

In the Early Hours

Khurram Murad

In the Name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful

REVIVAL PUBLICATIONS

The process of change always starts with postulation of fresh ideas to challenge the status quo. It is only through innovative thinking that problems can be solved and progress can be made. The hallmark of the Islamic Movement has always been to produce stimulating literature covering all aspects of life- social, political, economic and legal as well as moral, spiritual and religious. This dynamic literature has inspired and motivated a large section of the Muslim *Umma* and prepared them to struggle to bring about change in the society.

There is no doubt we require literature for the Islamic Movement that reflects the needs of this country. It should take into account the problems faced by the society in the West. The launching of Revival Publications is to meet these needs. We will endeavour to publish literature by the pioneers of the Islamic Movements as well as by young intellectuals and scholars so that a forum of discussion can be initiated to portray the message of Islam to society at large.

It is appropriate to launch this programme of publications by a collection of inspirational advice on the subject of spiritual and self-development by the late Brother Khurram Murad.

We are grateful to Allah (*Subhanu wa Tala,*) for His help and guidance in enabling us to undertake this task. Without His Help and Mercy we cannot accomplish anything.

We also very gratefully acknowledge the moral and financial support provided by the Islamic foundation and the UK Islamic Mission. We pray that may Allah accept our humble efforts and reward all those who are working in His cause.

The Editorial Board,

Leicester, October 1999

Preface

THE title of this book, *In the Early Hours*, has been carefully and specifically chosen to highlight that precious but often neglected time during the night that Allah is closest and most receptive to His servants. The Messenger of God said:

Our Lord descends each night to the nearest Heaven when only the last third of the night remains, and says: `Is anyone praying that I may answer him? Is anyone seeking forgiveness, that I may forgive him? Is anyone asking, that I may give to him?', and this continues until dawn. (*Tirmidhi*.)

The later part of each night is the most conducive period for reflection and self development. It is the occasion with the most potential for the heart to be present, alert and free of worldly concerns as the Quran declares: *Lo! The vigil of the night is [a time] when impression is more keen and speech more certain.* [al-Muzzammil 73:6.]

This book is a collection of inspirational advice by a dear and beloved teacher, *Ustadh* Khurram Murad on the subject of spiritual and self development. In it he sets out the goal of the Believer- the single-minded desire to seek the good pleasure of Allah and Paradise. He then outlines the methods and instruments which must be used in the attainment of that ultimate goal.

These spiritual exhortations that follow were originally delivered in those early hours of Summer 1993 just after *Salat al-Fajr* as part of a course entitled *Self Development for Islamic Workers* at The Islamic Foundation, Leicester. That course represented one of many similar courses *Ustadh* Khurram conducted for young Muslims, both male and female. He recognised that it was in the young generation's eagerness, strength and enthusiasm that the future of the Muslim *Umma* lay.

Each of the seven sections in this book represents one *Nasiha* or Advice. Each *Nasiha* was delivered in a presentation of approximately 45 minutes. This time allotment was not, of course, sufficient for *Ustadh* Khurram to discuss the subjects in detail. I have therefore drawn material from several of his other speeches and works for `thoroughness', coherence and to provide clarity on the topics discussed. I have also

added Quran and hadith references wherever I felt they were relevant and added to the richness of the text. Only Allah knows how close I have come to making clear the Message of the Quran and the *Sunna* as expressed by *Ustadh* Khurram.

Let me emphasise that this book merely represents an introduction to spiritual and self development. I hope that each of the topics exposed here will lead you to further study so that you can continue to grow and progress along the path of attaining closeness to Allah, our Lord and Master. A selection of suggested readings is given at the end of this text to assist in further study.

The task of preparing this text has certainly been a challenge for me, but one, which I have enjoyed and benefited from immensely. I am grateful to Muhammad Abdul Aziz, Alyasa Abdullah, Asim Abdullah, Sharifa Abdullah, Fazeela Mollick, Wajid Mollick, Hashim Mohammed and Lucy Bushill-Matthews who all read the manuscript and offered valuable comments and advice during the initial phase of this text's preparation. My deepest appreciation, however, goes to Abdul Wahid Hamid, whose literary skills, advice and motivation were instrumental in finalising this work. Ultimately, though, any mistakes this book contains are my own - may Allah forgive me and have mercy on me. Whatever good is derived from it, all praise is due to Him, for without His help and guidance, nothing is possible.

I would like to end with a *dua* or supplication of the Prophet which epitomises the sole objective of this work and our goal in life:

O Allah, You change hearts, so change our hearts to be obedient to You.
(*Muslim*.)

Riza Mohammed
Leicester, October 1999

CHAPTER ONE: The Process of Self Development

THE path to God is only illuminated when a person recognises the central place of God in his life and strives to develop his self accordingly. The Messenger of God said:

If someone wants to know what position he enjoys in the eyes of God, he has only to look at what place he gives to God (in his heart and life. (Hakim)

The term nearest in meaning to self development in the Quranic vocabulary is tazkiya. Tazkiya means purification and refers to the cleansing of the human self from all that is unwholesome, undesirable and unwelcome. It also refers to the nurturing and strengthening of all the qualities within the human self that are essential for growth and development, for blossoming and flowering.

THE GOAL IN LIFE

Success and happiness in this world and the Hereafter depend on tazkiya, the purification and nurturing of our personality. The Quran states that true success is only reserved for those who seek to purify themselves:

Successful indeed is the one who purifies his whole self [ash-Shams 91:9]

Our personality comprises not only the physical body but also the mind and the heart, feelings and attitudes, character and behaviour. Proper nurturing and development of these elements of the personality will achieve desirable goals. When goals are desirable, the process of aspiring to, working towards and achieving them also become desirable. This is part of human nature. It is critical, therefore, that we recognise and understand the true nature of our ultimate goal in life.

For the Believer, the most coveted goal in life is to seek the good pleasure of Allah and Janna or Paradise. Our Creator has set this goal for us: And surely Paradise - it is the goal [an-Naziat 79: 41]; Indeed the Next abode - it is truly the life! [al-Ankabut 29: 64]; The companions of Paradise - they are the

triumphant ones [al-Hashr 59: 20].

Know, however, that attaining the pleasure of Allah takes precedence over seeking Janna but the two are closely connected. Paradise can only be attained through seeking Allah's pleasure, and when Allah's pleasure is gained, we will indeed be granted Paradise. Reflect upon the following two verses in the Quran:

And there is a kind of person who would willingly give up personal interests, seeking Allah's pleasure; and God is Most Compassionate towards His servants.[al-Baqara 2: 207.]

Indeed Allah has purchased from the Believers their lives and their possessions, promising them Paradise, in return. [at-Tawba 9: 111.]

The alternative to attaining Paradise in the Hereafter is to be placed in Jahannam or Hellfire and to receive its punishments. The Quran states: But in the life to come: [it is either] severe suffering, or God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance. [al-Hadid 57: 20.] What is it that makes a person deserving of such a suffering? The answer is to be found in the second part of the same verse: for the life of this world is nothing but an enjoyment of self-delusion [al-Hadid 57: 20.] Jahannam therefore, is for those who seek as their ultimate goal in life, not the pleasure of Allah or Paradise, but the enjoyment of worldly gains.

The pursuit of worldly gain is but a mirage. All worldly gains are left behind when you die. All that is on earth is bound to perish while Allah and His good favour will remain forever. It is for this reason that the Queen advises:

Vie with one another in seeking to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness; and to a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for those who have attained to faith in God and His messengers: such is the bounty of Allah which He grants unto whomever He wills -for Allah is limitless in His great bounty. [al-Hadid 57: 21.]

All your efforts in this world should therefore be focused only on seeking Paradise. It is the Promise of the Almighty that:

You will only be rewarded fully for all your good deeds on the Day of Resurrection, and [on that Day] whoever will be drawn away from Hellfire, and admitted into Paradise, will indeed have triumphed [Ali Imran 3:185.]

THE FIRST STEP TO PARADISE

The first step in self development, then, is to concentrate single-mindedly on Paradise. Indeed, the one who is unsure of his destiny in life, torn between this world and the Next, like one standing with his feet in two separate boats - will be thrown off balance. Many of the difficulties that we face are due to this lack of commitment and inability to focus on the real and ultimate goal. If you can keep your focus on Janna, then everything else will be possible.

The selection of the ultimate goal of Paradise must be made consciously and may involve an absolute break with the past. To choose this new goal as the ultimate goal in one's life is in fact to choose a new life, to begin a new journey. Embark on this new journey by refreshing your wudu (ablution) and offering two rakas (units) of Salat or Prayer reminding yourself of all the punishment of Hellfire you have just resolved to avoid at all costs and all the rewards of Paradise that you will strive to achieve. Remind yourself also of the important stations and landmarks on the journey; imagine death as near; imagine the moment when the Angel of Death will declare, 'your time is over, now you must follow me'; imagine that moment when you will be made to stand in the presence of Allah, Most High, so that the final judgment of life may be passed on you and imagine the consequences of that judgment. When you have completed the two rakas then resolve once more that all efforts will be directed towards achieving Paradise, beseech Allah and pray with humility:

O Allah, I ask for Your mercy and whatever brings me closer to it, in word and deed.

O Allah, I ask for a faith that will never vanish, a blessing that will never diminish, a pleasure that will never abate, and the most elevated position in Paradise distinguished by the

companionship of Your Messenger, Muhammad.

While improvement in your habits and actions is a life-long process, the desire to achieve it can thus be sparked in a moment. This desire will provide the momentum for attaining your goal - the good pleasure of Allah and Paradise.

YOUR MISSION

Having taken the first step and resolved to attain Paradise, you may ask yourself, what does Allah require from me in order for me to succeed?

What Allah requires of you, in Quranic vocabulary, is for you to be a mumin and mujahid. A mumin is one who is true and firm in his faith in God. A mujahid is one who strives his utmost, with all the means at his disposal, to gain God's pleasure. If you are a mumin and a mujahid, Allah, the Most Exalted in Power and yet the Most Compassionate, will assist you to rise to higher stations both in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah has promised this to those who possess the qualities of iman or faith and the active resolve for jihad or struggle. The Quran states:

The Believers are only those who have attained to faith, in God and His Messenger and have left all doubt behind and who strive hard for God's cause with their possessions and their lives: it is they, they who are true to their word. [al-Hujurat 49:15]

You now have a mission: to become a mumin and mujahid. As you embark upon this mission you may come to feel that your knowledge of Islam is somewhat limited or perhaps that you are unable to attain those heights of submission and purification that you desire or others expect of you. This is only natural. You must not, however, allow these feelings of personal shortcomings to undermine your efforts to practise Islam. Remember that Islam is a state of becoming not a state of being. Each day you must strive to improve and better yourself - and you will improve.

Tazkiya or this new programme for self-improvement that you now find yourself in, is a process that unfolds itself step by step. You cannot expect to change all at once. This is

against the laws of nature. The Prophet was always aware of this when he was dealing with his Companions. Whenever someone embraced Islam, the Prophet would not ask that person to do everything immediately. Instead, he would teach and expect that person to start fulfilling his obligations only as much as he could bear at a time. This gradual process of change is also clearly reflected in the manner in which the Quran was revealed over a period of 23 years. In all your efforts towards becoming a better Believer, you must bear in mind this principle of gradualism, otherwise you may try to attain the impossible, and when you do not achieve it, you may become frustrated.

At this stage, what matters most is that your bargain with Allah, iman, remains sound and firm. This definition of iman is perhaps a little different from the definition you usually hear. It is, however, a definition that we find in the Quran [at-Tawba 9: 111]. Furthermore, attainment of such iman, allows you to be counted among the true and sincere servants in the eyes of your Lord. The Quran states:

Behold, God has bought of the Believers their lives and their possessions, promising them Paradise in return, they fight in God's cause, and slay, and are slain: a promise which in truth He has willed upon Himself in the Tawra, and the Injil, and the Quran. And who could be more faithful to his covenant than God? [at-Tawba 9: 111]

Once you have committed yourself to Allah, all that you have must be spent in His way. This is the ideal. Ideals, however, are always difficult to achieve - and this you must understand and accept. Ideals are always to be pursued; if they are easily and always achievable, they can hardly remain as ideals. Keeping to your side of the bargain then, is an ideal that you must always seek to maintain. It is this seeking and this striving to spend all that we have in the way of Allah that is known as jihad and alternatively, in this instance, as tazkiya.

PREREQUISITES OF TAZKIYA

As you proceed on your journey along the new path, in quest of the ultimate goal of Paradise, you will encounter difficulties and hardships.

These may often seem insurmountable. Overcoming them may be made easier by a good early grasp of the prerequisites of tazkiya. These are as follows:

1. Tazkiya -Your Personal Responsibility

You must accept that tazkiya is a highly personal process and that it demands taking personal responsibility for carrying it forward. You can only see the results of tazkiya through your own realisation, your own personal efforts and your own exertions. No one else can perform tazkiya for you. No organisation, no leader and no teacher can replace your own responsibility. God says: And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden; and if one weighed down by his load calls upon [another] to help bear carry it nothing thereof may be carried [by that other], even if it be one's near of kin. [al-Fatir;5: 18] This sense of personal responsibility is basic to the whole purpose and approach of Islam. Ultimately, we are judged individually for discharging our own responsibilities. If someone else fulfils your obligations, then it should be he that is rewarded, not you. To be rewarded you must do what is expected of you by Allah by yourself:

Whoever strives hard in God's cause does so only for his own good: for, verily, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds! And as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds, We shall most certainly efface their bad deeds, and shall most certainly reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did. [al-Ankabut 29: 6-7.]

Some people allow themselves to be dictated by others. The Quran states that the weak will say on the Day of judgment that they were coerced into following the dictates of others, but that Allah will reply that the excuse is not legitimate for the decision to deviate from the Straight Path was their own. [Qaf 50: 26-28]. Even Shaytan will stand up on the Day of Judgment saying: 'I invited you and you responded to me, so don't blame me, blame yourselves.' [Ibrahim 14: 22] Ultimately, then, the blame and the reward will be yours, because the responsibility was yours:

On that Day all people will come forward, cut off from one another, to be shown their deeds. And so, he who shall have done an atom's

weight of good, shall behold it; and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil, shall behold it. [az-Zalzala 99: 6-8.]

Taking charge of your own affairs may certainly seem a daunting task, but one which you will accomplish with distinction if you appreciate and take advantage of the tremendous human potential that Allah has blessed you with. Allah says in the Quran:

Verily, We created man in the best conformation, and thereafter We reduced him to the lowest of the low - excepting only such as attain to faith and do good works: and theirs shall be a reward unending! [at Tin 95: 4-6.]

Tazkiya does not consist simply of ideas, but of life, behaviour and conduct. The key to success, according to the Quran, lies in having true faith. To inculcate true faith you must start by acquiring a sound knowledge of Islam through a dedicated study of the Quran and Sunna. You must then translate your knowledge into practice. For this to occur, you need to have firm resolve and determination. This, in turn, will produce amal salih or righteous conduct.

To aid you in your task, you must seek the company of those who are also striving to please Allah. They will encourage you towards righteousness and correct you when you deviate from the true Path. Your company also includes your mental and psychological company- the ideas you entertain, the ambitions you nurture, the sensitivities and sensibilities you develop and the books you read. All of these represent a form of company because they are your companions in solitude.

2. Genuine Effort

In order to succeed, you must have a deep desire to make a genuine effort to fulfill your obligations as a Muslim:

But as for those who strive hard in Our cause - We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us: for, behold God is indeed with the doers of good. [al-Ankabut 29: 69.]

With desire, of course, come actions. But know that it is not solely the results of your

endeavours that count; what matters most is that you made your best effort. This is a very important point to appreciate because without genuine effort nothing can happen. Those who think that Prayer alone can work miracles are not living in a realistic world. Prayers are part of the effort, but Prayers are not the whole answer. If you pray, 'Allah! Guide me and make me good', it is not going to bring you any benefit unless you are also determined to become good and make an effort towards becoming good. Once you have done the latter two things, then, of course, Prayer will be a source of baraka or Divine grace that will further inspire and strengthen your efforts. The initial desire and the ensuing effort to do and become good, is part of the continuing process of self development, a process that may begin at any point in life that you choose and continue till your last breath:

O you who have attained to faith! Be conscious of Allah with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not allow, death to overtake you until you have surrendered yourselves unto Him. [Ali Imran 3: 102.]

There will never be a point when you will be able to say that you are now a perfect person or that you have achieved your full potential. If at any point you feel so, then be sure that is the starting point of your downfall, On the other hand, you may find that the greater your desire to fulfill your obligations as a Muslim, the more you feel beset or plagued by frustration, despondency and despair in your heart and mind. All of us, whether young or old, have experienced these diseases, and often just give up. What we should try to remember at such times is that it is the intention and effort that matters, not the result. This effort must be a continuing process:

Be not, then, faint of heart, and grieve not: for you are bound to rise high if you are believers. [Ali Imran 3: 139]

3. Sustaining Willpower

To achieve the ultimate goal in life requires a sustained determination to do so, a willpower that is forever responsive and strong. In Quranic terminology this is called irada. Irada is basic to all our efforts. Without willing to do

something you cannot do anything.

Irada is very different from desire. You always hear people reflecting upon unfulfilled aspirations. One of the main reasons why aspirations and dreams remain unfulfilled is that they are no more than desires which faded to assume the status of irada.

The Quran explains that one of the basic weaknesses in human nature which impedes self development is the weakness of will. While narrating the story of Adam, Allah informs:

And, indeed, long ago We made Our covenant with Adam; but he forgot and We found no firmness of purpose in him. [Ta Ha 20:115]

Irada requires strength and consistency and is indeed the antithesis of doubt, hesitation or lethargy. Once irada is firmly in place, then you must have no doubts and you must not hesitate.

Now, what purpose should irada serve? The Quran makes it clear that this will power must be a firm resolve to seek the pleasure of Allah because this is the part of the bargain that you must deliver:

And whoever desires [arada] the Life to Come, and strive for it as it ought to be striven for, and are [true] Believers withal-they are the ones whose striving finds favour [with God]. [al-Isra 17: 19]

4. Reliance on Allah

Self-confidence is borne from the Believer's intimate knowledge and understanding that Allah is ever ready to assist those who strive and struggle in His way. Self-confidence comes from depending upon Allah and knowing that He is there to help you, protect you and shower His mercies upon you:

So he who gives [in charity] and fears [Allah] and [in all sincerity] testifies to the best- We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Bliss. [al-Layl 92: 5-7.]

Self-confidence also emanates from knowing that Allah in His infinite mercy has equipped you with all that you require to undertake the tasks set before you. It is not characteristic of

the One that is Most Just and Most Merciful to prepare you for a duel without equipping you with the necessary tools.

Self-confidence is thus borne of total reliance and trust in Allah. It is knowing that at every step of your journey Allah is there assisting you. If you constantly hold yourself back believing that you are weak and incapable and blame your incompetence on minor inadequacies, then you are bound to fail. You must never allow yourself to believe or feel that Allah has treated you unfairly or that He has placed upon you a burden you cannot shoulder for on no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. [al-Baqara 2:286.]

Likewise, hope is central to your efforts and your success. You must sincerely hope and believe that everything you do to earn the pleasure of Allah will lead you to fulfillment. A superiority complex negates the task of self development. An inferiority complex is derived from a lack of confidence in Allah and oneself. You should never allow yourself to believe that you cannot fulfill your obligations nor should you despair of the mercy of Allah. Confidence, hope and determination are all important ingredients for your success:

Those unto whom men said: Lo! the people have gathered against you, therefore fear them. But it only increased them in faith and they cried.. Allah is sufficient for us! Most Excellent is He in Whom we trust! [Ali Imran 3: 173-174]

You must be wary, however, of the kind of self-confidence that causes a person to proclaim himself self-sufficient. Modern concepts of self sufficiency are indeed an evil form of shirk or polytheism. To ascribe self-sufficiency to one's self is to assume for oneself an attribute reserved only for Allah. For the Muslim, self-confidence is wholly dependent upon the trust one places in Allah; it is not an arrogant proclamation of complete independence from Allah. Allah alone is self-Sufficient. All else is reliant upon Him for existence.

5. The Best Use of Time

Time is not money or gold; it is life and it is

limited. You must begin to appreciate every moment of your life and always strive to make the best use of it. With all the demands of worldly life on your time, you will yet need to find time for self-development and maximise its potential. The better route towards self-development is, of course, to integrate all your efforts into a structured daily life. Imam al-Ghazali, may God have mercy on him, in his great work, *Ihya Ulum ad Din*, gives the following advice:

You should structure your time, arrange your regular devotions and assign to each function a set period of time during which it is given first priority but which it does not overstep. For if you abandon yourself to neglect and purposelessness, as cattle do, and just do anything that may occur to you at any time it happens to occur to you, most of your time will be wasted. Your time is your life, and your life is your capital; it is the basis of your transactions [with God], and the means to attain to everlasting felicity, in the proximity of God the Exalted. Each of your breaths is a priceless jewel, and when it passes away it never returns.

Remember also that 'the deeds most loved by Allah [are those] done regularly, even if they are few.' (Bukhari, Muslim.) While you must always strive to make the best use of your time, you must always aim for excellence in everything you undertake, whether at school, at home, at work or at play. Indeed, the Prophet has said, 'Verily Allah has prescribed *ihsan* (proficiency and excellence) in all things. (Muslim.)

6. Tazkiya -All-embracing Process.

Islam does not subscribe to the type of asceticism where we purify our hearts and yet remain immersed in political, economic or social corruption. Tazkiya must encompass our entire life - the privacy of our thoughts as well as their social manifestations in our daily life. Everything must be in conformity with Allah's will.

This will of God also requires you to seek and maintain a delicate balance between the various obligations that demand your attention; between your obligations to Allah, your obligations towards others and your

obligations towards yourself. The Prophet advised us against extremism of any kind. It is reported that he said to Abdullah ibn Amr:

'Have I heard right that you fast everyday and stand in prayer all night?' Abdullah replied, 'Yes, O Messenger of God.' The Prophet said, 'Do not do that. Fast, as well as eat and drink. Stand in prayer, as well as sleep. For your body has a right upon you, your eyes have a right upon you, your wife has a right upon you, and your guest has a right upon you.' (Bukhari, Muslim.)

Unless you approach tazkiya as an all-embracing process, you will find that your life is compartmentalized, certain parts impeding the development of others. This can only result in a life of disharmony and unhappiness. Approached as a comprehensive and all-embracing process, however, you will find that each part of your life will complement some other part. This should, God willing, make your struggle on the path to God and Janna, easier and full of grace.

As you struggle to make headway on the path to God, always remember that you have an excellent example before you. This is the example of the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. Often we would like to emulate our sports heroes, our parents, our teachers, our friends or others who attract our attention. For your spiritual development, however, the most beautiful example is that of the Prophet. Allah says in the Quran:

You have, indeed, in the Messenger of God an excellent exemplar, whoever places his hopes in God and the Final Days and who remembers Allah much. [al-Ahzab 33: 21]

BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS

The decision to purify and develop yourself requires that you clearly define the path and consider the ways and means to achieve Paradise. This whole process will not only purify your heart, but also affect your entire life and the will of Allah will become so much easier for you to follow. Following the Divine Will is, of course, tazkiya itself. Soon, all your efforts will be directed towards the ultimate goal - the pleasure of Allah and Paradise.

Know that every sin can be effaced through forgiveness, and forgiveness is a sure way to Paradise. As you strive to better yourself, then, simultaneously and continuously pray for forgiveness for all your shortcomings. God says: And whoever repents and believes and works righteous deeds, God changes evil deeds into good ones, and God is Ever-Forgiving, Merciful. [al-Furqan 25: 70]

It is a misconception to believe that simply by setting up Paradise as the ultimate goal, one can get there without any further effort. It is also a misconception that Paradise can solely be achieved by concentrating only on certain aspects of life, the 'religious and the spiritual'. The very fact that Paradise is the ultimate objective means that tazkiya must be pursued in all aspects of life, and in life as a whole. Consider, for example, the following:

- Is not honesty a means to enter Paradise?
- Will not a sense of responsibility enable me to enter Paradise?
- Will not striving to fulfill the needs of fellow human beings make me deserve Paradise?
- Will not abstaining from vain talk and aimless actions, bring me closer to Paradise?
- Is not consciousness of the best use of my time a key to Paradise?
- Will not keeping promises and offering Salat on time, which are distinguishing traits of the righteous, put me on the highway to Paradise?
- Must not all of the above be sought to attain Paradise?

Every effort that is legitimate and is aimed at attaining Paradise is also an integral part of the process of tazkiya

Insha Allah (God-willing), if you take heed of all the prerequisites, blessings and benefits of tazkiya, you will surely find the right environment, the true companionship and brotherhood and the most appropriate training programmes to make the task of self development easier and more rewarding.

So give the good news to My servants who listen to the word [of God], then follow the beauty in it. Such are they whom God has guided And such are they who are endowed with understanding. [az-Zumar 39: 17-18.]

SUMMARY

The most comprehensive goal for a Muslim is the single-minded desire to attain Paradise. This desire to seek Paradise is a life-long process which can be sparked in a moment- and this desire will provide the means and the momentum to reach the goal.

Your model for self-development is that of the Prophet Muhammad. In your quest for Paradise, you must personally take charge of your responsibilities, develop the willpower to perform and make a genuine effort to fulfill your obligations, ensure that you make the best use of your time and adopt a balanced approach to life.

Remember that every effort that is legitimate and is aimed at attaining Paradise is also an integral part of the process of tazkiya and that every sin can be effaced through forgiveness - and that forgiveness is the sure way to Paradise. And as for the one who fears to stand before his Lord and who restrains himself from base desires, the Garden is surely the abode. [an-Naziat 79: 40-41]

May Allah enable us to be among those who purify themselves for it is God Who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity; and none shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breath [an-Nisa 4: 49]. Were it not for God's favour upon you and His grace, not one of you would ever have remained pure. For it is God who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity; for God is all-Hearing all-Knowing [an-Nur 24: 21.]

CHAPTER THREE: Relating to Allah

EACH day in our Salat, we repeatedly make one humble request to Allah, our Creator and Sustainer: 'Guide us the Straight Way.' (al-Fatiha 1:4) It is only by seeking and staying on the Straight Way, that we can ever hope to attain true salvation and success. What then must we do to ensure that Allah accepts and grants our Prayer? The Quran explains: Whosoever holds on to Allah, he has already been guided onto a Straight Way. [Al-Imran 3:101]

CHARACTERISTICS OF 'HOLDING ONTO ALLAH'

What exactly is itisam billah or 'holding onto Allah'? How do we develop a close attachment to and a close relationship with Allah? Let us explore the answers to these questions by reflecting upon the characteristics needed to 'hold onto Allah' and thus be among those who are shown the Sirat al-Mustaqim or the Straight Way.

1. Thankfulness to Allah

The first characteristic is being ever grateful and thankful to Allah for everything that you possess including your wealth, health, status, intellectual abilities and life. You should recognise that your very existence and your continuing sustenance are dependent on Allah. Whatever praise is due, therefore, it is due to Him alone, for nobody has the power or the resources to give you anything except by His will. His bounties and blessings are countless. Allah says:

Is, then, He who creates comparable to any that cannot create? Will you not, then, take heed? For should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them. Allah is, indeed, All forgiving, All compassionate; and Allah knows all that you keep secret as well as all that you bring into the open. [an-Nahl 16:17-19]

It is for this reason that Allah commanded the Prophet Ibrahim to say: It is He who has created me, and so it is He who guides me; it is He who gives me to eat and drink, and whenever I am sick it is He who heals me; and

it is He who makes me die and then will bring me to life. And upon Him, I pin my hope that He would forgive my sins on the Day of Judgment. [ash-Shuara 26:77-82.]

In many places in the Quran, Allah compares the terms shukr and kufr. [al-Baqara 2:152, Luqman 31: 12]. Iman implies shukr or gratefulness as opposed to kufr or ungratefulness. A kafir or unbeliever is ungrateful to the Being who has given him everything, whereas a mumin or Believer is one who is ever thankful for all that Allah has given him, for he recognises that his Lord is Merciful and Loving. [Hud 11:90.]

Iman, therefore, requires due praise and thanks to Allah. If you are ungrateful, Allah is unaffected. If you become grateful, then you have taken the first step towards becoming a true Believer. It is for this reason that the Prophet exhorted us to 'love Allah as we benefit from His grace'. (Tirmidhi.)

In every moment and in every situation we see our Creator and Sustainer actively involved. He has not retired from this world. He is on His throne creating, distributing and administering everything. He governs and sustains all in the Universe. Not even a leaf can fall without His knowledge, His permission and His command. The Quran declares:

He knows all that enters the earth and all that emerges therefrom, and that which comes down from the sky and all that ascends therein; and He is with you wherever you may be. [al-Hadid 57: 4.]

Everything that happens to us - even events that we may consider to be personal afflictions or natural disasters-'are from Him. So even in times of calamity and distress, there will be some good for us, provided we respond appropriately. The Prophet said:

How wonderful is the case of a Believer! There is good for him in whatever happens to him - and none, apart from him, enjoys this blessing. If he receives some bounty, he is grateful to Allah and this bounty brings good to him. And

if some adversity befalls him, he is patient, and this affliction, too, brings good to him. (Muslim.)

Look again at the Quran, you will see that the very first introduction to Allah is ar-Rahman ar-Rahim. [al-Fatiha 1:1.] Allah Himself is saying that He is the Most Merciful, He is the Most Compassionate. He shows and gives mercy to all, even those who continue to be ungrateful and rebellious towards Him: Indeed God is the possessor of bounty for all people but most people do not give thanks. [al-Baqara 2: 243.]

Reflect upon your own life and you will find innumerable occasions when Allah's `hand' has been holding you and helping you. So often, we subconsciously use the expression `thank God for this and that', without realising the full implications of our words. The Quran even reminded the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, that in his early life, Allah's `hand' was holding him and guiding him:

Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter [and care]? And He found you wandering and He gave you guidance. And He found you in need and made you independent. Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness, nor repulse him who asks. [ad-Duha 93: 6-10.]

This exhortation is not only for the Prophet but for all people. From the moment that we open our eyes in this world until the moment our souls leave our bodies, and even beyond, Allah's mercy, compassion and protection remain with us. Continuously remind yourself then that your entire existence is dependent on Him. He is your Lord and Sustainer. He is nourishing and sustaining all that exists. From morning until evening, your tongue must be moist with continuous praise of Allah. In return, Allah has promised increased rahma or mercy for you: If you are grateful, I will surely give you more and more. [Ibrahim 14:7]

This is the cornerstone of your faith and the Islamic way of life. If you learn this first lesson, you will begin the process of `holding onto Allah'. And whoever is grateful, he is only grateful for the benefit of his own self. [Luqman 31:12] for surely if it was not for the grace of God on you and His mercy, you would

have been among the losers. [al-Baqara 2:64].

2. Worshipping Allah

Out of that sense of receiving everything from Allah, comes another important character trait of those who `hold onto Allah' exclusive worship of Allah. The Quran states that true taqwa cannot be attained until all your actions in life are done exclusively to earn the pleasure of Allah:

O mankind, worship your Lord alone, who has created you and those before you, so that you may attain taqwa or righteousness. [al-Baqara 2:21]

You must ensure that your qalb or heart submits totally and wholeheartedly to the Creator. Allah says: O you who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly, without reservation. [al-Baqara 2: 208.] The only [true] way in the sight of Allah is Islam [submission to the will of God]. [Ali Imran 3: 85.]

Your qalb cannot be compartmentalised. You cannot dedicate one piece of it to Allah and another to some other god, like wealth, status, career, spouse and so on.

There is a beautiful verse in the Quran which throws light on the absurdity of such a situation. It tells about some of the mushrikin or idol worshippers who sacrifice animals and then say that one part of the animal is for Allah and another is for their idols. The verse then states quite clearly that whatever is assigned to Allah is also, in reality, assigned to the idols, for Allah does not accept something divided between Him and others. He is One, indivisible and wants the human being to be undivided in service to Him. So long as our heart lies in a hundred places, so long as our eyes are set in a hundred directions, so long as we have many loyalties, we shall never be able to achieve that condition of 'holding onto Allah'.

Why should we allow divided loyalties to capture parts of our heart? Nothing in this world is going to be of use to us when we breathe our last, however hard we may have striven for it and however valuable it may seem to us. We must recognise that the prizes we seek are not the worldly possessions

received from human beings like ourselves. It is only our Creator who can put a real value on our striving and bestow on us a real reward. Shall I tell you of a business that will deliver you from a tormenting punishment? [as-Saff 61:10] This 'business' amounts to you committing your whole undivided being to Allah alone, and selling yourself in order to earn His pleasure.

Sincerity in Worship

What does it mean to do everything *fi sabilillah*, for the sake of Allah, which should be the crux and substance of our lives? People are in the habit of classifying life's activities into those which are mundane and those which are religious. Remember, though, only those things done for the sake of Allah are the 'religious' things. Everything that is done for other than Allah however 'religious' it may seem - is a worldly act. If a person prays ostentatiously, it is a worldly act; if he fasts to expose his spirituality it is a worldly act; but if he earns thousands of pounds to support his family and to spend for the cause of Islam, seeking only Allah's pleasure, it is a highly spiritual act. The Prophet reminded us:

Many people fast but gain nothing from their fasting except hunger and thirst; and many people pray all night but gain nothing from their night Prayers except sleeplessness. (Darimi.)

What is of most importance to us is not the outward form of our actions. Although we perform all our duties and conform to all the protocols, it is the sincerity of purpose and intention behind our actions that really matters. The Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, emphatically stated: 'Actions are judged only by intentions and everyone shall have what he intended.' (Bukhari, Muslim.)

Remember that purpose and intention are like the soul of a body or the inner capability of a seed. Many seeds look alike, but as they begin to grow and bear fruit, their differences become manifest. The purer and higher the motive, the greater the value and yield of your efforts. For all your daily actions, remind yourself of the motives behind your deeds. This may be the best way to ensure the purity and exclusiveness of purpose and intention.

3. Love of Allah

The next character trait of those who 'hold onto Allah' is that they love Allah. The Quran says that those who have iman, love Allah more than anything else. [al-Baqara 2:165.] It does not say that one must love only Allah. Love is a blessing given to us by Allah and is manifested in many aspects of life. In Islam, however, it must be foremost for Allah, our Creator and Sustainer.

What is love? Perhaps it cannot be defined in terms which adequately reflect its nature and importance in a person's life. It is not possible to define it by a formula in a manner we define a scientific fact. But still each one of us knows what love is and can tell from our own experience the powerful force that it is. It is the overpowering force in life. It captivates you, it grips you, it moves you and you are prepared to do anything for the sake of it. Once love is there, what you do is not something which has to be imposed upon you, because you need imposition only for the things you do not love. Iman is something which must penetrate deep into your heart and generate love for Allah and His Prophet more than anything else. Unless this happens, you cannot experience the real iman.

To develop this love for Allah does not require us to retire to or seclude ourselves in a monastery. This love makes us do our duty to Allah while we are out in the street, at home or in the office. With this love, we live as servants of Allah everywhere, willingly making every sacrifice required of us. In fact, it propels us to share actively in the service of Allah's other creatures. True love of Allah makes us care for people and their needs.

Whether or not you have that love is something for you to examine closely. If you love someone, one of your most intense desires will be to get closer to that person. In Islam, you have a way in which you can get closer to Allah and talk to Him and that way is through Salat. The Prophet said that when a person performs Salat, he actually comes nearer to Allah and talks to Him. If you look at how you pray five times a day, you will have a barometer in your hand to find out how much you love Allah.

Once you are praying to Him, you are in front of Him, you are near to Him, you are talking to Him, you are responding to Him in gratitude and you are asking for His forgiveness. Prayer is not just a ritual in which you go through certain postures. The soul has to surrender itself exclusively to Allah and love Him. This love is like a seed which, as it grows, envelops the entire personality.

Ihsan - The Essence of Worship

To entice us to remember Him and to love Him even more, Allah has used the beautiful words in the Quran: Wajh Allah or the Face of Allah. He says:

All that is on earth will perish, but the Face of your Lord will abide forever - Full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour. [ar-Rahman 55: 26-27]

Everything on this earth will perish except the `Face' of your Lord. His is the `Face' you must desire. The expression `Face of Allah' does not, of course, mean that Allah has a face like ours. But, again, if you love someone, you desire to look upon his face all the time, you always want to be in his company and you will make all the necessary sacrifices to earn his pleasure. So, when the Quran uses the expression `Face of Allah' it is really to make us conscious that Allah is looking at us and we should do the things which will please Him and abstain from things which will displease Him. Thus, when the Prophet was questioned about the true meaning of ihsan, he replied:

Ihsan is that you worship and serve Allah as though you are seeing Him; for even though you do not see Him, He surely sees you. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

If you continuously remind yourself that Allah is looking at you when you are praying, when you are studying, when you are doing your job, when you are with your family and friends, when you are involved in dawa - then you are well on your way to attaining ihsan, the most excellent form of worship. Ihsan takes us to the highest station of nearness to Allah. This is what gives real worth to everything we do and makes our actions acceptable in the eyes of our Creator and Sustainer.

4. Becoming Hanif

Those who `hold onto Allah' must also strive to become hanif. Literally translated, it refers to one who is inclined or one who cuts himself away from everything that is false and belongs only to Allah. The term is used in the Quran in ten places, six times with reference to the Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace, and the rest for any one who is sincere and sound in faith. The term connotes sincerity, uprightness and single-mindedness in one's dedication and commitment to Allah.

A. The model of Ibrahim

The example of a hanif is beautifully expressed in the life of Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace. Let us ponder upon two of his outstanding qualities.

B. Love for Allah

Ibrahim loved Allah. He forsook all loyalties and obedience to any object other than Allah. He said: 'I have turned my face [my entire being] to Him who is the Creator of the heavens and earth, having turned away from all else.' [al-Anam 6: 79.]

He brought his entire life and being under Allah's rule, ensuring that he worshipped Him with heart and body. Ibrahim understood that Allah must rule everywhere: in homes as well as in hearts, in manners as well as in minds, in public life as in private. For him, the decision to surrender was personal and free. A ceaseless striving towards that end became the substance of his life so much so that Allah endowed him with the worthy title, Khalil Allah or Friend of God. [an-Nisa 4: 125] With utmost devotion and concentration, Ibrahim supplicated:

My Prayer and all my acts of worship, my living and my dying are for Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds. He has no associate: Thus I have been commanded and I am foremost among those who surrender themselves unto Him. [al-Anam 6:162].

C. Complete trust in Allah

Ibrahim was tried and tested in every, conceivable way. Whenever His Lord called upon him to surrender, he would readily respond: `I surrender to the Lord of all the

worlds.' [al-Baqara 2:131] `If you want me to go into the fire and be burnt alive, I am ready for that! If you want me to leave my home, I am ready for that! If you want me to take my son and wife and put them in a place where there is no shelter, no food and no one to protect them, I am ready for that! And if you want me to make the supreme sacrifice and put a knife to the throat of that which I love best, my son, I am ready for that!'

It is following his footsteps that millions of people go to the Baytullah, the House of Allah, during the Hajj echoing the words of Ibrahim:

Here I am, O Lord, here I am!
Here I am; no partner hast Thou; here I am!
Surely to Thee is all Praise, all Goodness and all Sovereignty;
No partner has Thou!

Labbayk! Allahumma Labbayk! I am here! O Allah I am at Your command! I am always at your command! I am always ready to surrender! I am always ready to sacrifice!

Ibrahim accepted Allah as the only Lord and the only source of guidance. He had absolute conviction in the commandments of Allah. He was prepared to surrender and sacrifice everything at a moment's notice without any hesitation whatsoever. His tawakkul or trust in Allah was absolute. His example is reminiscent of the verse in the Quran: If anyone puts his trust in Allah, sufficient is [Allah] for him. [at-Talaq 65:3]

To become true servants of Allah, we must continuously echo and abide by the words of the Quran: Hasbunallah wa nimal Wakil [Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best Provider] [Al-Imran 3:173] in every circumstance of our lives.

To become a hanif, as exemplified in the life of the Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace, you must love Allah as he did, everything in life must be done to please Allah and you must trust and rely on Allah completely:

To each is a goal to which Allah turns him: So strive together as in a race towards all that is good. [al-Baqara 2:148.]

5. Jihad- Striving in the Path of Allah

The next characteristic of `holding onto Allah' is to strive with all the means at your disposal to make the Word of Allah supreme within your heart and in the hearts of those around you. You must therefore bring all of mankind to Allah by witnessing to His guidance, so that you be witnesses unto mankind and The Messenger be witness unto you. [al-Baqara 2:143.]

In the Sira, we note that when the first ray of Divine Revelation reached Muhammad in Hira [al-Alaq 96: 1-5], the command of 'Iqra' or Read was impregnated with world-shaking forces. He trembled. The second Revelation made things clear: Arise and warn! And your Sustainer's greatness glorify! [al-Muddaththir 74:2-3.] The Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, then took up his task with a single-minded dedication and encountered stiff opposition. The call to let Allah be the Greatest implied that all false claimants - and every claimant is false - to greatness, to unlimited power, authority and lordship to obedience, loyalty and servitude from Allah's creatures, must be challenged and dethroned. It is not difficult to see that this requires hijra, supreme sacrifices in `giving up' everything one loves and fighting with all that one possesses for the sake of that love of Allah which must be greater than all else. Allah says:

And strive hard in God's cause with all the striving that is due to Him. It is He who has elected you [to carry His Message] and has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to] religion [and make you follow] the need of your father Ibrahim. [al-Hajj 22: 78]

The Believers are only those who [truly] believe in Allah and His Messenger, and then they doubt not; and who struggle hard with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allah; it is they who are the truthful ones. [al-Hujurat 49:15.]

A life of jihad necessarily requires important qualities: knowledge of and devotion to the Quran, iman or deep and strong faith, sabr or resolve and steadfastness. Read the Quran and you will find every promise of success here and in the Hereafter conditional upon these qualities.

A. Acquiring knowledge

In order to fulfill your mission in life as the khalifa or ambassador of Allah in the establishment of His way of life, you need to arm yourself with ilm or knowledge of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad has said: 'Whoever Allah wishes good for, He bestows upon him a deep understanding of the Din.' (Bukhari, Muslim.) The Quran also exhorts those who possess useful knowledge and use it as an instrument to develop their closeness to Allah: Are those who know equal to those who do not? Only those with insight can keep it in mind [az-Zumar 39:9]. God will exalt those who believe among you and those who have knowledge to high ranks [al-Mujadala 58:11]. Of all His servants only those who know fear God. [al-Fatir 35:28]. The Prophet also said that there are countless rewards both in this world and the Next for one who seeks to educate and purify himself:

If one travels in search of knowledge, Allah will make him travel to Paradise. The angels, being highly pleased with him, spread their wings over the seeker of knowledge. Everything in the heavens and on earth, even the fish in the depths of water, seek forgiveness for a scholar. And the superiority of a learned man over one engaged in ritual worship is like that of a full moon over the rest of the stars. (Ahmad)

Consider the following guidelines as you set out on the path to educate yourself.

- Seek to have a sound understanding of the Quran and Sunna. May Allah bless the renowned Islamic scholar al-Muhallab, who advised his children: Acquire knowledge before you become leaders so that leadership does not keep you preoccupied from acquiring knowledge. [Fathi Yakan, Problems of the Dawaa and the Daiya, IIFSO, Kuwait, 1984. p. 71.]
- Try to improve your reading, writing and oratory skills.
- Be well versed in the issues of the day by reading current newspapers, magazines and journals.
- Strive to have a good understanding of

contemporary issues and problems affecting society.

- Strive also to understand the problems of the Muslims in such depth as to develop your own solutions in the light of the Quran and Sunna.
- Develop a personal library even if it is a small one and most of all cherish your Islamic books.

B. Practicing what you preach

`Real' iman, once lodged in the heart and embedded at the centre of life, must flourish into a mighty tree of righteous deeds. True iman which resides in hearts, shapes lives, and finds acceptance with Allah is always differentiated in the Quran from outward, `legal' islam.

The Bedouins say, `We believe.' Say: you do not believe, rather say, We have surrendered; for [true] faith has not yet entered their hearts. [al-Hujurat 49: 15.]

Similarly, mere verbal professions of faith, which are contradicted by actions, are rejected.

O Messenger, let not those grieve you who vie with one another in [the cause of] kufr from among those who say `We believe' with their mouths, but their hearts believe not. [al-Maida 5:41]

Even Believers are often called upon `to believe', that is, to attain true faith: O Believers, believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the Book He sent down before. [an-Nisa 4:136.] Or, Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and spend out of that in which we have made you vicegerents. [al-Hadid 57: 7.]

The connection between iman and actions is clearly manifest in the way both are almost always linked together: al-ladhina amanu wa amilus-salihah [those who believe and do righteous deeds].

The bond between true faith and ritual worship on the one hand, and a life lived totally in worship, which leads to justice and compassion in society on the other, is firmly established in many places in the Quran:

Have you seen him who denies Judgment? That is the one who repulses the orphan and urges not the feeding of the needy. Woe to those that pray and are unmindful of their Prayer, those who want to be seen, and who refuse small kindnesses. [al-Maun 107:1-5]

When we examine the body of hadith literature, we will also, immediately realise how the Prophet links a wide range of values and actions with iman in a very clear and defined manner. Just look at some of them:

No one among you believes until all his desires follow what I have brought. (Sharh al-Sunna)

What lies between a man and kufr is the abandonment of Prayer. (Muslim.)

While one fornicates he is not a Believer, while one steals he is not a Believer, while one drinks he is not a Believer, while one takes plunder which makes men look at him he is not a Believer, and while one defrauds he is not a Believer. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

Flesh which has grown out of the unlawful earnings will not enter Paradise, for Hell is more fitting for all flesh which has grown out of the unlawful. (Ahmad)

Finally, remember that as a daiya or caller to Islam you need to set an excellent example and you need to practice what you preach. Those who do not follow their own advice have been strongly condemned by Allah. Keep close to you the following verses of the Quran:

O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? Grievously hateful is it in the sight of Allah that you should say what you do not do. [as-Saff 61:2-3.]

Do you enjoin righteousness upon mankind while you yourselves forget [to practice it]? And you are readers of the Scripture/ Have you then no sense? [al-Baqara 2: 44.]

C. Developing patience and perseverance

There will be many obstacles and hardships that may prevent you from fulfilling your obligations to Allah and you therefore need to develop sabr or patience and perseverance. The Quran states: So [O Believers] endure

hardship with beautiful endurance. [al-Ma'arij 70: 5] So, patience is beautiful. [Yusuf 12:84] And God is with those who patiently persevere. [al-Anfal 8: 66.]

Know that life is filled with tests and trials. Allah reminds us in the Quran:

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, `We believe; and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false. [al-Ankabut 29:2-3.]

The best of people therefore are those who bear their tests and trials with fortitude and optimism and who see in every difficulty an opportunity to turn to Allah in remembrance and prayer. Remind yourself constantly that Allah shall make ease after hardship [at-Talaq 65: 7], and that on no soul does He place a burden greater than it can bear [al-Araf 7: 42]. Remember that He has all the power. He gives everything. No harm can come to Him, and no benefit can come to Him. Everything that is happening in life is because of Him and comes from Him for no power is there save with Allah, the Most High, the Great.

IMPEDIMENTS IN `HOLDING ONTO ALLAH'

There are some character traits that you must take care to rid yourself of as you strive to `hold onto Allah'.

1. Pride

One such evil and impediment is kibr or pride. This represents the antithesis of humility and is a devastating moral ailment. The efforts which we make for tazkiya, it is hoped, will make us successful. But if one is successful, the greatest cancer that can eat everything away, is kibr. The Messenger of Allah said:

`No one will be admitted into Paradise who has even a tiny grain of pride in his heart.' A man asked him: But what if someone likes to dress well and put on good sandals?' He replied: `Truly Allah is beautiful, and He loves beauty. Pride is to disdain the truth, and to belittle and despise other people.' (Muslim.)

The day you feel that you have attained something special is the day of your spiritual death. Thus, the entire effort which you make

should continue to be permeated with humility. Always remember that whatever you have achieved is by the grace of Allah, not through your own efforts.

Secondly, know that the ideal for you to emulate is the *uswa* of the Prophet. His example is so high and exalted: And you [Muhammad] stand on an exalted standard of character. [al-Qalam 68:4.] One of the reasons the 'ideal' standard is so high, is to ensure that we always strive to better ourselves. If the ideal is easily reachable, then once a person has attained it, he will feel content, and contentment will set him off on a downward slide. Because our ideal is high, we are always in a state of aspiration. We are perpetually in a state of effort, striving and spiritual development. Should *kibr* arise in this state, it can only be an act of *Shaytan*, who is there just to test whatever one has achieved in the field of knowledge or action. *Kibr* will destroy whatever you have achieved, so protect yourself against it. Remember that it comes in very attractive, very concealed and very deceptive channels and forms. So, be ever vigilant.

The characteristics of a Believer whose heart is free of pride and filled with *ikhlas* and humility are described in a *hadith qudsi*. Allah Most High has said:

Truly, of those devoted to Me, the one I most favour is a believer who is of meagre means and much given to Prayer, who has been particular in the worship of his Lord and has obeyed Him inwardly, who was obscure among people and not pointed out, and whose sustenance was just sufficient to provide for him yet he bore this patiently.

Then he [i.e. the Prophet] rapped with his hand and said: Death will have come early to him, his mourners will have been few, his estate scant. (Tirmidhi.)

You should thus strive to become like one who doggedly keeps on working for the cause of Allah. You may not necessarily read details of him in newspaper columns, nor does he appear on television screens, nor does he win applause by making beautiful speeches in large gatherings and commendations for writing good pieces. He is not plagued by doubts. He does not waver in the face of defeat and

failure. He does not calculate the chances of success but he knows very well that the only chance of success for him is to do his duty, and do it to the best of his ability. He is the backbone of the Islamic work and the Muslim Umma.

2. Hypocrisy

Another evil that destroys all that the Believer has achieved, or is trying to achieve, is *nifaq*. *Nifaq* entails hypocrisy, showing off, and pretending to have what one does not possess. The Prophet condemned this in the strongest terms. He said:

Whoever prays to show off, he is [a sort of] idolater, for he makes a god beside Allah; whoever fasts to show off, he also makes a god beside Allah; and whoever gives charity to show off; he too makes a god beside Allah. (Ahmad.)

He also said:

Three characteristics are the signs of a hypocrite, even if he fasts, performs the Prayer and claims that he is a Muslim: when he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is trusted, he betrays his trust. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

Hypocrisy serves only to cloud your consciousness of Allah. It is a moral ailment which eats away one's character as a moth eats away cloth. *Nifaq* is the opposite of *ikhlas* whereas *ikhlas* is the most essential ingredient of faith and good deeds. You should therefore assess your motives and actions frequently.

3. Pessimism

A third danger is that of *qunut* or pessimism. You must try to rid yourself of *qunut*, the feeling of hopelessness and pessimism. Allah calls *qunut* an act of *kufr* or disbelief and rejection: He says: who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, those who go astray? [al-Hijr 15: 56.]

If you have tried and failed a hundred times, your efforts would still have won incalculable gains. The feeling of disappointment and pessimism and of losing heart should never occur. The promise of Allah is true and will come to pass: And those who strive in Our way We will certainly guide them to Our paths. [at-

Ankabut 29:69.] Always adopt a hopeful and positive outlook. Be an eternal optimist.

4. Uncontrollable Anger

A fourth danger is that of uncontrollable anger. Once you begin to truly 'hold onto Allah' you will find that life becomes pleasant and easy. To work for the cause of Islam becomes a joy. Inter-personal disputes, family problems and organisational problems will be resolved amicably. Most problems which persist in affecting our social relationships and organisations are due to lack of sincerity and lack of exclusiveness for Allah.

If you begin to do everything for Him, there is no need to be angry if somebody insults you since he or she cannot harm you at all. Only Allah's displeasure can harm you. Remember the words of Allah:

Never let your enmity for anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Always be just: that is closest to being God-fearing [al-Maida 5:8.]

Why should you become angry? Uncontrollable anger and unnecessary rudeness and disputes that take place are counter productive especially when you are working in a jama'a, hand-in-hand with your fellow Muslim brother and sister for the cause of Islam. Remember that we are working only to seek the pleasure of Allah. Do not ruin your good deeds by corrupting your heart with kibr and letting your nafs or selfish desires get the better of you. Identifying a practical method of controlling anger, the Prophet advised:

When one of you gets angry while he is standing, he should sit down. Then the anger [will] leave him, and if not, then he should lie down. (Ahmad, Tirmidhi.)

The Prophet also used to make dua constantly in order to avoid negative emotions and behaviour:

O Allah. Purify my heart from hypocrisy and my actions from ostentation. (Bukhari.)

O Allah, Sustain me with Your love and the love of one who loves You, and the love of that which will draw me near to Your love, and make Your love more dear to me than cool

water. (Bukhari,)

There are many more Prayers and supplications of the Prophet for similar things. They are food for the soul, food for the qalb and a source of sustenance for living this worldly life, for doing business. for studying, for working, for bringing up children and for dawn. Remember, if we do things for worldly objects, these objects will perish and our own actions will also perish.

The parable of those who reject their Lord is that their works are as ashes on which the wind blows furiously on a tempestuous day. No power have they over what they have earned. That is the straying far, far [from the goal]. [Ibrahim 14: 18]

5. Abuse of the Tongue

A fifth danger is abuse of the tongue. We should be careful how we use our tongue for its misuse is the fastest way to Hellfire. Lying, slandering, backbiting and obscenity should never be part of our speech. We should be exceedingly careful with what we say about others. The Prophet said:

None of my Companions should tell me anything about anyone, for I like to meet [any one] of you with a clean heart. (Abu Dawud.)

Janna has been promised for those who are careful with their speech. The Prophet said:

Whoever can promise me that he will be virtuous with what is between his lips, and what is between his thighs; I promise that he will go to the Garden. (Muslim.)

The key to control of the tongue is to infuse our conversations with remembrance of Allah. The Prophet said in this regard:

Do not talk for long without remembering Allah, for talking much without remembering Allah is hardness of the heart. The most distant among man from Allah is one with a hardened heart. (Tirmidhi.)

6. Lustful Sexual Passions

The sixth and last impediment I wish to highlight is that of lustful sexual passions. Sex is a powerful driving force that Allah has blessed us with. In the Quran, Allah praises

men who guard their sex organs [an-Nur 24: 30], and women who guard their sex organs [an-Nur 24: 31]. Despite great temptations, true Believers are able to control their sexual desires and in the process preserve their chastity.

The abuse of one's sexual organs leading to either fornication or adultery (zina) is described in the Quran as a great abomination:

Do not come near zina for it is a foulness and an evil way. [al-Isra 17: 32]

The verse warns against approaching any avenue which excites passions, opens ways for illicit relations between a man and woman, and promotes indecency and obscenity. For this reason we are advised by Allah and His Prophet to observe the following regulations:

- We should seek to get married if we are in a position to do so. The Prophet said: 'O young men! Those of you who can support a wife should marry, for it keeps you from looking at women and preserves your chastity.' (Bukhari.) If you are unable to get married, you should fast regularly for this will assist in controlling your sexual desires. The Prophet said: 'O young men! You should marry. Whosoever cannot marry should fast, for fasting will lessen his desire'. (Bukhari.)

- We should strive to control all the parts of our body not just our genitals from zina or fornication. The Prophet said: 'Every son of Adam has his share of fornication. The eyes fornicate and do so by looking. The hands fornicate and do so by touching. The feet fornicate and do so by walking [to an immoral act or place]. The mouth fornicates and does so by kissing. And the heart forms thoughts and wishes which the genitals confirm or deny.' (Bukhari and Muslim.) Thus the Prophet used to make dua continuously: 'I seek refuge in Thee from the evil which may be in my ears, my eyes, my heart and my semen'. (Abu Dawud.)

- We should avoid looking at members of the opposite sex with desire. The Prophet considered lustful looks as the 'zina of the eye', according to his saying: 'The eyes also commit zina and their zina is the lustful look' (Bukhari). He also said: 'A gaze is a poisoned

arrow from Shaytan. Whoever abstains from it in fear of God shall receive from Him an increase in faith, the sweetness of which he will feel in his heart.' (Musnad of Ibn Hanbal.)

- We should avoid looking at the awra or private parts of others. The Prophet forbade looking at the awra of another, whether of the same or the opposite sex, and whether with or without desire. He said: 'A man should not look at the awra of another man, nor a woman of a woman, nor should a man go under one cloth with another man, nor a woman with another woman. (Muslim.)

- We should observe the rule of khalwa. Khalwa or privacy denotes a man and woman being alone in a place in which there is no fear of intrusion by anyone else, so that an opportunity exists for sexual intimacy. Islam prohibits khalwa between a man and a woman who are outside the degree of mahram relationship. The reason for this is not a lack of trust but rather to protect ourselves from sexual temptation arising when we are alone with a member of the opposite sex. The Prophet said: 'Whoever believes in God and the Last Day must never be in privacy with a woman without there being a mahram with her, for otherwise Shaytan will be the third present [with them].' (Ahmad.)

SUMMARY

The Quran has laid down certain guidelines for staying on the Straight Way. The first is to 'hold on to Allah' and life's journey will be easy.

'Holding onto Allah' means that you must be grateful to Him for everything, worship only Him, love Him more than anything else, strive to become a hanif, and make jihad only for Him.

Likewise, be aware of the following impediments in 'holding onto Allah': pride, hypocrisy, pessimism, uncontrollable anger, abuse of the tongue and lustful sexual passions.

May Allah guide us to the Straight Way for He guides whom He wills to the Straight Way. [Yunus 10:25.]

CHAPTER FOUR: `Relating to Allah's Messenger

THE Quran's major claim upon us is to put its teachings into practice for Allah demands the whole of our lives:

O you who have attained to faith! Surrender yourselves wholly unto God, and follow not Shaytan's footsteps, for, verily, he is your open foe. [al-Baqara 2: 208.]

The only way to live by the Quran is to live life as the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, lived it, for his life was the Quran in practice. His example is the surest guide to its meaning and Message. If you want to `see' the Quran then look at the Prophet's life. For, as Sayyida Aisha said, 'his conduct was nothing but the Quran.' (Muslim.)

The best way to understand the Quran and follow its Message is to learn what the Prophet said, spend hours and hours in his company, follow his footsteps and cast yourself in the mould that he left behind.

The Quran provides the essential framework for human life. But the Prophet and his Sunna provide us with the details of that framework. The manner in which that structure is to be given shape in actuality, the method to be adopted in order to live by Divine guidance, and the wisdom that enables one to rise to all occasions and live through all situations in accordance with Allah's guidance.

If you desire to know what type of person the Quran wants you to be and what type of society the Quran wants you to create, you only need to look at the Prophet's life history.

Knowing, however, is not enough. We require inner strength to follow the Quranic teachings. We need to have the real flavour of faith inside our hearts. This strength comes out of the love that a Believer must have for Allah and His Messenger. Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet said:

There are three types of people who will experience the sweetness of faith: he to whom Allah and His Messenger are dearer than all else; he who loves a human being for Allah's sake alone; and he who has as great

abhorrence of returning to unbelief after Allah has rescued him from it as he has of being cast into hell. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

This love is not merely the profession of faith. It is a love that supersedes all other types of love and a love that makes faith penetrate into the heart. It is through this love for God and His Messenger that one tastes the real sweetness of faith. The way to that love and the symbol of that love lies in following the footsteps of the Prophet who was commanded by Allah to say:

If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, most Merciful. [Ali Imran 3:31]

THE POSITION OF THE SUNNA IN A BELIEVER'S LIFE

By the time the Prophet, peace be on him, departed this world, there were thousands of people whose lives mirrored his life. He left behind a society whose every aspect carried his stamp. His guidance, his teachings, his actions and his sayings not only fashioned that society during his time, but also continued to influence it after he had died. He created a new society and led the creation of a new civilisation and culture out of the teachings of the Quran. This he did in accordance with the task given to him by Allah Himself.

O Messenger! Convey all that has been sent to you from your Lord. If you did not you would not have delivered His Message. [al-Maida 5: 67]

THE PROPHETS MISSION

Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was not simply a `Messenger' who brought a `Message'. His responsibility and his task went beyond merely conveying the word of Allah to mankind. He was assigned the duty of teaching the Book, the Law, and the Wisdom to people, purifying them and making them develop into the human beings that the Quran desired them to be.

In many places in the Quran, these duties

have been explicitly mentioned. In the very first part of Sura al-Baqara, Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace, prayed for a new Messenger:

Our Lord! Raise up in the midst of our offspring a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your verses and instruct them in the Book and in Wisdom and purify their lives. Verily, You are Mighty, Wise. [al-Baqara 2:129]

In the above verse, four duties of the Prophet are mentioned:

- to convey the Message of the Quran to people;
- to instruct them in the Scripture which means the 'code of law' for human life;
- to teach them wisdom, through which life can make its journey in the light of the Quranic teachings;
- to vain them in self-purification

His mission, therefore, was not merely to convey the Quran. He was designated to explain it and provide the guidance for day-to-day situations as the movement he led progressed from one stage to another.

In other places in the Quran, [See Quran: 33: 4-5; 5: 67; 2: 151; 48: 28; 9: 33; 61: 9; 7: 157.] Allah has described his mission and duty as:

- Indhar (warning)
- Tabshir (bringing glad tidings)
- Dawa (inviting and calling)
- Tabligh (communicating)
- Tadhkir (reminding)
- Talim (teaching)
- Tilawa (conveying and propagating)
- Amr bil-maruf wa nahi anil munkar (enjoining and promoting what is good and right and forbidding and eradicating what is bad and

wrong)

- Iqama (establishing the Din or way of life)
- Qist (establishing justice)
- Izhar (making Divine guidance prevail)
- Shahada (witnessing)

All these expressions pertain to the same mission, though from different perspectives and with different emphases.

The Prophet was also given the authority to make things permissible and to make things prohibited: Adopt what the Messenger gives you and refrain from what he prohibits you. [al-Hashr 59: 7.] And he had this authority from none other than Allah.

It was to accomplish these duties assigned to him that the Prophet Muhammad spent his whole life in changing people's behaviour and establishing a new society. The Quran accords him a unique position which no one else can ever have. Whoever obeys the Messenger, indeed, he has obeyed Allah. [an-Nisa 4: 80.] Those who gave their hands in pledge to you, indeed they gave their hands in pledge to Allah. [al-Fath 48: 10.]

Once the Prophet has given his decision and his judgment, no believing man or woman has any right to question, doubt, disobey, or harbour any feeling of disapproval. They must submit totally and willingly to him.

It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision. If any disobeys Allah, and His Messenger, he is, indeed, on a clearly wrong path. [al-Alazab 33: 36]

In the life of the Prophet, according to the Quran, lies the most beautiful and the most perfect example to follow:

You have, indeed, in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar, for whoever hopes for Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much. [al-Ahzab 33: 21.]

GUIDELINES IN STUDYING THE SUNNA

One may ask where can the Sunna be found for there are so many books and traditions circulated. What the Prophet has left behind however, is not merely a record of what he did or what he said. He left behind him living human beings and a living society. It is through these living human beings and through this society that one can find the Sunna. The degree of homogeneity, conformity, and consistency that you find in this Umma, even after 1,400 years, are because of this Sunna.

You may walk into any masjid from Indonesia to Washington and you will find the rites and rituals of the formal acts of worship and the language of Prayer almost identical. You may walk into any Muslim home and you will find every Muslim eating with his right hand. Why? Because that is the Sunna left behind by the Prophet.

These examples may seem trivial but my purpose in citing them is to point out that even on the minutest of details, uniformity exists in the Muslim Umma and this is due to the Sunna. If the Sunna is given up as a source of guidance and if the Quran is separated from the Sunna, then this Muslim society that has existed for over fourteen hundred years, through many periods of severe strains and tests and tribulations, would disintegrate. It would then be relatively easy for foreign cultures and societies to assimilate it. What gives Muslim society and Muslim communities a distinct identity and colour of their own is the pattern left behind by the Prophet.

THE SUNNA IN THE CONTEXT OF WESTERN SOCIETY

Muslims in Western societies live in a culture which is 'alien' in its spirit. To live in this type of culture is your own choice and your own decision. In many instances, you have no other option for the West is your home. Unfortunately, the same can be said for people living in Muslim countries since Western culture is slowly weaving its way and replacing genuine Islamic culture in these countries also.

To survive and prosper in western society requires great courage to stand up for your beliefs and ideals. You need to have a clear

appreciation of the true nature of Islamic culture. The true spirit of Islamic culture lies in an understanding that the 'real' realities of life are all beyond the perception of physical senses. The beginning of Sura al-Baqara states that its guidance is for: Those who believe in al-ghayb [what lies beyond the perception of physical senses]. [al-Baqara 2:4]

So all that is 'real'-Allah, His Angels, Prophethood, the Day of Judgment, Heaven and Hell - are all beyond any measure of physical testing. They all lie beyond human capability to see them, to smell them, to measure them, or to find their real situation.

Western culture as it exists and as it has spread now throughout the world, in this 'global village', has perpetuated the view that, only that which can be materially measured or found out is 'real'. Whatever cannot be measured has no value. Therefore, both Islamic and western cultures are diametrically opposed.

Once you have chosen to live in a 'Western type' society, the only source of light for you is the Messenger of Allah. He was also faced with an almost similar situation. As he came down from the cave of Hira, after his experience of receiving the light of Divine guidance, he re-entered a culture and society which were quite 'alien' to his Message. His Message began by linking the whole of life to the name of Allah. That was the starting point. All knowledge, all culture, all civilisation and all human action must be centred on one pivot and that is the name of Allah. This was a totally strange Message for the society in which he had to operate. So, we need to look at the Prophet's Sunna in the context of operating in an 'alien' society and see how we can practise a genuine Islamic culture.

THE REAL MEANING OF THE TERM SUNNA

The technical definition of Sunna is all that the Prophet did, said, or approved. When the term Sunna is used, our minds are diverted immediately to the manners and morals which we are so careful to observe, while dressing and eating, walking and praying.

I have no intention of belittling the importance of these relatively minor acts that he left

behind. It reminds me of a beautiful incident from his life. A man and his son came to meet the Prophet. As he came out of his house, the buttons of his shirt were open. Both of them shook his hand and went away. That was the only occasion in their lives when they came face to face with the Prophet. But, for their entire lives they always kept the buttons of their shirts open - not because it was obligatory, but once you fall in love with someone, each and every action that he does, and each and every thing that he says, becomes dear to the heart. It has to be followed.

If, however, you consider the technical definition of Sunna, and if you look at the life of the Prophet from the moment he received revelation in the cave of Hira till he breathed his last in Madina, what is it that stands out as his most dominant concern and his main activity? The most outstanding feature of his life was that every moment was spent in dawa, in inviting his fellow human beings to live in submission to their Creator. He lived

every moment of his life in purifying individuals and making them grow in their love and submission to Allah. Every moment of his life, he talked about and carried out his mission. In the streets of Makka, in the valley of Taif, on the battlegrounds of Badr and Hunayn, and to the totality of affairs of Madina - dawa was his essential concern. That was his essential Sunna.

YOUR MISSION

Dawa is the first and most important duty for Muslims today. In your daily affairs, it is the Sunna that must be uppermost in your mind and heart. It must make the greatest claim on your time and wealth.

Secondly, while living in an 'alien' culture, you have to preserve your Islamic identity - not only through rational arguments, but through emotional, cultural, and civilisational symbols. It is only the Sunna that can provide these emotional and civilisational symbols through which you will not only preserve your identity but strengthen and advance it.

Thirdly, it is the youth who must claim your major attention for that is also the Sunna of

the Prophet. They were the people who had the energies and capabilities to carry the burden of his mission.

Fourthly, in a society where so many misgivings about Islam prevail, where Islam has been misrepresented and distorted so widely, your conduct must be a living example of that mercy to mankind, just as the Prophet was rahmatun lil-alamin a mercy to the worlds.

We sent you not but as a mercy for all the worlds. [al-Anbiva 21: 107.]

The Prophet Muhammad was such a model of mercy that he declared that removing an obstacle from another's path leads one into Paradise; to quench the thirst of a dog entitles one to enter Paradise; and to tie a cat until he dies makes one deserve Hell-fire. Such was the mercy of his uswa, his living example. You will only be able to invite people to Islam if you follow his example.

SUMMARY

We must recognise the unique position that the Prophet must occupy in our lives as a focus of our love and obedience and as an ideal we must follow.

Our biggest challenge is to fulfill our role as ambassadors of the last Ambassador of Allah to mankind for all times. By our words and deeds, by our example of integrity and compassion, we must make our neighbours understand who Muhammad, peace be upon him, was and what his Message for mankind was.

In this process, we must be the embodiment of mercy that the Prophet was. In this way we will create a new future by making the new generation a living example of his Sunna. Then, perhaps, our presence in this world will prove a great blessing, not only for the Muslim community, but for all mankind.

CHAPTER FIVE: Spending in the Way of Allah

WHATEVER you give or spend in the way of Allah will be returned to you in manifold increase. Allah, the most Bountiful and the most Loving, commends:

Lend unto God a goodly loan. Whatever good you shall forward on your behalf you shall find it with God, as better and richer in reward. [al-Muzzammil 73: 20.]

Be generous, therefore, for whatever you spend on yourself is only for your temporary sustenance while whatever you spend in the way of Allah is an investment in your future for which will provide everlasting sustenance. Seek to invest in others for your own benefit with whatever Allah has endowed you.

Sadaqa or charity, of course, is not compulsory. What is obligatory, however, is Zakat, a fixed percentage of your halal or lawful savings which is meant to purify your wealth by recognising that the needy has a right over a portion of it. Indeed, the very meaning of the term Zakat signifies purification. Allah says: Of their wealth take alms to purify and sanctify them. [at-Tawba 9:103.] Furthermore: He that spends his possessions [on others] so that he might grow in purity. [al-Layl 92: 18.]

Love for worldly possessions is primarily a disease of the heart while the purpose of sadaqa is to act as its antidote or cure. Sadaqa serves as a form of dhikr to remind us that all forms of wealth come from Allah and what we possess is simply a short term loan for which we will be held accountable when our contract expires. This loan is meant to cater for our personal needs and family needs and those of the wider society.

SPENDING ON FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS

Spending on those in need is a highly commendable form of ibada or worship. The Prophet Muhammad declared:

A generous person is close to Allah, close to Paradise, close to people, and far from Hell. However, a miserly person is far from Allah,

far from Paradise, far from people, but close to Hell. Allah loves more an ignorant man who is generous than a worshipper who is miserly. (Tirmidhi.)

We should not, of course, expect any favours from those who receive our sadaqa. Neither should we expect that they will be grateful and kind to us and give something to us in return, nor should we be motivated by a desire for any other worldly reward. Concerning our attitude to giving Allah reminds us: O you who believe, make not your charity worthless by reminders of your generosity, and by causing vexation. [at-Baqara 2: 264.] Our sadaqa should be qard hasan, a loan given for the sake of Allah without expectation of profit. The Quran describes the attitude of those who give to the needy as follows:

And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive [saying], 'We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: No reward do we desire of you nor thank,.' [ad-Dahr 76: 8-9.]

Their reward is sought from Allah rather than mortals. And whose gratitude and return can be greater for us than Allah's, given out of love and mercy for us?

Instead of hoping for some worldly benefit from our sadaqa, we should be grateful to those who accept our sadaqa, for they have given us an opportunity to invest our wealth in a 'business venture' with Allah who has promised in return a reward 'seven hundred times greater'. The parable of those who spend their wealth in the array of Allah is that of a grain, out of which grow seven ears, in every ear hundred grains. [al-Baqara 2: 261.]

Just imagine if such an investment was offered to you by a company- you would rush to put every penny you possess into it when you consider the magnitude of profit to be made. To invest in Allah's 'business venture' requires the certainty of faith, which affirms that there is a 'real' reward available for you to receive. Of this reward, the Quran declares: Allah has purchased of the believers their persons and

their goods; for theirs [in return] is the Garden. [at Tawba 9:111.]

When a Believer attains the certainty and faith that his real reward lies in the Life to Come, his heart becomes enlarged with generosity and love for his fellow men and his giving knows no bounds. In return, Allah promises ease for him in all his efforts until he reaches eternal bliss.

Surely, your striving is to diverse ends. And for him who gives, is God-conscious and believes are the Truth -for him shall We make easy the path towards ease. But, as for him who is niggardly, behaves as if he is self-sufficient and denies the Truth-for him shall We make easy the path towards hardship. [al-Layl 92:4-10.]

The Prophet, upon whom be peace, was the most generous person in his community. It was his unique sense of generosity and affection which captivated the hearts of the people and brought them into the fold of Islam. His example was the most important form of dawa. Imam Bukhari has recorded that the close Companion of the Prophet, Jabir, testified that he never observed the Prophet refusing anyone who requested something from him. The Prophet, upon whom be peace, has himself testified: `If I had a mountain of gold, I would not like to save any of it for more than three days, except something I put aside to pay debts' (Bukhari). The magnanimity of the blessed Prophet is the example we must strive to follow.

SPENDING FOR THE CAUSE OF ISLAM

Spending on fellow human beings -family, relatives, the needy, the orphan, the destitute - is one aspect of infaq fi sabilillah or spending in the way of God. There is also another - that is, spending for the cause of Islam. When you spend for the cause of Islam, Allah adopts another manner of asking for it: Who is there who will give a loan to Me? [al-Hadid 57: 11.] Just imagine His generosity. It is His wealth, it belongs to Him. Even if He asks us for it without offering any reward, He will be justified in doing so but yet He is prepared to buy back His own property so that you may again reap its benefits and gain a noble reward.

Consider our attitude when we are asked to contribute for the cause of Islam. We are miserly. We will spend one-hundredth of what we spend on our homes, our children, our clothes and food for the cause of Islam. Sura al-Hadid goes on to invite those who claim to be Muslims to become true Believers and to give their lives and their possessions and belongings in the way of Allah. Finally, it invites Muslims to give a good loan to Allah which he will multiply many times and return with a noble reward:

One day we shall see the believing men and believing women with their Light running before them and on their right A glad tiding for you today, gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to abide forever. This a the supreme triumph.

On that day hypocrites, both men and women, shall speak unto those Believers; `Wait for us. Let us have light from your light.' But they will be told: `Turn back and seek a light of your own.' And thereupon a wall will be raised between them with a gate in it. Inside it will be mercy and outside the wall will be suffering and punishment.

Those who will be outside will call out to those who -would be inside `Were we not with you?' To which the others will answer: Yes, indeed, but you allowed yourself to be tempted and you were hesitant and you were in doubt and your wishful thinking

deceived you until Allah's command came to pass. For, indeed the deceiver deceived you concerning Allah. And so, no ransom shall be accepted today from you and neither from those who disbelieved Your abode is the fire. It is your only refuge, and how evil a journey's end. '

Is it not time that the hearts of all those who have believed should feel humbled at the remembrance of Allah and of all the truth that has been given to them, lest they become like those who were granted revelation before and whose hearts have hardened with the passage of time, so that many of them have now become Iniquitous?

But, know that Allah gives life to the earth

after it has been lifeless! We have, indeed, made Our Messages clear unto you, so that you might use your reason.

Verily, as for men and women who accept the Truth as true, and who offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, they will be amply repaid, and shall have a noble reward [in the Life to Come]. [al-Hadid 57: 12-18]

The above verses describe a vivid and graphic scene concerning the Last Day, Yawm al-Qiyama. It concerns two groups of people, those who are true Believers and those who are shaky, hesitant and doubtful in their commitment to their faith and to our Creator.

The first verse describes the group of believing men and women. They will have a Nur or Light which will be in front of them and on their right. With that Light they will journey to their destination and they will be greeted with glad tidings of beautiful gardens in which they will live forever- that will be the highest possible achievement for which they can hope.

The first point we may note is that both men and women are mentioned in the verse separately. This means that as far as the demands and duties of this world and eligibility for the rewards in the Life to Come are concerned, there is no difference between men and women. Both men and women will possess the Light for their journey.

Then, the Quran focuses the narrative on the second group, the hypocrites and miserly ones - both men and women -who will not possess the Light. Those who were niggardly and did not believe in the promises made by Allah will cry out to the true Believers for their bounty - but, it will be too late to benefit from the generosity of others. A wall will arise separating the generous ones from the miserly. The generous ones will find shelter in Allah's rahma, while the miserly ones and the hypocrites will be on the side of Allah's wrath. A dialogue will then commence between the two groups. Ibn Kathir elaborates the conversation in a very vivid manner. The miserly and the hypocrites will be saying:

‘Were we not with you? Did we not go with you to the Friday Prayers? And did we not attend with you the congregations? And did we

not do other things with you? Did we not fight side by side with you in the battles? So, why are you now leaving us behind?’ The true Believers will reply, ‘Yes, indeed, you were with us. But you were with us only outwardly, with your bodies, but not with your intentions and with your commitments. And you allowed yourselves to be tempted away by these worldly things which you considered to be dearer, more valuable for you in life. You were more concerned about your families, you were more concerned about amassing wealth, you were more concerned about making life comfortable and you were more concerned about building up a good life in the world. And so, all these worldly things, once they became the medium and vehicle for taking you away from the Right Path, led you to this position. And you waited and you hesitated’.

If we reflect on the whole scene, we will find that there is mention of a gate in the wall. If we believe that all that is going to happen in the Akhirah is a result of what happens today, it means that although there is a wall which separates the sincere from the insincere, and the true Believers from the hypocrites-there is always a door between the two groups that can be opened.

If, today, someone makes a decision to step inside that door it requires two things: a will and a step, and then you are inside, near the mercy of Allah. The time to walk through that door is today and not tomorrow, because tomorrow that door may not be open. But today, despite all the walls that may separate the sincere from the insincere and the generous from the miserly, the door for istighfar and tawba is open. The door for turning back is open and the door to make a decision and so become sincere to your commitment is also open.

Now is the time to commit yourself to Islam and to become sincere. You must ensure that your whole life is based on spending for the cause of Islam by giving your time, attention, heart and mind - utilising the faculties of speaking, writing, reasoning and intelligence that Allah has bestowed on you for the establishment of His Din or way of life. Only then will you attain the highest station of faith:

Never will you attain the highest degree of

virtue unless you spend [freely] in the cause of Allah out of that which you love; and whatever you spend Allah surely knows it well. [Ali Imran 3: 93.]

THE SMALL CHARITY

We should never consider any charity too small or not worth doing or giving. Even meeting your Muslim brother or sister with a smiling face or giving a good word of encouragement and praise are acts of sadaqa. Adi bin Hatim has related that the Prophet Muhammad said:

Every one of you will certainly meet Allah. On the day that he meets Him, there will be no curtain between them, nor any interpreter. He shall then say, 'Did I not send you a Messenger who was conveying the Message to you?' He will reply, 'Certainly'. He shall then say, 'Did I not give you property and show favour on you?' He will reply, 'Certainly'. Then he will look to his right and see only Jahannam and he will look to his left and see only Jahannam [Then the Prophet said] Guard against the fire, even though it be with half a date. And, if anyone does not have even that much, he should do so with a good word. (Bukhari.)

Some people have so narrow a view that they cannot bring themselves round to even utter a kind and pleasant word. The Messenger of Allah has said: 'Do not belittle even the smallest act of kindness, even if it were no more than meeting your brother with a smiling and cheerful face.' (Muslim.)

It will not cost a penny to say a good word, but so miserly we have may become that we are not even prepared to utter a word of kindness, praise and encouragement. It will make a lot of difference to our spouses, siblings, and neighbours - be they Muslim or non-Muslim- if we were to be loving and kind in all our inter-personal relationships.

MODES OF GIVING

Your din or way of life can be one of two types: one way of life is to look after your own self interests and the other way is to seek to improve the welfare of others, even at your own expense, in order to earn the pleasure of Allah. These are two diametrically opposed

ways of thinking, behaving and living. Now the way to Allah is the way of giving. The Prophet made a comparison of the two different personalities as follows:

The case of a miser and a generous one is like that of two people who are clad in steel armour from their breasts up to their collar bones. When the generous one spends, his armour expands until it covers his fingers and his toes. When the miser makes up his mind to spend something every ring of the armour sinks into his flesh. He tries to loosen it but it is not loosened. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

Wealth and possessions are a baraka or blessing from Allah when used in a productive way to earn the pleasure of Allah. Otherwise, it can be our worst enemy, a curse. As soon as we realise that everything belongs to Allah and that the things that we are going to receive in the Akhirah depend on how much we spend in the Dunya, it will become easier to give freely from our pockets. Giving and sacrificing will become a pleasure rather than a burden.

For most of our life, we work hard to earn money in order to build bank balances and to buy houses. These are all commendable acquisitions - in moderation. Remember that you may have a house with one hundred rooms, but you can sleep in only one room. You may have one hundred dresses in your wardrobe, but at any one time you can wear only a single dress. You may have one hundred dishes laid on the table, but you cannot eat more than will fill your one stomach. Even that may be difficult for you to digest. Always remember the hadith: 'Self-sufficiency does not mean plenty of provisions; it means self sufficiency of the spirit.' (Bukhari.) All those extravagant things that deceive you are not worth pursuing or living for.

Say: if it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have gained; the commerce in which you fear a decline; or the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than Allah, or his Messenger, or the striving in His Cause - then wait until Allah brings about His Decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious. [at Tawba 9: 24.]

LOVE OF THIS WORLD

I am not saying that you should not enjoy the 'good things of this world'. Rather, we must work hard for them because nothing good comes without genuine effort. Abu Bakr as-Siddiq said: 'Your religion is your future and your money is your livelihood: there is no good in a man with no money in his name.' We should therefore live this life fully. We should be interested in it. As Allah encourages us:

Seek, by means of what Allah has granted you, the life to come. and forget not your share of the present world; and do good as Allah has done good to you; and seek not to spread corruption on earth. [al-Qasas 28: 77.]

In addition, the Prophet informed us that wealth can also serve to increase our taqwa: 'What a good helper is wealth in maintaining God-consciousness.' (Kanz al-Ummal.) He also said: 'Anyone who acquires it [wealth] lawfully and spends it lawfully, for him it is the best helper.' (Muslim.)

Thus, all the good things in life must be pursued, but not the love of this world. There is no true enjoyment of the good of this world if we do not adequately prepare our home in the Next world. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz used to repeat the following verse unceasingly: 'There is no good in the life of a man for whom Allah has appointed no share in the everlasting abode.'

The love that we should desire is the love of the Akhira: For this to be achieved, the love of Allah and His Messenger must be dearer to you than all else [al-Baqara 2: 165]. This will earn you the pleasures of this world and of the next. When the Prophet was requested by one Companion to tell him of some deeds which will make him earn the love of Allah, as well as that of other people, he replied, 'Do not covet this world, and Allah will love you; do not covet what people possess, and people will love you'. (Bukhari.)

It is not the amount of money that you possess which matters in the eyes of Allah. Rather, He wants you to rid yourself of the love for that money. If a person has one pound only, but his heart is in that one pound, then he is a man of this world. On the contrary, if he has 100,000 pounds and his heart is not in

those pounds and he is prepared to part with it whenever it is required, then he is not a man of this world; he is a highly spiritual man. Similarly, if you earn £10 and give £5 in charity, this is much more precious in the eyes of Allah than someone who earns £100,000 and gives £1,000. The first person has given half of his wealth while the second has given one-hundredth of what he has earned.

In the time of the Prophet, those who possessed firm conviction in Allah's promises would bring everything they had in their homes and put it at the feet of the Prophet. It is of the Sahaba and their selfless sacrifices that the Quran says: They give preference over their own selves, even when they themselves are destitute. [al-Hashr 59: 9.]

If you truly seek the pleasures and rewards of the Hereafter, spend, infaq fi sabilillah! This is one of the most effective ways of ridding ourselves of the love for the Dunya and acquiring a love for the Hereafter. It is indeed an important instrument of tazkiya as the Quran declares:

And the likeness of those who spend their substance, seeking to please Allah and to strengthen their souls, is as a garden high and fertile: heavy rainfalls on it, but makes it yield a double increase in harvest. [al-Baqara 2: 265.]

While spending in the way of Allah, you must give as much as you can give, but do so with moderation. The Quran exhorts us to be like those who are neither extravagant nor niggardly in spending but keep a balance between the two. [al-Furqan 25: 67.]

There are also two important things you must take care to avoid when giving to those in need. One is that of kibr or pride and the other is riya or show. Giving with pride in your heart and actions will only consume your good deeds while spending to seek the attention of others will corrupt your pure intentions and make your actions worthless in the eyes of Allah.

The battle to part with what you possess is one that you will experience each day until your meeting with your Lord. It is an ongoing war between the temptations of this world and our conviction in the rewards of the Akhira.

This world is filled with beauty and attractions but the Akhirah is filled with beauty unimaginable. The Quran has made a comparison between both worlds.

Alluring has been made for people the love of desires for women, and children, and heaped up treasures of gold and silver, and horses of high ranks, and cattle, and farms. But all that may be enjoyed only in the present life - whereas, the best resort is with Allah. Say: Shall I tell you of better things than these [earthly joys]? For the God-conscious there are with their Lord, gardens through which waters flow, therein to abide for ever, and pure spouses, and Allah's good pleasure. [Ali Imran 3: 14-15.]

FORGIVING OTHERS

Sadaqa also has no value without love and sympathy. The Quran states: Kind words and the covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury. [al-Baqara 2:263] Those who are generous forgive people for their mistakes. The Prophet reminded us: 'If one gives charity it does not diminish his wealth; if one forgives others, Allah bestows more honour on him; and if one humbles himself for Allah's sake, He exalts him higher.' (Muslim.) The Quran also mentions both giving and forgiving together: And compete with one another for your Lord's forgiveness and a Paradise as vast as the heavens and earth prepared for the God-fearing, who give generously whether in times of plenty or in times of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow human beings; Allah loves such doers of good. [Ali Imran 3:133-134]

Spending in the way of Allah is closely related to controlling anger and forgiving people. All come from a big heart. The Prophet said: 'Two of the qualities which Allah loves are gentleness and endurance.' (Bukhari.) When your heart becomes big enough to forgive the faults of others, Allah has promised for you the reward of Janna.

The wronged one who endures with fortitude and forgiveness indeed achieves a matter of high resolve. [ash-Shura 42: 43]

SUMMARY

Whatever you can give, spend. Spend on your family and those in need. but be even more generous in spending for the cause of Islam. Remember that the time to commit yourself to Islam is now. Utilise all the resources at your disposal: time, attention, heart and mind, faculties of speaking, writing, reasoning and intelligence that Allah has bestowed on you for the establishment of His Din. Do not let the love of this world beguile you. Be forgiving and accommodating to your fellow human beings if you want to earn the forgiveness and mercy of Allah.

May Allah enable us to detach ourselves not from this world, but from the love of this world. May He help us to spend of that which He has bestowed on us for our own benefit.

CHAPTER SIX: `Relating to Allah's Creation

ALLAH has laid down certain rights and duties between people and between all of His living creation. Parents and children, wife and husband, brother and sister, neighbours, Muslim and non-Muslim, employer and employee, even animals are all included in this wide range of rights and obligations. In this interdependent world, every person is responsible for those under his care. The Prophet Muhammad said:

Every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is responsible for his flock. A ruler is shepherd over his people and he is accountable for their welfare. A man is shepherd over his family and he is accountable for their welfare. A woman is shepherdess over her husband's household and children and she is accountable for their welfare. A man's servant is shepherd over his master's property and he is accountable for it. Be careful! All of you are shepherds and all of you shall be accountable for your flocks. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

The Quran also informs us that we must be compassionate with each other and generous in our giving:

Worship and serve Allah alone and make no gods beside Him; and do good to your parents, relatives, the orphans, the needy, the neighbour who is a relative, the neighbour who is a stranger, and the companion by your side, and the wayfarer, and those you rightfully possess; for Allah does not love the proud and boastful, those who are niggardly and urge others to be niggardly. [an-Nisa 4:36-37]

The injunctions of the Sharia or Islamic moral and legal code relating to rights and duties are usually divided into two categories: the rights of Allah together with our duties towards Him and the rights of Allah's servants together with their duties towards mankind. This classification is meant to simplify our understanding of our obligations but the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, taught us that Allah would Himself be claimant on behalf of those whose rights have not been honoured on the Day of Judgment. A hadith qudsi states:

The Messenger of Allah said: Allah will say, `Son of Adam, I fell ill but you did not visit Me.' He will say, 'O Lord, and how could I have visited you! You are the Lord of the worlds!' He will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had fallen ill and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him you would have found Me with him?'

`Son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not feed Me'. He will say, 'O Lord, how could I have fed You! You are the Lord of the worlds!' He will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had asked you for food and you did not feed him? Did you not know that if you had fed him you would surely have found Me with him?'

`Son of Adam, I asked you to give Me drink but you did not give Me'. He will say, `O Lord, how could I have given You drink! You are the Lord of the worlds!' He will say, `My servant so-and-so had asked you to give him drink and you did not give him. Had you fed him you would surely have found Me with him.' (Muslim.)

So, Allah regards the rights and duties that He has defined between His creation as His rights and duties. The Messenger of Allah has said: `All creatures are Allah's family; and Allah loves most those who treat his family well and kindly.' (Bayhaqi)

THE REGISTERS OF DEEDS

In a hadith narrated by Sayyida Aisha, the Prophet said that all the deeds that we perform are written down in three registers:

- One register contains the deeds of those who have associated partners with Allah. Allah will not forgive those who commit shirk or polytheism. He forgives all sins except shirk.

- The second register contains those deeds that Allah will not forgive, unless they have been compensated for. These are the ones between fellow human beings.

- The third register contains the deeds about our personal duties to Allah. They are the deeds between man and his Creator like Salat and Sawm Allah determines whether they are forgiven or not.

The second register of deeds is especially important for us to consider because there is no Divine pardon in cases where personal rights have been violated. Forgiveness can only come from the person concerned - either directly or when Allah makes it possible for that person to grant a pardon. The Prophet Muhammad said in this regard:

Whoever is guilty of doing some wrong against a fellow human being, whether in regard to his honour or anything else, he should obtain his forgiveness before the Day of judgment, when there will be no money to pay for it. If he has any good deeds to his credit, they will be taken away from him to the extent of his wrongdoing. And if he has no good deeds, the sins of the wronged-one will be taken and put on him. (Bukhari.)

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR FAMILY

Your first obligation after satisfying your personal needs is to your family: O you who believe! Save yourself and your family, from a fire whose fuel is men and stones. [at-Tahrim 66: 6]

Fulfillment of your responsibilities towards your family is certainly an onerous task which requires a considerable amount of effort and time on your part. This task can be made easier, more rewarding and indeed more satisfying if you are careful in following the guidelines set out by the Prophet in the selection of your marriage partners.

When choosing your prospective spouse, ensure that you check your niyya or intention. Remind yourself that in seeking to get married you are fulfilling an obligation [an-Nur 24: 32-33], and in so doing you are also following a very strong tradition of the Prophet. Imam Bukhari narrated that the Prophet strongly advised all young people who possess the means to get married, to do so. Marriage will in turn assist you in safeguarding your chastity and hopefully, increase your iman and commitment to Islam. The Prophet further

commented on the benefits of a blessed marriage as follows: 'Whoever is granted a righteous wife by Allah, Allah has helped him in half of his faith. So let him fear Allah in the remaining half.' (Tabarani.) This exhortation, of course, applies equally to both men and women.

Your choice of spouse should be based foremost on the merit of taqwa. Take time to make the best choice, for this too, is an investment in your future and that of your 'future' children, insha'Allah Accordingly, the Messenger of God said:

Do not marry women for their beauty, maybe their beauty will lead them to destruction; and do not marry them for their wealth, maybe their wealth will cause them to become haughty. But marry them for their taqwa (piety). A wide-nose, clumsy slave woman who possesses faith is better [than the above categories]. (Ibn Majah.)

Look for a partner who will bring comfort to your eyes, one who has a pure heart and one who will encourage you and participate in your dawa work [ar-Rum 30: 21]. In this way, not only will you benefit from the baraqa or blessing of Allah in your dawa efforts, but your home will also be filled with the Nur of Allah and become a source of inspiration for your efforts [al-Araf 7: 189]. For this reason, we are told in the Quran that the Ibadur Rahman or true Servants of the Most Gracious, make the dua:

Our Lord, grant us in our spouses and children comfort to our eyes. And make us exemplary to the God-fearing. [at-Furqan 25: 74.]

Having chosen the most suitable spouse, remember that your responsibility to yourself and to your family has not ended. Rather, your obligations in this regard have just started. You must follow the Prophet and be the best uswa or example to your family. Sayyida Aisha, the Prophet's wife, narrated that he said: 'The best of you is he who is best to his family, and I am the best among you towards my family'. (Tirmidhi.)

Within the family, both husband and wife have different but equal roles to play. Both parties must complement each other in the fulfillment

of their responsibilities: They are garments for you while you are garments for them [al-Baqara 2:187].

To further deepen the love and to improve communication between members of your family - spouse, children, parents - you should aim to establish the following three activities in your home.

- Firstly, perform some of your daily Salat collectively with your family. The Prophet said that, 'when you have finished your [Fard] Prayer in the masjid, you should offer the rest of your Prayer at home for Allah will bless your home because of your Prayer.' (Muslim.)

- Secondly, establish an usra or family circle to study the Quran with your family. The Quran alludes to reading of the Quran in families and in homes in the following verse: And remember that which is recited in your houses of the Revelations of God and the Wisdom. [al-Ahzab 33: 34] You should aim to hold these sessions at least twice weekly, if not more regularly. Remember that the first recipients of the Message of the Quran were the members of the Prophet's household. They were the ones he paid most attention to in the early phase of his mission in Makka. So, you also must ensure that you spend adequate 'quality' time in educating and training your family.

- Thirdly, develop the habit of having meals with your family. This will also provide a golden opportunity to interact with everyone, discuss family matters and reflect upon issues of the day.

Finally, to ensure that your home is a place of comfort and relaxation, you need to manage the stress in your life by adopting a balanced approach to living. Some degree of stress is inevitable and good. It keeps you aware and responsive. However, too much stress can damage your health, your relationships, and your ability to work for the sake of Allah. If you are taking your daily work stress to your home, then you may be disrupting one of the most important sources of your well being. You must continually evaluate yourself by sitting with your family and discussing your performance. Discuss the responses to the following points with your family:

- The time I spend at work or in studying does not prevent me from having good communication with my family

- My family is aware of what I want to achieve in my job, my studies and my life.

- Most of my time at home is not spent in working or studying at the expense of interacting with my family.

- I adequately participate in family matters so that in future I will not be guilty of neglecting my family.

- My time is balanced among my family, masjid, personal obligations and among non-Muslims.

- My morality is the same at home as it is at school, work, the masjid and among non-Muslims.

- My family means more to me than worldly possessions and accomplishments.

- I keep an open mind when I consider how my decisions will affect my family.

- I am involved with all my family members and I try to share in their areas of interest.

- It is easy for me to relax when I leave my work or my studies. I appreciate the beauty that Allah has placed around me. [Islamic Horizons, Indianapolis, February 1985, P. 12]

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR CHILDREN

As a parent, you must treat your children with love and kindness. The Prophet Muhammad said, 'He does not belong to us, Muslims, who is not kind to our young and does not respect our old'. (Tirmidhi.) Indeed, if people were to observe this single hadith in their inter personal relations, many of the evils and discords that plague society would be removed.

Each child has the right to a good name, good character, good training, a quality education, and to be married to a suitable and compatible spouse. The Prophet further emphasised, 'No father can give a better gift to his children than providing them with a good education'.

(Bayhaqi.)

Within the family, both mother and father have important roles to play in the growth and development of their children. But, mothers have an even more important role because they are the real teachers. The love and attention they can provide, the father cannot match. The father, of course, has to contribute as much as he can in spending quality time with his children and being the best role model for them. But, the real training will come primarily from the mother's affection, compassion, example and teaching.

We must also treat all of our children with the full care and attention that they deserve, be they male or female. However, in contemporary times, and a similar situation existed in the time of the Prophet, parents seem to give preferential treatment to their sons. This is why the Prophet has told us that we have a special obligation to our female offspring. Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that he said:

Anyone who looks after and brings up three daughters, or sisters, educates them well, treats them with compassion, until Allah makes them self-sufficient, Allah guarantees him Paradise.' A man asked. 'Suppose there are only two?' He said, Yes, two as well.' People said, And if there be only one?' He said, 'Yes, even if there is only one. (Sharh al-Sunna.)

This is how he emphasised the rights and obligations towards our children with special regard towards our daughters. This is something we must consider carefully.

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR PARENTS

After your obligations to Allah, your parents have the greatest right over you. You should treat them with love, kindness and respect. Your Lord has decreed that you shall serve none but Him, and do good to your parents. Should one or both of them reach old age with you, never say 'Ugh' to them, nor scold either of them; but speak to them kindly and respectfully. [al-Isra 17: 23]

After every Prayer you should make dua for their well being. The Quran says, spread over

them the wings of humility and mercy and say, My Lord, have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little. [al-Isra 17:24]

Even if your parents are non-Muslims and they insist on you participating in that which is unlawful, you still have an obligation to treat them with goodness and kindness. Remember that their cultural background may not make them easily receptive to your new faith. So, the best way you can present Islam to them is to become a loving, obedient and caring child. Your uswa or example to your parents should also reflect the message of the Quran and the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad. The Quran explains the attitude we must adopt as follows:

And We enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: his mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his weaning takes two years. Hence, be thankful to Me and to your parents. With Me is the end of all journeys. Yet, should they endeavour to force you to make gods beside Allah, of whom you have no knowledge then do not obey them. But, even then keep them company in this world's life with customary good behaviour, but follow the faith of those who turn towards Me. [Luqman 31: 14-15.]

Hadith literature is also filled with many accounts and guidelines concerning the manner in which we should treat our parents even if they are non-Muslims. In one account, Asma, may Allah be pleased with her, recorded the advice of the Prophet when she turned to him, being unsure about the manner in which she should treat her mother who was still a non-Muslim:

The mother of Asma, the daughter of Abu Balr, was still a polytheist when she came to visit Asma during the time of the Muslims' peace treaty with the Quraysh. Asma asked the Prophet, 'O Messenger of Allah, my mother has come to see me. Should I receive her and treat her with all the affection that is her due?' He said, 'Yes, treat her with full affection.' (Bukhari. Muslim.)

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR FELLOW MUSLIMS

Ukhuwwa, brotherhood in Islam, is primarily an ideological bond that binds Muslims to each other. [al-Hujurat 49: 10.] The Prophet said:

‘The strongest link of faith is to love someone in order to gain the pleasure of Allah and to hate someone for the sake of Allah’. (Ahmad). This relationship with your brother or sister should be based on the following:

- Sincere Advice: You should give *nasiha* or sincere advice and counsel and you should also wish your brother well. A hadith states that ‘[The essence of] Din or religion is *nasiha*.’ (Muslim.) True *iman* cannot be attained ‘until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.’ (Bukhari, Muslim.) The Prophet also said: ‘The Believer is a mirror to a Believer, and the Believer is a brother to a Believer. He removes his injuries from him and protects him in his absence.’ (Tirmidhi.)

- Self-sacrifice: You should give preference to your brother's welfare over your personal needs. The Quran records the attitude of true Believers: But [they] give preference over themselves, even though poverty was their [own lot]. [al-Hashr 59: 9.]

- Justice: The Quran declares: Allah commands *adl* or justice and *ihsan* or doing that which is best. [an-Nahl 16: 90.] You must fulfill all your obligations - moral, economic, social, and political - to all Muslims with firm and resolute justice.

- Doing that which is best: If *adl* is considered the foundation of your relationship, then, *ihsan* is its perfection. *Ihsan* demands that you do even more good to your brother. Additionally, if your brother does some wrong you must respond to the brother and his actions in a positive manner. The Quran advises: The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel [the evil] with that, which is better. Then he, between whom and you there was enmity, [will become] as though he was a close friend. [al-Fussilat 41: 34]

- Mercy: In the Quran, Allah has used the term *rahma* or mercy to depict the relationship between Muslims: Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those who are with him are strong against unbelievers, [but] full of compassion [*ruhama*] among themselves. [al-Fath 48: 29]. The Prophet also taught us: ‘He who shows mercy, Allah will shower His mercy upon him. Be merciful to the people of this world so that the One above will show

mercy on you.’ (Abu Dawud.) He also said: ‘The Believers in their mutual love, compassion and sympathy are like one body: when one of its parts suffers from some illness, the rest of the body shares its suffering with sleeplessness and fever’. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

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- Forgiveness: Your heart should be filled with forgiveness for ‘anger destroys *iman* like poisonous medicine turns honey into waste’ (Bayhaqi) The Quran also states: So, pass over [their faults] and ask for [Allah's] forgiveness for them. [Ali Imran 3: 159.]

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- Patience and perseverance: You must demonstrate *sabr* or patience and perseverance with your brother. Strive to forgive your brother wholeheartedly despite having the ability and the means to take revenge. The Quran states: But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would be an affair of great resolution. [ash-Shura 42: 43.]

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- Reliance and appreciation: Your brother must be able to count on you in times of need. You

should share in the pain of his adversity and the pleasure of his prosperity.: Your brother must be able to count on you in times of need. You should share in the pain of his adversity and the pleasure of his prosperity.

There are also certain things that you should consider in order to preserve the relationship with your brother and to prevent its disintegration. These include:

- Respect for his rights. [al-Baqara 2:229]
- Respect for the value of his life. [an-Nisa 4: 93]
- Being careful with your language ensuring that you do not use abusive language or words that will offend him. [al-Hujurat 49: 11]
- Ensuring that you never backbite or slander him. [al-Hujurat 49:12.]
- Ensuring that you never embarrass him, belittle him, cast suspicion on him, ridicule him or go in search simply to expose his faults. [al-Hujurat 49:11.]
- Ensuring that you do not hurt or harm him in any way; and finally never become jealous of him. [al-Falaq 113: 5.]

You can also make the relationship with your brother stronger by:

- Maintaining his honour and prestige. Participating in his pain and sorrow.
- Offering criticism and sincere advice to him; meeting him regularly.
- Visiting him when he is ill and making dua for his speedy recovery.
- Meeting him with love and a cheerful disposition; greeting him with words of peace.
- Embracing and shaking his hand on meeting him.
- Calling him by the best of names.
- Inquiring about his personal matters and expressing your concern and offering your assistance.

- Offering him gifts to express your love and closeness.
- Expressing your gratitude to him regularly.
- Sharing a meal with him whenever possible.
- Making dua for him regularly.
- Responding to him with love and affection.
- Always striving to settle your disputes with him in an amicable manner; being willing to forgive him.

Finally, always keep before you the verse of the Quran:

The Believers, men and women, are protectors of one another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular Prayers, practice regular charity and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise. [at-Tawba 9: 71.]

OBLIGATIONS OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

As an employer, you have an obligation to care for your staff; provide the most suitable working environment; and ensure that they are fully compensated punctually, for all their services rendered: 'Give the labourer his wages before his sweat dries'. (Ibn Majah.) The Prophet also said that one of the persons he shall be against on the Day of judgment is the man who does not pay the right wages to his employees after their labours.

As an employee, you must perform your job with diligence and proficiency. `Verily, Allah loves that when anyone of you does a job he should perfect it' (al-Bayhaqi.) The Quran also declares: Work because Allah, the Prophet and the Believers will witness your work [at-Tawba 9: 105.] Know that the best food is that which comes from your own efforts: `No one eats better food than what he earns by the labour of his own hands'. (Bukhari.)

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR NEIGHBOURS

Neighbours have rights, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. The Prophet of Allah said: `He is not a true Believer who eats his fill while his

neighbour is hungry'. (Bayhaqi.)

Thus, the quality of your Din and fate in the Akhirah will also be determined by how well you fulfill your obligations towards your neighbours. In a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, a man said:

'O Messenger of Allah, such and such woman has a reputation for engaging very much in Prayers, Fasting and Almsgiving, but she hurts her neighbours with her tongue quite often.' He said, 'She will go to Hell.' Then he said, 'O Messenger of Allah, such and such woman engages in only a little Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving and gives just a few pieces of cheese in charity, but she does not hurt her neighbours with her tongue'. He said, 'she will go to Paradise.' (Ahmad, Bayhaqi.)

The Quran defines the neighbour in a very wide sense. [an-Nisa 4: 36-37.] One class of neighbours is our relatives. Another class are those who are not our relatives and the third class of neighbours are those who sit with us, even for a few minutes. This third class of neighbours is a very wide group and includes those who sit by your side. If you are travelling in a taxi, bus, train or aeroplane the person who is sitting by your side is your neighbour. If you are in the office, your co-worker is your neighbour. If you are at school, your classmate is your neighbour. The Prophet gave a comprehensive account of our duties towards our neighbours when requested to do so by one of his Companions:

If he asks for a loan, you should give him a loan; if he wants your help, you should help him; if he be sick, you should go to see him; if he be needy you should try to fulfill his need; if he gets good news, you should congratulate him; if any calamity befalls him, it is your duty to console him; if he dies, you should attend his funeral; you should not raise your walls to such a height that they obstruct the ventilation of your neighbour's house, even if he is willing; do not tantalise your neighbour with the smell of your delicious food unless you send a portion of it to him; if you bring fruit into your house then send some to your neighbour; otherwise, keep it hidden from your neighbour, and you should also be careful that your children do not take some out, else the

children of your neighbour may feel disappointed. (Tabarani.)

Among the rights of your neighbour is that his life, property and honour must be protected. Violation of any of them is haram or unlawful. His life is inviolable. To kill someone - be he Muslim or non-Muslim - is such a great crime that if someone commits first degree murder Allah says that person will live in Jahannam forever and ever. Of course, if the death was accidental, one can pay compensation to the victim's family.

Remember that the life of a non-Muslim is as important as that of a Muslim. The Prophet Muhammad said that 'One who kills a non-Muslim whose protection is pledged will never smell the fragrance of Janna, even though it reaches as far as 40 years distance'. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

So the life of the non-Muslim is also inviolable, as is his property and his honour. All must be respected and safeguarded. This is especially important for us to consider because we live in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society and, unfortunately, there are many misconceptions prevailing among Muslims about the extent of their obligations towards non-Muslims. The Prophet himself used to pay special attention to the needs of non-Muslims even when there was poverty, hardship and difficulties in the Muslim community.

THE RIGHTS OF ANIMALS

Animals have rights, for all of Allah's creatures comprise His 'family'. Sahl ibn Amr narrated that once the Messenger of Allah, passed by a camel who was so emaciated that his belly seemed to have disappeared. He said, 'Fear Allah regarding the animals who cannot speak. Ride on them while they are healthy, and eat of them when they are healthy'. (Abu Dawud.)

A famous hadith says that 'a woman was punished and thrown into Hell-fire on account of her cat. She kept it tied up till it died of hunger: she neither gave it something to eat nor drink, nor let it go so that it could eat things on earth'. (Bukhari, Muslim.) The Prophet also said:

'Forgiveness was granted to a prostitute! She

came upon a dog at the mouth of a well, which was panting and was about to die of thirst. She took off her leather sock, tied it with her headscarf and drew some water from the well for the dog. It was for this act of kindness that she was forgiven her sins.' When asked, 'Are we rewarded even for good we do to animals?' he replied, 'Reward is given for good done to any living creature.' (Bukhari, Muslim.)

If Allah commands us not to treat animals in this way, you can well imagine the extent of our obligations exhibited by someone, the dearer that person is to Allah.

SUMMARY

All creatures are Allah's family; and Allah loves most those who treat His family well and kindly. Our responsibility to others is especially important for us to consider for there is no Divine pardon in cases where personal rights have been violated.

Your primary obligation after satisfying your personal needs is towards your family. Indeed, after Allah, your parents have the greatest right over you. Fulfill your obligations towards your spouse and treat your children with love and kindness.

When it comes to the obligations to your fellow Muslims, know that the strongest link of faith is to love someone in order to gain the pleasure of Allah.

As an employer, know that you have an important responsibility towards your employees. Similarly, as an employee, you must perform your work with proficiency.

Your fate in the Akhirah will also be determined by how well you fulfill your obligations to your neighbours be they Muslims or non-Muslims. The Prophet used to pay particular attention to the needs of non-Muslims even when there were difficulties in the Muslim community.

Animals have rights for all of Allah's creatures comprise His `family': `Fear Allah regarding the animals who cannot speak. Ride on them while they are healthy, and eat of them when they are healthy.'

May Allah enable us all to fulfill our obligations to the members of His family.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Meeting Allah

THE most important questions in life are those that deal with the meaning and purpose of man's existence. The Quran explains that the human being has been placed on this earth to utilise his enormous potential to conduct himself in a manner which will fulfill his purpose in life.

It is He who has created death and life that He may test which of you is best in deed. [al-Mulk 67: 2.]

The Quran further explains that man's role on earth is to live as his Creator desires him to live: in surrender and worship to Him alone. This is not because Allah in any way needs his worship, but because man needs to worship only his Creator and none else so that his own nature is not perverted and corrupted, and so that he does not live in opposition to his intrinsic character. Only by so living will his earthly life be set on the right path and prosper, bringing him peace and happiness.

I have not created jinn and men except to serve Me. I desire of them no provision; neither do I desire that they should feed Me. Surely God is the All-provider; the Possessor of Strength, the Eternal. [adh-Dhuriyat 51: 56-58.]

Man, with no 'mentionable' history before birth, has been given the faculties of hearing and seeing, [ad-Dahr 76: 2] two eyes and a tongue, and a pair of lips, [al-Balad 90: 8-9] as well as the capacity to reason and discern between right and wrong in using his freedom of will.

Given freedom of will, judgment is inevitable. The human being must give an account of his conduct and must face the consequences of how he lives his life. Obviously, to be judged fairly, this judgment must be made only after his earthly life has come to an end, and only by the One who gave this life, who knows everything, and who is All-powerful and All-just. Only then can he be judged fairly, and duly rewarded and punished, for everything—from his innermost thoughts to the consequences of his conduct that extend far

and wide, and beyond his life for generations to come.

What, did you think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not be returned to Us? But, high exalted is God, the King; the True! There is no god but He, the Lord of the Noble Throne. [al-Muminun 23: 115-116]

A person's ultimate destiny, therefore, lies in the Life to Come, in the Akhira Everyone will be judged there by due process of justice, fairly and equitably, mercifully and kindly. No one will be wronged or dealt with unjustly even by an atom's weight.

Surely God shall not wrong so much as an atom's weight. [an-Nisa 4: 40.]

This as only what you had sent forth, you are being recompensed only for what you had done before. [al-Kahf 18: 49]

Thus, everything in our lives is being recorded. Even the smallest of incidents will be replayed before our eyes on the Day of Judgment. That Judgment will be final and one from which there will be no escape. Paradise will be the reward for excellence in doing good, while Hell-fire will be the penalty for those who were ungrateful and indulged in evil:

The parable of the Paradise promised to those who are conscious of God [is that of a Garden] through which running waters flow: [but, unlike an earthly garden,] its fruits will be everlasting, and [so will be] its shade. Such will be the destiny of those who remain conscious of God -just as the destiny of those who deny the truth will be the fire. [ar-Rad 13: 35]

The delights and pleasures of the Hereafter, as well as, the penalty for those who condemn themselves to darkness and the wrath of Allah are described in such great detail in the Quran that almost one quarter of it is related to the Akhira. This is what the Prophet came to convey and this is what instills meaning and purpose to our lives.

THE OBJECTIVE OF LIFE

When the lifestyle of one who is working solely for the material gains of this world is compared with that of a person who is striving for the everlasting rewards of the Hereafter, there is seemingly very little difference. In both cases, each person is seen to be striving to maintain a quality life. The Quran, however, states that the two parties are far from equal: Is then the one who believes equal to the man who is a transgressor and wicked? Not equal are they. [as-Sajda 32: 18.]

It is clear that the non-believer, limited to himself and feeding upon his own desires cannot, compare with the true Believer. The non-believer may find that all his worldly desires are fulfilled, but his accomplishments will only bring temporary satisfaction;

To him who desires only this fleeting life, We grant him only here and only as much as We please, only to whomever We will: but in the end We consign him to Hell. [al-Isra 17: 18.]

The true Believer on the other hand, may achieve worldly gains but he realises that true contentment will only come when the ultimate reward of Paradise and the pleasure of his Lord is achieved.

Verily, that which is with Allah is best for you, if you, but knew all that which is with you is bound to end, whereas all that which is with Allah is everlasting. [an-Nahl 16:95-96.]

This understanding of life and its true objective is the secret of the believer's strength and support. This makes him the most powerful and resourceful person to walk upon the earth, The Quran continues in Sura al-Isra:

But, as for those who desire the life to come, and strive for it as it ought to be striven for, and are true Believers- they are the ones whose strivings find acceptance and reward. [al-Isra 17: 19.]

Start, then, to prepare for the Akhira today! Why waste your time and energy on what will perish when you can use the same to earn the delights and pleasures of the life to come? Everything you have must be put forward as an investment for that life, but you must keep in mind that the investment is not the

objective. All that Allah has bestowed on you - body, mind, faculties and property -are valuables for investment, but the real objective is to earn the pleasure of Allah and the rewards of Janna.

Remember that your personal destiny and, therefore, the end of all your life's pursuits, lie in the Akhira, but the road to that destiny lies in Dunya, in this world. Indeed the achievements made during the time of the Prophet were the results of full participation in this world - neither withdrawing nor retiring from it - for the sake of the Life to Come. The Prophet and his Companions planned for this world as though they were going to stay here forever but equally they sought the rewards of the Hereafter as though death was close at hand. It is this delicate balance that you must strive to achieve in your approach to life. The Prophet Muhammad said:

This Din or way of life is easy. But if anyone overdoes it, it gets the better of him. So keep to the right course, approximate to perfection, rejoice, and ask for help in the mornings, the evenings, and some of the later part of the night. (Bukhari.)

THE REALITY OF THE HEREAFTER

For those who sat and listened to the Prophet, the Hereafter became almost a living reality to the extent that they could almost visualise it with their own eyes. On some occasions, during the Prophet's descriptions of the Akhira, they observed him going forward as if to grasp something while on other occasions he would withdraw as if to save himself. When questioned about those unusual movements the Prophet explained that as he spoke, he saw the fruits of janna in front of him. He reached out wanting to seize some so that he could show them. He said that, had he done so, it would have provided enough food for the entire world in all times to come. Similarly, when he withdrew, he saw the Hell-fire in front of him and wanted to save himself from it. It was this and other similar experiences witnessed by the Sahaba which were responsible for reforming their lives so completely that all their morals, manners, activities, goals in life - indeed, their entire purpose of existence - was determined by their awareness of their meeting with Allah. It is this

reality and conviction in our ultimate fate - repeatedly emphasised in the Quran and in the life example of the Prophet - that we must continuously refer to for inspiration in conducting life's activities.

THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

Allah has created everything with a fixed life span. The Quran states: It is not given to any soul to die save by Gods permission, and at an appointed time. [Ali Imran 3: 145.] Indeed there is no certainty in life except death. Every soul will taste death. [Ali Imran 3:185.] Not only is death itself inescapable, but the place and the very day and hour of death have been forever fixed: No person knows what he will earn tomorrow and no person knows in what land he will die. [Luqman 31: 34.] When the time arrives they cannot tarry a single moment nor can they go ahead. [an-Nahl 16: 61.]

In death, we are compelled to return to God. In life, however, we can choose to draw closer to God voluntarily by living our lives according to His will. In this way, we have the opportunity to meet Allah and gain His pleasure even before we leave this world.

Those who fail to use the bounties of Allah to earn His pleasure during this life, will forever regret their mistakes for the cessation of life brings the cessation of opportunities for redemption and salvation, as the Quran warns:

When death comes to one of them, he says, My Lord, let me return, let me return to life, so that I may act righteously in whatever I have left behind" Nay, it is but a meaningless word he utters; for behind them now is the barrier of death until the day they shall be raised up. Then, when the Trumpet will be blown, no ties of kinship will remain between them that day, neither would anyone be able to take care of another. Then, they whose weight of good deeds is heavy in the balance will attain salvation. But, they whose weight is light in the balance, will have squandered their own lives. In Hell will they abide forever. [al-Muminun 23: 99-103.]

MAN'S FORGETFULNESS

Though death is certain, we tend to forget from time to time our meeting with our Lord.

This forgetfulness, although part of human nature can make us stray from our true mission in life: If anyone withdraws himself from Allah's remembrance, Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one to be his intimate companion. [az-Zukhruf 43: 36] Forgetfulness, however, can be overcome by remembering Allah in all of life's activities, as the Quran again declares: Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Shaytan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance -whereupon, lo! They see aright. [al-Araf 7: 201.] Additionally, we are urged in the Quran to make the following supplication:

Our Lord take us not to task if we forget or make mistakes. Our Lord lay not upon us a burden like that which you laid on those before us.

Our Lord, make us not bear burdens which we have no strength to bear. Pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Lord Supreme: Help us against people who deny the truth. [al-Baqara 2: 286.]

Know that to fear death from which there is no escape is foolish. Having no fear of what is going to happen after death, though it is within our power to change it in our favour, is reckless. Allah reminds us in the Quran, Do not throw yourself into destruction with your own hands. [al-Baqara 2: 195.] For, no effort to please Allah will be left unrewarded, while every effort made to seek the pleasures of this world will come to naught. Moreover, the Prophet reminded us that nothing will go with us to our graves except our

deeds and that constant reminder of death will assist in keeping our indulgence in Dunya in perspective: `Remember often the terminator of pleasures [i.e. death]'. (Tirmidhi.) He also advised that we should take time to attend janaza or funeral prayers, as well as visit the graves of those who have made the transition into the Next-life, for these too will serve as reminders of our eventual fate: `He who expects to meet God should visit the graves for they remind us of the Hereafter'. (Muslim.)

The Prophet also wanted us that if we seek only the fulfillment of our selfish worldly desires, our lives may well become filled with frustration:

Whoever allows the world to become his biggest concern has nothing to do with Allah, and Allah will instill four qualities into his heart: anxiety which will never leave him, business which he will never be free from; poverty which he will never rid himself of, and hope which he will never fulfill. (Tabarani.)

Additionally, one of the worst punishments the Quran describes is reserved for those who remain forgetful of Allah. On the Day of Judgment Allah will not speak to them. He will not even look in their direction. In this world they will claim to belong to Allah but they are heedless of His commands. On the Day that matters most, there will be a wall between them and Allah. His mercy and His compassion will be overflowing, but not for them.

Behold those who barter away their bond with Allah and their pledges for a trifling gain - they shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come; and Allah will neither speak unto them nor will He cleanse them of their sins; and grievous suffering awaits them. [Ali Imran 3: 77.]

SEEKING ALLAH'S MERCY

The abundance of Allah's rahma or mercy will not come without pure actions. Pure actions, however, when performed, will make you deserving of Allah's mercy. This, in turn, will enable you to earn the delights of janna and His pleasure. The Quran proclaims: Call on Him with fear and longing. Surely, Allah's mercy is ever near to the doers of good. [al-Araf 7:56.] The Messenger of God also said:

'No one will be saved [from the Hell fire and admitted into Paradise] by his deeds alone.' When asked, 'Not even you, O Messenger of God!', he said, 'Yes, not even me, unless Allah covers me with His mercy. So, do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately in the morning, in the afternoon and during part of the night. Always remember moderation and always abide by moderation. Thus, you will reach your destination.' (Bukhari, Muslim.)

Be reassured that Allah is not a vengeful God, ready to punish, but rather, one who is full of mercy and compassion. He, Himself has declared: My mercy encompasses all things.

[al-Araf 7: 156.] Likewise, consider, the manner in which our actions are recorded in His scale of justice, as explained by the Prophet:

Allah records the good deeds and the bad deeds thus: If anyone intends to do a good deed but does not actually do it, Allah writes it down with Him as a full good deed. If he intends it, and does it too, Allah writes it down with Him as ten to seven hundred times that good deed, or many times over. If anyone intends to do a bad deed but does not actually do it, Allah writes it down with Him as a full good deed. When he intends a bad deed and does it as well, only then Allah writes it down as one bad deed. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

Thus, as long as our actions are worthy and deserving of Allah's mercy, His mercy will not be denied to us. The Prophet has again explained:

There are one hundred parts of mercy. Allah has given only one part which is distributed among the jinn, humankind, animals and insects. It is because of this that they are kind to one another, show mercy to one another; it is because of it that a wild animal is kind to its young. But, Allah has kept ninety-nine parts of mercy with Him, which He will show to His servants on the Day of Resurrection. (Bukhari, Muslim.)

SEEKING ALLAH'S FORGIVENESS

The decision to live our lives for the sake of Allah is no guarantee that we will not forget Allah and commit mistakes for `all children of Adam are sinners, but best among sharers are those who constantly repent'. (Tirmidhi.) Imam Bukhari recorded that even the Prophet, though he was sinless, `sought Allah's forgiveness 70 times a day'. We should therefore, constantly seek the forgiveness of Allah for every single sin, small or great. Allah says:

Ask forgiveness from your Lord, then turn towards Him in repentance; He will loosen the sky over you in abundance, and He will add strength unto your strength. [Hud 11: 52.]

Seeking continuous forgiveness of Allah will assist in ensuring that our hearts and souls

remain pure and wholesome. The Prophet said in this regard:

When a Believer sins, a black spot appears on his heart. But if he repents and seeks Allah's forgiveness, his heart becomes cleansed and polished. However if he continues to commit more and more sins [without seeking forgiveness, the spot continues to spread and ultimately covers all of his heart. This is the rust which Allah mentions [in the Quran]: What deeds they earn rust upon their hearts. [al-Mutaffifin 83: 14.] (Ahmad, Tirmidhi.)

Whatever the magnitude of our misdeeds, Allah is always ready to respond with an even greater amount of pardon. Therefore, never despair of the mercy of Allah, in seeking His forgiveness, even for those sins committed repeatedly: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, despair not of Allah's mercy; for Allah forgives all sins, surely He is the all-forgiving, the Mercy-giving. [az-Zumar 39: 53.] Thus, as long as there is hope there remains opportunity for redemption and salvation. Be aware, though, that the best form of repentance involves a firm resolve to reform and do better. The Messenger of Allah said:

Remain conscious of Allah and Fear Him wherever you are, and follow a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out, and behave well towards people. (Tirmidhi.)

SELF-EVALUATION

The Prophet emphasised the necessary of Ihtisab or self evaluation at every opportunity: 'Everyone starts his day and is a vendor of his soul, either freeing it or bringing about its ruin'. (Muslim.) Umar ibn al Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, also said in this respect:

Judge yourself before you are judged, evaluate yourself before you are evaluated and be ready for the greatest investigation.

At every Prayer time, especially in the early hours of the morning, when you are alone and can feel your own heart beating -seek forgiveness from Allah. The time of Salat al-Fajr, before the start of each day, is an ideal occasion to take account of yourself and plan for the day ahead.

Imam Tirmidhi related that the Prophet said, on the Day of judgment no child of Adam will move from the presence of God, unless he has answered the following five questions:

- In what pursuits and work did he spend his time?
- For what ends did he use his mental and physical energies?
- By what means did he earn his wealth?
- How did he spend his wealth?
- How far did he act according to what he knew was right?

These five points can serve as a useful self-analysis programme. They can assist in checking our moral motivations, God-consciousness and determination to work for the cause of Allah. This self-analysis programme, when implemented on a regular basis, will serve as an important measure of your readiness to meet with Allah.

CONQUERING FEAR OF DEATH

The Day of judgment, though it is to be feared, must also inspire in us a desire and eagerness to meet Allah. Sayyida Aisha reported that the Prophet said:

'Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet with him; and whoever dislikes the meeting with Allah, Allah also dislikes the meeting with him.'

I asked: 'O Prophet of God, is it because of the dislike of death, for all of us dislike death?'

He said: 'It is not so, but rather it is that when the Believer is given news of Allah's mercy. His approval and His Paradise, he likes to meet Allah and Allah likes to meet him; but when the unbeliever is given news of Allah's punishment and His displeasure, He dislikes to meet Allah and Allah dislikes to meet him.' (Muslim.)

Our eagerness and desire to meet Allah should therefore, be echoed in all our Prayers. The Prophet Muhammad used to supplicate

repeatedly:

O Allah, I ask you for a soothing life after death, and I ask you for the pleasure of looking upon Your Face and for the yearning to meet You, free from suffering distress or from trial that leads one astray. O Allah, adorn us with the ornament of faith and make us guides and rightly guided. (an-Nasai.)

This desire to meet Allah will calm our fear of death, which is only a natural instinct. Even the Prophet Musa, on whom be peace, out of fear ran away when he saw his staff turning into a serpent. [Ta Ha 20: 17-24.] Fear, though, can be conquered with dhikr, doing good and keeping ever before us, our meeting with the Lord and Master of the Day of Judgment.

Whoever hopes to meet his Lord He should do good deeds and associate none other in the service of his Lord [al-Kahf 18: 110.]

SUMMARY

Preparation to meet Allah must be the purpose and ultimate goal of our existence. It is the most critical decision and resolution we must make today. This will set the course and direction of our entire lives - to live according to the Quran, as shown by that most noble of exemplars, Muhammad, upon whom be peace.

The knowledge that Allah is pleased with us will be the climax of our mission in life. This will be attained when we find Him responding, God willing, to each of us in our hour of greatest need with the reassuring and welcoming words:

O soul at peace, return unto your Lord, well-pleased, well pleasing! Enter among My servants! Enter My Paradise! [al-Fajr 89: 27-30.]

Further Reading

- Way to the Quran by Khurram Murad, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester.
- Let us be Muslims by Sayyid Abut Ala Mawdudi, translated and edited by Khurram Murad, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester.
- Sacrifice: The Making of a Muslim by Khurram Murad, The Islamic Foundation. Leicester.
- The Islamic Movement Dynamics of Power, Change and Values by Sayyid Abut Ala Mawdudi, translated and edited by Khurram Murad, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester.
- Remembrance and Prayer: The Way of Prophet Muhammad by Muhammad al-Ghazali, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester.
- Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship by al-Ghazali, trans. by Muhtar Holland, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester.
- Morals and Manners in Islam: A Guide to Islamic Adab by Marwan Ibrahim al-Kaysi, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester.
- Lasting Prayers by Ahmad Zald Hammad, Quranic Literary Society, Illinois.
- To be a Muslim by Fathi Yukon, American Trust Publications, Indianapolis.
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- The Muslim Character by Muhammad al-Ghazali, IIFSO, Kuwait
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- Islam the Natural Way by Abdul Wahid Handel, MELS, London.