



THE ROAD TO PARADISE

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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For more information, please write to:

Goodword Books
1, Nizamuddin West Market
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email: info@goodwordbooks.com
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The world of nature is a zero defect world. In it, there are all kinds of activities, but they do not produce any noise pollution. It has 'factories' operating round the clock but they do not produce any smog. There are many great industries, but they do not sully the water. For million and millions of years, the world of nature has been functioning, but without causing any deterioration or any accidents. All its parts are active, but we do not find anywhere that they have such a thing as a labour problem. The world of nature, although ephemeral, and not eternal, is nevertheless a complete world.

Sometimes things happen which appear to be undesirable, for instance, landslides, floods, droughts, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, etc. Therefore, the opinion of some is that, that the world of nature is not evil-free. But such remarks are the result of misunderstanding. In fact, such apparently unwanted occurrences are either to maintain a balance in the world of nature, or are aimed at giving man a lesson—to cut him down to size. Such events, therefore, are

desirable so that the natural state of the world may be maintained.

However, our world may be said to be full of contradictions. Here, everything is perfect—with the exception of human beings. For the human world is flawed by all kinds of defects and shortcomings, as a result of which man is continually faced with a state of unrest. The human story is one of man's continual effort to overcome this state of discontent.

Everyone cherishes a dream world for himself. Call this dream world 'paradise', and we can rightly say that man is indeed a paradise—seeking creature. One thinker has remarked that in this world everything is beautiful except for one thing, and that is human beings. We can put this differently as follows.

On closer inspection, we find that there is an extremely strange contradiction in our material world. Of the numerous things in this world, everything has taken its ultimate shape. We cannot think of any other colour for the sky except blue. Neither can we think of any other colour for light and water. We cannot think of any other form which the grass or the trees could have. Nor can we think of any other colour for the vegetation but green. Even our greatest artists could not produce any other model for the ants or

the tiger, for the deer or the elephant or the birds or the fishes, and so on. It is a fact that everything in this world has been cast in its final mould. We just cannot think of a better model for anything that exists in this world of nature.

However, there is only one aspect of this vast world, which is an exception to this general rule, and that is the recurrence of the many unpleasant things in the human world. Here there is suffering, old age, accidents and death. Life is marked with all kinds of misery and fear. Even when there does not appear to be any problem, there are boredom and tension which in themselves are unbearable. Why is there this contradiction? The answer to this is to be found in the existence of the paradise of the next world. The Creator of the universe made another world besides the present one, one in accordance with the desires of human beings, in that it is free of all kinds of limitations and disadvantages, including fear and pain. There, man will have every opportunity to live to his full capacity. His being will have its fulfillment. It is moreover an eternal world, where we shall remain young forever, and old age will not afflict us any longer. We shall not fall victim to any decline or decay.

The world of nature functions at the zero defect level. Everything here is a final model. Man has

been created in his final shape. Yet we find human life in this world imperfect to an extreme degree. It is marred by all kinds of evil. This dualism in one and the same universe demands as a logical necessity that this contradiction be brought to an end. Man should also attain to a perfect life as does the rest of the world. Yet this difference is not an evil. In fact, it is in accord with God's creation plan. God, according to His plan of creation has made a totally perfect world called paradise. But the entry to this world is not open to all, being on a selective basis. It is only those who, in their life before death, come up to the standard of the citizenship of paradise, who will be granted an abode in this perfect world of paradise.

This paradise, which is hidden from our eyes due to the exigencies of man's trial, has been created for man alone. However, entry to this world of paradise has been restricted. Entry will be given only to those pure souls who have brought with them the necessary qualification.

This paradise has been brought into existence in the world after death. The stage before death is one of preparation, and the stage after death is that of reward commensurate with this preparation.

What is man's trial? It rests on man's discovery of God,

who is in the Unseen. Before seeing Him, man should voluntarily surrender himself before God. He should be so greatly desirous of paradise that this present world appears meaningless to him. He should adopt divine ethics without any external pressure on him to do so. He should develop his intellectual and spiritual being to such an extent that he produces in himself, the ability to inhabit the refined world of paradise. Paradise is a heavenly colony where peace and love, and noble character prevail. Of the inhabitants of this world, only those will find a place, who have succeeded in maintaining a high moral character.

For one who has no concept of paradise, total satisfaction in this present world will turn out to be a lifelong quest, that has ended in failure. People expend all their energy in its pursuit, but they fail to construct this dream world for themselves.

One who is able to discover paradise, begins his life in paradise from this world itself. Here, he will have the pleasure of its intellectual discovery; and after death he will have the pleasure of actually experiencing it. Today, he is blessed with peace of mind; tomorrow he will experience this peaceful life in his external world also. Today he has the full satisfaction of conviction at the intellectual level, tomorrow he will find an opportunity to live in the pleasures and

comforts of practical life. Today he is living in a world of limitations, tomorrow he will find an unlimited world in which to live forever, in total freedom. Today he finds paradise in the intellectual sense, tomorrow he will find it in the practical sense. Indeed, there is nothing greater than this for man.

In the perfect world of nature the imperfect human world appears to be a contradiction. Paradise puts an end to this contradiction. Paradise signifies perfect world of eternal comforts and pleasures for man, a world which is invested with a meaning, far greater even than that immanent in the natural world. Perhaps it is this divine plan which has thus been alluded to by Jesus Christ in these words:

Pray to God in these words: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

(Matthew: chapter 6)

The question “Who am I?” is asked by everyone, consciously or unconsciously. The answer is : I am a traveller to Paradise. This world is a pathway and paradise is its final destination. Man has come here to tread this path while on his way to eternal bliss.

Paradise is an eternal abode: a perfect place for all kinds of happiness and comforts. Paradise is free from

all kinds of limitations and disadvantages. Paradise is the realization of human dreams of finding an ideal world. If the present world is a 'thorn,' then the world of paradise is the 'rose'.

In this world everyone suffers frustration and failure. The reason is that everyone wants to find his desired world in this present world itself, whereas the present limited and ephemeral world is not created for this purpose. That is why, despite all efforts, one fails to find one's dream world in this life. The present world, in actual fact, makes paradise understandable to us. It is not paradise. But man often mistakes it for his destination, and his life thus becomes one of missed opportunities.

By nature, the present world is an imperfect and limited model. It is but an introduction to paradise. It is not paradise in itself. It is a waiting room and not the final destination of the journey.

During this limited life span on this earth, what man needs to do, first and foremost, is to seek the Creator and Sustainer of this universe. Having seen a glimpse of paradise on this earth, he should become its seeker in his heart of hearts. Intellectually, spiritually and morally he should make himself deserving of an abode in the extreme refinement of paradise. He

should devote this present life span to preparation for an unlimited life in the hereafter.

Every man and woman born in this world is like an 'ore', which has to be refined and fashioned into steel, in order that they may become a part of the consummate world of the Hereafter. Every living being has to awaken his or her consciousness to the ultimate extent. Human beings are born at the animalistic level. They have to elevate themselves through intellectual and spiritual development. Those human beings that are not able to attain to the human level will find a place in the 'dustbin' of the Hereafter, hell being another name for it. Those who succeed in reaching that high level of humanity will find a place in the orchard of happiness in the world to come, which is what we call paradise.

The animals have no consciousness of tomorrow. They live only in their 'today' and die in their 'today'. Whereas man has a sense of tomorrow. Man cherishes a very pleasant consciousness of tomorrow, an aspiration towards a better day, or the fulfillment of his dreams. All human beings strive hard to make their tomorrow better and better. But they do not find this 'tomorrow'. The reason being that this 'tomorrow' is not to materialize in this world, but will come into existence, in the eternal life to come, i.e. in the Hereafter.

After death, everyone will discover that 'tomorrow'. Those who have prepared for it will meet with all kinds of success there, while those who have not made the necessary preparations will be doomed. They will be denied all the good things of that life.

Who would be the people of paradise? Those who discover the Higher Being, that is God, and who are able to turn their natural potential to good account; who are able to awaken their spirituality to such a high degree that they can receive the realization of the Hereafter in the present world itself. While living in this world, they become inhabitants of the world of paradise on the conscious plane. They are physically in this world, but psychologically they are in the world of the Hereafter.

When this paradisiacal personality develops in human beings, the present world is rendered meaningless in their eyes. Their intellectual plane reaches to such heights that everything becomes immaterial. They do not find any fulfillment in the material things of the world. The world of paradise is so perfect that the riches of this world are nothing in comparison to it. Owing to their heightened consciousness, they realize that the present world is not the place that they have been created for. Their hearts cry out to God: "O God! Bestow on us, the

paradise of the Hereafter. Give us a place in the world of Your neighbourhood.”

The present world is just an introduction to paradise. It is not paradise in itself. The present world is a passageway and not the destination. It is the place for preparation, and not for reaping the harvest. The present world is full of limitations. It does not have the means to fulfill the unlimited desires of man. It has all the means of subsistence at the animal level, but does not have the spiritual necessities of the higher level of man.

In the world of the Hereafter, all evil people will be separated from the good. Only good people will be given a place in the dwellings of paradise. Besides this, all such worldly events, like death, disease, and accidents, and mental states such as tension and boredom will be eradicated forever.

Thirdly, in that world all the sources of comfort and pleasure will be gathered in their ultimate form. How thrilling it would be to live in that world! So every man and woman must strive to make paradise their destination. They should devote themselves to preparing for this world of tomorrow.

Who are the people who will inherit paradise? They are the souls who have discovered God, and whose

greatest concern is the Almighty. They worship only the one God, and devote their lives to improving their intellectual and spiritual abilities to a high degree. They have shunned the life of falsehood and adhered steadfastly to the way of truth, staying away from hypocrisy and remaining resolutely on the path of sincerity. They have adopted the path of honesty throughout their lives; and have of their own imposed the divine discipline upon their words and deeds. They reserve their feelings of love and fear exclusively for God. Their life and death is for truth. They do not live their lives for anything less than the higher cause. Their activities are 'hereafter'-oriented rather than world-oriented. They succeed in steering clear of all negative feelings such as hatred, jealousy, prejudice, selfishness and other such shallow thinking, and raise themselves to the highest moral level. They associate themselves with people for the sake of truth and distance themselves likewise for the sake of truth. They give and take for God alone. Their lips open for the truth alone. They follow the way of forgiveness and not of revenge in this world and do not embroil themselves in the attractions of the world, but fix their gaze on the Hereafter in all situations.

A paradisiacal person, that is, one fit to inhabit paradise, is such an ardent seeker of paradise that

he begins to feel as if he is living in paradise while remaining physically in this world. If he has found paradise in terms of such a feeling, in the next world he will physically become a resident of paradise.

God's angels will welcome those men and women, who reach the Hereafter with all the above qualities. The angels will come forward and say: "Congratulations, O Blessed Souls! Enter God's heaven by divine decree. Here, there is no death and no parting from this joyous world. The eternal life has been given to you for all eternity." The Quran says:

O Soul at peace! Come to your Lord well pleased, and He will also be well pleased with you. So enter among My chosen servants. And enter My Garden. (89:27-30)

In the book the author explains that the world of nature functions at the zero-defect level. Yet we find human life in this world marred by all kinds of evil. According to the Creation Plan, this contradiction will come to an end in Paradise, the eternal world in the hereafter, where man can also attain a perfect life. God created a totally perfect eternal world called Paradise. Then He created man as an eternal creature and placed him temporarily on earth, for the purpose of testing him. One who, in his life before death, comes up to the standard of the citizenship of Paradise, will be granted an abode in this perfect world of Paradise in the hereafter.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is the founder of Center for Peace and Spirituality, New Delhi, an organization dedicated to presenting Islam to the world as a complete ideology of peace. He has written a commentary on the Quran and translated it in English and other languages and authored over 200 books interpreting Islam in the modern, scientific idiom. He is internationally recognized for his contributions to world peace and interfaith dialogue.