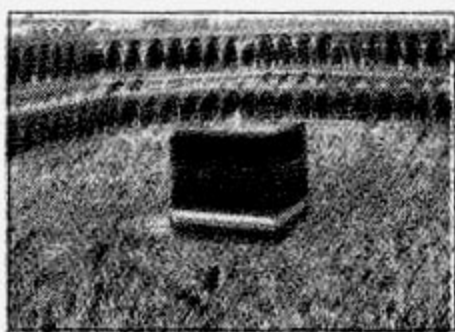


## ISLAM

# Practical wisdom

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



**K**ing Solomon was the ruler of Palestine and Syria. He was also a Prophet. One of his contemporaries was the Queen of Sheba, who ruled Yemen. According to Biblical and Quranic accounts, she received a letter from the powerful King Solomon in which he demanded that she surrender to him. What happened after she received the letter is thus recorded in the Quran: The Queen of Sheba said, "O Counsellors, an honourable letter has been delivered to me. It is from Solomon. It reads, 'In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, do not exalt yourselves above me, but come to me in all submission.' Now advise me in this, Counsellors. I never decide any affair till I have conferred with you." They said, "We are strong and our prowess in battle is great, but the decision

is in your hands, so consider what you will command." She said, "Surely, when mighty kings invade a country, they despoil it and humiliate its noblest inhabitants — these men will do the same" (27: 29-34).

Then, according to tradition, the Queen avoided confrontation by surrendering. Thus she saved her country from invasion by Solomon's army. This surrender was only in the political sense; in all other senses she was able to continue to rule autonomously. The Shebeans were a trading nation. By this partial political surrender, they were also able to continue trading as before.

This kind of act was not surrender but a good example of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom means opting for the less than ideal when the ideal is not achievable.

This practical wisdom is indispensable not only for rulers but for every individual, for controversy is a part of life. Everyone tries to produce an ideal solution, but the fact is that the ideal cannot be achieved. The best formula, therefore, is for everyone to opt for the possible.