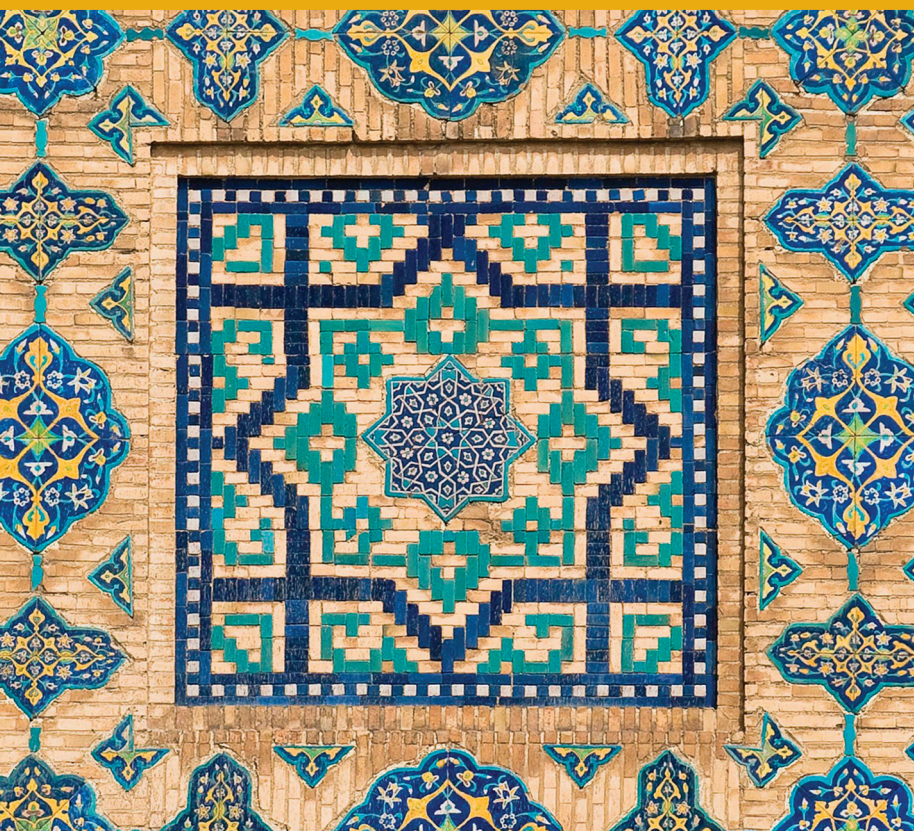


Discover Islam

THE FIRE OF HELL

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN





*In the name of Allah
The Merciful, the Compassionate*

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The Fire of Hell

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Introduction

The most powerful motivating force in our lives is fear. Consciously or subconsciously, everyone's actions are the result of some kind of fear. It could be of financial ruin, worldly disgrace, a powerful enemy, or some superior power. Each and every person functions because of some real or imaginary fear.

Yet there is no substance to the actions which people perform on the basis of such fear, for there is no substance to the objects that they fear. The only fear that is of any value is fear of God, and sincere actions can result only from true awe and apprehension of one God.

God has created man: He controls the vast universe and has complete power over man's destiny. Anyone who truly believes this will certainly fear God. But there is more to the matter than this: God will raise us up after death and will judge us according to our words and deeds on earth. We are responsible to Him for our actions.

One has to think seriously about life when one considers it from this point of view. If we keep in

mind our eternal destiny, we shall then have no choice but to submit to the Lord who created us, and who will judge us after death.

We must do our utmost to protect ourselves and others from the torment of hell fire. God's Prophets taught man the reality of life. According to their teachings the real issue facing us in life is how to avoid God's punishment in the next world. We must prepare ourselves for meeting God and must exhort others to do the same. As Muslims, this is the basic task that lies before us. Other things that we desire in life can be ours only if we perform this fundamental task.

Wahiduddin Khan
October, 1980
The Islamic Centre,
New Delhi

The Reality of Life

There is only one God. He has created all things. All men will return to Him after death, and He will judge them according to their actions on earth. Some will be rewarded with eternal paradise, while others will be condemned to hellfire. Everyone shall meet the fate he merits, be he weak or strong.

When one realizes this grave reality, one's life changes completely. One becomes careful to avoid that which will lead one to Hell, and desirous of anything which will make one deserving of paradise. One comes to love and fear God above all else.

When one fears God and is conscious of one's eternal destiny, one becomes extremely cautious in one's dealings with one's fellow men. By mistreating others, one feels as if one is exposing oneself to the fire of hell. One is never arrogant, for one realizes that it is not just humans one is dealing with; every man is supported by the power of God and His angels. One is never unjust when dealing with one's fellow, for one knows that eventually one is going to have to answer before God for one's actions. One does not see others as mere people; one realizes that the Almighty God is also standing by their side.

What we must do is strive to save ourselves and our fellows from the punishment of the next world. The prophets have taught that man should make every effort to save himself from eternal doom. We must do our utmost to protect ourselves from the torment of Judgement Day and exhort others to do the same. There is no task in life more important than this. This is the Muslims' fundamental task. Only if they perform this task can they hope to obtain that which they desire in this world.

Inner Revolution

God is the greatest of all powers. No one can escape His reckoning. He will deal severely with the wicked. Belief in a God of this awesome nature is no simple matter; faith transforms a person's being when it enters his soul.

Imagine the change that comes over a person who suddenly realizes that a lion is roaming free in front of him. A far greater change occurs when one truly realizes the existence of God. To believe in God is to discover Him, and when one truly discovers God, one becomes more certain of His existence than of anything else; one fears Him above all else.

Faith in God is like an earthquake that shakes the human soul. The true believer sees the Day of Resurrection before it comes.

Such belief engulfs one's entire being in the fear of God. This fear is manifested in all one's dealings with others. One does not humiliate the weak, for one sees that they are God's envoys. One does not cower before the strong, because one sees that all are helpless before God. One accepts the truth when it is proven, for denying it would be like seeing heaven and Hell before one, then leaving the fresh gardens of paradise to plunge into the flames of Hell.

The Trial of Man

When one considers one's dealings with others in purely human terms, one is apt to resort to cruelty and injustice. If one were to be aware of the presence of God, one would be careful to avoid all injustice and cruelty.

All worldly events occur by God's leave. Everything fits in with a divine scheme according to which man is tested by the Lord. Everything happens so that those concerned may be tested. A person's calibre can only be made out from the way he responds to life's situations.

In all worldly matters we are being tested as to whether we are just in our treatment of one another. We are being tested, in the various situations we have to deal with in life, as to whether we are consistent in the values we apply, or whether we have one set of values for ourselves and another set for others. In the decisions we have to take in life, we are being tested as to whether we follow a policy of convenience, or stick to what is right.

Our future fate is being decided on the basis of our present performance. We can either make use of our opportunities on earth to deserve a place for ourselves in paradise, or we can waste them and condemn ourselves to punishment in Hell.

What Man should Realize

Man thinks he is free to do and say what he likes in this world. He accumulates wealth and thinks it will ensure his future security. He wields power fearlessly, certain that it will never be taken away from him. People are sure of themselves in this world. They have no idea of the fate that is in store for them. Eventually death will put paid to the false security they feel in this world. They will be transported in a

helpless state with dreadful suddenness to the next world.

No one can escape this fate. When death comes, we will realize, with terror in our hearts, how wrong we had been about things in this world. What seems real to us in this world is, in fact, only a deception; the reality of things will only be revealed to us after death.

A person's attitude will suddenly change when he perceives reality. "Lord," he will cry, "I thought I was free in the world, but my freedom was only an illusion. I thought I was rich, but I have turned out to be destitute. I considered myself powerful, but now I have been exposed for the helpless creature that I was. I thought I had many friends in the world, but they have all deserted me; there is no one to help me now."

This is what man should realize. But unfortunately man has forgotten that this is the reality that is going to affect him more than anything.

Doomsday

People eat, drink and make merry in this world. They establish themselves in comfortable homes. They seek to win promotion in life. They believe or reject matters at will. They are free to do and say what they like. They strive to excel in whatever department of life they choose.

Man has been deluded by his worldly position. He thinks that what he owns in this world will always be his. He forgets that he is being put to the test by means of all the power that he wields in this ephemeral world. Nothing that he has will last. Everything will be taken away from him. He will be stripped of even the most basic of the worldly amenities he used to enjoy. He will be brought before the Lord of the Universe to be judged.

All disparity between men will disappear on the Day of Judgement. Fear of God will seal everybody's tongue. Injustice will benefit no one; truth will be inescapable. Man will stand alone, answerable for his actions.

We must foresee the coming of that day before its arrival. Those who fail to see it coming before it is upon them will have to pay dearly for their

shortsightedness. They will have to endure the punishment of hell-fire.

Credit Alone

Man has no intrinsic power. No one can, by himself, give anything to, or take anything away from anyone. All events happen by the will of God. Man exists in this world to be tested, and the test of man concerns his intentions alone, for man can only wish for an event to take place; he cannot actually make things happen.

Everything that happens in this world seems to have a cause, but these 'causes' are no more than a veil over reality. Cause and effect are beyond the powers of man. These tasks are accomplished by God through His angels.

Man is being tested in this world by means of the situations with which God confronts him from day to day. God wishes to see how he reacts to these situations. Sometimes he is being tested as to whether he upholds the cause of truth, or forsakes the truth and follows a false path. Sometimes he is being tested as to whether he is just in his treatment

of others or not. Sometimes he is being tested as to whether he is true to his word, or breaks promises after they are made.

All worldly events occur by the will of God. Man simply takes credit for what happens, whether good or bad.

Seeing into the Future

In order to put man to the test in this world, God has given him some power. Everybody has been granted a certain domain in which he is able to act at will. Some have more scope to act than others, but everyone acts, within his own domain, as others act in theirs. It makes no difference whether the power one wields is minimal or great. Everyone misuses it in much the same way. Different as people may seem, in reality they are all the same.

People, seeking to prove themselves, are always trying to further their own interests at the expense of others. They overestimate their power and consider that they can usurp others in order to establish themselves. They do not realize that it is not anyone's vacant seat that awaits them: it is their own graves. Those who seek to destroy others are bound to be destroyed themselves. Those who would like to see

others dead and buried are soon to suffer that very fate themselves.

Those who consider themselves successful today will have to face failure in the future. We are being reminded of this daily, but no one takes heed. Everyone is too engrossed in the present. No one cares to look beyond the present into the future.

Those who are caught up in the present should begin to look into the future, for the present will soon pass, it is in the future that the day of reckoning lies. We shall then have to face the consequences of that day for all time to come.

Before Time Runs Out

Man is on trial in this world. Here, everyone is being tested: if one acts rightly, one will succeed in the trial of life. Neglect of the task that lies before one is tantamount to failure. Those who do not strive to succeed in the trial of life are doomed to failure, whether they like it or not.

Man can be likened to an ice-vendor in this respect, one whose ice is continually melting and who has to sell his merchandise before it all dissolves. If he

delays in selling the ice, then he will have nothing left to sell; his capital and his profits will have vanished into thin air.

This same principle applies to the life of man. Man is rapidly moving towards a sorry end. There is only one thing he can do to avoid disaster, and that is to put the time he has been allotted on earth to the best possible use.

A successful ice-vendor is one who sells his ice before it has all dissolved. Similarly a successful person is one who puts his life to good use before it ends, and prepares for the life to come before it is upon him.

When Will They Ever Learn?

Man has been given freedom of choice in this world, for this world is for the trial of man, and man can only be tested if he is free to do as he wills—if he is free to choose between right and wrong, and free to use the opportunities and potentialities which he has been given in whatever manner he chooses. His freedom, however, will be short-lived.

If anyone wishes to reject the truth in this world, he will have no difficulty in finding words with which to

justify himself. If anyone wishes to deny the true call to religion, he will find other beliefs in which he can take refuge. If anyone chooses to ignore God's call, he will find other things to hold on to in this world, which will lull him into a false sense of security. When the true nature of things is revealed, however, the props on which he depended in the world will be exposed as false and unreal.

When man rises from the dead, and God appears in all His glory, man will be helpless before the Lord. He will have no choice but to accept that which he used to deny in the world.

If man only knew the awesome nature of the last day, he would cease the vain conversations in which he endlessly indulges in this world; he would refrain from all the crimes which no humanitarian or moral exhortation could prevent him from committing.

The Tragedy of Man

Man has lost all sense of reality in this world. So lost has he become in his own vainglory that he has forgotten the greater glory of God. Although man is constantly being reminded of his

helplessness, before death he thinks he has power; in fact, he is nothing but a pawn of the reality that he chooses to ignore.

Man breaks his promises; he does not pay people their due; he does not bow to the truth; he accuses others, but fails to admit his own mistakes; he turns away from the weak and hails the strong; he bases his life on desire rather than on principle; he persecutes the downtrodden and cowers before the mighty; he concentrates on himself rather than on God. Fear of Hell and desire for heaven do not dominate his life; he is guided by worldly apprehensions and desires alone.

Man continues in his evil ways and forgets that in so doing he is moving further away from Paradise and drawing closer to Hell. This is the tragedy of man; he does not care for that which is most to be desired; he does not fear that which is most to be feared.

No Refuge

One who does not bow before the truth but cringes before worldly might, who is not persuaded by sound reasoning but cowers in submission when there is any threat of force, is worthy of going to Hell.

Whereas in eternity God Himself will appear directly before men, in this world there can only be indirect evidence of His existence. To bow before the evidence of God is to bow before God Himself. Those who do so will be admitted into Paradise. Those who do not bow before the evidence of God in this world have, in effect, refused to bow before God Himself. They will be punished for their rebelliousness and will be consigned to Hell.

When some insignificant person proclaims the truth, those who deny it are sure that they cannot be harmed. They forget that it is not some weak person's word they are denying; it is the word of God. Their action amounts to a rejection of God Himself and the whole universe rejects one who rejects God. They will be left to wander aimlessly, with no refuge in heaven or on earth.

The day is coming when those who rely on false evidence will have to face the truth, when those who

are settled in the world will be rendered homeless and those who are secure will not find a blade of grass on which to stand.

Wishful Thinking

People seek their own happiness in other's pain. They oppress those who are close to them and attempt to make a name for themselves amongst the far-distant. They are unjust in their private lives, but put on a show of justice in public. They cannot bear to hear themselves criticized, but consider themselves as having been appointed by God to criticize others. They are expert in detecting the faults of others, while ignoring their own.

But the reward of God will be reserved for those who give others what is due to them, and who do no wrong to their neighbours; who are not selfish in their dealings with others, but think in terms of what is fair and just; who do not think of their own interest when the truth is at stake; who lose themselves in the greatness of God.

People are playing with fire, but have no idea of the consequences of their deeds. They are careering towards Hell but are happy in the mistaken idea

that they are well on the way to heaven. One can but pity those who have only false hopes to their credit, and who seek to make capital out of such wishful thinking. One can only pity those who want to fashion, in the world created by God, a world of their own choice—which is not permissible in the eyes of the Almighty.

Angelic or Satanic

God's faithful servants act on angelic promptings, while the rebellious take their cue from the devil. The source of people's guidance is clear from their actions and speech.

Those who live in the company of angels are humble in times of disagreement and quick to bow to the truth. They show by their actions that they have been guided on to the path of the angels, for angels are never proud; they show no hesitation in bowing to the truth.

The devil's way is very different. Those who follow it are cruel and vindictive in times of disagreement. They are haughty in their dealings with others. They are following in the devil's footsteps. Arrogance and self-assertiveness are attributes of the devil: the Quran has made this clear.

Ignorance of death and of the resurrection of man gives people the courage to indulge in injustice and contumacy in this world. If people knew what was coming to them they would stop dead, in fear; their tongues would freeze into silence. They would not try to justify their mistakes; they would immediately admit that they were wrong.

When God Appears

When one truly discovers God, one realizes that He cannot have created man and the rest of the world in vain. God has created the universe: He sustains it in its functioning. How can an almighty and all-knowing God such as He let the whole cosmic machine grind on pointlessly without its meaning ever being revealed?

Faith does more than this for a person. It instills in one the firm conviction that God will Himself eventually appear before man. In this world He remains hidden, though His presence is felt as He guides and sustains the universe. Faith tells one that the manifestation of the Lord will be an event of the greatest relevance. God is both mighty and just; He is aware of all things; His appearance will bring justice to the world. When God comes before mankind,

those who refused to serve Him on earth will be brought low before Him. They will appear more despicable than insects. On the other hand, those faithful servants of God, who devoted themselves entirely to Him, will be honoured in heaven.

God's invisibility in the world seemingly gives unbelievers the license to run amok. But when God appears before mankind, only the faithful will be honoured. They will inherit a new, complete and everlasting world in which they will enjoy the eternal delights of paradise, while those who defied God in the world will be thrown into the fire of Hell.

The Lesson of Death

Man desires life, but, sooner or later, he has to come to terms with death. Just as he is at the peak of his career, death comes and shatters it all. Suddenly, he has to face a world for which he has made no preparation.

Man aims at establishing his own glory on earth, but death comes and demolishes all the delusions of grandeur that he had nurtured, teaching him how powerless he had been before death. Man wants to be his own lord and master, but his helplessness in

the hands of fate shows that he has no control over his destiny. Man wants to satisfy his desires in this world, but he is foiled by death, which teaches him to seek in the Hereafter the gratification that constantly eludes him in this world.

We must learn from death, for the secret of life is hidden in the message it has to teach us. Death shows us that we are not our own masters; that our stay on earth is only temporary; that the world is no place for the realization of our dreams. Death teaches us how to live; it shows us the way to real success.

Delusive Grandeur

People usually take worldly success to be an indication of success in the life to come. But they are mistaken in this, for success in this life has nothing to do with eternal success.

Worldly grandeur is no true grandeur at all. It is just a means by which man is put to the test. Some are happily placed in this world, while others are not. But whatever the conditions of human existence, all men are the same in that they are being tested. A person's position on earth is not an indication of success or failure: it is just a test.

When one is raised in stature or in some way honoured in this world, one would be mistaken if one were then to look down on others, for all are equal in the face of death. Death puts the whole human race on one level. Then great are those whom God sees fit to make great, and lowly are those who are cast down by Him.

The world is a place of trial. Here man can pretend to be great, but it will not be long before his real position is exposed. On that day many who have honour in this world will be debased before God; many who claim to be friends of justice and humanity will be exposed as enemies of the very causes they espoused; many who are acclaimed amongst the brave will be condemned as cowards; many who claimed to bow to the truth will be exposed as shams.

The Inevitable Fate of Man

The poor are aggrieved by their lowly conditions of living. They eye the rich with envy, not realizing that wealth creates even more problems than poverty. Important figures may appear to command substantial popular support, but in private they have no peace of mind. They are so restless that they

cannot sleep at night without the help of sleeping pills. Everyone is beset by problems in this world, though the nature of these problems differs from person to person.

However much happiness one obtains in this life, it can only last for a short time. Death will spare no one. When it comes, wealth and power will be of no avail. Some die walking on the streets, others die while traveling in aeroplanes. Some die in shacks, others in palaces. Death shows no mercy. It is an inevitable fate that everyone has to face.

Death reminds one to look beyond the present, and to seek success beyond this ephemeral world. Those who fail to learn will soon be deprived of the temporary pleasure that they enjoy in this world. They will find themselves in a world of darkness. They will feel remorse at not having prepared themselves for the life after death, but their remorse will not benefit them. They will have to live with their anguish for all time.

Life's Journey

Everyone's mind is full of hopes and ambitions. Everyone cherishes some dream and likes to think that he is progressing towards the fulfillment of that

dream. Death puts paid to all his hopes and shows him that he has been traveling towards the world of God, not the world of his own fancies. The journey of his life is not destined to end in this world: he is bound for eternity. How ignorant man is of his own fate! How different from what he imagines his real destination.

Man spends his life ensuring that his children make the most of their future, but he does not live to see the fruits of his efforts. Before long he himself is forced to face a future for which he has made no preparation. Man strives to build himself a comfortable home, but death comes between him and the enjoyment of which he dreamed. Man seeks to enrich himself; he thinks that the more he earns, the more he will advance in honour and prestige. But soon he has to come to terms with the fact that he is bound for the desolation of the grave rather than the honour and prestige of which he dreamed.

Man cannot do without ephemeral comforts. This obsession causes him to deny the stark realities of life. If only he realized that his temporary pleasures would soon be replaced by eternal torment, then his attitude to life would change radically.

God's Mercy

What a shock it will be for man to realize that his activities on earth have come to nothing. People take pride in asserting themselves, but they would do better to take pride in humility. They seek to justify their errors, but they would do better to admit them freely. They have been given tongues with which to praise God, but instead they praise humans. They have been instilled with emotions of love and fear to offer to God, but they waste them on other objects. Hoarding wealth is their greatest aim in life, whereas their greatest aim should be to give their wealth in God's cause. True virtue lies in being kind to the weak, but they ignore the weak and hail the mighty. They would do well to delve into the silent world of meanings, but they prefer to engage in noisy, worthless pursuits. Progress lies in being able to criticize oneself, but they are busy criticizing others.

Man is living in a fool's paradise of his own making, but the Resurrection will shatter all his dreams. Then, only those who take refuge in His mercy will be saved.

Extraordinary Disillusionment

Man has directed all his efforts towards mundane objects. He is possessed by thoughts of food, clothes, shelter, fame, wealth and happiness. His attention is fixed on the attainment of these worldly goals. He expends all his energy in striving after them. If his efforts are successful, he is pleased. If not, he becomes so discontented that his life is ruined.

Death comes to show man that he is not destined to be happy in this world. Even if one obtains all these things in this world, one can only possess them for a very short time. When, after decades of unremitting struggle, man is at the peak of his powers, death comes and puts paid to his career.

This shows that this world is not meant for the fulfillment of one's hopes and ambitions. The place for their fulfillment is the eternal world in which we are going to dwell after death. People, busy preparing for their worldly future, have neglected their eternal future. They overlook, in the next, more complete life, the very goal that they have set their eyes on this ephemeral world.

Thus man is busy losing exactly what he sets out to gain. What extraordinary disillusionment is in store for him.

The Great Divide

The grave divides this world from the Hereafter. The next world lies across this great divide. Today we are on this side of the divide; tomorrow we will cross it. All living men will taste death; no one will be able to escape it. But man is oblivious of death—the greatest reality of life.

We have all seen people entering the grave never to return, but few of us realize that we are also going to meet the selfsame fate. The door of the grave will open for us and then close on us for ever.

How strange it is that man witnesses others dying every day, but himself lives as if he was never going to die. He can see others being summoned before God every day, but he excludes himself from death's list; he acts as if he was never going to come before the Lord to be judged.

We are closer to death than life. If we could realize this we would look on everyone's death as our own; it

would seem as if we ourselves were being carried to the grave when we saw someone else's funeral.

When Words Fail

Every soul shall taste death. Those who see will become sightless and those who speak will be silenced. When death overtakes us, we will leave this world behind and enter the next world. We will leave this world never to return and enter a world in which we will have to abide for ever. We will be removed from the worldly arena of our actions to an arena where we must suffer the eternal consequences of our deeds.

We are closer to death than life. People think they are alive, but it would be truer to say that they are dead, for no one knows when death will come. Death is already upon us. It is not a future event.

Everyone is moving towards death. Some set their eyes on the world, others on eternity; some live for that which meets the eye, others for that which lies beneath the surface. In this world both types of people appear the same but, in relation to their final destination, they are very different. Those who live God-oriented lives are safe, while those who live self-oriented lives are destroying themselves.

The Final Hour

The final hour comes to everyone. It can come while one is sleeping, walking or lying in one's bed. No one can escape this hour, though the form that it takes differs from person to person.

How strange death is. The flame of life is suddenly extinguished; a happy face abruptly fades into oblivion, as if it were less than dust; the aspirations and ambitions that one cherishes on earth are shattered in an instant, as if they were meaningless.

How meaningful life appears, yet its conclusion renders it meaningless. How free man appears to be, yet he is absolutely helpless before death. How dear man's ambitions and desires are to him, but how mercilessly the hand of fate brings them to nothing.

If one only remembers death, one will never be arrogant. The secret of a good life is to stay within one's own bounds: death alone can teach one the truth of this.

Death teaches one not to despise others, for soon one will be brought low oneself. Death reminds one not to crush others, for soon one will be crushed beneath tons of earth oneself.

The Coming Day

Death will surely carry man off. On the day of death the angels will come to take man before his Lord.

It will not be long before man is carried off, but people know only about this happening to others; they do not realize that the same fate awaits them. They gossip about the demise of others, but they forget that one day the angels will also take them before the Lord to be judged.

People are good at finding faults in others, but they would do better to find faults in themselves. They try to save themselves by justifying their actions, but they can only be saved by admitting their faults.

The day when man is taken before God will be the most awesome of days. If one is really aware of what this day means, one's whole life will change. One will live in this world, but one's mind will be focused on the Hereafter. One will weigh oneself today on the divine scales of justice on which everyone will be placed after death.

One who fears the hand of God will look on everyone's death as if it were his own. When he sees

someone being taken to a human court in handcuffs, he will think of his own fate, when he is brought into the Divine Court to be judged by the Lord of the Universe.

Remembering Death

Man has endless words at his disposal in this world; but there will come a time when he will be at a loss for words. There will be no one to listen to what he has to say, no press to print what he writes, and no loudspeaker to announce his words. The fool's paradise that he had constructed for himself in the world will have been razed to the ground. He will look for some respite from anguish and despair, but there will be none.

If only man were to remember death, the things that make him cruel and unjust would become meaningless; he would realize that his actions are leading him towards Hell. Man cannot make use of the wealth that he holds so dear before death comes and severs him from his earnings for all time. If man were to remember this fact, he would not be so obsessed with self-enrichment in this world. People plot the destruction of others, but before they can carry out their plots, death comes between them and

their enemies. If one constantly keeps this fact in mind, one will never seek to harm others; one will never plot the downfall of another.

No one is ready to buy a house that is due to be demolished the next day. No one inhabits a city that is about to be devastated by an earthquake. Yet everyone makes the much more serious mistake of ignoring the most severe earthquake which will strike us—death.

Man's Negligence

Old age is a completely new experience for a person. Life loses all its meaning. One sees that one is about to plunge into an unknown world. One longs for a ray of hope at this decisive time; but death catches one unprepared. Suddenly one is robbed of all one's freedom. One enters, a world where one is helpless and forlorn.

Death haunts us all. We tend to forget about it in our youth, but eventually the hand of fate holds sway. When our life on earth has run its course we are taken to a world of darkness—a world in which we will be bewildered and confused, because we had not prepared for it on earth.

In the daytime man knows that night is coming. He organizes his day in accordance with this knowledge. Then, when night falls, he is sure that soon a new day will break. Yet few are conscious of the coming of the Hereafter. Few look forward to life after death as one who travels by day looks forward to the coming night. Even fewer realize that we will be exposed to the raging fire of Hell after death. Everyone seems to think that death and Hell are for others, not for himself.

Man Stands Alone

Death proves that man is alone. In this world, he lives with others. He has family and friends to keep him company and support him. But death will tear him away from all such attachments; it will isolate him from his friends. Death proves that, in this world, man stands alone; he has no friend or helper.

Every day, everywhere, people see this happening. They see others living amongst family and friends in this world. Then suddenly death descends upon them and isolates them from everybody. They find themselves in a pit where there is no one on either side. How strange and striking this event is; but few

take heed of the lesson that it teaches.

In this world one has friends to help one at every stage of life; but after death one will be alone in the grave; one will have to contend with the angels alone; one will come before God with no one to support one.

Man thinks that he has everything in this world, but in fact he has nothing. Death comes to convey this reality to man in the most conclusive possible way.

The Deluge of Eternity

Death is all that divides us from the next world. No one knows when death will come; it might come at any time, breaking the barrier that divides us from eternity, and unleashing the grave realities of eternity upon us like a deluge. No amount of words of force will be of any use then. Man will stand helpless before his Lord. All those who were lost in the splendours of this world and were not prepared to listen to any admonition will be condemned to eternal doom. Only those who reckoned with themselves, before coming to the Lord to be reckoned with, will be saved.

There is no one more ignorant than those who choose to ignore the coming of this day; but their ignorance will not save them. There is no one weaker than those who depend entirely on worldly supports, for these will crumble and fall, leaving one with nothing to depend upon.

Many who seem to be building for themselves are in fact demolishing their own edifices. Many consider themselves superior to others in this world, but will be proved inferior in the next. This will happen when the deluge of eternity engulfs the whole world. On that day, God, together with His angels, will appear. Everyone will be questioned as to what they have left behind them in the world, and what they have to take with them into the afterlife.

Man's Ignorance

Talking is the easiest thing in the world, and keeping quiet the most difficult. But there will soon come a time when speech will seem to be such a grave matter that one will wish that one had remained silent all one's life; one will wish that one had renounced the power of speech and that one's tongue had been frozen into a perpetual silence.

There is no greater source of temptation in man's body than his tongue, yet it is his tongue that he misuses more than anything: he uses it to deny rather than accept truth; he uses it to utter evil instead of righteous words. People are quite happy with the way they explain themselves in this world. They do not realize that eventually they are not going to have to answer to any human being; they are going to have to answer to God. If they were conscious of this fact, they would prefer to own up to their worldly disgrace rather than pretend to maintain their honour.

This is all because man wrongly considers himself to be his own master. He forgets that, before long, his true Lord and Master will appear, leaving man to languish in his helplessness.

If people knew what was going to happen to them tomorrow, they would cease to derive enjoyment from their present state. Their pride would suddenly change to humility. It is their ignorance of the after-life that has made the world seem too attractive to them.

The Trumpet of the Last Day

Those who truly discover God become completely changed people. Outwardly they appear like anyone else, but inwardly they are quite different. They live on a different level from others.

Such people live in the world, but are in the aura of eternity. Everything in this world seems to them to mirror eternity. They catch a glimpse of the splendours of Paradise in the lustre of this ephemeral world, but are reminded of the torment of Hell when their experiences are bitter. Within the framework of this world, they see a picture of eternity. Life conveys to them the message of death.

The true believer is one who sees the world of eternity within the present world. He lives as if the realities of the next, unseen world were present before him. Unbelievers will also see the next world, but this will only be when all veils have been torn asunder by the shrill noise of the trumpet announcing the resurrection of man. Then, all unseen realities will be visible to man. But man's vision will not profit him on that day, for it will be the time for retribution, not the time to give evidence of one's faith in God.

The angel who is to announce the Last Day is ready and waiting with the trumpet in his hand for God to give the order to sound it. This will be a most terrifying time for man. He will want to speak, but will be struck dumb. He will want to walk, but his legs will not carry him.

The Day of Reckoning

The time will come to pass when the whole of creation will be gathered before the Lord. All voices will be silenced except for the voice of God. Only the truth will have any weight on that day. Nothing else will be of any consequence. On that day man will be judged.

Only death divides us from that day. We are all proceeding towards a fate that will bring us either eternal bliss or eternal torment. Every moment that passes is bringing us closer to the fate that is in store for us. We lose one day more in our lives every day the sun sets, and we will never have another chance like the present to prepare for this awesome day. We have only a comparatively short time in this world, but will have to endure the consequences of our life on earth for ever: either bliss or agonizing punishment.

We are soon going to leave this world where we are free to act, and enter another world where we will reap the consequences of our actions; we must examine our lives before this happens. We will all have to stand before God one day. On that day, how fortunate will be those who are included among God's faithful servants, for they will be honoured in heaven. How unfortunate will be those whom God rejects, for they will have nothing to look forward to except eternal torment and disgrace.

Only One Chance

Man is an immortal being. He passes part of his time on earth and the rest of his time in the hereafter. This world is for actions; in the next world we will reap the consequences of our actions.

The only chance we have to work for the Hereafter is in this world. Afterwards we shall not be able to act: we shall rather have to bear the consequences of our actions. We have very little time on earth. Many who were once among us on earth are now dead and gone. In the same way we shall be removed one day from the land of the living. Our lives will end and we shall be brought before the Lord.

This life is the first and last chance that we shall have to build an eternal future for ourselves. We have only one life on earth, and it is in this life that we must prove our worth. We are being tried on earth, and this trial is sure to reach a decisive outcome. We shall not be able to escape the consequences of our actions.

Every second that passes is conclusive, for time that has passed can never return. We have only one chance to show our worth; we can either waste it or put it to good use. We have only one life on earth; we can either grow for ourselves a heavenly crop or an infernal one.

Real Success and Failure

Some seem to be successful in this world and others appear to have failed. For this reason people have come to think of success and failure as confined to this world. Heaven and hell have become for them things of this world, not the next.

But this is no more than an illusion. Real success and failure lie in the next life. Many who consider themselves successful in this world will be shocked to find that the reality is far from what they thought.

They will discover there who are the losers and who are the winners; they will see who understood the reality of life and who was taken in by mere appearances; they will realize who forged ahead in the race of life and who was left behind; it will be evident who put his talents to the best possible use and who wasted them on the fleeting enjoyments of this world; it will become clear who has attained to true honour and who has been disgraced.

Failure in its true sense is failure in eternity, and likewise true success is success in eternity. Opportunism and expediency earn one honour and status in this world, but they will be of no use in the Hereafter. People who gained worldly honour in this way will find themselves quite unfit for honour in the everlasting world of God. They will be like an old-fashioned, manual worker, who is considered skillful in an agrarian society, but whose skills are of no use in a modern technological age.

The Greatest Earthquake

Earthquakes are a sign of God. When an earthquake strikes, it demolishes all the props which man relies on. It causes mighty stone fortresses to come tumbling down, just as it reduces flimsy wooden

huts to matchsticks. It does not distinguish between the strong and the weak. It strikes the mighty in the same way as it strikes the helpless.

Earthquakes give us prior warning of what is eventually going to happen to all of us in this world. They remind us in this world of the doomsday which all mankind must face in the next world. When the trembling of the earth makes people lose their senses; when houses start falling as if they were made of playing cards; when the earth is turned upside down; then people will realize how utterly helpless they are before the might of God. All man can do at such a time is helplessly gaze on his own destruction.

The earthquake of the Last Day will be infinitely more severe than any worldly earthquake. All man's supports will collapse. He will forget the skills that he displayed in the world. The grandeur that he enjoyed on earth will disappear. The only people who will have anything to rely on will be those who did not rely on worldly supports. The successful one on that day will be those who attached themselves to God, while others had taken refuge under other banners.

On the Verge of Death

Everyone is on the move and everyone's journey ends in death. Death means heaven for some and hell for others. Fortunate are those who find themselves on the threshold of heaven at the time of death; they will dwell in eternal bliss; they will know neither grief nor apprehension. But there is no limit to the misfortune of those whom death brings to the threshold of hell; for they will be trapped forever in a world of fire and smoke.

Those who acknowledge God's greatness and bow before Him, who abide by the truth and do good to others, are the ones who will be admitted into heaven.

Those who do not acknowledge the greatness of God, who are unjust in their dealing with others, who are cruel and proud towards their fellows, will be condemned to Hell.

Heaven is for those who are of a heavenly nature in this world, while Hell is for those who do not make their lives conform to heavenly standards.

All too Soon

Man seeks wealth, honour, power and offspring in this world. He does all he can to obtain these things, but death shows him that his desires cannot be fulfilled in this world. He cannot find in this ephemeral world what he longs for above all else.

One only has to think: what is the point of gaining anything in this world when one is bound to leave it behind in a few days? If one were to be content with one's lot in this world, all the plundering and exploitation that man indulges in would then cease. It is a fact that there is no great difference between acquiring a thing and not acquiring it: what is the value of an acquisition that the very next day is going to be turned to loss? Man expends all his energies to obtain something, only to lose it the next moment. Life is sure to end in death. Man will leave behind all the valued possessions that he surrounds himself with in this world, never to return to them again.

Man lives for today; he forgets about tomorrow. He builds a home for himself by destroying others' homes, although tomorrow he is going to step into the grave. He takes others to human courts, where he makes out false cases against them; he forgets

that the angels are standing over him, ready to take him to the divine court. He looks down on others, thinking he is secure in his worldly greatness, but this greatness will soon be destroyed, and there will be no trace of it left.

Divine Scales of Justice

In this world of trial every man is free. It is possible to torment one's neighbour, yet still be acclaimed for one's piety. One may be struggling for leadership, yet still be hailed as a holy crusader. One may choose to be unjust to those one deals with, yet still be invited to preside over meetings whose aim is to promote peace and justice. One may be forgetful of God in private, yet in public places, be considered a representative of the divine cause. One may be totally indifferent to the plight of the oppressed, yet still find a place in the headlines as friend of the downtrodden. One may only be spouting empty words, yet be given credit for beneficent actions.

No facade, however perfect, can conceal man's true nature from God. But he keeps his superior knowledge hidden in this world and will reveal it only in the hereafter. The scales of God will be put into place and everyone will be seen for what he is.

There is no doubting the coming of that day. No one will be able to postpone it or escape from it. Wise are they who prepare for that day by placing themselves today on the divine scales of justice; for those who are placed on them tomorrow will be damned.

After Death

All men will have to face death sooner or later. They will leave the world behind them never to return. Ahead of them will be the Hereafter. They will have no option but to enter this new world.

The Judgement Day is approaching fast. On that day every soul will appear as it really was. All the veils that conceal a person's true nature in the world will disappear. Beautiful words will be of no avail in concealing that true nature.

In this world a selfish person can appear as a godly one. One who is hungry for fame can present himself before men as a standard-bearer of truth. One who places self-interest before all in his work can by clever talk deceive people into thinking that he is selflessly serving the cause of truth.

But death is the event in man's life that exposes all such pretence as false. In the world after death all such veils will disappear. Man will appear as he really is for himself and for others as well.

Brought Before God

Death is not the end of our lives; it is the beginning of our real life. After death man will be brought before the Lord for final judgement.

Man has many concerns in this world, but after death he will be concerned with one thing alone: escaping from the wrath of God. If one has ample time at one's disposal, one engages in many tasks. But if time is short then one concentrates on the most important task. At crucial moments, no one is foolhardy enough to engage in irrelevant pursuits.

No time is fixed for death. It can come at any moment. This fact makes death an even more delicate issue. First and foremost, we should communicate to others the dangers that death holds in store for us; we should inform people about tomorrow, before it is upon us.

This is the essence of the message of Islam. Islam calls man to faith in the Hereafter; it seeks to awake the

living to the issues that will face the dead. The preacher of Islam stands between life and death. While still on earth, it is as if he has already experienced death and is thus able to inform his fellows of what lies beyond the grave.

The Greatest Calamity

The greatest calamity afflicting our world is that one million people die every day. No one knows, of those who are alive today, who will be dead tomorrow. Every one of us shall taste death, but no one knows when death will come. We do not know which of our fellow men will leave this world tomorrow, and who will remain to receive this message.

Every one of us is hastening towards this fate. Everyone who is alive today is in danger of dying tomorrow. Then we will not have the chance to warn others, nor they the chance to listen.

Under these circumstances, it is clear what our real task must be: we must dwell on the life after death and warn our fellows of it, for this is the real issue of life. There are over four billion people on earth, and this task applies to each and every one of them. Everyone is ignorant of the reality of life,

and everyone needs to be informed of it. If a strong hurricane is approaching, one forgets trivial matters. Death is greater than a hurricane. If one were to realize this, one would think and speak about death more than anything.

Warning People of the Hereafter

Muslims have a responsibility to God: to tell all nations of the world that the day shall come when God will judge them, meting out reward and punishment according to the merits and demerits of people's actions. The Muslims' present and future well-being rests entirely upon their fulfillment of this responsibility. Their value lies in the performance of this service of conveying the divine message. They are of no value in the sight of God if they do not rise to this task.

If Muslims neglect this responsibility, nothing that they do will be acceptable to God; even their apparently religious work will count for nothing. When they neglect this responsibility, God will leave them to their enemies; He will set other nations over them. Even the movements, which they call Islamic, but which are not aimed at the execution of this duty, will come to nothing. They will continue to indulge

in wishful thinking, but they will not be able to deny the truth of the fact that God has deserted them.

If Muslims do not rise to the task of warning people of the next life, they lose their worth in the sight of God; they become disgraced and miserable both in this world and the next. One only has to look at the vicissitudes in the history of the Jewish people to understand this fact. Man's worth is in relation to his performance of the duties that have been entrusted to him. If Muslims neglect their duty to God, then how will they be of any worth in His sight?

Responsibility of Preaching

In this world, floods come to remind us of a greater flood which will come in the Hereafter. Every year, in some part of the globe, towns and villages are submerged in flood waters. The day when man rises from the dead, there will be a huge flood of this nature. All protective measures will disintegrate before the oncoming flood. It will submerge all of us; even high mountains will not be able to give us safe harbour.

The ones who survive worldly floods are those who have prepared boats before the coming of the flood. So, the survivors of the great flood of the Hereafter

will be those who ride in God's boat by giving themselves up to Him.

Mankind must be warned of the flood that is descending upon him. To issue this warning is the greatest task in the world today. It was to warn mankind of the coming of this flood that God sent His messengers to the world; so that after death, when man is brought before God, no one will be able to claim ignorance, and say that he is being punished for something he had never been told about.

No prophet will come to the world now, but this task is still as important as ever. After the termination of prophethood, this special mission of the Prophet has been entrusted to the followers of the final Prophet. They must fulfill their duty, before God unleashes the flood waters upon us, or no one will have a chance to warn others, or be warned himself.

The Awe-Inspiring Day of Retribution

What an awe-inspiring day it will be when God sits in judgement. No one will be able to be defiant or proud. Those who had been considered

worthless and rejected in the world will be raised in value and accepted in God's sight. Those who had been considered weakest among men will, by the grace of God, be given great importance: it will be according to their testimony that people will be sent either to heaven or to Hell.

Those who were loquacious in the world will be rejected by God. Those who were thought of as mighty and powerful in the world will be reduced to powerlessness. Those who feigned piety in the world will be exposed for the impious beings they really were. Their brightness will be dimmed and, for them, white will be turned into black.

People are hidden behind artificial appearances in this world. Some hide themselves behind seductive words; others conceal their true natures behind material grandeur and splendour. But they will be denied these things in the life to come. Everyone will appear in his true garb. One who realizes the awe-inspiring nature of that day will suddenly be reduced to silence; worldly honour will seem to him as meaningless as worldly disgrace.

The Soul of Islam

The true believer is one who actually sees the Archangel Israfil standing, waiting to sound the trumpet that will signal the end of the world. This is the true difference between a believer and a disbeliever; the disbeliever lives for this world, while the believer lives for the next world; the disbeliever is engrossed in the outward form of life, while the believer discovers the inner truth of life in its final outcome.

Islam means to devote one's life entirely to God. A man's soul should commune with God in this world. If this is not the case, it means that the true spirit of religion is lacking. People may claim to believe in God, but their belief consists of an attachment to empty rituals. They bring religion down to the level of their own consciousness, and neglect the spirit of true submission to God.

When this happens, people tend to ignore the spirit behind religious observances, and as a result, only outward forms survive. People stop crying to the Lord in private, they are interested only in public espousal of 'Islamic' causes. Mosques are crowded by worshippers but the prayers do not succeed in

illuminating their souls. People do not concentrate on abstinence in fasting, but rather on having lavish meals before and after the fast. The spirit of servitude is lacking in religious festivals, which become instead occasions for self-indulgent, ostentatious enjoyment. The Prophet's life ceases to be an example for his followers; instead they show their attachment to the Prophet by celebrating his anniversary and holding conventions in his honour.

In short, when the spirit is lacking, religion is moulded in the form of the worldliness of its adherents.

Hushed Silence Among the Crowd

When religion becomes part of a national tradition, a new phenomenon comes into existence: ceremonies performed in the name of religion increase, but true religion disappears entirely.

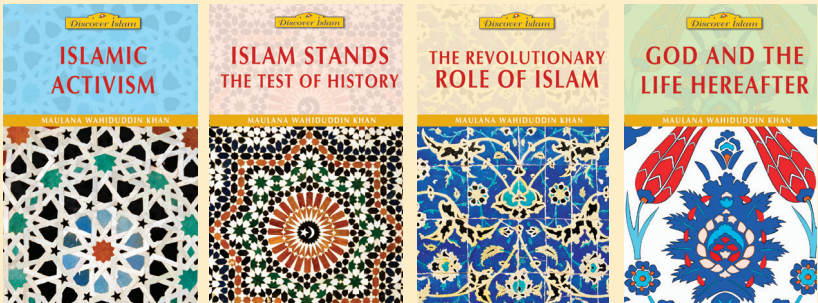
This is what is happening to the Muslims today. The number of people who pray is on the increase, but there are few who really fear God. There is no lack of people who will speak on behalf of Islam, but there

are few who will remain silent for the sake of their religion. Everybody sees his own righteousness, but few see righteousness in others. There are plenty who are ready to display their piety in public, but few are really pious in private. Everyone wants to see Islam established in the whole world, but no one has time to establish it in the individual self. Everybody has huge reserves of fine words at his disposal, but few have any fine actions to offer. Everybody thinks he has the key to paradise, but few feel the need to tremble in fear of Hell. Everybody is enthusiastic about Islam when it is embellished with material grandeur, but no one is interested in the Islam, which shakes one's soul and makes one live in awareness of the afterlife.

Never before in the midst of such a proliferation of religious activities has there been such spiritual bankruptcy.

Discover Islam

In this series, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan presents the fundamental teachings of Islam in a simple way. The series provides the general reader with an accurate and comprehensive picture of Islam—the true religion of submission to God.



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