Be informed that these transgressors will suffer a lasting torment. They will have no protector to help them than God. He whom God allows to go astray has no way [to revert]. (42:45-6)

We, therefore, pray to God: 'O Lord, give us of good in the world, and give us of good in the life to come and save us from the torment of the Fire.' (2:201) Amen.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Spending in the Way of God

It is indeed only God who has given man whatever he possesses. Man's life and all his belongings are the bounties given by God. The only befitting way man can express his gratitude to acknowledge this truth is by presenting everything he has in his possession at God's disposal. Spending a part of one's wealth in the way of God is only a symbolic expression of such an attitude. 

Whatever one earns is attributable to the fact that God has given man the physical and mental abilities to do so: hands to work with, eyes and tongue to see and speak with, mind to plan with. Moreover, He has given man to live in a world which is completely subservient to him. Everything in this world has been designed in such a manner that man can use it to the best of his advantage. If this were not the case, it would not have been possible for human beings to usefully employ the resources of this world. If seeds of were unable to germinate, but instead continued to languish like pebbles in the soil, man could not have obtained the flourishing crops he feeds on. Likewise, if nature had refused to play its subservient role, generating electricity would have become impossible; similarly all transportation facilities would have come to a standstill. The truth is that in the present world man survives and thrives only as a direct consequence of God's graciousness. The right return for this kindness is that man should spend his earnings in the way of God. He should use his wealth to help out the poor. He should spend his God-given wealth on God-proposed avenues.

The only spending that can qualify to be described as having been done in the way of God is one that is meant to please Him alone, not one that is done to earn fame, respect or reward. Man normally spends wealth to get away from the troubles of this world; wealth spent in the way of God is done to save one from the troubles of the hereafter.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

Spreading Evil the Indirect Way

The Qur'ān (31:17) requires us not only to stay away from evil, but also to prevent others from being involved in it. Evil can take different forms, and unless it is properly understood, it cannot be effectively checked. One form of evil is simple: it is the one which is blatant and is, therefore, unlikely to go unnoticed. A morally alert society would normally not allow evil in its obvious form to be promoted. However, it is the other form of evil – the one that creeps into the society slowly, hiding its devilish threat under the apparent garb of innocuity -- that can have a more devastating effect on an otherwise morally sound society because of its slow-poisoning effect. It is the responsibility of the religious leadership of a society to warn people against the grave consequences of the indirect evil. As in the case of virtue and goodness, evil too prospers if it is introduced gradually in an indirect manner. The reason why the strategy of gradual introduction of evil meets with more success is that it overcomes the immediate resistance of the conscience of the society so cleverly, that collective piety gets confused on the question whether there is anything wrong at all with the practice in question. Even religious people become doubtful. 'If it was really an evil why did God not condemn it clearly in His *shari'ah*?' might be an argument presented by some scholars. Thus, by intelligently mixing good with evil and creating confusion amongst the defenders of faith, the devil is able to find cracks in the society that enables it to threaten its moral fabric in a manner that was not possible through a more direct way.

One of the most striking examples of the 'success' of this devilish strategy in recent times can be seen in the proliferation of obscenity through the media of film and drama in Muslim societies. The whole idea of fiction-based characterizing of has been introduced in such a manner that people are given to view stories with men and women playing different roles. If properly produced, the presentation is so gripping for the viewers that they are glued to their screens until the very end of the show.

Since in many of the 'clean' films and dramas, the entire story is seemingly acceptable and, in some cases, reform-oriented, many good people find hardly anything bad in enjoying this 'innocuous' family entertainment. The truth, however, is that there have been few other more effective ways contrived by the devil than this to deprive our society of the true sense of morality. Indeed, there is no clear mention in the Qur'ān that drama and film are prohibited in Islam. However, that is how the entire scheme of *shari'ah* is: the basic principles have been mentioned and believers are encouraged to use their God-given intellect to apply the understanding of those principles in all those areas of application where the spirit of those principles is being violated. The intent of the *shari'ah* is after all not to just require believers to sheepishly follow the apparent form of a few injunctions. The real purpose is to plug all possible holes that Satan can exploit within us to lead us astray. The Qur'ān mentions this purpose thus:

And Allah wishes to turn to you in mercy, but those who follow their low desires wish that you should incline wholly towards evil. (4:27)

Thus, in order to look at the possibility of whether the above-mentioned means of entertainment should be viewed favourably in Islam, we should look at the injunctions of the Qur'ān where there is clear mention of the fact that the institution of marriage has to be respected (4:24 and 24:32), that there are close relatives specified with whom marriage cannot take place at all, (4:23) and that in case of the possibility of intermingling of opposite genders outside the circle of very close relatives, certain norms of decency have to be maintained (24:27-31). Moreover, the Qur'ān expects all believers to stay away from even the least possibility of extra-marital sex, (17:32) and wants to make sure that there should be no mention of an extra-marital affair in a Muslim society at all (24:4). Given the spirit of these teachings, how could it ever be imagined that Islam would allow men and women, strangers to each other, to come into contact, playing the roles of lovers and beloveds, husbands and wives, and thousands of believing men and women to view them without entertaining any thought whatsoever that this practice could be unacceptable in the eyes of their Creator?

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

The Call to Eternity

While life is indeed a priceless blessing, death puts an end to it, at least in this present, apparent world. How should a believer react to the phenomenon of death, especially when he has lost a close one? The question assumes considerable importance when the deceased appears to have received a ‘premature call’.

No death, it should be clearly borne in mind, is premature. The decision of the time of death of each soul is already taken long before he is even actually born. It is all a part of the divine scheme of the All Knowing God. Anyone, therefore, who dies in his twenties, for instance, has lived the true length of his life as much as the other, who has experienced a stay stretching over a period of a century or so. The former, as a consequence, would have ‘overstayed’ had he lived beyond his death-day; the latter would have died ‘too early’ had his departure been a few days earlier than what it actually turned out to be. Death of an individual should not, therefore, be carried beyond a reasonable expression of affection and sympathy for the deceased because, after all, it is only the consummation of an event, which was pre-planned and could not have been otherwise.

The decision of the time of death, moreover, is taken by none else except the Merciful, Benevolent God. A believing reader of the Qur’ān cannot escape noticing the overwhelming emphasis on these attributes of God. How can such a Magnanimous, Deeply Loving Creator thrust upon his creatures a time of departure from this life, when some other occasion could have been more appropriate? If that is not possible -- and indeed it is not -- then there is only one reasonable attitude a believer can adopt when he finds an incident actually appearing at an ‘inopportune time’: to conclude that his own intellect is incapable of appreciating the wisdom of God’s decision. As a matter of fact, on many occasions, enlightened by the later

events, we are able to correct our judgment about the timing of past events. The general principle always holds good, although on some other occasions we may not be able to catch the rationale of His Divine Wisdom. This complete confidence in His Wisdom and Mercy in all His acts pacifies, to a great extent, the tragedy of death.

What behaviour does God expect from His servants, apart from resolute patience, when death breaks the peace of an individual's routine life? It is quite obvious that the Merciful Creator wants to serve an effective notice to all those who have not received 'the call to eternity' as yet to remember death as consciously as possible. Man has been put into the trial of this short and uncertain life without any prior idea of its duration. This uncertainty of its length of time is a blessing, for it helps in keeping a true believer alert and vigilant. The colourful attractions of the world have the obvious advantage of being readily available. However, they threaten the possibility of an individual to take up the challenge of the trial of life prudently. Man is firmly gripped by the clutches of this world. Death of a close one tends to remind him of life's uncertainty and to help him to break out from the firm trap of the world if he is conscious enough. There are, unfortunately, very few who take this message of death seriously enough to be blessed with its real virtue.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

The Citizens of Paradise

It is only God whose discretion holds supreme in this world. No one else's power to decide has, in reality, even a semblance of authority. However, for the sake of trial, God has sanctioned freedom to man, who has been given considerable liberty in an otherwise completely enslaved existence, to see how he uses it: does he opt for the realistic choice of submitting to God's -- the real Master's -- will, or does he get carried away by the excitement of his undeserved liberty and, as a consequence,

resort to a rebellious attitude.

God has prepared paradise for those who, despite possessing many other options, choose to take the straight path; those who volunteer to fear God even on occasions when fear is not apparently warranted; those who, despite wielding full authority surrender all their authority to God.

When such people are provided with sustenance through the medium of some apparent material source, they acknowledge that it is in fact God Who has arranged it for them. They have the liberty to be unfair to others, but they check this inclination for fear of God. Opportunities of demonstrating anger, hatred, and revenge come their way, but they choose to exercise restraint on these occasions, and prefer to forgive and hold peace. God allows them to be praised lavishly by others, but they find solace in remaining humble. God makes them wealthy, but instead of spending their wealth to satisfy their vain desires, they find it more satisfying to spend in the ways He has desired. They follow the way of God instead of following the way of their own whims; instead of living for their own sake, they live for the sake of God.

The serene world of paradise is indeed for such people. They make themselves subservient to God with their own free will; they choose to remain constrained within the divinely ordained boundaries, despite having the freedom to remove these constraints.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

The Keep it Simple Rule and Islam

Are God's expectations from humans easy to fulfill? If they are, should we not let others do what they are doing and not disturb them unnecessarily by declaring that what they are doing may be un-Islamic? Also, should we not let non-Muslims remain what they are? Is it not an unnatural expectation from them to convert to a completely new faith? If we expect non-Muslims to

convert, why should not Muslims be expected to conform to the truth within their own faith? Is changing from one religious view to another not difficult? If it is, how is then Islam easy to follow? Why can we not follow the Keep-It-Simple rule in Islam?

God wants to make things easy for us. This is what He has to say: “Allah desires ease for you; He does not desire hardship for you.” (2:185) The Prophet (pbuh) strongly urged his followers to “make things easy and don’t make them difficult. Give them good news and don’t scare them away.”² However, ease in religion has to be managed in the way God has ordained it. It should not be mistaken for casualness. Here are the outlines of the easy way, as I understand it, that God wants us to follow:

i) One should always remain open to truth. It is only in that way that one acquires true faith. Laziness in matters of truth is an offence, and unjustifiable stubbornness is an inexcusable crime. If one refuses to take interest in the truth simply because one is already attached to some other ideology and one does not want a new one to disturb one, it is not acceptable. If one is confused, in the process of comparing the contestants for truth, God would accept it as a valid excuse.

ii) There is no Muslim vs non-Muslim divide in the eyes of God. No one is at a disadvantage in this trial of life. Muslims are expected to be open to truth quite as much as non-Muslims are. Those non-Muslims, who know that the message of Islam is from God and are still spurning it out of arrogance, are criminals (*kāfir*) in the eyes of their Creator. Likewise is the case of Muslims who are guilty of a similar crime in any aspect of the truth that comes from God. As long as a person is confused about whether a certain message is from God or not, he is not guilty. The ultimate decision on all such matters will be taken, thankfully, by the All-Knowing God Himself.

iii) In matters of practice, the rule is that you are expected to follow the truth as much as is possible. God has promised that His expectations are simple. However, we need to understand them in order to follow them. That strategy would ensure that things are kept simple.

iv) In matters of new findings on religion, science, or any other discipline, we again need to remain open. Not everyone is

interested in everything, but if someone tells me that what I am doing right now is not acceptable to my God, then I cannot take it lightly. Even in non-religious matters, once we jump into a discussion, we must behave as truth-seeking believers and not like truth-spurning *kāfirs*.

v) God has promised that He shall not make any soul accountable for anything more than what his potential is. He has also promised that He shall forgive people who repent after realizing that what they were doing was wrong and that He shall punish only those who continued to insist on a wrong, criminal attitude knowingly. What better keep-it-simple approach could there be than this?

vi) One of the things I am expected to do as a good believer is to correct those who are closely involved with me. Likewise, I should allow others to influence me positively whenever I am wrong. Such an attitude of mutual correction is a demonstration of the believers' concern for the welfare of each other. In no way does it demonstrate an unnecessary interference in the affairs of others. In fact, not doing so would be indicative of a lack of interest in the spiritual and moral welfare of the other person.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

The Message of Death

A pilot of our air force once narrated to me a personal experience of a lifetime: one that shook his imagination to the core and transformed his subsequent behaviour in life completely. He recounted:

On a routine flight, the engine of my aircraft developed some complications which I was unable to locate and correct. Frantic messages to the control tower proved fruitless. Very soon the plane was accelerating towards the ground. I was convinced that my few moments of survival were ticking away fast. As death stared at me with lustful

eyes, I could see the ‘performance’ of my life flashing across my mind in those very last few seconds. I was a terrified and an ashamed witness to my own misdeeds. I could see no one around to soothe and comfort me – none of those assuring and reassuring heroes, friends, and relatives who used to help avoid the discomfoting question of death and its consequences. The ordeal was terrible; the chances of survival nil!

... It was a new life for me when I was miraculously saved: it was incredible indeed. I forced my way out of the cockpit with some minor injuries and the most important message I could possibly learn: life is too precious to be wasted in the meaningless pursuits of self-gratification. Thereafter, my attitude has undergone a complete transformation. Now I try to make sure that I learn about the religion of God as much as I can, and practice it sincerely. I hope my Gracious Creator forgives my shameful past when my unavoidable day of meeting Him would arrive.

All of us may not experience a near-death experience before the real one. We do, however, receive enough reminders of death in the news of the departure of others. We have only two options: either to sincerely prepare for the ultimate by bowing before the message of God, or to avoid contemplating the idea of death until it actually arrives. The consequence of the first choice will be lasting happiness in the future; the second option may result in an uncertain pleasure in this world, but will result in a definite disaster in the next one. The choice is ours!

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

This Worldly Life- a Trial for Man

The worldly life, which is a very short duration of existence

between birth and death, is only a trial, nothing more and nothing less. Whatever different phases man experiences here, whether in the form of success or failure, are all different manifestations of this trial. The culmination of this life, however, would herald the beginning of another existence where death will be an entity.

The Qur'ān invites man to lead a life which would destine him to a life of eternal pleasure. It warns him that a failure to earn a place in everlasting happiness would lead him inevitably to an abode of unending ignominy and pain. All human beings, it informs us, are travelling along either of the two paths---the one that leads to heaven or the one that has hell waiting at the end.

The only way a man can ensure entry into heaven, is to adopt the life of the hereafter as the ultimate ideal in his present life. All worldly decisions should conform to this ideal. His life should be an adequate testimony to the fact that he keeps his 'future' more dear to him than his 'present'. Whether he is carrying out his business, discharging family obligations, dealing with fellow human beings, or responding to the call for prayers, his overwhelming preference for the next life should be clearly evident.

On the contrary, if an individual is so deeply engrossed in worldly affairs, that religious considerations---nay, considerations of the next life---are relegated to be secondary, all planning is confined to the uncertain present, success and failure are gauged by the worldly barometer, he is travelling on the highway to hell. The verdict of the Qur'ān is:

“Whosoever desires the transitory things of this world, We readily grant them---such things as We please, to such persons as We will; in the end, [however], We have provided hell for them, they will burn therein, disgraced and rejected. Those who desire the Hereafter and strive for it with necessary effort, and have faith---they are the ones whose efforts would find favour [with their Lord].” (17:18-19)

Let us consciously adopt the way to heaven and avoid being consigned to the unbearable pains of Hell.

(Dr Khalid Zaheer)

A Knack – It is not

Good and evil are not alien to man. He is doubtless equipped with a sharp vision to separate the former from the latter. More often than not, he strikes the right choice between right and wrong. Even where he fails, he is found to have another good sense. This sense helps him appreciate the correct choice when someone else distinguishes between good and evil. While he appears to be instinctively inclined to good in order to personify it, he seems to experience strong repulsion to evil – so much so that he wants to eliminate it altogether. His adherence to good makes him feel relieved, contented, and humble. And his submission to evil causes him to feel low, embarrassed and arrogant. However, perpetual adherence to either virtue or vice determines the course of his life before too long. Little does he deviate from this course once it is set by his conscious compliance with either of them – he is then destined to reach the destination defined by his own actions.

The Holy *Qur'ān* says that the Lord has shown him both these ways. In addition to blessing him with eyes, tongue and lips, he also blessed him with the knowledge of right and wrong (90:9-10). At more than one place, the *Qur'ān* reinforces that man knows both ways and it is up to him to choose whatever he may wish; he can either become thankful by taking the correct course of life or be unthankful by treading the path of evil (76:3). The Lord indeed has inspired to him the boundaries to respect and the vices to avoid that lie beyond them (91:7-8). The assertions of the *Qur'ān* can hardly be disputed since they depict a phenomenon commonly observed. The tradition of the majority of mankind seems to be pregnant with narratives of how they have cherished the good virtues and loathed the despicable ways of evil. The annals of history record the awe inspiring anecdotes of the sacrifices made for upholding the virtue of justice, and eradicating the evil of oppression. From a simple shoemaker to a grand emperor each has made unforgettable contributions to the

preservation of virtues and elimination of evil. It is therefore highly improbable that we can put down the assertions of the Holy Book regarding the human knowledge of right and wrong.

Despite our instinctive impulses to comply with our knowledge of good and bad, the Holy *Qur'ān* enjoins upon us to remind each other. True it is that we have the knowledge; we nonetheless have other frailties that obstruct perpetual adherence to good. The Holy Book recognizes that to have this knowledge does not mean that we have acquired a *knack* and that we are now preconditioned to do good (103:3). For if we were conditioned, there would have been no reward for us in the Hereafter. To confuse knowledge and even experience with conditioning is to overlook the central problem in most issues facing mankind on the face of this earth. Unless hypnotized, man will of necessity carry out good works by his own free volition. To galvanize the volition into the favor of good, one needs to be reminded constantly. It is a duty prescribed for us – to help others and be helped in order to lead a life that is virtuous.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

The Reflection of Sincere Faith

As we repose faith in the Lord, our immediate desire is to be what our Lord wants us to be. Awed by His Mercy and Grandeur, we surrender before the religion He has revealed. With veritable sincerity of heart, we wish that this religion must govern our life such that no aspect of it should escape the religious directives. Encapsulated thus within the confines of religion, this life should exude unmistakable conformity with these directives and even more so with the spirit underlying them.

This is only true a reflection of our sincere faith since to disregard the spirit is actually to throw the directive back in the face of the Master. Any act performed to the exclusion of the spirit is liable to attract Divine wrath instead of gaining favor. As we prostrate before the Lord, our heart should also prostrate, and

as we give away money in charity, we should also truly acknowledge the right of the recipients in our hard earned wealth. As much as there is need to observe the form of the directive, there is need to comply with its substance. Without substance, any duty performed is a mere physical exercise that may bring worldly benefit with no share in the reward of the Hereafter. For the express directives, therefore, the right and true approach is to follow them in letter and spirit.

As for the spheres of human activity where we have not been given any express directive, this sincere faith again goads us on to carefully decide a definite course of action. Once decided, it insists that we should abide by it. To take our religious decisions, which we sometimes make, lightly has also been condemned by the Almighty (the *Qur'ān*, 2:187). To contravene what we feel is God's wish is no less in severity than disregard the explicit directives of God. Besides, it is the obvious requirement of our faith in Allah that we endeavor to find the right path in activities not directly addressed by religion, and stick to it at all cost. Without reflection, the wrong path chosen may cripple and incapacitate us to follow even the explicit directives of religion. A little mistake here may precipitate circumstances of profoundly undesirable consequences. Each step should be trekked with caution and care.

The knowledge of the entire religion should come to our aid to make the befitting decision in such situations. The Islamic scholars, who have expertise in religious sciences, should be resorted to in this regard though their help in understanding the explicit directives is equally warranted. The fact that they spend day and night in understanding the word of God confers on them the privilege to guide the masses both about the explicit directives, and the issues not directly touched upon. They keenly observe the spirit present in the specific directives of the *Sharī'ah* while giving their humble verdict. With a vision sharpened by the revelation, they are better placed to help us choose the right path whenever we stand in confusion on the crossroads.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

To humble before Knowledge

The traditional approach to education in Islamic Sciences is the most appealing to my mind. The teaching method of personal tutelage seems to fit not only the psychic structure of the students but also conforms to the spiritual make up of the teachers, who wish to transmit the invaluable treasure of knowledge. In the maze of insuperable enigmas, teachers guide their pupils how to find the way out. In the unfathomable ocean of delusional questions, they take their hands and swim to the surface to help them breathe clarity and certitude.

The tunnel of ignorance which the 'toddlers' are liable to trip up in is lit by the enduring flame fueled by the compassion of the teachers. As long as the ability to learn is accompanied by the insatiable desire for knowledge, the compassion remains in a perpetual state of burning. Despite the fact that many a time the teachers provide for the sustenance of their students, they do not feel crossed when their premises are dauntlessly questioned and their conclusions are audaciously challenged by their students. The more questions are debated, the more intensely the flame burns – and sheds light on the hitherto hidden aspect of the problem. Having a first hand knowledge of the personal inhibitions of students puts the teachers in a very favorable position vis-à-vis communication of knowledge is concerned. More often than not, an impregnable bridge soon comes into being to let the traffic of ideas moves about speedily in highly sophisticated parlance – which only aim at utmost precision and exactitude. The theme which was obscured in the mist of confusion, of surety, comes into the veritable sunlight.

The expedition of learning which begins by studying the scholarly masterpieces of the earliest great Muslims ends with the investigation of the works of the contemporary scholars. Each and every important sentence is debated, and the themes presented are voraciously devoured in sheer hunger of knowledge. Objective analysis and free inquiry into the sources signify the hallmark of this expedition. While this is done, time is taken to understand and appreciate the works, and due regards are paid to the authors. Whatever discipline is studied, the

teacher stands at the focal point of this activity. To sit before him is to humble before knowledge – that always eludes the bigheaded and makes friends with the humble.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

When we get hurt

As Muslims, we have a strong belief that the world has been designed by the Most Wise and sagacious Lord. Everything that finds place in His marvelous work has a pre-determined role to play. Everything, from the small ant to the huge hippopotamus, is supposed to carry out the work ordained by the Almighty. The case of pain, that we sometimes have to endure at the hands of our friends and fellows, is no different. It in fact lays the basis over which the humane structure of humanity is erected.

Doubtless, the pain sometimes can be very distressing and can also rip us apart so much so that we feel awfully weak. The more we think, the more we get depressed. The memory of our love for our offender, on the one hand, augments the pangs of pain and, on the other, fills our eyes with warm drops of water. It is not the end of a relationship that kills us but *of trust*. Even for the trust, we ourselves are to be blamed for we put this trust in our offender. Each effort to stop the pain simply fails because it is the ‘source’ – the fountain of emotions and feelings – that is wounded when trust vanishes. At times, this pain may also compel us to resort to despicable ways to heal our wounded ego; to react and inflict – or at least wish to inflict – the same pain on our offender.

It is obvious that these feelings are natural. However, what needs to be appreciated is that their excess is not warranted by Islam. To feel weak is natural but to lose hope is to show disbelief. The vision with which a believer is blessed for his strong faith in Allah definitely helps him learn from whatever unexpected agony he has to suffer. The troubles that befall us because of our relations are often very ticklish in their nature

since any immature action would put a check to once a pleasant and friendly connection. Try as we may to hold back, there is a great chance that we will react. But this reaction should never exceed the moral limits stipulated by the Almighty. We have been created as moral beings, and morality we must adhere to, in all circumstances no matter what.

The lesson that we should learn from our pain is that every one stands in complete equality with others in 'the sight of pain'. The sorrow and grief that we experience when we get hurt is exactly the same that any other person will have to endure under similar circumstances. To suffer pain in this world is inevitable; but to compose ourselves in such circumstances is equally imperative. Instead of losing heart, we should seek refuge in Allah immediately and share with Him what agony has afflicted us; instead of becoming morose and sullen to pour out our wrath on our subordinates, we should learn from our pain and improve our own character. We must realize that any impetuous act – whether it be a result of hopelessness or reaction – on our part is very likely to cause the same distress to some other people with whom we stand in a relationship of trust. Neither should we extinguish the flame of our own life out of hopelessness nor should we unload the consequences of our agonies, out of reaction, on our spouses or our children or whatever poor creature we are able to lay hands on.

The Almighty has asserted at scores of places in the Holy *Qur'ān* that believers must never let go of their relations. Keeping the bondage intact is highly desirable in the religion of Islam. The Holy *Qur'ān* praises those who give in to win over their relations. On the contrary, it has condemned severing ties with relatives and other relations. This practice is indeed tantamount to spreading disorder in land. A believer must remain vigilant not to commit anything that will ultimately attract the rage of the Most Just and Powerful Creator.

The soothing reality that should help us stand upright is that every trouble we have to encounter is in fact destined to earn us reward in the Hereafter. They are sure to rid us of our sins and raise us to one level up in the cadres of God-fearing believers. The Holy Prophet (sws) is reported to have said:

No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor hurt, nor distress

befalls a Muslim, even if it was a prick that he receives from a thorn but Allah expiates some of his sins for that. (Bukhārī: No, 5210)

Therefore, it is only human to feel sad when we are hurt. But this hurt should not induce us to diminish the love and compassion we used to cherish for our innocent offender. We must always strive to stand one step above our fellows to keep the relationship move on smoothly. To sum up, the key to better relations is indeed to endure not to inflict, to give not to demand, and to forgive not to avenge.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

Epitomizing the Moral Ideals

The time of the great fair had come again. I would have been deprived of the tremendous opportunity to view it had I not left home to buy for my father some medicines from the market. The heat was on; rhythmic sounds of the drums, a long series of outstretched golden shawls¹, devout youth with red lips² and their lively dance with bare feet, all revived the picture that roams before my eyes when I ponder on the damage caused by mysticism. The devoted young fellows were headed for the shrine of *Miyān Mīr*³ to humbly enshroud his grave with those

1. These shawls are carried to the shrine of a Sufi and laid on his tomb as a symbol of respect and veneration.

2. Allusion is to the custom of chewing betel leaves with catechu on such occasions of which the juice reddens the lips.

3. *Miyān Mīr* (d:1635) is a renowned Sufi who belong to the *Qādariyyah Silsilah*. He pledged *Bay'at* at the hand of *Khizar Savistānī*. After a considerable period of training and making accomplishments in this *Silsilah*, he came to Lahore in the era of the *Mughal* emperor *Jalal-ul-Dīn Akbar*. He considered the *Sharī'ah* to be binding and himself adhered to it. He was most respected by emperors of his time, *Jahāngīr* and *Shāh Jahān*. (Saleem Hasan Mirza, *Hazḍrat*

sacred shawls on the annual 'Urs (anniversary celebrations). Their dance would turn into wild and frantic African rumba if some ladies happen to watch the devotees from over their balconies. It is very likely that one dancer should lose his senses and faint owing to dancing 'faithfully': this is indeed desirable and commendable; because he, it is erroneously believed, gets a chance in his faintness to see and converse with the Great Mystic, *Miyān Mīr*. Securing awe and applaud from people standing on both sides of the road, the procession moved on to the holy shrine carrying the shawls with utmost respect. Generous as people were on the way, they would drop into the shawls currency of varying denominations, though one should not suffer from the illusions that they pay *Zakāh* as much devoutly that is imposed on them by their True Master.

A more despicable picture comes to view as one enters the precinct of the shrine. It is always packed to the fullest at this time of the year with the mixed gathering of males and females of all ages. Oddly enough, sentimental enthusiasm mesmerizes the Muslim ladies more effectively who, with a lot of make up on, come to attend the ceremonial event in gay dresses. This event also provides to the forlorn lovers a wonderful opportunity to deceive their families and obtain a chance to meet. Side by side, the business of prostitution finds yet another safe haven to be transacted in a place that is originally intended to be holy. In many circles of the *Qawwāl* (vocalists), tribute is paid to the mystic in words that entail transgression in terms of polytheism. Many ladies are observed to ambulate around the tomb of *Miyān Mīr* much like the way the Muslims circumambulate around the House of the Lord. Away from this frenzied state of affairs, the spiritual disciples are observed to sit in various groups; some are found preoccupied with struggles to cross the boundaries of mind and body with the help of marijuana, and others are heard to give a vent to the slogan *Haiderī Qalandrī*⁴ while enjoying the hemp they prepare to make most of the event. Thus, the

Miyān Mīr, (Lahore: Allied Press, 1405 Hijrah)).

4. *Haiderī* has reference to *Alī* (rta); his second name was *Haydar*. *Qalandrī* perhaps refers to the title of another Sufi, *Lāl Shahbāz Qalandar*. This expression is a typical slogan of *Majzūb* Sufis and indicates that they are inebriated.

ceremony, with all its activities, runs quite averse to the scheme of the religion of Islam.

The Lord has blessed us with as clean and fine a soul as a transparent object is. Like glass is left with the traces of our fingers – if nothing else – once we touch it, our soul gets contaminated with even the slightest of blemish when we expose it to evil influences. The Holy *Qur'ān* vehemently proclaims that the Almighty wants us to come back to Him with a cleansed and purified soul. He has created us in His image. We are supposed to preserve this image at every cost. Our life may become a bit dull, replete with the treadmill of routine, and devoid of much fun but we need to adhere to the image that is all good and exclusive of evil in all forms and faces.

As Muslims, we strongly believe that this world is transitory in nature, and that a Day is soon to come when the good will be separated from the bad; the first pocket will be rewarded fabulously and the second will be cast into the abyss of destruction in accordance with the sublime principles of perfect justice. In addition to this, what we need to always keep in view is the criterion introduced by the Holy *Qur'ān* that will demarcate an evident line between the good and the bad. The Book of Allah asserts that good is indeed the person who saves his soul from all contaminations and nurtures what is decent in it. In other words, success in the afterlife is destined for those who succeed to purify their soul in this life period provided to them. To quote the words of the Holy *Qur'ān*:

He succeeded who purified his soul and remembered his Lord and offered the Prayer. But you prefer the life of this world when the Hereafter is better and more lasting.
(87:14-7)

At another place this idea has been explicated in the following words:

He succeeded who purified his soul and he failed who contaminated his soul. (91:9-10)

After studying the Holy *Qur'ān*, the picture of a believer that springs to mind is like a humble man who stays miles away from activities that are likely to undermine the purity of his heart. He

knows that the time he has now must be spent wisely and not to be dissipated in trivial engagements. He does not loathe the members of the opposite sex nor does he endeavor to destroy their reputation. He extends to them the same respect as he does to his parents and siblings. He firmly believes in the principle of lowering gaze and preserving modesty. His eyes are always set on the reward of the Hereafter instead of the pleasures of this world. In his heart and mind, he is fully convinced that there is no intermediary between Allah and him as the Book of Allah has stressed. In addition, he knows that every person, in the Hereafter, shall be judged on an individual basis and none will be able to transfer to him some good deeds or share his burden. The realization of these facts definitely plants within him a deep sense of accountability that compels him to lead a responsible life in this world. He faces boldly the perils of life taking them as an integral part of the trial of life and never resorts to drugs to overcome the obstacles.

On the other hand, if he is placed at the helm of the state affairs, he makes arrangements to ensure that citizens are not caused to go astray and ultimately be a party to spreading disorder in land. Without restraining their freedom to practice the religion they wish to, he issues necessary orders and commandments that morality is not sacrificed under any circumstances. His foremost priority is to help conduct every ceremony in a manner as endorsed by the dictates of his sense of morality. He ensures that people are able to nicely discharge their responsibilities – which they perceive to be their religious responsibilities. In a nutshell, a true believer, whatever sphere of life he is placed in, epitomizes the moral ideals by leading and helping others lead a good moral life.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

The Lesson I Learned

Much as I wish to live a happy life I am compelled to live a

miserable one. My aspirations are shattered and my dreams are eroded beyond repair. The peace and serenity I plan to bring to my life is somehow impeded by the irony of fate. One after the other obstacles keep popping up, eventually leaving me weary and tired. Paradoxically, the more perseverance I demonstrate, the more trying circumstances I am put through. Increased patience, instead of attracting the favors of Heaven, adds to my misery and grief. So much so, the friends and the relations I trust and hold dear seem to have little time for my recurring problems. The earth appears to be narrow despite all its spaciousness while the Almighty seems to be so apathetic to inequity. As I deliberate, this hum of complaints turns into a full-blown pandemonium engendering in me feelings of hopelessness and confusion. My desperation reaches to the extent that I clutch my head between my fists to stop the echo when suddenly a voice whispers in my ears and says:

‘This is so typical of humans. They jump so quickly to conclusions no matter if it is their Creator and Cherisher they are going to pronounce a judgment against. How could it be that their Master would be ignorant of their circumstances? It is He who places some in difficulty and some in prosperity according to His own ordained scheme. The underlying objective, however remains to test them to see which one of them is best in deeds. The truth is that nothing can ever escape the watchful eye of the omnipresent and no notion passes through a person’s heart but He is aware of it. The fact that must be appreciated is that He is completely devoid of the hastiness that man is brimful with. He neither rushes to punish the wrongdoers nor does He hurry to reward the pious. His scheme is firm and His strategy is based on an all-embracing wisdom and sagacity. He has indeed laid down many objectives for the pains and agonies that a person has to suffer in this world:

- a) To shield him from greater misery (18:74, 18:79),
- b) To give him the opportunity to earn reward by showing patience (3:142, 76:12),
- c) To make him mend his ways (30:41),
- d) To punish him for his misdoings (42:30).

Hence, if it is not to prevent him from attracting more problems then it is for affording him a chance to show

perseverance in order to win fabulous rewards. If it is not for cleansing him of his sins, it is for him to suffer punishment in this very world to avoid the greater one in the Hereafter. In a nutshell, as one test fulfills the first objective, the next begins to achieve the second one. Thus move on the wheel of life always in favor of the rider provided he understands and appreciates the scheme of the Almighty by surrendering to His will in all circumstances.

Another fact that a believer must keep in mind is that the Almighty has ordained that relief shall immediately follow hardships (94:5-6). He should be hopeful that ease would replace difficulty when the appointed time comes. The virtue of patience if adhered to will illuminate his path to help him cruise through difficulties to his destination. No doubt, there come times in a person's life when the flame of this virtue flickers and a sudden upsurge of emotional weariness endeavors to extinguish it for good. Then the Almighty has provided him with another weapon to protect and nourish it. A prayer rekindles the flame of hope and gives the seeker strength and courage to better combat the tough circumstances. He should place all his feelings and emotions in his stretched hands and present them humbly before his Master. The Ever Merciful would surely accept the 'gift' and always return the seeker with a better one...

You who have done great things,
O God, who is like You?
You who have made me see many
troubles and calamities
will revive me again;
from the depths of the earth
You will bring me up again.
You will increase my honor,
and comfort me once again.

(Psalms, 71:20-1)

(Jhangeer Hanif)

To My Sisters in God

Superstitious! Coward! Old fashioned! are the words that still echoed in her head. Her face was soaked with warm drops that she had shed during the past couple of hours while she had prostrated herself before the Almighty time and again in this interval. She did not know how long she had been up collecting and presenting before Allah the broken pieces of her soft heart which was brutally hurt by the ruthless comments her friends made at the college this morning. She had always been kind to them but they would always pass low comments about her attire and for her fear and concern about the Hereafter. Her only crime was that she could not leave her head and chest uncovered like them and that she could not put on skin tight almost transparent garments. She had always found it hard to show interest in the topics they would discuss. She knew that modesty was her real asset and that inner-purification was the real objective of her life in this world. How could she go against the values that the Almighty had inculcated within herself? How could she undertake to do something that her conscience would vehemently disapprove of? Now at this moment of the dark night when she saw that she could not cope with the situation anymore, she resolved that she's had enough. She must quit going to the college and shut herself up from the rest of the world!

Such an event may take place in the life of many people with little change in the details of the scenario. But they are often led to arrive at the same decision because of the morbidly obnoxious treatment they have to receive for opting to live their lives according to the injunctions put forth by the Almighty. This is awfully ironic, that the world plays so insensitive a role to the sincere feelings of those people who wish to take all of them to the road that directly leads to eternal bliss. It is sad that those who must be respected and given an ear to hear soft words of good advice are mistreated and branded as inferior.

This writer does not have an iota of doubt in his mind that these circumstances are fair and just but his understanding of religion compels him to humbly present the complete picture before all his sisters in God so that they could know that 'quitting' is not what their Lord as well as this *Ummah* expects

from them.

What they must realize is that the unbecoming behavior that their fellow human beings adopt towards their sincere feelings is nothing new and has been so since ages. When we peruse the Holy *Qur'ān* or even study history we find that good souls always had to face hatred for showing unconditional love, hurling stones for offering the Garden of Paradise, and harsh comments for advancing words of wisdom and admonition. This however was their marvelous attribute that they never gave up and remained steadfast unless they either changed the world or sacrificed their lives for the sake of this holy mission. This quality is no doubt hard to imbibe and retain but very desirable for those who undertake to swim in the direction explored by their conscience instead of drifting along in the immoral current with other people. Further deliberation here reveals that while avoiding the circumstances resolves the crisis a person is currently facing for the time being, it allows a minor problem to eventually become a major one. To put it in other words, this attitude would surely permit the evil to entangle each and every person on the face of this earth till no one is left to proclaim the greatness of Allah. It is precisely for this reason that the *Qur'ān* has urged us to assume the status of the exhorter as well as of the exhorted so that the good can flourish and the evil be put in check. The *Qur'ān* thus reads:

Believing men and believing women are friends to each other. They enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong.
(9:71)

Another point that must be understood very clearly is about the nature of the test we are put through in this world. This life is not supposed to be a path adorned with roses that someone would have to tread until death overtakes them. The truth of the matter is that we have no choice but to prick our feet with thorns that have been scattered by the Almighty Himself on our way in the form of financial problems, natural calamities and humans themselves. We, therefore, must not suffer from the illusion that we will win entitlement to Paradise without being tested in this world. This idea has been expounded upon by the *Qur'ān* in the following words:

Did you think that you would enter Paradise without Allah testing those of you who fought hard [in His cause] and remained steadfast? (3:142)

The implication being that when a believer undertakes to combat evil for the sake of Allah, he is not showered with rose petals. On the contrary, he has to face great difficulties and full-blown problems. But if he remains stoical and steadfast, he stands eligible to be blessed with everlasting life in the Garden of Paradise.

As far as the expectations of this *Ummah* are concerned, they must know that it wants them to become a role model for all women across the world. Everyone knows that there has been much hullabaloo over women's rights in the last couple of centuries and much of the blame was placed on the religion of Islam for violation thereof. Feminists clamorously put forward that Islam hampers the achievements that women can otherwise accomplish in every sphere of life. Although, it is a baseless allegation that the fanatics have placed on Islam in their struggle to renounce every religion that would endorse moral limits, many people have gone astray because what they see in practice also substantiates the veracity of the allegation. Innumerable articles have been written to refute the claims of the feminists. But this alone won't work. We must let the world see that a Muslim woman while observing all the injunctions of Islam can achieve astronomical targets that others would dare not to commence at all.

Obviously, this business necessitates that Muslim women be as daring as to challenge evil in its makeshift safe-haven and as bold as to overthrow all the absurdly fabricated claims of the feminists. They must be creative enough to introduce new chapters in the field of fine arts and as much intelligent as to make revolutionary discoveries in the field of science while keeping the Islamic attributes that make them unmatched ornament.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

Repentance

There is no denying the fact that man has made tremendous progress in every sphere of life. The last couple of centuries have been of immense importance in this regard. Scientists introduced a new era in the history of man making a break-through in every branch of science. The nature of this progress was such that with each step that man took towards development, he came closer to the conclusion of a Godless world. Material prosperity dazzled him so immensely that he turned almost blind to observe the stark reality to which every particle of this world bears witness. The intellectuals of the world made an absurd blunder because they ignored the simple fact that the knowledge of the entire cosmos – something beyond the reach of man – was a prerequisite to comprehend the underlying cause of the world's creation. Although, this scientific atheism, which awed many people, was later done away with completely when new research showed that the mechanical interpretation of the universe was nothing more than a fallacy, material advancement that science helped man added to the toughness of his trial and test through under the divine scheme of Allah, the Almighty.

Everyone would agree that while new technological innovations have made our life much more comfortable. They have given a quiet way for evil to creep into every fundamental unit (home) of our society. Electronic media has surpassed print media in this regard since the former is much more interactive and alluring than the later. Every society is indeed sensitive to evil in its blatant form, but not always of this evil which spreads slowly but surely in the disguise of 'need of the hour'. It is usually not possible to assess the slow poisoning effects of this quiet evil initially but, as time passes, it changes the whole course of a person's life. Thus, a once innocent person indulges in activities he himself never imagined¹. Ironically, it is often

1. This writer does not opine that media is the only factor that has given rise to evil. There are indeed other factors as well, for instance, non-provision of justice, the difficulties one has to face in gratifying one's basic desires legally, inequitable distribution of wealth etc. They equally cause a person to lose his equanimity and resort to despicable

difficult to realize the misfortune till the octopus entangles the victim from top to bottom. Then, the person feels like the scattered pieces of a broken glass which can not be put together to make the genuine person again. Satan, who played the previous game skillfully, now begins to play another one even more tactfully to fully achieve his ends. The pitiable creature is made to see the Ever Merciful Creator, who is much near, miles away from him: a distance he feels ashamed to tread. The nature of the mistakes he has made is so grave that it is foolish to still expect forgiveness from the Almighty. He suddenly begins to hate himself for the filth he has got himself soaked with. How worthless my life is! This treacherous animal does not deserve to live.

As pointed out earlier, we have been put through a test in this world by the Almighty. The very nature of this test requires that we subsist in this world no matter how trying the circumstances we have to face or we shall run quite averse to the underlying purpose of the world's creation. This is why suicide has vehemently been condemned by Islam. The point that needs to be kept in mind is that while we are supposed to follow the Good and avoid the Evil throughout our life, we are never expected to live a perfect life. If we had been immune to evil influences, we would not have been subjected to a test since the essence of it entails that there should be full-blown difficulties and also potential opportunities at the same time. According to the verdict of the *Qur'ān*, those who fear the Almighty shall get through this test successfully. They shall be blessed with their Lord's favor and forgiveness on the Last Day. In the words of the *Qur'ān*:

For those who feared the Lord without having seen Him,
there is indeed 'forgiveness and a great reward'. (67:12)

The implication is clear that those who fear their Lord will falter but since this fear of Him induces them to repent and mend their ways each time they error, they shall meet with their Lord's favor and forgiveness on the Last Day. It is, therefore concluded here that though our mistakes should bring tears to our eyes and

ways. The point that needs to be appreciated here is that the media, in recent times, has worked like fuel to the fire. As for the plus points of the media, they are duly recognized here.

feelings of sadness to our heart, they must never dissuade us from starting our journey yet again with ever new strength and courage.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

Unto Him shall We Return

Whether it was a big bang that brought our world into existence or something else, the bitter truth is that we are living in a place full of misery and suffering. The torment that men inflict on each other is nothing comparable to the torment inflicted by the natural calamities and disasters. Of course, it is easy to explain away the hard facts of hundreds of thousands of people massacred in a bloody war or the innumerable casualties suffered in a terrorist attack. Man is evil incarnate! He is egocentric, envious and devilish! But what about the natural catastrophes?

The perennial problem of evil has pervaded our philosophical literature since ages. Obviously, it is not possible to deny the bare fact that evil permeates the entire world we subsist in. In one form or another, we have to encounter it very many times throughout our life. There is no denying that good is also found around us, and that the bounties of nature mesmerize us once we look for them. However, the prominent form that evil takes is manifest to all people – whether intelligent or dull minded. Therefore, despite the abundance of good, the problem of evil has always posed a big question to mankind.

Various interpretations which man has been led to indeed give no real solace to us. For example, to equate evil with lack of knowledge, and knowledge with knack is the most perplexing problem of its own kind¹. Man is of course neither innately ignorant nor does he get conditioned to function *mechanically* once he obtains knowledge. The universal truths of justice, honesty, and veracity are evident to all people. It is quite

1. Allusion is to the views of Plato.

possible that difference of opinion should arise on very subtle points while adhering to these universal truths. However, the majority of mankind has always cherished these truths, and upheld them at the expense of their lives. Furthermore, this equation gives us no clue as how to unfold the underlying meaning of the natural catastrophes that befall mankind. Of course, the evil that seems to emanate from the works of God is what the central problem is at hand. And it is awfully absurd to entertain, in the slightest degree, the notion of ignorance on the part of God for otherwise He would be no God in actuality. Therefore, the ignorance-evil notion leaves us in the middle of nowhere.

Undeniably, the problem apparently is resolved by a so-called persuasive explanation that each evil is in fact good in the light of the overall universal natural laws and orders². To know the coherence of nature is to appreciate the ultimate good in every manifestation of evil. Good and evil are relative to man, and indicate nothing positive considered in themselves. Therefore, what our reason says bad is not bad as regards the orders and laws of universal nature but only as regards the laws of our own nature. This explanation doubtlessly places us in a broader spectrum, and helps us see the ultimate good in the evil that befalls us. It insists that the all-encompassing divine sight envisions good in all the evil around us. We need not despair and feel low. Good may elude us but it does not escape the world altogether.

However, there is nothing in this proposition for the individual beings who suffer. It is hardly possible to get big kicks from the supposed ultimate good that is yielded at the expense of my suffering. If my son is hanged for no offence, if my daughter is raped callously, and if an earthquake leaves my entire family dead, the only comfort for me is to think philosophically: all the pain that I bear for the sufferings of my loved ones firstly, and for not having been given justice subsequently will contribute to the universal good – the most elusive notion ever heard of. What would I do with this so-called universal good? And if I yearn for justice, why is it that the Providence will ignore it after engendering within me this yearning in the most intense and

2. Allusion is to the views of Spinoza.

palpable form in the first place?

Now, when we look into the Holy Qur'ān, we find it a quintessential fountain that furnishes ceaseless supplies of sheer solace. It is not because it has concocted a fable to hush the cries of the suffering mankind. It has actually lifted the veil from the face of reality. In the Holy Qur'ān, man stands face to face with reality yet finds superb consolation in the soothing explanation purported by it. This world is not a work of chance nor is what happens in it a work of blind forces. In fact, the world has been created by an Omnipotent and Omniscient God with a predefined purpose, that is, to test men which of them is good in faith and deeds. This sole objective is the fiber that human life, on this planet, is interwoven with. The wheel of life moves on only to test the vigor of men's faith in God, and assess the conduct of their lives.

In the span of their life in this world, men have been given free will to plan and act as they please. As an obvious corollary, sometimes, innocent blood will be shed and sometimes, innocent souls will be deflowered. But everyone is being tested: while the criminal is tested in his crimes, the victims are tried for their patience and trust in God. The criminals would not be left to go scot-free nor would the pangs of pain that we endure go in vain. The Holy Qur'ān sounds a stern warning to the criminals and announces fabulous rewards for those who persevere. We mustn't fall prey to the notion that life of the world is an end in itself: once dead, we shall not be resurrected to account for our deeds. As the appointed time comes, the dead will be raised to see the ultimate justice being dispensed in the Kingdom of God.

In fact, the scheme of the Almighty about this world is exceptionally clear as pointed out earlier. The disasters and adversities are also a means to put mankind through test and trial. He has unequivocally declared that He shall test men with loss of wealth and lives, fear and hunger. The catastrophes are but a part and parcel of the trial that man is put through.³ Far from the notion of universal good, whatever we do is accounted for in our own records – true and fair presentation of our entire life – which shall provide a detailed basis on which our fate in

3. It seems pertinent to mention that the Holy Qur'ān maintains that this is the trial that man of his accord accepted to take.

the Hereafter will be decided. In the Kingdom of God, the minute details shall be examined so much so that the covert secrets of our hearts shall be probed and brought into open. No matter what we do, human relations and natural forces shall continue to propel trying circumstances for us. For the thankless souls, there shall be heavy penalty and tremendous loss. However, they shall have no fear or despair who when struck by evil calls out (we are God's and unto Him shall we return!)

(Jhangeer Hanif)

For the Sake of Allah

The unanimous verdict of mankind is that justice is a virtue. To uphold it is praiseworthy and to contravene it is sinful in the eyes of men as well as the Almighty. As such, it can well be construed that justice is not a mere compliance with a compelling need of nature; rather it is a task which, of our own free volition, is carried out and consequently acclaimed. On the other hand, this also shows that the concept of justice is a common legacy of mankind that calls for spontaneous appreciation.

An inquiry into the concept of justice would however reveal that while mankind has always appreciated it, they have differed about what engenders an irresistible urge for it and also about its application in practical affairs. The former difference arises mainly because of the blatant error of applying the evolutionary approach to the moral aspect of human life much like the way it has been vigorously applied to their so-called physical evolution. It is contended that man developed the notion of justice because he faced the problem of survival of his race. It is clear that this contention is worthy of no consideration since man feels this urge from within much before he has to listen to any call from his surroundings; moreover, he is convinced that he ought to uphold justice contrary to his own interests which he reflexively

thinks about and wants to secure first. The fact that justice is a universally acknowledged virtue and that man feels the urge to comply with it from within is sufficient evidence that it is ingrained in his nature – the nature fashioned by the Almighty. The differences insofar as they are concerned with practical application are indicative of the stark truth that man is burdened with the fresh application of the concept of justice – a task which is termed, the trial of life, by the *Qur'ān*.

Despite the utmost desirability of justice, it seems almost impossible to define what exactly justice is in a few words, which is perhaps one strong reason for differences that arise in practical applications. The clarity of the concept of justice is evident yet when it is clothed in words, reinforcement of one point is achieved at the expense of many ultimate corollaries. Much unlike the all encompassing nature of the concept, the definition of justice can never be comprehensive. This of necessity calls for a fresh consideration of justice vigilantly in each and every circumstance. With a sense of responsibility, when we approach a novel situation we are very likely to arrive at the right decision.

The Holy *Qur'ān* also praises those who uphold justice and direct their affairs in compliance with this virtue. Salvation in the Hereafter is thus dependant on whether we lead a life in consonance with the concept of justice. We also find that the Holy *Qur'ān* exhorts its addressees to justice as a known virtue, which they can only evade through lame excuses. For the correct application of justice, the Holy *Qur'ān* proposes that it should be done with a view to earning the pleasure of God. When we rid ourselves of meanness and self-interest, and seek only the pleasure of God, we are likely to reach a correct decision.

O you who believe! Be you of those who maintain adherence to justice, being witnesses to it for the sake of Allah, even though this goes against yourselves or your parents or your kindred. Be it a rich man or a poor man, Allah should be the top priority for both. (4:135)

(Jhangeer Hanif)

God thus teacheth

Again, the same scene seems to replay. Tears are trickling down the cheeks of the hero while he is sitting on his bended knees with his hands stretched out. In the dead silence of the dark night, one can easily hear his heart pounding against his chest so fast that it seems that it would burst open. He has not uttered a word yet but it is certain that he is going through immense pain. His contracted countenance exhibits that this excruciating pain is not limited to his deeply wounded heart alone rather it has extended to his soul as though it has been shredded to pieces. From his head bowed down, it can be imagined that he is sorry for something that he has done and that he is now seeking the forgiveness of the Most High.

Suddenly, his lips begin to move slowly and his thoughts are thus projected in a soliloquy: 'O my Lord, isn't it ironic that I am in front of You in the same posture wishing to say the same words that I have articulated many times before? I very well remember the last time that I requested You to please forgive me for just one more time and very confidently assured You that this would never happen in my life again. You took pity on me and granted me Your forgiveness. I felt as though a new life was inspired into me. This gave me strength and I was determined to avail myself of this opportunity to defeat Satan once and for all. For the next few days, I remained very vigilant and overcame one obstacle after the other. Then, on this day I have erred again getting soaked with the filth I strongly resolved to rid myself completely of. I know if I request You to forgive me once again, You surely will. But I feel so hopeless. I have lost confidence in myself and become disillusioned with my strength. I don't understand why You have proscribed suicide when it may be the only way to immigrate to the next world preserving the faith as well as the purity of heart. O my Lord! Please hasten to me. Help me. I am perplexed. I don't know what I would do...'

'My servant, I am here just for that: to help you, to nourish you and to hold you in a moment you find no one else to turn to. You are right I have again forgiven you. But, today, I will also impart to you something very valuable which if you keep in mind would

help you to better combat evil. You thought that since you sincerely resolved to fight against evil, victory would always stand before you in complete submission. But you should know that no doubt sincerity will bring you marvelous reward in the Hereafter, it does not necessarily lead you to triumph in this world. Evil is not like the common enemy that once defeated by you would be afraid to stand in your way forever. You surely can enfeeble it but can never obliterate it from within yourself. To have an idea of the function of evil you should understand the mechanism of germs within your body. You remain healthy but it does not mean that you are devoid of any kind of germs. They are right there within your body. The moment they get their desired food, they get stronger and attack you more vigorously than ever. You don't lose hope and after taking medicines, you again attain the strength to fight back. This is how it goes with your bodily illness. The case of spiritual diseases is no different. You cannot defeat evil once and for all. It will be there waiting for a chance to attack and divest you of your inner purification. The purity of heart is so vulnerable that you let it be affected and it will be. This is why you should be careful about what you take in for your spiritual health. Again, like the person who does not wish to acquire any bodily illness yet sometimes suffers from it, you too will be prone to evil influences. But know that the Master is well aware of the frailties that His servants have. He will treat you every time you turn back to Him with a broken heart brimmed with feelings of contrition. You pray to Me and I will award you strength and courage to fight back. And always keep in mind that there is no end to My mercy as there is no end to Me and the authority I wield over My kingdom.'

(Jhangeer Hanif)

“Thank you” Culture

“Thank you” are two very powerful words. When said at the right time, they build confidence, enhance relationships and

engender love and affection. People need to be appreciated for what they do for us. In fact, acknowledging their good gestures needs spontaneous expression. It is an unwritten right on us. It should be discharged magnanimously and graciously. While saying thank you to those who have done a good turn to us is imperative, words of gratitude even to those who are supposed to do what they are doing is a sign of courtesy and civility.

Let us make a conscious effort to initiate this “thank you” culture in our lives to all those whom we are indebted to. And let us be persistent in this!

And there so many people we owe our gratitude to and that too persistently because of what we have received from them persistently.

Let us continue to thank our parents for the time, effort and resources they have spent on us.

Let us continue to thank our teachers for what we have learnt from them.

Let us continue to thank our children for bringing joy and happiness in our homes.

Let us continue to thank our friends for being there for us when we needed them.

Let us continue to thank our employees for making our organization prosper.

And then there are those instances in which we must show courtesy by expressing our gratitude whenever they arise:

We must thank people who listen to our woes even though they cannot solve them.

We must thank those who hold the door for us and let us pass through first.

We must thank the person who stops his car to give us the way.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

“Sorry” Culture

To human beings erring and sinning comes naturally. Blunders

and mistakes emanate from us every now and then. At times these blemishes are advertent and at times in advertent. Sometimes, when we try to avoid making a mistake, we end up making more. Yet when we realize our mistake, we must make amends and also apologize to the aggrieved person.

It is not the sin that counts as much as our attitude after it: it is essential to apologize and say sorry and to the person we have caused any harm. Making amends goes without saying. Saying sorry is never easy. It makes us small in the eyes of others. Yet it elevates us in the eyes of God.

Let us be more vigilant and diligent in this regard and make it our constant practice to say sorry to the aggrieved person!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

The Ailment of Self-Righteousness

Humility is the key to scholarship and self-righteousness is perhaps the greatest impediment to it. In the study of religion, contemporary Muslims scholars have generally adopted the latter approach. It is the opinion of this writer that this approach has contributed significantly in promoting sectarianism and dogmatism.

A student admitted to a conventional *Madrasah* is indoctrinated with the notion of self-righteousness throughout the years he studies there. From the very first day, he is labelled as an orthodox follower of a particular sect. His destiny seems to be carved out beforehand as one of a devout denouncer of every other sect and an ardent acclaimer of his own. He is made to believe that only his brand of beliefs is in direct conformity with the Qur'ān and Sunnah. An inference attributed to a highly revered scholar of his sect stands supreme till the Day of Judgement. That it can be challenged by cannot be dared thought of.

The time has come to realize how wrong this attitude is. As Muslims, we must understand that self-righteousness is actually a declaration of the infallibility of human intellect. Obviously, no human being can make such a claim. So if Muslim scholars

want to become men of scholarship and erudition, they must abandon this approach. They should instead reflect, deliberate and then humbly submit their inferences to criticism. They must always think that the religious opinions they present are not the last word. No scholar can ever be totally sure that he has stumbled upon the final truth in matters that require interpretation of the scripture. So he must keep his eyes and ears open and his intellect tuned to change for the better.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

A Greater Pollution

Today the world is becoming more and more sensitive to environmental pollution. Cleansing the atmosphere and human surroundings from things that are detrimental to any form of life has assumed unprecedented importance. This is of course a very healthy development. In the limited life span we all have, our quality of life should be as high as possible. However, there is another form of pollution to which God wants us to become sensitive to as well. It can be called 'moral pollution'.

Just as the filth around us pollutes our environment, the evil found within and around us also stains our environment. Eyes may not see it, yet it cannot be concealed from the mind's vision:

... Things that come out of the mouth come from the heart and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'. (Matt, 15:17-19)

If environmental pollution is detrimental for man's physical being, moral pollution is detrimental for his spiritual being. A body which is morally polluted is perhaps dirtier than a place which is environmentally polluted. It is only a question of recognizing this reality. Man tends to forget it and the Gracious

Allah constantly reminds him of it.

Purification of the soul, consequently, has remained the objective of divine religions, for it is their verdict that only purified souls will enter the everlasting abode of Paradise. So, we must all vie to root out moral pollution if we are to enter this blissful life.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Guard thy Gaze!

With the advent of the media revolution, we are witnessing an unprecedented exchange of information around us. This giant leap has afforded us the opportunity to explore frontiers as yet unexplored and potentials not yet realized. “Boldly, we are going where no man has gone before.” Cultural boundaries are being infringed and a new global culture has emerged.

Nothing can be done to stop this advancement nor is there any need to do so. However, there is one dire need: protecting the heart from impurities by shielding the eyes from contamination.

The speed with which bits, bytes and photons continue to traverse the mind, heart and soul is mind boggling. One may not even begin to grasp what is happening until it is too late. In the humdrum of TV, Internet and Dish Channels, while hunting for entertainment one may end up forsaking one’s inner purity without realizing what has been lost. The faculty of sight is vital. Its affect on the heart is the most potent. If proper vigilance is not maintained, the eyes may still remain lit but the soul will be engulfed in desolate darkness. Almost two millenniums ago, Jesus (sws) had warned:

You have heard that it was said: “Do not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
(Matthew, 5:27-29)

Let us guard our gazes to preserve our inner purity.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Enhance thy Radiance of Faith

Perhaps the greatest asset of a person is his faith. It helps us in warding off evil. The greater the level of faith, the deeper is one's relationship with the Almighty. Like a lamp, faith illuminates the places where light falls. A true believer is a person who not only benefits from the radiance of his faith, but also helps illuminate the path of others. The glow of faith he carries with him needs not only to be fueled, but also to be protected from the onslaughts of adverse winds.

To constantly think about enhancing the level and extent of our faith is something which pleases the Almighty and which earns us His special help in this regard.

Here are a few measures which may prove helpful to us:

1) We need to take out some time regularly, everyday to study the Qur'ān with specific stress on its meanings.

2) We need to develop a habit of gradually memorizing parts of the Qur'ān. This will make us feel closer to God and will also make our prayers more involving. Needless to say, we should have an idea of all that we are reciting in our prayer.

3) We should memorize the supplications (*ad'iyah*) of the Prophet (sws), and remember to recite them at appropriate times of the day.

4) We should try to spend as much time as is possible in the company of pious people. It is difficult to fight evil and more so when one is alone. Environment makes a great difference. The cleaner it is the more the strength to subdue evil.

5) Whenever we feel depressed or low, we need to recount the blessings of Allah which we have, and which others around us may not have. With the vicissitudes of life, one is bound to face trying circumstances. One needs to pull one's self up and fight one's way through. Remembering the blessings of Allah in such times keeps a person in a positive frame of mind and gives him

the opportunity to earn more reward by being patient and steadfast.

May Allah always bless us with the concern of increasing our faith: this in itself is a sign of faith.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Men of Action not Hermits

This world is just a transient prelude to the real life to come. The *Qur'ān* says that this world in reality has not been made to reward a person for every good deed or to punish him for all his bad deeds. It is only in the Hereafter where results will truly be in conformity with the deeds done. Every person who had remained a sincere seeker of the truth would attain success in the world to come. Thus the *Qur'ān* is firm that real success is success in the Hereafter:

He who is saved from Hell and admitted into Heaven indeed attained success. (3:185)

Now what needs to be understood is that Islam wants its adherents to live a profound life in this world by doing whatever they can for its betterment. However, they must always give priority to the requisites of the Hereafter. If they have to choose between good and evil, they must always try to choose good. Other than this, they must strive to make this world a better place by becoming good scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers and the like. All this is inherent in the urges found in human nature. Islam does not curtail these urges; it only directs man to live with the priority of the Hereafter while contributing to this world through his skills and abilities. In short, one must strike a balance between one's struggles and efforts to achieve material success, while not overriding the requisites of the life to come.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Constant Vigil

As humans, we must never claim that we have totally conquered evil temptations and surmounted the peak of our base desires. We may be able to conquer evil most of the time, but never can we conquer evil all the time. The most pious of people succumb to the most ignominious of desires and to the most immoral of wishes. The victor may turn into the vanquished in no time and wonder what went wrong after being such a ‘blessed’ and ‘favorite’ creature of God. Fighting evil regardless of the extent of one’s faith is a continuous process – a relentless incessant struggle. Only death will bring an end to this tussle. We must strive throughout our lives to overcome adverse currents.

We must be bold enough to concede that we are after all “humans” and persistent enough to get up and start again – and again if despite the resistance put up evil overcomes us. One of the greatest weapons of Satan is to overwhelm a person with so much frustration and disappointment that he is left with little or no desire to repent and start over again.

Experience shows that one great factor in resisting evil is deep attachment to one’s goal. An idle mind is prone to all sorts of onslaughts from evil. The more a person is devoted to some cause, the lesser are the chances of his deviation. A target-oriented life is thus what we must aim for and pray that all targets that we set before us contribute positively to this world and that to come.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

The Real Contest

Not all people are sharp and intelligent, not all are good

looking. Not all are born with a silver spoon in their mouth and not all achieve fame. However, the yearning to be intelligent and the desire to be good looking, the wish to be wealthy and the thirst for fame can cause sadness in a person because these are not always achievable. To brood over what one does not have is one of the most common causes of depression and frustration. A person loses interest in life and becomes the victim of inferiority complex if he is persistently overwhelmed with feelings of deprivation. His desire to become superior to others persistently haunts him.

The Qur'ān corrects our approach by pointing out that the real contest among human beings lies elsewhere: the sphere in which they should strive to outdo others, is not the sphere of ordained circumstances and inherent traits: it is the sphere of virtue and piety in which each person has equal opportunity to excel and surpass others. It is just as open to the ugly, the poor and the ordinary as it is to the good looking, the rich and the intelligent. Wasting one's effort in the wrong sphere only instills a negative approach towards life. If one really wants to test their mettle and enter into a contest with others, he must select the sphere of piety and virtue. The Qur'ān says:

And in no way desire those things in which God has bestowed His favors on some of you over others: to men is allotted what they earn [in the sphere of piety], and to women what they earn [in the sphere of piety]. And ask God of His bounty. For God has full knowledge of all things. (4:32)

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Gratitude

The favours of God are uncountable. If ever we try to make a comprehensive list of them, we will soon realize that it is a futile task. Unfathomable is God's mercy and innumerable are His blessings. If a person can eat two meals a day, has a shelter to live in, clothes to wear, a healthy body, the opportunity to get

education and friends and family to turn to, then he can count himself to be one of the luckiest persons on the globe. However, we seldom acknowledge the blessings of God; we often take them for granted and only when we are stripped of them do we realize what we always had. Our ungrateful attitude often leads us to depression and frustration; we brood and complain and show pessimism; we condemn others and become jealous of their happiness; we are seldom happy even when some good comes our way because we are always looking towards people who are blessed with more favours than us.

Here are some measures which may help us become more grateful to God.

We should specially plan to take out time every day to reflect on the blessings we have received from God. We should try to imagine our life without some of them. For example, we can reflect what we would have to go through if we did not have eyes or were deaf, lame or mentally retarded.

We should realize that we were never entitled to the favours we have been blessed from God. They are purely a gift of God. We should contemplate that if God has given us such favours, He can also take them away from us whenever He wants to. So, we must not be indifferent to people around us who are inflicted with any calamity. Fortunes can reverse any time and if God wants, He can take away his blessings and reduce us to indigence.

We should always look at people who are less blessed than us. If we look around, we are bound to find so many people who are deprived of what we ourselves have. With this will come the appreciation of the favours we have and which we take for granted.

Finally, we must realize that perhaps the greatest way to express our gratitude to God is to share our favours and blessings with others. If we do so, we will soon come to realize that sharing them will make their treasures grow and make us spiritually satisfied individuals.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Forgiveness

God is Ever Merciful and we always expect that He will deal mercifully with us and forgive our mistakes even if we falter again and again. But often we do not show mercy to others. There are instances which warrant clemency on our part but we choose to become callous instead. If a person commits a mistake accidentally or does so in ignorance and forgetfulness, we still scold and punish him. Similarly, at times, we become harsh and unforgiving even after a person has made amends and is genuinely sorry for his bad behaviour. Sometimes, we do not forgive a person even after we have taken revenge. At other times, we castigate someone for a small mistake or chide him much more than his mistake calls for. Similarly, at times, we adopt an unforgiving attitude towards a person who comes forward and confesses his mistake even before it comes to our notice. No doubt, all these are instances which warrant clemency and compassion from us. But we become callous, cruel and ruthless.

The Qur'ān says though a person can avenge the wrong inflicted on him by someone, yet forgiving and forgetting this wrong will earn great reward and indeed the pleasure of the Almighty.

Perhaps the most effective way to become a forgiving and forbearing person is to keep a constant and watchful eye on one's own faults and blemishes. We expect God and our fellow human beings to be magnanimous towards us by forgiving our faults. So we should all the more be ready to forgive the faults of others. 0300 4823672

However, there can be instances which warrant an unforgiving attitude on our part. For example if a person is not sorry for his mistake and repeatedly commits the same mistake. Similarly, if a person does not realize his mistake and in fact shows arrogance in this regard, we need not show mercy or compassion. We may do likewise if a person continues to show carelessness and indifference in realizing that he has done something wrong.

Perhaps, the real test in this regard is to correctly and

judiciously choose the instances which merit our forgiveness and those which do not.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Courage

Courage is an enviable trait. It is also elusive because mustering courage requires courage. Instances which call for courage abound:

Courage is needed not only to speak the truth but also to support the weak who speak the truth;

Courage is also required to point out the faults of loved ones whose anger we fear;

Courage is also needed to admit one's faults; without courage we cannot say no to questions we have no answer to and without courage we cannot ask questions we are afraid to ask and which may open up new knowledge frontiers for us;

Facing the trials of life requires courage;

Forgiving others also needs courage;

To never give up in the face of adversity also requires a captain courageous;

Saying no to commitments we very well know we will not be able to honour also needs courage;

Refraining from venting anger on the weak asks for loads of courage;

Finally, most feats of physical courage spring from the moral courage within.

If courage is elusive and the instances to exercise it also are plentiful, how can we then acquire this enviable trait? Some measures may be helpful in this regard.

1. The opposite of courage is fear and if we want to be courageous we need to conquer our fears. Perhaps the greatest way of conquering our fears is to fear God alone and make other fears subservient to His fear. If the love of God and love of the cause of God take root in us, if the love of the truth is more than

the love of any other thing and if we ourselves try to be honest and morally upright, this will hopefully instil courage in us.

2. We should also look for people in our society who are courageous. If possible we should befriend such individuals and seek their company. It is a common experience that a person gets inspired by remaining near such people. Every now and then, even in our own society and surroundings, we do get to know of such people. It is only a question of remaining on the lookout for such individuals.

3. We should also try to gather anecdotes of people of the past which reflect courage. One receives motivation from such tales. We know that there were people in the past who stood up to and never gave up even when faced with repeated adversity. They wrote tales of courage from the way they led their lives. People like Malik ibn Anas and Ibn Taymiyah, Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Shah Wali Ullah, Socrates and Galileo were nothing but courage personified. They adhered diligently to the views they held correct and no amount of persecution could waver them from their stance.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Nothing but the Truth, Please!

Truthfulness was once a cherished trait. Such was its awe that people would hide their lies and would never dare disclose them. However, today people seldom feel ashamed of telling lies; in fact, many a time they are not even aware that what they are doing comes under its ambit. They proudly mention their feats – some of them falling under shameless lies, at times without realizing their horrible nature. Even more alarming is the fact that people do not even seem to have the courage to point out such things and nor do they make an effort to play a prudent role in correcting and reforming near ones in this regard.

At times, we misquote the opinions of others and at times, we transmit negative information about a person without checking it

out; we chat and gossip and dwell on un-researched facts; We make lame excuses knowing full well that we have no excuse; we sell defective and counterfeit goods without disclosing the reality behind them; we seldom have any qualms in forging the signatures of a friend thinking that the application is merely a sick leave. We even bear false witness to show “faithfulness” to a friend. False birth certificates to admit our children to school, false medical certificates to cover an absence from job, false certificates to make someone a *mahram* to offer as noble a ritual as *hajj*, false degrees to qualify for a position, false identity cards and passports seem to have become an everyday affair. We summarily make commitments and promises about which we are quite sure at the time of making them that we will never be able to honour them. Often we find lawyers proving the innocence of their client about whom they are sure that he is downright guilty. Students plagiarize their assignments and theses and merrily proxy the presence of their friends. Wrong opinions are given to please friends and flatter bosses. Polytheism is a falsehood imputed to God. What is more, people have concocted Ḥadīth narratives to inject force in their views. And the list is unending ...!

In these dismal times, when the difference between truth and falsehood has become blurred and the call of one’s conscience has been lulled to sleep, speaking the truth is no less than the *jihād* of the tongue. Some tips may help us in being more truthful, more honest and more upright:

1. We should try to become true seekers of the truth – and cherish it whenever and wherever we find it. If truth becomes our prized possession, we will also always like being truthful.

2. We should stop thinking what others will say or think of us. This is because at times we lie to give others a false impression.

3. We should accept the fact that as human beings we can falter. One of the greatest things that induces us to lie is that we should not falter.

4. We should develop respect for blunt people because truth is seldom sweet. If we can bear unpleasant situations, we can bear the brunt of the truth.

5. When we lie to people we should confess before God and also apologize to the aggrieved party.

6. Whenever we lie, we should impose a fine on ourselves and

gradually increase this fine if the habit becomes more pronounced so that a fear of heavy penalty may impede us.

7. We should avoid situations which tempt us to lie and misstate. We are the best judge of our own selves and know our weaknesses. We best know when situations can arise which may lure us to lie.

8. We should prize the state of guilt-consciousness whenever it arises for it is an impediment and a hindrance to lying.

9. Speaking the truth requires courage, and this courage can only be attained when fear we God alone.

10. Fasting is a very good training for telling the truth. A person however much of a liar he is will never be dishonest to God while fasting by secretly eating or drinking.

Finally, the words "I shall speak the truth and nothing but the truth" should be the motto of our life instead of being an undertaking while testifying in a court.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Overcoming Selfishness

Many a time, we end up being selfish and self-centred. Seldom do we look beyond our needs and interests and seldom do the needs and plight of others bother us. Living for others is now the motto of only a few noble souls. We fail to realize that while selfishness keeps the mind under constant pressure, selflessness keeps it serene.

Instances of our selfishness are at times subtle and at times blatant. We are selfish when we do not give time to our children, our parents and our loved ones; we are also selfish when we do not shower praises our contemporaries deserve; not solving the problems of others when we very well can also falls in this ambit; not spending on the needy for fear of ending up poor is also a selfish act; we are selfish when we do not realize that a wedding function or festivity might bother our neighbours; we are also selfish in not making *du'ā* for others as much and as

frequently as we can; a thing as small as smiling to make someone's day too at times does not cross our mind.

Selfishness, it seems, is deeply ingrained in us and we need a constant effort to get the better of it. Perhaps the starting point to combat it is to start with not so difficult a task: we can begin by just looking around our house to find things which will never be needed by us and which are totally redundant. Experience shows that if one looks with such an eye, one ends up with loads and loads of such things. Parting ways with them should not be very difficult as these things have little or no use for us in the first place.

Some of the following tips may help us further in this effort:

1. We should stop taking credit for good deeds we do, and in fact hide these deeds from others thinking that God knows them and He will duly reward us.

2. We should take up some voluntary work and try to spend time, effort and our skills for others.

3. We should save money every month specially to use it for the welfare of the needy. This money should be over and above the *zakāh* amount.

4. Reading inspirational stories of selfless people and spending time in their company if one is lucky enough to have them around helps a lot.

5. A selfish motive may be of help here: We can forget our own pain if we become selfless. When we live and work for others, it makes us see how better off we are than so many others and this makes us thankful and satisfied souls.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Humility

Humility is perhaps the quintessence of human values. It is the recognition of the fact that only God is great and the rest are meek and weak before Him. In other words, it is acknowledging the reality.

If we want to cultivate and strengthen this trait in us, we must watch out for things which are its antithesis or are detrimental to it. Although our conscience is enough to guide us in this matter, yet some blatant attitudes which are counter to humility may well remain in our minds. Thus when we make fun of others, do not let others speak, take credit of things we never did, boast of our achievements, do not take the initiative in greeting others, do not apologize even after realizing our mistake, walk and make gestures in an arrogant way, do not thank God enough, show conceit on our lineage and status, do not invite poor relatives to our banquets, splash our solo photographs all over house walls, put up a show of piety and religiosity, do not admit our faults, deliberately deny the truth and show self-righteousness, we are in fact doing things which are against humility and modesty.

Some practical measures may help to inculcate humility in us. Here are some of them:

1. We should stop claiming credit for the good things we do.
2. We must realize that all our talents and assets are a gift of God and He can take them away any time He wants to.
3. We should highlight even small achievements and qualities of others.
4. We should not buy and use things which reflect status.
5. We must understand our limitations. No matter how talented, rich, powerful or beautiful a person may be, there are always people who have these traits to a more pronounced extent.
6. We must learn to confess our faults to God and make amends on what we have done wrong.
7. We must keep an eye on our own faults and shortcomings for the more we realize them the more lowly opinion we will hold about ourselves.
8. We must listen more than we talk. This gives others the impression that we do not want to impose ourselves on them.
9. We must give others the benefit of the doubt in situations where a better interpretation of a person's attitude can be made.
10. We should avoid making sweeping statements. More often than not, they reflect arrogance.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Sympathy

Sympathy is a trait that should surge from us like a gushing fountain. Like a mother's love for her child, it should be spontaneous and impulsive. Seeing a person in distress should perturb and agitate us. Even if we are helpless to practically do anything to redress the situation, concern should pour out from us and anxiety should stir us up. We too should writhe in agony – as if we ourselves were going through it. If such a situation does not affect us in any way, then surely there is something terribly wrong. We should then make a positive effort to awaken this dormant trait.

We can revive and enhance the radiance of this trait in us by simply opening our eyes to the world around us.

We can learn sympathy from the prophets of God who were an embodiment of this attribute. They were selfless well-wishers of their people. They wanted to secure their people from the wrath of God. What greater an expression of sympathy than to awaken people from their deep slumber and to prepare them for the kingdom of heaven?

We can learn sympathy from a mother; how she continues to wait on her children and serve their needs even when this means sacrificing her own needs, forsaking her own comfort and giving up her own priorities.

We can learn sympathy from individuals who, risking their own lives, attend to the sick and wounded both in times of peace and war.

And if all this is not enough to inculcate or enhance this trait in us we may think of a selfish motive: being sympathetic and kind to others makes us forget our own worries. It gives us peace of mind which is so elusive a thing these days.

And of course instances at which we need to show sympathy abound:

Attending persistently to sick relatives and friends; treating pets and beasts of burden with utmost humanity; doing whatever can be done for those afflicted with some calamity and praying to God if nothing else can be done; using our influence to help

those in distress; not forsaking sinners for they need sympathy the most; treating those subservient to us especially servants with extreme kindness and affection; merely lending an ear to a person going through some agony; supporting the oppressed against the wicked; lending a hand to the old, the disabled and the handicapped; ignoring the weaknesses of others; welcoming guests wholeheartedly; tending vigilantly to plants ... of course there is no end to this list.

May God grant us the courage and will to overcome any shortcoming in being sympathetic that we may have and help us adhere to the dictum:

*Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as you can*

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

The Cause of Truth

Lord! Make the cause of truth the most cherished thing for us to live and die for. If life, wealth and honour and freedom of expression are under threat, give us the strength to raise our voice against the aggressors. If people are persecuted and tortured for adhering to the truth, bless us with the courage to defend them. If people jeer and make fun of us for upholding the truth, instil in us the patience to politely smile back at them.

Lord! Make us true seekers of the truth. Make us possessed and obsessed with this undertaking. Make this quest and yearning burn in us till our last breath. Let not anything stop or discourage us when the chips are down and there is darkness all around. Let not the love of a near one overcome us in giving a

false testimony. Even if our life is at stake, make the love for the truth conquer the fear of death. If seeking the truth inflicts us with worldly failures, make us patient and persistent and consistent to keep going.

Lord! Make us understand that it is the effort undertaken for the cause of truth and to strive to seek the truth that counts – regardless of the consequences.

Lord! Make us live according to what you have declared to be true. Make us forget our own will and make us walk the path of truth marked by you.

Lord! Let there be people among us like Socrates who drink hemlock for inciting the youth to seek the truth. Let there be people among us like Ahmad ibn Hanbal who in spite of severe physical torture never bend down against the voice of their conscience. Let there be people among us like Galileo who stand for the truth and bear religious persecution.

Let there be people among us who feel the desire to seek the truth burn even more within them with advancing years – who continue this fascinating voyage undaunted and unruffled as long as their eyes can see, ears can hear and minds can ponder:

O Truth!
Thou art crafty and elusive
Thy quest never conclusive
Restless and agitated
I continue unabated
To seek and savour thee
Relish and revere thee
Wherever thou be
Wherever thou be

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Pretension and Pomposity

Pretension is a human weakness and at times has such a subtle

garb that one gets afflicted with it without realizing. However, even its blatant forms seldom stop people from indulging in it.

More often than not our conversation and mannerisms reflect pomposity. Our gait and appearance too depict this trait. Affluence, fame, high status and physical attributes often lead us to bragging and boasting. We like to mention our contacts with rich and influential people; we like to boast about the posh locality we may be living in; we like to brag about our foreign tours and children studying abroad; at times, every room of our house will display our photographs with dignitaries and high-ups; we often publicly mention our staggering asset and property list; using expensive brands to show off has become quite normal; manipulating a conversation between friends so that an opportune moment is provided to boast what we have is a graver form of this human weakness; false modesty too is no less a compounded form of it; putting up a show of religiosity may strike us as unusual but it does not take much effort to see how this abounds in our societies. Amounts spent in charity, *'umrahs* done, *nafals* offered, *tasbeeh* beads read become a shameful source of showing off.

What must then be done to check this tendency and proclivity human nature is so prone to? A number of things come to mind but perhaps none more effective than the following two:

1. A primary motive to show-off is to impress others and get noticed. This is also a human instinct. The best way to curb is to modify its direction. Instead of impressing others and trying to catch their attention, we should make an effort to impress God and to catch His attention by trying to do deeds that please Him. And the more these deeds are brought to His notice *alone* the better the objective achieved.

2. Talents, abilities and blessings – some of the things which induce us to show off – should be regarded as a bestowal from God. Without His will and intention we could never have gained them. We are thus the custodians of these blessings and we should think that we have been blessed with them to share them with others and not to brag about them. Sharing them with others in fact is the proper way to express gratitude to God on His graciousness.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Taming the Tongue

“Wounds inflicted by the tongue are deeper than the wounds inflicted by the sword,” is an adage that we have often read and also experienced. These wounds cut deep into the heart and are not easily cured. Even after years, a person may feel their pain. At times, these wounds are caused inadvertently and at others in a planned and cold-blooded way. However, whatever be their nature as human beings it is our foremost duty to make an all out effort to control the tongue.

Abusing and cursing others, making fun of them, lying, misreporting facts, backbiting, slandering others, swearing false oaths and bearing false witness, lustful chatting, bragging, enticing others to sin, speaking disrespectfully, expressing arrogance, gossiping, giving sweeping statements and being judgemental, teasing, flattering and even talking incessantly are some prominent areas where restraining and containing the tongue is required.

The first step to overcome such blemishes is to realize that they are blemishes. Realizing faults means that the job is half done. The other half requires a concerted and sustained effort.

The starting point after this realization is to plan before hand to hold back the tongue from its evil habits or letting it enter into a frenzied state; more often than not, this is due to some reaction that arises within us. Obviously, blemishes of the tongue can be classified in two categories.

Blemishes which are habitual and do not involve rage: like lying, backbiting and misreporting facts etc.

Blemishes which occur in rage, like abusing, screaming and shouting.

Blemishes of the tongue which are habitual need a concerted effort. They can only be overcome if a person makes up his mind to root them out by realizing that they are grave sins and not only besmear one's inner-self but many a time cause hurt, deceit and damage to others. These blemishes are a shame to

humankind and bring disrepute to it. We should first enlist all these blemishes and work out a place to eradicate them one by one. We should pray to God to prod and intimate us right before we commit a sin of the tongue and then the courage and strength to overcome it. Being prodded is essential because in blemishes committed as a habit we often are not even aware of what we are doing. The next step is to apply brakes. This needs will power to stop short of entering the highway that leads to excesses of the tongue. It may not work every time and it is not meant to work every time. We are not angels and neither can we ever be. There has to be some pilferage. We have to realize that we cannot be good all the time. However, we must be good most of the time. The first target is not humanly achievable; the second one is and it is to realize it that we should work for. A daily plan of self-accountability is needed for improved results. We must take time out every day to think over the blemishes we have committed with our tongues in the previous twenty four hours and then resolve to do better in the next twenty four hours.

Blemishes of the tongue which occur in rage need prior planning as well. When overcome with rage, we need to delay our reaction. Merely deferring our response at that time can go a long way in reducing the harm caused. Taking a deep breath, taking a glass of water, changing one's posture or location can help a lot. If our anger is caused by some person, we need should try bring to mind the good qualities in that person. We can vent our rage by uttering whatever we have in mind in seclusion. Fasting helps to restrain rage and hence the misuse of the tongue. Even after adopting all these measures, it will still take time to overcome this habit and it will not go overnight. So during this time if one does lose temper and is not able to restrain his or her tongue, then one thing that should be persistently done in offering an unconditional apology to the aggrieved party.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Four Steps to a Successful Marriage

If anything that can really make a marriage work, in fact work wonders, it is the attitude the spouses adopt towards one another. Seldom are two people alike and expecting that marriages of only like-minded people succeed is a failed assumption. It is how the two behave and conduct themselves with another that makes a heaven or hell of marriage. Many things can be said in this regard. In my humble opinion, the success-attitude in marriage can be summed by four F's: forbearance, friendship, forgiveness and fidelity.

Forbearance means that spouses must exercise patience and self-control in accepting each others' personality especially in areas where both have conflicting habits and tendencies. As Tolstoy once famously put it: "What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much as how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility." Empathizing with the other is the key word here. Working out a conflict resolution strategy is also part of this forbearance attitude.

Friendship needs no explanation. Nietzsche once so very aptly wrote: It is not the lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages." To be a friend in every sense of the word is needed. Friendship is the name of a complete attitude. Friends hides the faults of friends; they encourage one another; they fall-back on one another; they are confidantes of one another; they put themselves into pain and discomfort to provide relief and comfort to one another; they do not score points; they are always grateful for what friends have for them; they support one another in their psychological, emotional needs and financial needs. The pinnacle of friendship is to become soul-mates of one another.

Forgiveness means to overlook and ignore blemishes of one another and not maintain a register of mistakes. It means not to be on the lookout for mistakes and forgoing and forgetting. If spouses adopt this attitude, they will build mutual confidence and also develop the courage to share each and every thing. If a person is prepared to share his or her faults, it is quite likely that many other issues will be shared.

Fidelity means that the spouses vouch to remain sincere with

each other at all levels. It is generally associated with sexual fidelity. However, it has a much deeper connotation. It means that the spouses will reserve their emotional attachment to one another. This starts with guarding the gaze and not lusting after others not only in the real world but also in the virtual world of the internet. In other words, the spouses should not let anyone get between them in the slightest way. More often than not it is some weakness or shortcoming in one spouse that makes the other find its remedy in someone else. We only need to think that every single person is fraught with shortcomings. The remedy is to look into the qualities a spouse has and forgo and ignore the shortcomings.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

How to Avoid Clashes in Marriage

Many of us tend to live in idealism. As marriage partners, we think that a marriage should never be marred by unhappy moments. Marital tensions should never come our way. The husband should always remain the sweetest creature on earth and the wife should always remain thankful to the husband. These are expectations all of us espouse. But the stark truth is bitter and sourer. Husbands are not sweet all the time and wives are not thankful all the time: husbands are dictatorial and bitter and wives unthankful and quarrelsome most of the time. Clashes between the spouses become a routine. Wives at times are so helpless that the only reason for them to put up with their husbands is the children. Those who are not helpless and can become financially independent often take the ultimate step of seeking divorce. Ever than before, today the institution of marriage is on trial and people are questioning the utility of getting married in the first place. To them, it brings more misery, suffering and despair than one can imagine.

What then must be done!

The first step perhaps is to realize the fact that it is next to

impossible that a marriage can be clash-free. Even spouses having the same interests and views cannot avoid quarrels and disputes. So first of all a strategy needs to be worked out that can resolve clashes every time they arise. It is the success or failure of this conflict-resolution strategy that can make a heaven or hell of marriage.

Here is a proposed strategy that can perhaps be considered as a starting point.

1. A husband should note down his own mistakes and shortcomings which he genuinely acknowledges as ones that may bother his wife. A wife in return should do the same.

2. A husband and wife should then note down each others' mistakes and shortcomings not covered in the first list. This would constitute mistakes and shortcomings of one the other does not acknowledge as mistakes and shortcomings.

3. The lists should then be exchanged. Each of the two should now set about correcting the acknowledged mistakes and shortcomings. These mistakes will not go away overnight; however, the will to overcome them means that the job is half done. The next half is to hold oneself responsible each night before going to sleep for every outbreak of that mistake on that particular day and urging oneself to do better the next time.

4. In this regard, once the two know each others' acknowledged mistakes and shortcomings one thing will happen or in fact should happen: each time there is an outbreak of some mistake, the one responsible for it should thoroughly apologize to the other and in fact ask him or her to give allowance and pray that this does not happen again; this will earn the one committing excess the sympathy of the other.

5. Once work is progressing steadily on this list, the other list should be taken up. Now this list would require some discussion between the two as it constitutes mistakes and shortcomings of a spouse which the other does not acknowledge. If the difference of opinion continues, it is best that both realize that they will keep discussing the differences at opportune moments and at the same time try to put up with one another's shortcomings with patience and sympathy.

6. Besides the two lists just mentioned, a husband and wife should also make a third list: each should note down the qualities of the other. This list may also be exchanged. This will

boost the confidence of both because of acknowledgment of the qualities of one another. One of the greatest reasons for clash and conflict is anger and frustration that may arise in one spouse for the other for various reasons. It is here that the utility of this third list lies. One's first reaction to the emotions of anger arising within oneself should be to at once remember the qualities of one's spouse and the benefits drawn from him or her.

These suggestions may help in improving marital ties and in understanding that the best way for peaceful co-existence and earning the respect of a marriage partner is to forgive and forget as far as possible. For this, we should remember that God graciously forgives us and we should in turn graciously forgive our offenders.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Are We Ready to Die?

We very well know that none of us is going to live forever; all of us are destined to die; the icy hands of death will spare none. The young and the old young, the sick and the healthy, the rich and the poor are in equal danger to become its prey anytime anywhere. If death is so imminent and impending, should not we be very well prepared for it? Merely realizing that it can come anytime is not sufficient; some practical steps need to be taken so that not only we meet our Lord such that He is pleased with us but also we do not leave our family and heirs in any spot of bother.

For a God-fearing person, the foremost preparation for death is that he leads a life of virtue and shuns vice. He never becomes persistent on a sin and whenever he is soiled by its stains, he immediately washes them by sincerely repenting before God. He has to maintain this priority all his life as far as he can.

Now besides this God-fearing attitude that is constantly required from us as a preparation for death, there are some other spheres as well that need vigilance and attention. Some of these

include the following.

1. A will should be made for the assets and wealth that is being left behind. A person may be sensible enough that the will made should not in any way infringe the rights of the actual heirs. In this regard, as directed by the Qur'ān, Muslim husbands must make a will in favour of their wives regarding their maintenance in case they become widows. A will can also be made in favour of the heirs in case a particular heir has done some special service or is in some special need.¹

2. A person may own intellectual property like books, magazines, websites – in particular if they are a means of financial return. A clear view about these assets should be documented and given to the heirs.

3. A person may be involved in financial obligations and transactions known only to him. This includes borrowing, lending as well as business and work liabilities. A list of all these financial obligations must be documented and a responsible person must be directed what he must do about them.

4. A person may have in his or her possession important documents and papers like licenses, agreements, cheque books, old bills etc. Similar is the case of keys and passwords. A list of all these should be made and the heirs guided about them.

5. In case a person wants to, he or she should also make a will to donate body organs that may prove useful for others. This is an act of great virtue.

6. Family relics and artefacts can also be in a person's possession. Their care-taking and smooth transfer to the next generation must also be thought of beforehand.

7. A person should be sensitive about body cleanliness and hygiene. His or her mortal remains will soon be in the hands of people who will bathe these remains, enshroud them and consign them to the grave. A lack of physical cleanliness may make the bathers form an embarrassing opinion about the deceased.

These are some of the important areas about which we all should write a memorandum and a will as soon as we can and lodge them in the safe-keeping of a trusted one. Of course, as

1. This of course is a will that is not on the basis of familial ties which is forbidden since in this case shares have been specified by the Almighty.

long as we live we can keep making changes in the will once made depending upon the circumstances that may arise.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Anger Management

Anger is a human emotion that can wreak havoc. It can ruin relationships in the blink of an eye and hurt people irreparably. The tongue can inflict wounds deeper than the sword, as they say. In a few moments, irreversible damage can be inflicted. So extreme this emotion becomes at times that a person physically abuses others and even goes as far as killing people.

The pinnacle of human dignity is to show patience and restraint when the adrenaline of anger pumps within us. We need to realize that if things are not going our way, then they are going God's way. So why should a true believer vent his frustration when faced with unexpected situations? It is essential that a concerted plan be chalked out to manage our anger. Suggested below are some short term and long term measures to restrain this monster. Both these types of measures work in tandem and attention needs to be paid to both.

As far as the short term measures are concerned, they primarily relate to delaying our immediate reaction and response. They include:

- i. Changing of posture: for example, if we are sitting, we should stand up and vice versa.
- ii. Drawing deep breaths: it is recommended that we take ten deep breaths.
- iii. Repeating relaxing phrases: we should slowly repeat a calming word or phrase such as: "relax," "take it easy," while we are breathing deeply.
- iv. Drinking a glass of water.
- v. Changing location: thus only leaving the place where one has experienced this surge in temper helps.
- vi. Finding a physical release: It is suggested that "an anger

workout” be done. Thus hitting a mattress with a tennis racket or slapping the sofa with a bat or punching a pillow releases the pressure built.

vii. Talking to God: some of the above measures may not completely release our anger, and in spite of controlling it for the time being one may find its surge arising later. In such cases, it is best to talk with God and share our pain and anguish with Him. Inevitably, we will feel relieved.

Some long term measures which can be useful to manage anger are as follows:

i. Figuring out what generally triggers our anger viz a viz our relatives and friends as well as situations: once we are able to calmly evaluate these triggers, we should try our best that we stay away from scenarios that cause these triggers.

ii. Giving ourselves positive messages: this is particularly useful when anger is caused by a person. In this regard, we should always look at the qualities of that person, and any benefit we may have received from him or her.

iii. Learning to relax in our lives: if we take regular time out in our daily routines to relax and enjoy we tend to become individuals who in general are not stressed out; a relaxed body has relaxed nerves that provide a tremendous buffer in critical situations.

iv. Visualizing our response: we should imagine and visualize what we should do when the crunch time comes. We should talk to ourselves that when it happens how we will react and what we will say. This may save us from spur of the moment flare ups which really can cause great harm and havoc.

v. Following exemplary people: we human beings are weak by nature and need encouragement and inspiration from role models. It is really worthwhile to read stories and anecdotes of people whose exemplary patience and forbearance in testing times make them unlikely victors.

vi. Reminding ourselves that no one is perfect: anger most of the time results because of various imperfections in life that we come across. We should continue to remind our selves that we have to live with imperfections – foremost with one’s own and remember that these may be a cause of anger for others. So if others tolerate us we should reciprocate this attitude.

vii. Learning to forgive: Forgiveness mitigates anger. We

expect God to forgive us for our own blemishes; all the more reason that we should forgive others in return for their faults and shortcomings.

These measures may prove helpful in restraining our fury. However, in spite of trying hard to contain anger, we humans can still err and lose cool. And when we do, two things may help us further:

- i. We must always apologize to the aggrieved person
- ii. We should impose a monetary fine on ourselves and then spend the collected money in the interest and welfare of the aggrieved person.

Here is what some prophets of God say in this regard:

Muhammad (sws) is reported to have said that a strong person is not the one who defeats his rival in a dual; rather a strong person is the one who controls himself when he is angry.¹

Jesus (sws) is reported to have said: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you."²

David (sws) is reported to have said: "Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing."³

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Charity: Points to Ponder

To give in charity is a very coveted human trait. Looking after the need of others is an acknowledgement of God's favours on one's self. It is also our unwritten obligation towards the society. People who are sensitive to the needs of others will find others sensitive to their own needs. The pinnacle of this charitable attitude towards others is to spend on them even if we ourselves are in need. The Qur'ān while extolling believers says: "Those

1. Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣahīh*, vol. 5, 2267, (no. 5763).

2. Matthew, 5:44.

3. Psalms, 37:8.

who, in spite of being needy, give preference to the needs of others.” (59:9)

However, at times spending in charity is marred by blemishes and shortcomings. We need to be very careful about them. Some of the common ones are:

i. At times we condescendingly remind people of our charitable behaviour towards them and in this way hurt their self-esteem. The Qur’ān has emphatically stopped us from this and said: “Believers! Do not mar your charity by reminders of generosity and by hurting [the recipients].” (2:264)

ii. Many a time we show off and even blatantly publicize the amount we spend in charity. This obviously is very detrimental to our own inner-purification and spiritual advancement.

iii. More often than not we shy away to give in charity if we do not have a substantial amount; we may be going through stringent circumstances and can only afford a meagre amount to give in charity. We should realize that it is not the amount that counts; it is the concern and capacity that we have that counts. If our capacity is to give a few pennies, we should not shy away. It is our responsibility to look after the needs of others in proportion to our own financial status. The Qur’ān states: “Those who spend in all circumstances whether they are in ease or in hardship.” (3:134)

iv. There are instances in which we do not take pains to find out the most deserving recipients of our charity.

At times, we do not realize that people among our friends and relatives are in need while we spend huge amounts in charity by giving to various charities not directly related to us. It is a natural right of our close ones that if they are in need they should be the first recipients of our charity.

Similarly, there may be people around us who in spite of appearing financially sound are in fact in deep financial stress; however, their self-esteem does not let them make fuss of the situation and they conduct themselves in a dignified manner. It is our responsibility to find out such people; it only requires a little insight and careful observation. The Qur’ān points out: “This [spending] is for the poor who are stranded in the cause of God and are not able to travel in the land to earn their livelihood. The ignorant take them for men of wealth on account of their modest behaviour. You can recognize them by their faces – they

are not annoyingly insistent in begging.” (2:273)

v. At times, we end up scolding a beggar or a person who asks for monetary help. This is something very despicable. If a person is not in a position to help, he can still show sympathy and then withdraw in a dignified way. The Qur’ān says: “A kind word and forgiveness [at unpleasant instances] is better than charity followed by inflicting hurt.” (2:262)

These are some points that we need to ponder while spending in charity. They may go unnoticed. Let us resolve to be more cautious and more vigilant about them.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Turning Foes into Friends

We live among friends and foes. There are those who are fond of us and are very affectionate, and there are others who are jealous of us and conspire to make us sink in life. Some of these foes are covert while some can be easily identified. We really feel annoyed and frustrated at their attitude. But can we turn foes into friends?

The answer can be in the negative and can also be in the affirmative.

In the negative, if care is not exercised and we end up responding in a negative way and become worse foes to our foes than they are to us.

In the affirmative, if our guideline is the Qur’ānic verse: Retaliate evil with that which is better, and he who is your foe will become your dearest friend. But none will acquire this except those who patiently endure; none will acquire this except those who are truly fortunate. (41:34-35).

In other words, if with patience and endurance, perseverance and forbearance we keep on doing good turns to our foes and adversaries, it can melt their hearts and turn them into our dearest buddies. Moral victory is what we should aim for, as this subjugates hearts and conquers egos. Meeting our foes with a

bright smile, extending out a warm hand to them, greeting them with enthusiasm and treating them with respect are just some starters of this journey.

Giving them gifts at opportune moments, hiding their faults when others want to highlight them, praising their abilities when others want to play them down, helping them in times of difficulty when few are there for them are the next steps of this journey.

While doing our part by adopting these measures, we must also turn to God and pray for our foes. We must seek His help and invoke Him to melt their hearts and make them mend their ways. And more than that seek His help to see our own flaws and mend our own ways.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Leap out for Others!

We are often occupied with our own selves. Our desires, our fears, our ideals, our worries, our comforts, our families and the list goes on and on. Though it is certainly not wrong to think for our own selves, what can really be painful is to not look beyond us. It is outright self-centeredness and a cause of serious concern if we are not even able to detect the pangs of pain around us. A parent in distress, an employee in discomfort, a friend in agony, a neighbour in anguish, an ailing acquaintance, a relative in grief, a pet in pain, a plant in need of water – these are some situations which require our attention – asap. We must look about and be on the look out for such scenarios. Our minds' antennas should catch signals of grief and agony found around us and our eyes and ears should track down misery and sorrow that lie in our vicinity.

If we are vigilant in this regard, then the next step is action: to do whatever we can to redress such situations: financially, physically and intellectually. However, if nothing of this sort can be done, there still are some steps that we can take:

- i. Hear out the person in grief; it will lessen his burden.
- ii. Communicate this grief to others; maybe they will be able to help.
- iii. Request others, if they too are helpless, to communicate this to their own circle of friends
- iv. Beseech and invoke the Almighty from the depth of our heart and soul. It is said that at times prayers can move mountains!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Secret to Inner Peace!

Tensions and worries seem to be an essential part of our lives. Strained finances, ill-health, failure in studies, fiasco in business ventures, fatal accidents, kidnappings, house burglaries, tragic deaths, handicapped children, unfulfilled desires, feeling of deprivation ... and the list goes on. It becomes very difficult at times to cope with these sufferings in life. And then troubles seldom come singly. They come in clusters and then continue to come. Relentless and ruthless they become as a result.

The result more often than not is frustration and depression. Inner peace and mental calm are lost. The agony of life stares us in the eye. How can we tackle this scenario?

Besides a strong relationship with God, a three pronged strategy may help us win inner peace:

1. Let us always keep a track of our blessings. The favours of God on each of us are numerous – in fact limitless. A list of these blessings will easily outnumber the troubles we may be facing. We tend to lose sight of them and take them for granted. So it is recommended that we continue to count our blessings each day. The best occupation of sitting idle is to rehearse and review what we have. This will give us the strength and resilience to fight the miseries of life. Above all, it will bless us with that inner calm so missing in our lives today.

2. Let us set before ourselves a mission in life. If we have an objective in life and go all out in achieving it, worries and suffering will not bother us as much – simply because we will have little time for them. A person who is focused on a cause is so deeply involved in realizing his mission that worries he may have – but seldom will they get the better of him. His commitment and devotion to a cause will contribute to his inner peace.

3. Let us start sharing the woes of people around us by reaching out to them and helping them as much as we can in their difficulties and worries. Knowing about the grief of others lessens our own grief. It gives solace to the mind that we are better off than so many. Lending a hand to others makes us contributing individuals to the society and makes us look at life in a positive way. Instead of brooding on what we do not have, we should see what others do not have. This will make us thankful to God and give us mental peace.

These then are three therapies that are the key to inner peace. Summing up:

The first of these can be called: Gratitude Therapy.

The second can be called: Mission Therapy

The third can be called: Reaching-Out Therapy

(Dr. Shehzad Saleem)

Saintly Sinners

As human beings, sinning and erring come to us naturally and at times persistently. Frenzy gets the better of us and we end up committing sins that we may feel ashamed of. Though this is unbecoming of us yet if we realize the blemish and immediately turn in penitence to God and make amends, we have been given glad tidings of forgiveness by the Almighty:

It is incumbent upon God to forgive only those who commit a sin while being overwhelmed with emotions and then

quickly repent. It is they who are forgiven by God. God is All-Knowing and Wise. (4:17)

Sinning continuously, at times, takes us deeper into sin and reduces our inclination to seek forgiveness. If we continue to sin after repeated repentance, we are overcome with frustration and hopelessness. We think that since we are so incorrigible and return to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree in spite of frequent bouts of repentance, how can God forgive such a habitual sinner? It may be worthwhile to note that instilling hopelessness in us is one of the greatest weapons of Satan. In Arabic, his name is Iblīs which means one who has eternally lost hope. Hence, he wants to make all his targets lose hope like him. It is here that we need to stand up after every fall and take hold of ourselves after every transgression. We must never lose hope in God's mercy even if we sin persistently. The above verse of the Qur'ān says that every time person repents after being overwhelmed by emotions, God will forgive him. It does not say that this clemency of God is not for persistent sinners.

What thus needs to be understood is that it is not the sin which counts as much as our attitude after it. Like lost sheep that have wandered away from the herd, we need to get back into the herd minded by the supreme shepherd.

Moreover, let us not hate sinners; let us hate their sins. We ourselves are no less sinners. Hating sinners will be like hating our own selves. It also is worthwhile to note that however much we may try, we cannot rid ourselves from sins entirely. Saints we may become for a while but not forever. Even saints can slip because to falter and err comes to us naturally. So let us behave as humans.

Finally, in choosing to become saints or sinners, let us choose to become saintly sinners: whenever we sin, we should feel embarrassed, repent before God and go on to make amends wherever possible.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

The Battle for Honesty Continues!

It is not easy to remain honest in a society where dishonesty is the name of the game, a society in which virtue and vice were once distinguishable and when people perpetrated evil they would feel ashamed about it; in fact, they would try their best to hide their evil ways. Alas! Today the once distinct line between virtue and vice has become blurred. People now openly indulge in wrongs and even have the audacity to boast about them. Illegal gratification, dishonesty, corruption, cheating and lying have become such common practices that hardly are they looked down upon:

O Judgement thou art fled to Brutish beasts!
And men have lost their reason

What then should be done to counter these wrongdoings going on at such a massive scale? Should we sit and watch and let the tide sweep us away? What about our future generations? Should we allow them to fall prey to these monstrous evils? Should we not even put up some resistance? Surely, we cannot be so spineless as to let the flood of falsehood continue unabated and unchecked! Who knows that if we stand against it in the form of a human chain, we may be able to turn the tide with a collective effort?

So, let us declare war against these dissolute practices: for their nature is diabolic, their fibre fiendish and their breed sinister. Let us launch an offensive against Satan and his agents. Let us try to become exemplars of morality and let this be our *only* weapon in this uprising. Lighting our own candle of truth in the desolate darkness that prevails can be the starting point. Protecting its flame from adverse currents should then become our mission.

Let us make a solemn commitment that we will be honest even if others are dishonest to us and that we will always follow the voice of our conscience. Let us then come forward and light up the path of honesty and justice, truth and righteousness – for whatever it takes. Yes, for whatever it takes!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Two Tough Trials

As soon as we reach mental maturity, we are faced with two tough and perpetual trials: one relates to the heart, one to the eye. At times, choices have to be made every second. The sequence is relentless and needs tremendous will power which only a strong relationship with God can provide.

In the trial that relates to the heart, a person is faced with the ordeal of lending ear to the calls of his conscience – if it is vibrant and alive. Good and evil are innately found in his nature. He does not need any external help to find out about them. However, help and push is certainly needed to make the right choice. That a person prefers good to evil at most instances is not easy at all. It is indeed an exacting trial.

In the trial that relates to the eye, a person must guard his gaze from taking undue liberty when viewing members of the opposite gender. In an era, where ogling is normal practice and staring at physical attributes a common norm, it needs a concerted effort to not let our eyes go astray. Like the trial of the heart, this too is a perpetual and unrelenting trial.

Let us make a resolute effort every day to consciously strive to succeed in these trials!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Discovering our Inner Talent

Every human being on this earth has some innate talent and ability which is more pronounced than the rest. In fact, it is this talent which shapes his aptitude for certain tasks. This talent and ability can become formidable if it is recognized at the right

time. This is because talents are generally found in raw form and need to be groomed and developed.

Unfortunately, neither our parents nor our educational system generally help in discovering our latent talents. The result is that people deprive themselves of their own inner potential. Instead of discovering them, more time is spent on wishful thinking, day dreaming and making castles in the air.

Yet, it is never too late. Whatever our age, we can begin the exercise to discover our inner talent. Here are ten questions which may help us in determining it.

1. What do you think you are naturally good at?
2. How would you use a gift of a handsome amount of money if it is given to you to be spent for a cause, issue or problem?
3. What activities make you lose track of time?
4. Which qualities of a person inspire you?
5. If you had to teach something, what would you teach?
6. If you were to give a message to a large group of people what would it be?
7. Who are your heroes and why?
8. People say: "Oh, you are so good at..."
9. What do people typically ask you for help in?
10. In which fields / subjects have you won praise or awards?

Discovering our inner talent can radically transform our lives. Let's begin today!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

When Death shall Die

We are all born to die. Death is the greatest and perhaps the most ignored reality of life. Some fleeting moments and then off we go. We may fall to the deception of this transience -- but not for long: the dawn of life relentlessly gives way to the dusk of death everyday only to herald the advent of a new dawn, a new

life. The process continues and life goes on under the shadow of death. Inexorable is this practice, unrelenting this law.

And then one day, the glorious sun and the milky moon, the dazzling stars and the stormy seas –would also meet their fate:

At the time [O People!] when the sky is rent asunder, and when the stars are scattered, and when the seas burst forth, and when the graves are opened, at that time each one [of these people who have wronged their souls] will come to know what he has sent forward and what he has left behind. (82:1-5)

And then, as this verse says, man would be made to stand before his Lord. He who was vanquished by death would now forever be free from its claws: “Death shall be no more: death thou shalt die.”

But realize he should: Death he may have overcome – but now he would face a dilemma more critical: the blissful life of Paradise or the torment of Hell.

Before such a time comes, would that we all remember that on that fateful day:

The disbeliever would cry out: “Would that I were dust.” (78:40)

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Quest for the Truth

The quest for the truth can prove to be the most despondent of tasks. At times, it may seem a lost cause, a mission impossible. So rough and rugged may be the terrain traversed that one tends to lose hope. Yet if a person persists in this quest and keeps searching for that elusive needle in the haystack, he might feel a divine force grasping his hands and taking him to the brink of his destination. He would then feel God – experience Him. Doors are opened, locks unbolted, the concealed revealed, the unknown known. Jesus (sws) is reported to have said:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened. (Matthew, 7:7-8)

A person who has gone through this experience is sure to learn that despair is the worst enemy of this yearning for the truth. He is bound to realize that to hope when there is no hope and to keep going when the going gets tough is the only way that may lead to success. To strive, to struggle and to never lose hope is what he should keep doing – for even if failure vanquishes him, he should know that it is the effort undertaken that would ultimately count. He would be able to stand up in the next world and say to the Almighty:

Lord! I had sought to seek the truth with all my mind, with all my heart and with all my soul!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Intellectual Stagnation

In our society everything is given patronage except learning and research. Praises are showered on worthless ideas, meaningless concepts are applauded and senseless thoughts extolled but, sadly enough, true knowledge is forsaken and condemned. Ignorance is garlanded with an ignorance profound. Scholarly research in religious issues, in particular, is considered high treason and inevitably rewarded with bricks and batons.

In this regard, the greatest malady is *Taqīd*¹. Every opinion which has once been adopted is never thought over again. Every idea which has once been formed is regarded with a sanctity which renders it eternal. Every view which has remained

1. Blind acceptance of a jurist's verdict.

undisputed in the past has become no less than the Word of God. Emotional attachment to traditional concepts and conventional thoughts, however foolish they may be and however much they might distort the truth, has given rise to prejudice and intolerance. Sincere words of criticism are anticipated with fire and fury from these quarters. A person who does so is degraded and disgraced in the society, even if his arguments are based on the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*.

But then, this attitude is not even worth complaining. Irrespective of all consequences, a person should always uphold the voice of his conscience. He should remain steadfast in the cause of truth and face every adverse current of the society with grit and endurance. Any increase in the intensity of opposition should only increase his patience. The more the going gets tough, the tougher he should become---for expending even the last drop of blood in the cause of truth will make this path easier for others to tread. Like a lighthouse all his struggles and sacrifices will gleam as a source of guidance for humanity. He would then redefine the meaning of courage. He would then extend the frontiers of valour. He would then add new dimensions to dare and defiance. In the heavens, the angels will pray for his success and upon the earth success itself would yearn to waylay him.

He should, also, never forget that since the earliest stroke of his intellectual voyage, he has remained the most besought target of traditionalists---the worst enemies of true knowledge. They have always challenged the torrent of his intellectual advancement. In all times of known history they have obstructed his progress, but then, with no avail. Every time that their claws have closed on the champions of truth, a new episode of man's loftiness has been scribed by the historians pen. Ibn Taimiyah and Ibn Hazm, Abu-Hanifa and Malik, Socrates and Copernicus all have written with their own blood, stories of man's resolve against oppression and persecution. They did die fighting but with their death the torch of truth shone even more brightly and is held high to this day by the successors of these giants, by no means any less in stature.

These legends, perhaps, have a message for us:

Lives of great men all remind us

We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

The Sword of Poise

The Almighty has made this world a place for trials and tests. Here each person has been given the chance to prove his mettle and become worthy of an eternal reward in the Hereafter. If he is unable to do so, he shall have to face the ignominy of Hell. The *Qur'ān* we read every day and the prayer we offer five times a day actually serve to remind us of this reality, which we tend to forget so very easily.

However, this does not mean that one should not get involved in worldly affairs. In fact, a person should use whatever talents he has been blessed with for the betterment of the society he lives in. He should try to correctly assess himself and choose a life which best suits his talents and abilities. A person who contributes towards building a society is actually fulfilling his duty not only towards His Creator, but also towards his fellow human beings. The only thing he must remain mindful of in his struggles in the affairs of this world is that whenever, he has to make a decision in life and there exists a clash between interests of this world and those of the Hereafter, then he should always give priority to the Hereafter. Islam is not a religion of hermits and recluses, nor does it condone leading a life that is cut off from the rest of the world. It wants a person to live in the mainstream of events and face the harsh realities of life. It wants people to become tough and get going when the going gets tough. Escapism and Indulgence are two extremes which a person must avoid.

In other words, the key word is poise and giving each thing its proper due. Neither should a person get so involved in life that he forgets the Hereafter, nor should he forsake the life of this

world, lest he lose the chance to achieve high honours in the Hereafter.

The poise we are required to maintain in life is our real test. The circumstances each one of us is put through may vary, but the trial each of one us is put through is the same. Once a person realizes this fact, he must try to adjust his life and his attitude towards life according to this barometer. This of course requires a lot of inner conviction and discipline from him. A tall order it may be, but once a person sets out in this direction, he is sure to experience that his solitary soul is not solitary after all. He would then live close to His Creator and experience the joys of the world to come in this very world.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Remembering God

A believer's day should be spent as much as is possible in his Creator's remembrance. This remembrance not only reinforces his relationship with God his Lord, but also provides him with the inner strength to ward off evil when it comes his way. It blesses him with inner peace and serenity and endows him with a life that is spent to serve and please the Almighty.

There are a number of ways to remember God: Some of the important forms include saying the prayer, reading His guidance, making supplications, asking His forgiveness, expressing gratitude at His favours and blessings and deliberating on His attributes and established laws and practices. However, in order to reap the benefits of God's verbal remembrance there is one primary requirement: one must pay special attention to what is said and recited. The more one concentrates on the words he utters, the more meaningful the whole exercise becomes.

Today, unfortunately, the spirit of keeping God in remembrance seems to be marred by two things:

Firstly, certain words that express God's remembrance are repeated in a certain fixed quantity often counted on beads and

ticker-machines. This has given this remembrance a sort of mechanical and artificial element. One tends to be more attentive to the count than to what is actually being said. In fact, one seems to be so overwhelmed with the figure he or she has in mind that words which might otherwise be a beautiful expression of Allah's remembrance fail to move the heart or stir the soul.

Secondly, God's remembrance in general has assumed the form of congregational recitals. This is something which was not found in the time of the Prophet (sws). The only congregational *dhikr* which the Prophet (sws) seems to have undertaken was the collective prayer offered in the mosque. All other forms are generally more suited to be done when a person is alone. In seclusion, a person's emotions and feelings are very pure and flow naturally out of him; *dhikr* in such circumstances is also more free from false pretense.

It is, therefore, strongly recommended that people should adopt only those forms of *dhikr* which do not deride its spirit and are a means of illuminating both the mind and the heart.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Human Conscience and the Day of Judgement

Every human being is born with a conscience. Within this conscience resides the cognizance of good and evil. Through this conscience a person has an inborn knowledge of what is good and what is evil. Not only does a person has the ability to discriminate between good and evil, he is also equipped with an internal correcting mechanism: The conscience within him praises him on every good he does and pricks him on every evil that emanates from him. This is the basic function of human conscience. If a person does not pay heed to the calls of his conscience, it becomes weaker and ultimately even dies. A dead conscience means that it no longer rebukes a person on any wrong he commits. Conversely, it remains alive only when its calls are heeded to.

Now it is the verdict of sense and reason that a person should

succeed if he adopts the good revealed to his conscience, and be doomed if he adopts the evil revealed to it. However, since this world is a place of trial and test, and as a consequence of this, the result of a good enterprise is not necessarily good and the result of an evil undertaking is not necessarily evil, a day must come when results are in accordance with the nature of deeds. Furthermore, if the Almighty has no intention of evaluating a person, why at all has He endowed him with such an internal mechanism of correction? The *Qur'ān* stresses that not believing in a day in which good and evil shall produce congruous results would mean that this world is the toy-land of an unjust Creator in which the righteous and the wrongdoers meet the same fate. It, therefore, asserts that the mere existence of conscience in a person is evidence enough for the Day of Judgement:

[They think that the Day of Judgement will never be]; By no means! I present as evidence the Day of Judgement itself. By no means! I present as evidence this reproaching soul [within you]. Does man think that We will not be able to bring together his bones? Why not? We can put together his very finger tips. [No this is not so]; in fact [the truth is that] man wants to be mischievous before his [conscience]. He asks: 'When will the Day of Judgement be?' (75:1-6)

In other words, this chiding conscience within a person shows that he will not be left unaccountable for his deeds. One day, he will be called to account. A person may be blind to the brimming evidence of this Day in the world around him but he cannot be blind to the world within him, unless of course he has lulled the calls of his conscience to sleep.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

The Trials of Life

According to the *Qur'ān*, a Muslim should always try to

remain thankful to the circumstances the Almighty has ordained for him. Our objective as a Muslim is to surrender to His will since we know that He always means well for us. It is His will which has to ultimately prevail and it is to this will that we must submit. This resignation is the essence of Islam.

In this regard, the true philosophy of life should be understood. We have been created to be tested and tried regarding our deeds. This trial has been conducted through the circumstances which we are put in. If we are put through good circumstances, then our trial is whether we remain thankful to the Almighty, Who gave us without asking and without our having any right. If we are put through difficult circumstances, then our trial is whether we show perseverance and patience in these times or not.

Both these circumstances generally come in a person's life. They are his real test. He cannot be given total happiness or total misery since that would make the trial profoundly difficult.

Though good circumstances often make us forget God, trying circumstances at times are a blessing in disguise: they strengthen our inner-self and increase our resilience to face adverse circumstances; similarly, they are a means of bringing us closer to God for in such situations we tend to remember God more; moreover, trials also bring to the fore our latent potentials and abilities because some abilities are only nurtured if the going gets tough. Finally, trials are a time of soul-searching and should push us to re-evaluate our moral blemishes.

It is evident from the Qur'ān that the Almighty tests us through trials and difficult circumstances:

- i. to punish us for our own misdoings (42:30),
- ii. to shield us from greater misery (18:74, 18:79),
- iii. to sift out the evil within us (3:179),
- iv. to give us the opportunity to earn reward by showing patience (3:142, 76:12).

In such circumstances, it is expected that a person should surrender to God's will and always seek Him. He is our only saviour and refuge – One Who we will never lose like our other relations.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

...Till you Find your Dream

Climb every mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream

It was many years ago when I first heard this beautiful stanza. Sung by Patricia Routledge for the movie "Sound of Music," these words indeed carry a great message for all of us:

To strive, to search and to never lose hope.
To try, try and try again and to never despair.
The will to go on and the will to leave no stone unturned in seeking one's goal is a person's greatest asset. Like that mountain rivulet that flows on a rocky surface but still smoothly glides down, fight we must against adverse circumstances and smoothly make our own way.

To dwell on dreams is great – to launch a relentless effort to realize them greater... but if a person is unable to fulfil his dream in spite of all the effort, he must accept the will of the Almighty. Mere dreaming is ambition, but dreaming with care is submission. So, our plans may not always materialize, but the effort expended should always be in line with what Ḥaāfīz Shīrāzī once said:

دست از طلب ندارم تا کام من برآید

یا تن رسد بجانان یا جان ز تن در آید

(I shall never rest at peace until I achieve my goal. Either I shall win my beloved or shall die in this cause)

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

All is Well ...!

Not always do our plans materialize; not always do our expectations fetch congruous results; not always do our efforts bear fruit. And then, at times we are faced with staggering circumstances: a handicapped child is born, a person dies in the prime of his youth, a flourishing business suddenly runs into great losses, a young lady becomes a widow, cruel relatives deprive their blood relations from even the basic necessities of life. The list of course is unending.

The result of all this more often than not is quite predictable: depression, continued sorrow and sometimes severe anger and rage. The unexpected brings out from within us reactions which cross limits.

The *Qur'ān* says that there may be various reasons for such untoward circumstances. While explaining one of them it says:

And sometimes you dislike a thing and [in reality] there is great welfare for you in it and sometimes you like a thing and [in reality] there is great harm for you in it. Allah knows and you know not. (2:216)

It is thus expected of a Muslim to submit to the Almighty in all circumstances with the belief that whatever has happened was best for him. We cannot always grasp the profundity of the Almighty's wisdom. Time, however, often tells how the 'untoward' happening actually positively influences the course of our life. So instead of becoming upset and frustrated we must resign to his will and wait to see how things ultimately take shape.

In short, 'all is well even if does not *seem* to end well'.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Trial of the Affluent

There are people who think that the affluent people of the world are put through lesser trial since they have wealth and riches to play about. They do not have to worry about their food and shelter. The luxuries of life open their arms for them.

This perception is not true. The Almighty has created this world as a trial and test for all of us. Every one of us undergoes this trial in some form or the other. It is not that only the poor and the needy are put through this test. Affluence also is a form of trial. Here the trial is to test a person regarding his attitude towards the Almighty. He is tested on whether he shows gratitude to the Almighty on His favours and blessings. As such, since a person generally tends to forget his Lord if he is blessed with an affluent life, this trial is perhaps tougher than that of a person who is put through the trial of poverty and adverse circumstances; in such circumstances, a person tends to remember the Lord more – or at least, has more opportunities for this remembrance.

Moreover, affluence is just one form of comfort a person may have. There are people who maybe affluent and very rich, but still have various forms of mental worries, troubles and tribulations.

Besides, having a strong relationship with the Almighty, the best way to fight out the ups and downs of life is to always look at people who are worse off: a cursory glance would bring many to our mind. One will begin to realize what one actually has in contrast with millions of others. Where others have been deprived, he would find himself blessed with many favours.

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

The Key to Everlasting Friendship

Making friends is easy; maintaining friendship is not. In fact, making ourselves unpopular is a job so easily done. One slip of

the tongue, one harsh word, one instance of anger and we might end up losing our best of friends. What's more – friends may even turn into foes if this tendency is not checked.

The key to a lasting friendship is self-control. But then, this is not easy. It only comes through a strong relationship with the Almighty, and a firm commitment to the notion that self-control and self-restraint in this world will lead us to great reward in the Hereafter.

One of the toughest impediments in exercising self-control is an unfavourable response from a friend. One often gets put off by a cold response. It is not easy to put up with such behaviour. The best and perhaps the most successful way to tackle it is to keep doing good regardless of what one encounters in return. This requires great effort and profound patience. It also requires that a person should not expect anything in return for a favour he does. If it is returned, he should consider it a bonus, and if it is not, he should continue to do good as long as he can and adhere to the dictum:

Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as you can

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Soul Searching!

Experiencing some loss is a taxing time of a person's life. It reminds him of a great reality he often forgets and ignores: trials and tribulations are a part and parcel of life; they change form but as long as a person breathes they can come anytime, more so when least expected.

But when they come, it is not the time to get depressed and feel defeated. It is time for some soul searching.

Feelings of anguish and distress at the loss should soon be replaced with review and re-evaluation of one's life. Sometimes, damage and loss are a blessing in disguise. They serve to correct and redirect a person. The disarray and unsettlement they cause afford him an opportunity to break away from the ruthless routine of life and re-assess his priorities. When a person is wandering in a desert, everything around him looks so deceptively similar that he may serenely tread on a path which actually leads him away from his destination. It is in these circumstances that sometimes stormy winds and jolts of thunder induce him to re-think his way.

But if he wants to see the silver lining behind that dark cloud, he must adopt a positive attitude when he experiences some loss or deprivation. Nothing other than a relationship of deep trust with the Almighty is needed to engender this positive attitude: He is the haven and sanctuary for all of us; and He, in reality, never wishes ill for His creation. We only need to seek and serve Him:

The Lord is the Refuge for the oppressed,
A stronghold in times of trouble
those who know your name will trust in you
For you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.
(Psalms 9:9-10)

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

... And the List is Unending!

We often become thankful to our Creator even though His favours abound. Even a very partial list of these favours would outdo a loss or deprivation we may be experiencing. It is just a question of opening our eyes to the world around us. We need to look at the shimmering sun whose warmth is so vital for life, the glittering stars which light up the heavens to show us the way,

the towering mountains which maintain the balance of this earth, the rain which enlivens desolate terrains; the bustling day which dawns to herald new opportunities in life, the serene night which alights to provide us with peaceful slumber, and still closer ... the selfless mother who is an embodiment of affection for her children, the tireless father who sweats for the family and dutiful children who are a bliss for their parents ... and the list is unending!

And if this is not enough, we need to think of the mishaps we have been shielded from; tales of sorrow and sadness are writ large in our surroundings: every now and then we hear of a young lady becoming a widow, a child being born handicapped, robbers looting the dowry of a poor girl, a sole bread runner of a family being murdered on a trivial issue ... and the list is unending!

Our souls should thus be drenched with gratitude and return favours we must in whatever form we can: remembering God in solitude to thank Him for His blessings, being kind to parents for love which is matchless and which cannot be repaid, spending on the indigent who are too shy to ask, bearing ourselves with humility which is not pretentious, controlling anger over the subservient who are too weak to speak out and ... and ... and even meeting others with a smiling face ... and, of course, the list is unending!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Travelling Alone!

Travelling alone in a journey is a very revealing experience. It reminds us that man is in fact alone in his voyage on this earth. His only companion is God, and his only solace in this journey is the time he spends in God's remembrance. A living relationship with God gives him the piece of mind in the humdrum of this expedition.

All supports are temporary and transient, and friends are not

forever. God has been kind enough to provide this ephemeral backing to man. However, man must realize that if he wants to remain at peace with his heart, he must remain connected to the abounding mercy and unfathomable benevolence of the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He should know that God is even closer to him than his life-vein. He may not be able to see him or touch him, but he most certainly can experience him. And this is no new an experience to him: after all, he never sees the gust of wind which freshens him up, but he can feel it; he never see the scent of a rose which enthralls him, but he can smell its fragrance.

Coming close to God requires some extra effort. And why should not that extra effort be expended if it can lead to a close companionship with Him. One step in this direction is to make an effort to get up late at night and stand in prayer before Him. It is the best time to sleep for those who sleep and the best time to be awake at for those who can break their sleep. Real sacrifice is the sacrifice of what is most cherished. It is at this time that the Almighty descends to the nearest of heavens to answer the prayers of those who have forsaken their sleep to converse with Him. It is at this time when He proclaims: "Is there any person who repents at this time that I may forgive him? Is there anyone who seeks My mercy that I may enshroud him in My mercy?"

... so, the lone traveller will find himself to be in divine company!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

**Brig. Noor Ahmed Husain's
Reminiscences of Quaid-e-Azam and
Liaquat Ali Khan**

Brig. Noor Ahmed Husain passed away on 9th August 2011 after a protracted illness. He was the last military ADC (Aide-de-Camp) of the Quaid. As such he was a treasure trove of the history of the Pakistan movement and in particular of the last six

months of the father of the nation. As a grand nephew of Brigadier sahib, I had the privilege of hearing him both in private and in public while he would recount many incidents and anecdotes about the Quaid-e-Azam and Liaquat Ali Khan. Most of these events may already be known to many and a few might be new. I consider it a national duty to share these events with all those who are interested in an eyewitness account of our history. I am penning down some of the memories I have of Brigadier sahib's own memories of these two great leaders of Pakistan.

Quaid e Azam

During his association with the Quaid as his ADC, Brigadier sahib was obviously able to observe the father of the nation very closely and became privy to many of his habits. He once told us that the Quaid was a very reserved person and remained very pensive in his last days at Ziarat. He was soft spoken and kind hearted unless someone tried to hide his mistake. He was also very quick in correcting grammar or wrong diction. At times he would be stern, probably because of office pressures. He would always have soup at both meals. Lunch was with both ADCs. It would strictly be one dish. It would be a very quiet affair and the Quaid would often remain lost in his thoughts. Brig sahib recalls that the Quaid was very fastidious in dressing especially in his selection of cuff links and ties. His conversation would mostly be in English with hardly a word of Urdu being spoken. Brigadier sahib clearly remembers not seeing the Quaid short tempered or cynical despite the fact that his country was facing crippling financial problems. According to Brigadier sahib, the Quaid was truly what was once said of him by someone: hard as a diamond who had with the brilliance of a diamond.

An incident that Brigadier sahib once related to us showed how much a man of principles the Quaid was. The Quaid instructed him as his ADC to buy a pair of socks from a vendor in Quetta. He vividly remembers that the Quaid gave him 10 rupees to purchase a top English brand. He returned with the socks. Much to his surprise, he found that the Quaid was not satisfied with the deal and asked him to return these socks. He was told by the Quaid that the socks were substandard for there was a small hole in one of them. The Quaid sternly remarked:

“Did he charge the full price for these; if he did, he had done a wrong thing?” Brig sahib’s conclusion was that the Quaid wanted to impress upon the shopkeeper the ethical principles of doing business.

A similar incident about the Quaid’s strong regard for principles was narrated to Brigadier sahib by Captain Gul Hasan (later General Gul Hassan) who was Brigadier sahib’s predecessor as ADC: once a person approached him (Gul Hassan) with his visiting card to see the Quaid at the Governor General’s residence in Karachi. Gul Hasan took the card to the Quaid. After looking at the card, the Quaid scratched it with a red pencil and told Gul: “Tell him that I will not see him.” Gul was taken aback and as he was walking back he looked up and saw that the card read: Ahmad Ali Jinnah, brother of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Governor General of Pakistan. The part “brother of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Governor General of Pakistan” had been scratched. By this, he wanted to put an end to narcissism, surmised Brigadier sahib.

While recalling the most prized possession he had received from the Quaid – again a reflection of the Quaid’s regard for principles – Brigadier sahib writes:

There are many memories one cherishes as one nears the end of one’s journey. But the most cherished possession I have of the Quaid is neither a sterling silver cigarette case nor a gold-plated souvenir usually presented by Heads of State to their personal staff. It is the autograph of Quaid-i-Azam not done on a photograph but on a chit of simple white paper for a tin of 50 Craven ‘A’ cigarettes, he had purchased from his – the Governor-General’s Household, signed for the sake of absolute accountability of the tax payers money, entrusted to him as Head of the State – the State he himself had founded.

(<http://nazariapak.info/quaid/resdocs/reminiscences.asp>)

Here is another interesting incident recorded by him in a published essay while reminiscing about the Quaid’s intense regard for the rule of law:

To escape from the heat and humidity of Karachi and on the advice of his personal physician, the Quaid decided to fly to Quetta, accompanied by a skeleton staff. There are many

incidents one can recollect, but one comes to mind again and again. The Quaid was staying in the Residency, vacated by the AGG (Mr Savidge), for the Quaid. The relations of the AGG and Pakistani Judicial Commissioner were strained. The Pakistani Judicial Commissioner, No. 2 in Baluchistan's administration, had taken exception to some remark of the AGG and had served notice on him that unless he apologized, the former would haul him up for contempt of court. The AGG was in a predicament. As head of the administration and host to the Quaid how could he do so without losing face? Could we, the ADCs, request the Quaid to intervene? We know which ground we could tread and which we dared not. As the day of tendering apology drew near, Mr Savidge, grew more and more restive and apprehensive. Finally he met the Quaid and requested intervention. The Quaid listened quietly, paused for a moment, looked out of the window into the picturesque garden below; and said, "Mr. Savidge the law must take its course and must be upheld, you must not hesitate in doing the right thing by apologizing," Mr. Savidge tendered his apology at the due time and place. The Quaid lived by principles and not by personalities or expediency.

<http://nazariapak.info/quaid/resdocs/reminiscences.asp>

It was this unflinching attitude and a great regard for principles that made the Quaid very dear to all. Brigadier sahib once related to us a mind boggling incident which showed how people valued and cared for the Quaid and were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the gravely sick Quaid when he was spending his last days in Ziarat in 1948. Squadron leader Abdullah Baig volunteered to deliver an injection to Brigadier sahib which the doctors had advised was necessary for the Quaid's life. Sqn Ldr. Abdullah Baig had to fly from Karachi to Quetta to deliver it in a PAF Dakota. The meteorological office at Quetta air base warned that there was almost no visibility at the airstrip and landing in such conditions was virtually like plunging into the jaws of death. Undaunted by this, Sqn Ldr. Abdullah jumped on the plane and informed Brigadier sahib that he had decided for the sake of the Quaid's life to undertake this suicidal mission. To his immense relief, when hours later the plane miraculously landed safely at the Quetta air strip,

Brigadier sahib jumped with joy. As he finished narrating this incident to us, his eyes lit up and his face became radiant with pride. What a stock of officers the Air Force had produced!

Brig sahib would become particularly sad when he would narrate the last few months of the Quaid's life. In his personal opinion, the decision to go to Ziarat, a high altitude region of Balochistan was not correct. It is a place which is more than 7000 ft above sea level and the oxygen level there is not that high and breathing is not that difficult. While recounting one of the reasons which in his view induced the Quaid to go to Ziarat, Brigadier sahib told us that while the Quaid was in Quetta he was living in the residence of the AGG of Quetta who had vacated his house for him. The Quaid did not like to inconvenience anyone for his sake. Ms. Jinnah and some others tried to dissuade the Quaid from going there but he had taken the decision. Conditions at Ziarat were not very rosy. There was no electricity there and they had to use a generator from 6 to 10 pm after which kerosene lamps were used. About the Quaid's illness, Brigadier sahib once informed us that British reports said that it was lung cancer while the Pakistani doctors insisted that it was Tuberculosis.

According to Brigadier sahib, during their stay in Ziarat, the Quaid never consulted Ms. Fatima Jinnah on state matters. He treated her more like a daughter because she was sixteen years younger than him. In Brigadier sahib's assessment, she was quite hopeful that the Quaid would nominate her to take over from him. She would often ask Brigadier sahib about the person who was being selected for the job. Brigadier sahib also disclosed to us that in April 1948 Begum Khawaja Nazimuddin told him that her husband was told to get ready to move to Karachi at short notice. From this, Brigadier sahib had gathered that the Quaid already had Khawaja Nazimuddin in mind. Brigadier sahib informed us that in April 1948, the Quaid had fallen very ill and the doctors had virtually given up. It was also at this time that the decision to move to Ziarat was taken.

While once recounting the last hundred days of the Quaid in a televised interview, Brigadier sahib related that they had to gone to Quetta from Ziarat on the 12th of Aug to record the Quaid's speech for 14th August – the first birthday of Pakistan. Mr Z.A. Bukhari had come there with all the paraphernalia. When the

speech recording began, Quaid's voice was so feeble and frail that he could not have it recorded. Ultimately it was decided that this speech would be broadcast by someone else.

On 10th Sep while they were still in Quetta and had not gone back to Ziarat, Dr Col. Elahi Baksh asked Brigadier sahib to move the Quaid to Karachi and asked him to call over his Viking plane. Sister Dunham, a qualified English nurse was with them to look after the Quaid. The Quaid was taken on the stretcher in the ambulance to the aircraft in the afternoon of 11th Sep. Brigadier sahib told us that he held the stretcher from the head side and Lt. Mazhar the (Naval ADC) from the other. As they were taking the stretcher to the plane a gust of wind blew the sheet onto the Quaid's face. With his right hand, the Quaid put it back which meant that he was fully in his senses. The Quaid even returned the salute of the RAF staff when he entered the plane. Brig sahib recounted that during the air journey, there came a moment when weather became very bumpy. A British officer attending to the Quaid related later that the Quaid gave him a big smile and told him not to worry.

Much has been said and written about the ambulance which broke down after the Quaid was put into it. According to Brigadier sahib, there is a lot of exaggeration in the story. The sequence of events according to him was that he was told that this was to be a private arrival with no protocol. The plane landed at the Mauripur airfield where an ambulance came and he was put in it. Liaquat Ali Khan and Sardar Abdur Rabb Nishtar were there in their private capacities to welcome him. Sister Dunham and Ms. Jinnah were in the ambulance. Later in the journey the ambulance broke down. The Military Secretary dashed off to get another ambulance and returned with it in 30-40 minutes. The Quaid was very much alive and comfortable and was transferred into it and the caravan consisting of four cars reached the Governor General's house. It is not true that he was kept in the heat and bore its brunt. The Quaid was then taken to a small room on the ground floor because the stretcher could not be taken up the stairs. The Quaid had refused a lift to be installed at the Governor General's residence because he thought that the government of Pakistan could not afford this big expense. Dr Col Elahi Bakhsh and other doctors gave an injection to sedate the Quaid as he was restless. At 7 pm, the

Military secretary told Brigadier sahib to arrange to get his daughter who was in Bombay. At around 10 30 pm, Col Elahi Bakhsh walked out, threw down his stethoscope and slumped on a sofa. Knowing that the fateful moment had arrived, Brigadier sahib recalls that he charged into the room where he found the Quaid's face covered. Ms Jinnah was quietly sobbing and sister Dunham looked a picture of grief. The Quaid was no more.

Liaquat Ali Khan

Besides the Quaid, Brigadier sahib would also often express praise for Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. In many ways, he is an unsung hero of the Pakistan movement. His integrity and honesty have been regarded as exemplary. Once Brigadier sahib narrated to us an incident that clearly showed how Liaquat Ali Khan (a Nawabzada of India) in spite of being reduced to poverty wanted to settle the five million refugees before claiming any property for himself. Brigadier sahib told us that while he was the ADC to Governor-General Khwaja Nazimuddin, he was witness to an Eid day luncheon conversation in 1949 between the Governor General and the Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. On this occasion Ms Fatima Jinnah and Begum Rana Liaquat were also present. During the course of the conversation, Begum Rana suddenly turned to the Governor-General and addressed him: "If something happens to my husband, I and my two sons would be shelterless since we have no roof of our own." At this moment, Brigadier sahib paused and was visibly overcome with emotions. His voice became solemn and grim and then he continued with his narration. He said that before the governor general could respond, the Prime Minister exclaimed: "Until my people are settled, I will not accept any roof of my own."

One may keep in mind the fact that Liaquat Ali Khan had gifted his Delhi residence to the government of Pakistan where the offices of the Pakistan High Commission were later set up. It may also be noted that he never filed a claim for any property in Pakistan. It is known that when he died his vest was torn in several places and his socks had holes in them. What a man!

While describing the far sightedness of Liaquat Ali Khan, Brigadier sahib once related that as the Finance member Liaquat Ali Khan thought that the most important thing for the newly

founded state was to be able to pay the salaries of its employees. He knew that money would be short when the time came. So he wrote to the Bank of England and the State Bank of India that currency notes be printed and stored in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and Dacca. This was done and later it was this money which was used to pay salaries to government officers after partition when the public exchequer was short of money.

Brigadier sahib would often quote these words of the Quaid about Liaquat Ali Khan: "I found Pakistan and Liaquat founded Pakistan." A glowing tribute richly deserved by him.

Brigadier sahib was of the opinion that there was absolutely no basis for the alleged rift between the Quaid and Liaquat Ali Khan. According to him, the actual issue was that there was a clash of personalities between Begum Rana Liaquat and Ms. Fatimah Jinnah. Once when Liaquat Ali Khan offered the Quaid to tender his resignation if this would improve affairs, the Quaid responded by telling him: "Let not the relations between these two spoil our long standing relationship."

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Illness can be a Boon!

Flu, fever and body aches incapacitate us at times. We are so busy in the hectic routine of life that such instances are very frustrating – in fact, annoying. Many a time we become cranky and vent this frustration on our attendants and close ones who look after us.

What if we turn this bane into a boon!

Yes we can.

In the humdrum of life we lose track of many things. Most of us are so mechanically stuck in our routines that we seldom have time to think and re-evaluate our life-styles and our priorities. At times, something is severely wrong with our priorities and we do not follow the right moral conduct. We might not fulfill certain obligations we owe to God or to our fellow human beings. So

content we may be that we are fulfilling our obligations that a thought to the contrary does not even cross our minds in normal circumstances. However, it is situations like sickness that suddenly take us out from the set routine of life and place us in a new paradigm. Intense schedules are dashed to ground. Incessant meetings and relentless appointments have to take a break.

Annoying this may be but slowing down teaches us patience and with patience comes the opportunity not only to review and re-evaluate our lives but also to keep a more vigilant track of our blessings. A temporary shut-down in life should not shut our eyes to the favours of God. This is the best time to count and cherish them, savour and relish them. It is an opportunity, therefore, to strengthen our relationship with our Creator. It is a time to say a big thank you to Him and a time also to look at people around us who are deprived of God's favours and who need our affection and sympathy.

Another way to avail this illness-afforded free-time is to think of unconventional solutions to conventional issues. In illnesses which do not affect our intellectual powers, it can be a time to use our brain to think in an out-of-the-box manner. We can tune our brain to novel ideas and creative thinking. The starting point is to look at an issue that bothers a lot. We can make our mind solution oriented to this issue by simply thinking of bizarre and unusual ways of solving it.

Still another benefit that we can derive from this God provided break from life is to conquer our fears. Fears have their roots in our brain and need resolve and determination to overcome them. If this resolve can be mustered, then the best way to vanquish our fears is to gear ourselves during this time to plan to start doing exactly what we fear, consistently and rapidly if possible.

Illness then is a bane that can be turned into a boon with the right attitude!

Believe In Yourself

There may be days when you get up in the morning
and things aren't the way you had hoped they would be,
that's when you have to tell yourself
that things will get better.

There are times when people disappoint you and let you down,
but those are the times when you must remind yourself
to trust your own judgments and opinions, to keep your
life focused on believing in yourself
and all that you are capable of.

There will be challenges to face and
changes to make in your life,
and it is up to you to accept them.

Constantly keep yourself headed in the right direction for you.

It may not be easy at times,
but in those times of struggle
you will find a stronger sense of who you are,
so when the days come that are filled with
frustration and unexpected responsibilities,
remember to believe in yourself and all you want your life to
be,
because the challenges and changes will only help you to
find the goals that you know are meant to come true for you.

Keep believing in yourself.

(Author Unknown)

Outlook

Forget each kindness that you do
As soon as you have done it.
Forget the praise that falls to you
The moment you have won it.
Forget the slander that you hear
Before you can repeat it.
Forget each slight, each spite, each sheer
Wherever you may meet it.

Remember every kindness done
To you, whate'er its measure.
Remember praise by others won
And pass it on with pleasure.
Remember every promise made
And keep it to the letter.
Remember those who lend you aid
And be a grateful debtor.

Remember all the happiness
That comes your way in living.
Forget each worry and distress;
Be hopeful and forgiving.
Remember good, remember truth,
Remember Heaven's above you,

And you will find, through age and youth,
True joys and hearts to love you.

(Priscilla Leonard)

It Will Come

When life's largest pressures leave you struck dumb,

Just search for an answer; the solution will come.

When a tragedy occurs leaving you feeling numb,
Just wait for your health; the strength will come.

When everyone relies on you and there is no way you can see,
Trust your mind to think with time; patience is the key.

When you have made it where others always flee,
Just wait to gather courage; soon you'll be where you want to
be.

When it is nearing the end and you're in need,
Muster up your courage; endurance will lead.

it will come

(Nathan Watson)

Life's Mirror

There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true,
Then give the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you.

Give love, and love to your life will flow,
A strength in your utmost need,
Have faith, and a score of hearts will show
Their faith in your word and deed.

Give truth, and your gift will be paid in kind;
And honor will honor meet;
And a smile that is sweet will surely find
A smile that is just as sweet.

Give pity and sorrow to those who mourn,

You will gather in flowers again
The scattered seeds from your thoughts outborne,
Though the sowing seemed but vain.

For life is the mirror of king and slave,
'Tis just what we are and do;
***Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you.***

(Madeline Bridges)

Things Work Out

Because it rains when we wish it wouldn't,
Because men do what they often shouldn't,
Because crops fail, and plans go wrong-
Some of us grumble all day long.
But somehow, in spite of the care and doubt,
It seems at last that things work out.

Because we lose where we hoped to gain,
Because we suffer a little pain,
Because we must work when we'd like to play-
Some of us whimper along life's way.
But somehow, as day always follows the night,
Most of our troubles work out all right.

Because we cannot forever smile,
Because we must trudge in the dust awhile,
Because we think that the way is long-
Some of us whimper that life's all wrong.
But somehow we live and our sky grows bright,
And everything seems to work out all right.

So bend to your trouble and meet your care,
For the clouds must break, and the sky grow fair.

Let the rain come down, as it must and will,
But keep on working and hoping still.
For in spite of the grumblers who stand about,
Somehow, it seems, all things work out.

(Edgar A. Guest)

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
when the road you're trudging seems up hill,
when the funds are low and the debts are high,
and you want to smile but you have to sigh,
when care is pressing you down a bit - rest if you must,
but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns.

As everyone of us sometimes learns.

And many a failure turns about when he might have won had
he stuck it out.

Don't give up though the pace seems slow - you may succeed
with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than it seems to a faint and faltering
man;

often the struggler has given up when he might have captured
the victor's cup;

and he learned too late when the night came down,
how close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out - the silver tint of the
clouds of doubt,

and you never can tell how close you are,

it may be near when it seem so far;

so stick to the fight when you're hardest hit - it's when things
seem worse,

that you must not quit.

(Author Unknown)

Start Where You Stand

Start where you stand and never mind the past,
The past won't help you in beginning new,
If you have left it all behind at last
Why, that's enough, you're done with it, you're through;
This is another chapter in the book,
This is another race that you have planned,
Don't give the vanished days a backward look,
Start where you stand.

The world won't care about your old defeats
If you can start anew and win success;
The future is your time, and time is fleet
And there is much of work and strain and stress;
Forget the buried woes and dead despairs,
Here is a brand-new trial right at hand,
The future is for him who does and dares,
Start where you stand.

Old failures will not halt, old triumphs aid,
To-day's the thing, to-morrow soon will be;
Get in the fight and face it unafraid,
And leave the past to ancient history,
What has been, has been; yesterday is dead
And by it you are neither blessed nor banned;
Take courage, man, be brave and drive

(Berton Braley)

As You Travel Through Life....

As you travel through life there are always those times
When decisions just have to be made,
When the choices are hard, and solutions seem scarce,
And the rain seems to soak your parade.

There are some situations where all you can do
Is simply let go and move on,
Gather your courage and choose a direction
That carries you toward a new dawn.

So pack up your troubles and take a step forward -
The process of change can be tough,
But think about all the excitement ahead

There might be adventures you never imagined
Just waiting around the next bend,
And wishes and dreams just about to come true
In ways you can't yet comprehend!

Perhaps you'll find friendships that spring from new things
As you challenge your status quo,
And learn there are so many options in life,

Perhaps you'll go places you never expected
And see things that you've never seen,
Or travel to fabulous, faraway worlds
And wonderful spots in between!

Perhaps you'll find warmth and affection and caring
And somebody special who's there
To help you stay cantered and listen with interest
To stories and feelings you share.

Perhaps you'll find comfort in knowing your friends
Are supportive of all that you do,
And believe that whatever decisions you make,
They'll be the right choices for you.

So keep putting one foot in front of the other,
And taking your life day by day...
There's a brighter tomorrow that's just down the road -
Don't look back! You're not going that way!

(Author Unknown: Thanks to Kim for submitting)

Just One

One song can spark a moment,
One flower can wake the dream
One tree can start a forest,
One bird can herald spring.

One smile begins a friendship,
One handclasp lifts a soul.
One star can guide a ship at sea,
One word can frame the goal

One vote can change a nation,
One sunbeam lights a room
One candle wipes out darkness,
One laugh will conquer gloom.

One step must start each journey.
One word must start each prayer.
One hope will raise our spirits,
One touch can show you care.

One voice can speak with wisdom,

One heart can know what's true,

**One life can
make a difference,
You see,**

it's up to you

(Author Unknown)

Giving Your Best

It's the hand we clasp with an honest grasp
That gives a hearty thrill;
It's the good we pour into others' lives
That comes back our own to fill.
It's the dregs we drain from another's cup
That makes our own seem sweet;
And the hours we give to another's need
That makes our life complete.

It's the burdens we help another bear
That makes our own seem light.
It's the anger seen for another's feet
That shows us the path to right.
It's the good we do each passing day,
With a heart sincere and true;
In giving the world your very best
It's best will return to you.

(Author Unknown)

A Motivational Poem, All for the Best

Things mostly happen for the best.
However hard it seems to-day,
When some fond plan has gone astray
Or, what you've wished for most is lost

An' you sit countin' up the cost
With eyes half-blind by tears o' grief
While doubt is chokin' out belief,
You'll find when all is understood
That what seemed bad was really good.

Life can't be counted in a day.

The present rain that will not stop
Next autumn means a bumper crop.
We wonder why some things must be-
Care's purpose we can seldom see-
An' yet long afterwards we turn
To view the past, an' then we learn
That what once filled our minds with doubt
Was good for us as it worked out.

I've never know an hour of care
But that I've later come to see
That it has brought some joy to me.
Even the sorrows I have borne,
Leavin' me lonely an' forlorn
An' hurt an' bruised an' sick at heart,
An' though I could not understand
Why I should bow to Death's command,
That it was really better so.

Things mostly happen for the best.

So narrow is our vision here
That we are blinded by a tear
An' stunned by every hurt an' blow
Which comes to-day to strike us low.
An' yet some day we turn an' find
That what seemed cruel once was kind.
Most things, I hold, are wisely planned
If we could only understand.

(Edgar A. Guest)

Loser and Victor

He was beaten from the start,
Beaten by his doubting heart,
And he had a ready ear
For the busy tongue of fear,
And he had a timid mind
Unto fretfulness inclined,
Filled with many reasons why
It was vain for him to try.
Given a task he'd shake his head,
"Can't do that!" he often said,
"Times are hard and none will stay,
Listening to the words I say.
It is futile now to try,
People simply will not buy!"
Thus he walked the streets of trade,
Both discouraged and afraid.

But another kind of man
Thought this way: "Perhaps I can!
If I will supply the pluck,
Fortune may provide the luck.
If I have the grit to try,
There are people who may buy;
Anyhow, I'll not submit
To defeat before I'm hit."

One was beaten from the start,
Beaten by his doubting heart,
Beaten when he gave his ear
To the busy tongue of fear.
But another with his chance
Seized the moment to advance,
And came happy home at night
Just because he dared to fight.

(Edgar A. Guest)

Death the Leveller

THE glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against Fate;
Death lays his icy hand on kings:
Sceptre and Crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field,
And plant fresh laurels where they kill;
But their strong nerves at last must yield;
They tame but one another still:
Early or late
They stoop to fate,
And must give up their murmuring breath
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on your brow,
Then boast no more your mighty deeds!
Upon Death's purple altar now
See where the victor-victim bleeds.
Your heads must come
To the cold tomb:
Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

(James Shirley (1596-1666))

The Psalm of Life

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream ! —
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Act,— act in the living present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait.

(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

The Character of a Happy Life

How happy is the born and taught
That serveth not another's will;
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill.

Whose passions not his masters are;
Whose soul is still prepared for death,
United unto the world by care
Of public fame or private breath;

Who envies none that chance doth raise,
Nor vice who never understood
How deepest wounds are given by praise,
No rules of state, but rules of good;
Who hath his life from rumours freed;
Whose conscience is his strong retreat;
Whose state can neither flatterers food,
Nor ruin make oppressors great;

Who God doth late and early pray
More of His grace than gifts to lend;
And entertains the harmless day
With a religious book or friend;

This man is freed from servile bands
Of hope to rise or fear to fall;

Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all.

(Sir Henry Wotton)

Life's Battles

If you think you are beaten, you are.
If you think you dare not, you don't.
If you like to win, but you think you can't,
It's almost a cinch you won't.

If you think you'll lose, you've lost.
For out in the world we find;
Success begins with a fellow's will.
It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you are outclassed, you are.
You've got to be sure of yourself before;
You can ever win a prize.

Life's battles don't always go;
To the stronger or faster man,
But sooner or later the man who wins;
Is the one who thinks he can.

(Author Unknown)

IF

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,

If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you
But make allowance for their doubting too,
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream--and not make dreams your master,
If you can think--and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much,
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And--which is more--you'll be a Man, my son!

(Rudyard Kipling)

Leisure

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

(Henry Davies)

Immortality

Foiled by our fellow-men, depress'd, outworn,
We leave the brutal world to take its way,
And, Patience! in another life, we say
The world shall be thrust down, and we up-borne.

And will not, then, the immortal armies scorn
The world's poor, routed leavings? or will they,
Who fail'd under the heat of this life's day,
Support the fervours of the heavenly morn?

No, no! the energy of life may be
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;
And he who flagg'd not in the earthly strife,

From strength to strength advancing only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.

(Mathew Arnold)

Courage Brother

Courage, brother, do not stumble,
Though thy path be dark as night;
There's a star to guide the humble:
Trust in God and do the right.
Let the road be rough and dreary,
And its end far out of sight,
Foot it bravely; strong or weary,

Refrain

*Trust in God, trust in God,
Trust in God and do the right.*

Perish policy and cunning,
Perish all that fears the light!
Whether losing, whether winning,
Trust in God and do the right,
Trust no party, sect or faction;
Trust no leaders in the fight;
Put in every word or action,

Refrain

Some will hate thee, some will love thee,
Some will flatter, some will slight;
Cease from man, and look above thee:

Trust in God and do the right.
Simple rule, and safest guiding,
Inward peace and inward might,
Star upon our path abiding,

(Norman Macleod)

Twinkle, Twinkle

In the darkest of dark nights
The sky lit up with the lights
Comfort none to the one that cries
In infant innocence, it just dies:

I needed love, not your pride
I gave just love, took no side
You did me cripple, gave me fear
Chilling death far 'n near
So great your cause, so great your aim
My smothered chuckle did not ye shame

Twinkle, twinkle many a star
Spreading death near 'n far
Up above the world so high
Like a curse in the sky
Your baby or theirs, I cry?!
Or the child of life was I
May I then ask O sky?
For what cause, did I die?

(For a dead child -- Palestinian-Israeli Conflict)

(Asif Iftikhar)

In Hope and in Fear

Demons all around me Lord
Of them the worst is me
Though your name I hail my Lord
I am but frail my Lord
So far from longed destiny
Yet, to your mercy, your love
My struggling hope does cling
I know my failings abound Lord
Why sadness does my heart sing
Your glory does my tongue praise
At your door do mine eyes gaze
Open your door my Lord
In great hope and fear I knock
You'll close it on me if you want
Full well that I know
But I have no place to go
You are my only rock
You are my only peace
For all human love
Just artful deceit
To see our own dreams come true
True love comes just from you

In your way I still crawl
Against the stream I still swim
With arms tired and a rusty heart
Let not your forgiveness
From your sinner part
Ease my burden for me Lord
Grant me strength to go on
Make light this distance long
For though faltered I have
A million times
Lagged behind many miles
And though weak beyond measure
Is my unworthy endeavour
I haven't given up my Lord

And hoping I haven't stopped
For end of hope in you my Lord
Is end without end
An end that must never be
Don't forsake me Lord
Don't stop loving me

(Asif Iftikhar)

Smiling Alone

The strength to be weak
to see oneself
-- one's weakness
and to accept it -- in front of everyone

The strength to change, to move on -- against the tide -- all alone
The strength to demolish -- that which one had built
in many long years
with one's own hands
in great pain and with great love

And the strength to dream -- once again
The strength to build again
to demolish again
and to dream -- yet again

The ambition to achieve -- nothing
The ambition to make the effort
And the heart to see that -- as achievement

The courage to lose, and to see that -- as triumph
The courage to bear -- persecution, banishment
And the power to take revenge --
by forgiving
and loving

and giving

The gift of giving -- one's own self
without letting anyone know
and of smiling alone

(Asif Iftikhar)

Money is Everything!

Love,
Is it an investment
On which a handsome interest is earned?

Does the hand that rocks the cradle
Seek it too?
That the return be turned
Into a golden crown
And worn over a head
Always held high

Where can that love be found
Which seeks no return
Except love?

Why is it a crime, a sin
To be ordinary, just ordinary?
I am but an ordinary person
With dreams and aspirations
That yield no 'return', that give no 'interest'
But they make me what I am
A man
Not a god
Which I'll never be
Though I was brought up by them --

By the gods on Mount Olympus
Where everyone has to be extraordinary -- all the time

I shall not forsake
My mortality --, which rests upon truth
For apotheosis founded upon deceit
To make a man a god
Which no man -- being human --
Can actually be
But though I have left Olympus
Olympus has not left me

Investors
Each one of them
As a teetering, avaricious, greedy Jew
Tear at my flesh
To get back every penny
Of the return they wish to hungrily devour
Of the investment they tenaciously hold
For the love they ruthlessly sold

Ah! But in the hands that tear and scratch
Is one which with a soothing lullaby
Had once rocked my cradle

Heu prisca fides!
The heart that bleeds, the blood it poureth
Cried out loud
Though none understood
I am but a man, sir
Neither great, nor good
Just a human, gentlemen
Nice gentlemen
Rich, fat, scornful gentlemen
Just a human gentlemen
Who needs love
In return for love

(Asif Iftikhar)

The Friend I want to keep

He is here.
I believe in Him,
And cherish holding Him dear.
Life is a mystery without Him;
I shudder to think of a life without Him.
His very thought gets me high,
Makes me stoical and intrepid.
He helps me face the perils of life,
Get over with the terror of death.
He has provided me with all I need,
I just think of His benevolence and start to weep.

All that He asks of me is modesty,
A vow of chastity,
A heart brimmed with humility;
A life without passivity,
And love for humanity

O Gracious Friend! I resolve with dignity,
I will do whatever I'm asked of;
Because I love you deep,
And You are the Friend I want to keep!

(Jhangeer Hanif)

Change of Heart

You watch them cry,
Suffer and die.
They leave sheer poverty.
Hunger overcomes the progeny's mind.

Working day and night,
They lore equanimity.
Streets are swarmed with beggars,
And revenging wolves.
They turn the world upside down,
And keep the demonical wheel turning.

It all upsets you,
In deep thoughts buries you.
'There should be someone vivacious,
Indefatigable and true blue,
I am brimful of frailty,
Too weak to make a difference.'

Bah! Friend, you're in a fog,
You've got the matter wrong.
It just needs your change of heart,
You've got to do your part.
Leave upon God the rest,
He will do it to the best.

(Jhangeer Hanif)

No Saints but Sinners Still

Lord! Give us direction
Insight and perception

Of the secret of life
Of patience in strife

To yearn for perfection
And dislike deception

Disgust for projection
And time for reflection

Like lost sheep
Timid and weak

We earnestly seek
In this locus bleak

Thy pleasure and thy will
No saints but sinners still

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Efforts -- not Results Matter

The restless soul, the curious mind
Never rest till the truth they find

But it keeps eluding us
Escaping and evading us

Sleepless nights and starry skies
Hear O God! Our earnest cries

The fire burns, the heart beats fast
Is there hope for the seeker at last?

Prithee! slow down – hey!
Be patient if you may

Despair not if dreams shatter
Efforts – not results matter

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Dignity in Hard Labour lies!”

His radiant face and sparkling smile
Left me wondering for a while

Innocence writ large on his face
Worry and anxiety had no trace

Had barely reached his teens
Polishing shoes his means

A modest yet proud Pashtoon
Making a living began too soon

His home he left many years ago
Because of war, strife and woe

His education he could not complete
Yet with its yearning he was replete

Gingerly he sat on his teeny stool
And fished out his working tool

With vigour and devotion
In a back and forth motion

He began scrubbing
Rubbing and buffing

Soon he victoriously beamed
Elated on the boots he'd cleaned

Said to me his earnest eyes:
“Dignity in hard labour lies”

(2013)

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Visit to a Graveyard

Where death stares us in the eye
Where everyone must come to lie

Where silence reigns supreme
Where tears flow in streams

Where helplessness is everywhere
Where winds howl loud and clear

Where both young and old must go
If the angel of death tells them so

Where flowers blossom on graves
Where epitaphs catch our gaze

Where the rich and poor are equal made
“With the poor crooked scythe and spade”

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Preparing for the Inevitable!

This life is but a fleeting story
Hands of death end our glory

One day we must go away
Short it be or long a stay

As sudden as a door chime
Death may come any time

Prepare then we must to depart
But before our heavens fall apart

Let's not leave our kin confused
Unsure, puzzled and bemused

About assets and money we may owe
And transactions only we may know

Files, bills and documents of lease
Records, passwords, codes and keys

So a memo we must write
In words black and white

A will also we should jot down
Of the wealth we leave around

So that they know what to expect
And carry on from where we left!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Never Lose Hope

When the chips are down
And darkness is all around

When troubles abound
And hopes are dashed ground

When faith in God is shaken
And endless every road taken

Look at the destitute around you
And the poor who surround you

And the deaf who smile
And the lame who walk a mile

And the paupers penniless
And the orphans helpless

And the terminally ailing
And the widows wailing

And the hapless who hope
And the blind who cope

With the miseries of life
And beam even in strife

Who thank God no less
Even in pain and stress

Then woes you will fight
With all force and might

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Let us Promise...

The truth we shall always speak
And boldly help all the weak

And try to do what is right
With all our force; all our might

Fight we shall when the going gets tough
When winds rage and the seas are rough

Humble we will strive to be
And hold fast to modesty

In God we will put our trust
And battle alone if we must

He will be our saviour
When we falter, when we err

Admit we will if we are wrong
God O God! Make us strong

Strive we will to do our best
And leave to God all the rest!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Enjoy the Blessings of Today!

Enjoy the blessings of today
Tomorrow is still far away

This world is a place of trial
Hardships do stay a while

And if there is some delay
Show patience if you may

Wisdom for sure is in it
Yet we may not know it

Trust in God; do not despair
All worries with Him share

Smile and shrug your sorrow
Accept His plans for tomorrow

Strive and struggle to your best
And let Him take care of the rest

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Illness

Illness is a blessing in disguise
Often it may make us realize

Our short comings and woes
And sincere friends from foes

A time for soul searching
An occasion for ruminating

When life is smooth and easy
We end up errant and sleazy

But when the sailing is rough
We cannot thank God enough

For it makes us reflect
Think deep and correct

The wrongs we were doing
The vices we were chewing

To become better than before
A lucrative deal for sure!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Let us then Live for Others!

Let us then live for others
O sisters mine and brothers

Their pain let us appease
Stress from them release

A smile at times is enough
For the weary sailing rough

Let us save coins and change
And help from others arrange

And hear out the aggrieved
And embrace the bereaved

Items lying here and there
Those we can easily spare

Which we seldom or never use
Parting from them let us choose

Phone, skype and email
Their services we can avail

To inquire about those unwell
And who in tough times dwell

And before God let us cry
With that wailing teary eye

Prayers are gushing fountains
They can move mountains:

Lord! Take good care of the bitten
Shower thy mercy on the stricken

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Charity

Spending on others is noble
A trait so human and global

Yet selfish we do become
Ignoring the sad and glum

And then we do shy away
If we have little in our tray

Others we can ask to pool in
If our own resources are thin

And if we have been kind
To those deaf and blind

Never must we brag
Or wave our own flag

But reach out to others in pain
And worried for them remain

And scold not those who ask
And take not them to task

And not stress to them
Favours done to them

Generosity let us not flaunt
And give away even in want

Searching for those in need
Is humane and kind indeed

But remember when we roam
That charity begins at home

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Tears of Gratitude

Your blessings abound
Your favours surround

Thank you God
For being around

Grant me fortitude
A life of rectitude

Faith with certitude
Modesty in attitude

And for thy latitude
Mercy in magnitude

Tears of gratitude
I shed in solitude

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Small Acts of Kindness

Being the first to greet
When others we meet

Regretting mistakes
For whatever it takes

Holding the door
For the old 'n poor

Being just to our foes
And sharing their woes

Giving spare things away
Even if costly are they

Soothing those unwell
Who in hardships dwell

Solving rifts and rows
Of the distant and close

Small are these acts
Huge their impacts!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Experiencing God

We cannot see Him
Yet we can feel Him

Like the scent of a rose
That everywhere flows

Like a gust of breeze
That ruffles the leaves

Like a mother's touch
That's cherished much

Like water to thirst
Mercy to the cursed

Virtues He accepts
Vices He neglects

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Truth shall be our Sword!

Speaking straight
An enviable trait

Yet hard to find
An alley blind

Reporting hearsay
Is bad I dare say

Promises broken
And lies spoken

And signatures fake
Trust they all shake

Truth surely is a prize
We musn't compromise

Promise let us our God:
Truth shall be our sword

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

Visit to an Old Home

I saw some silent faces
Forlorn in their graces

Inflicted with tragedies
Discarded by families

Haggard and woebegone
How will they carry on?

Yet they were cordial
In spite of their ordeal

Can children be so unkind?
To ditch their parents behind

Humanity burnt at the stake!
Worthless creatures they make!

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)

A Worried Soul!

Four kids she had
With a tumor bad

Her face was pale
And eyes were stale

Will I then survive?
Recover and thrive?

Or in pain languish?
She asked in anguish

Who will look after them?
If I go away from them

I tried to console her
Calm and control her

The will of God be done
He looks after everyone

Do not worry at all
He is a refuge for all

(Dr Shehzad Saleem)