Halaqa: Wednesday, November 13, 2013

Topic: Intercession in Islam; Who can help us?

Question: What comes to your mind when we say intercession?

1. Culture: Help from religious saints who have passed away (grave-worship)
2. Prophet’s intercession: On the last day, when people are returned to God, the prophet’s will make a case for their respective communities.
   * The Prophet will intercede with God for his followers

Question: Is there any verse in the Quran that talks about intercession?

1. Yes. The topic is dealt with in the Quran

* How many verses refer to the subject?
* 24 to 27 verses deal with the topic of *salah*
* More than 50 verses deal with the topic of intercession

The reason we fail to see this, is because we are not Quran-oriented thinkers. We have to be careful when we are reading the Quran.

* Although we may read the Quran every day, we do not orient ourselves around the Quran methodologically

Tomb-worship

* Anyone who visits the grave most definitely knows that the contents of the grave are merely dead matter
* Why then, would they ask a dead body for help?
* So the point is not to debate with others about the action itself. We need to think more deeply about such matters and not get swayed by superficial arguments.

Ask yourself: Who can really help us?

* The One who created us
* No one else can help us
* Although we may directly ask assistance from creation, we have to remember that God is the only one helping us.
  + **This is the crux of intercession**

However, we may then ask ourselves: Why do I struggle in this world, if God can help me?

* How do I adjust myself between these two paradigms?
  + God’s help versus My own labor
* This is where the topic of intercession is so crucial in developing our world view

**“…Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; who is he that can interceded with Him but by His permission?...”**

**Baqara (2): 255**

* In this verse, God defines who He is

Pay attention to the context in which the word ‘intercede’ is introduced.

* Remember, the Quran’s words are a guidance
  + Don’t imitate the Quran
* The Quran is telling us: O’reader, try and look and investigate so that you may reach the conclusion presented in this verse

The verse is our destination. We have to investigate in creation to reach the conclusion presented in this verse (i.e. Everything in creation belongs to Him and all of creation ‘intercedes’ for us by His permission).

* Does everything really belong to Him?
  + We have to investigate: To whom does everything belong?
  + Can we find anything in creation that belongs entirely to something else in creation?
  + The verse is an invitation that presents to us the conclusion. We cannot take what is mentioned in the Quran for granted BUT rather we have to reach the conclusion as a result of our investigations

If you cannot find any source to attribute this world to, you have to admit that the world belongs to the One who says that it belongs to Him.

- If what the Quran says is true, I am confirming that the ownership of the universe is in His hands

**…who is he that can intercede with Him**…

* When the Quran uses the word ‘*men’* in arabic, it is referring to conscious beings
  + Similitude: When we use **who** rather than **what** in our conversations, we do so because we are referring to ‘humans’ who are conscious
* But in the context of the Quran, everything is conscious and glorifies God
  + However, their consciousness is different from human consciousness
  + The glorification of animals and plants are represented by angels (angels are conscious beings)
  + Whether we are aware of it, is an entirely different topic.

If everything belongs to God, who can intercede for us to get to God?

* Nothing can intercede with God EXCEPT by His permission
* Intercession is taking place at every moment between all of creation and myself

Example:

When you till the ground in farming, you ought to be aware that you are farming in His name (you are knocking on the door of the earth is in reality, asking the owner of the land to give you some provision from it)

* As a result of this attitude, the person who is asking the owner of the land/universe, you will realize that the seed which is going to grow will act in the name of the Creator
* The seed can only give you provision by His permission
* Without the permission of the Order of the Universe, nothing can act.

I cannot speak, if my owner does not permit me.

* All the qualities in my body are there by the permission of the owner of the order of this universe

We have to consciously be aware that our existence, all our qualities, exist ONLY by the permission of the Order of the Creator.

Only by the permission of the order of this universe does a tree grow.

I can only hear, by the permission of the Creator of the order of this universe.

Everything is interceding with God

* The tree is interceding with God to nourish me
* This is what we need to develop in our perception of existence
* When I pluck a fruit from the tree, I have to be conscious that the tree is just an intercessor

When I plant a seed, I am asking the seed to intercede on my behalf

* I know that the order is established by the Creator of the universe
* If I want to receive fruits, I have to obey the order and plant the seed in the soil

Example:

When you eat an apple, you have to have the consciousness that the apple is interceding with God by His permission.

* I eat the apple for nourishment
* But the apple itself cannot nourish me
* It is God who is nourishing me through the apple
  + The apple is interceding for me, to get to know the Nourishing provider.
  + My interaction with the apple is like a form of intercession
    - This is belief
    - Your convicted understanding of how God is providing for you

If God is the Nourisher, what is the point of eating an apple?

* My relationship with the heavens and the earth is for the sake of intercession
* All of creation are entitled to intercede with God through His permission

Example: When you drink water, it is not the water that quenches your thirst

* It is God
* The water is a means (an intercessor)
* It is not a source of effect in and of itself

Water is acting as an intercessor with the permission of my Creator.

*Regardless of whether you are a believer or not, everyone receives intercession.*

*-But if I am a believer, I will be in His presence through my conscious awareness of the intercession taking place*

The Creator of the universe is the God of everyone

* If I do not acknowledge Him, I place myself in the well of loneliness and anxiety
* I can either believe that He is the owner (believe) or reject it (unbeliever)

As Allah says in the Quran, He never harms human beings, except that we harm ourselves.

* We are the ones who deprive ourselves of His presence

Understand the concept of intercession on a universal level – not just with tombs, etc.

Although we are understanding this part of the verse by segmenting it from the whole verse, if we read it in context of the whole verse, it still makes sense.

**“God is He besides Whom there is deity, the Ever living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows that is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge, but what He willed. His Seat extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not, and He is the Most High, the Great.”**

**Baqara: 255**

*Slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep*: There is no moment that slips away from God’s will or Creatorship. Whoever owns the universe, never leaves anything to itself. It is always subject to His will

* **“Have they taken others as intercessors besides God? Say: “Even if they have power over nothing whatever and have no intelligence?**
* **Say: To God belongs all intercession. His is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, then to Him you shall be brought back.”**

**Zumar (39): 43-44**

You may think that the apple is interceding but in reality, it is all happening as per God’s will.

* God created the universe BUT the apple is feeding me
  + In essence, you have taken intercessors other than God because you claim that the apple is your nourisher
* We have to return all our intercessions back to God
  + In reality, it is only by His Will that the apple provides me with nourishment

I am breathing BUT breath is not the source of life.

* My breathing is by the Will of God and it is an intercessor for me that connects me to the real Source

Intercession: A way to know the qualities of God

* Everything in creation is a way for you to know God
* The Creator has permitted objects in creation to possess certain qualities but in reality, they all belong to the universe

Traditional understanding of intercession: Someone/something that can connect you with God because of their esteemed qualities

What we are learning: Everything is an intercessor with the permission of its owner

Example: You visit someone’s house and the host tells his servants to serve you the food.

* You will know that the servants/waiters are not the owner or the cooks of the food
* We get food from the waiter, but we know that they employed by the owner of the restaurant
  + Similarly, every tree and every animal is a ‘waiter’
    - They are bringing a message to us
    - They are not the source of what they are bringing to us
    - Their host employs them to bring the food to us
* We ask the waiter: Please give me a dish of curry
  + Similarly, we ask the cow to give us milk
* We know that it is not the waiter OR the cow that gives us food
  + Everything belongs to the owner; don’t be mistaken

We need to re-orientate ourselves and free ourselves from the indoctrination that we have grown up with about following things blindly

* Re-investigate our belief