Halaqa: Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Topic: How does the Quran present God?

How does God present Himself to human beings?

What constitutes a human being?

* A being with free will to choose

While the Quran does not describe God within specific categories, it presents God in a very ambiguous but certain way that is impossible for the human mind to reject God.

The One who created human beings with the capacity to reason, speaks according to the ability of human capacities

* It would be contradictory for the speaker in the Quran to speak to conscious beings in a way that does not make sense to them

In the Quran, God presents Himself in a way that I can understand; with the abilities He gave me.

* The faculties of questioning that have been given to me are meant to be used so do not settle by accepting religion in an imitative way

Example:

Let’s assume that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) wakes up from his grave and says: I appreciate you following the actions I left behind, but in reality, I made everything up so that you would all follow me. The Quran, too, is made up by me.

If we heard this, what would be our response?

* Would we still be able to say that despite Muhammad’s claims, our belief in God as described in the Quran is unchanged?

Is my belief in the Quran founded on the basis that I’ve been told it is a ‘sacred book’ OR on the basis that I found the claims in the book so valid and true, that it becomes a sacred book for me?

The former is just a way of following tradition. It is not belief.

* Belief with certainty requires a personal sense of conviction that is unshakeable regardless of what may come or is said
* If my belief is founded on a sense of conviction, I will hold on to what I believe even if Muhammad claimed his identity is a farce

I am made. By whom or by what?

* + We have to ask this question
	+ If someone denies the fact that we are made (consciously) by an agent who has free choice and has preferred a thing to be as it is, that is his choice. But consciously, just by observing the fact that I exist, I am compelled to accept that I have a Maker or Creator.

Quran describes God as “He” (*huwa)* (Gender free “He”)

* I cannot attribute the existence of this world to anything other than a single Conscious choice, He.
* I am a product of a Conscious Being.

We have to challenge the notion of He as a conscious agent and we have to look for this agent.

*Huwa (*He) : A conscious agent behind the existence of this whole world

* You have to first search for ‘*huwa’*
* If we don’t search for it, the Quran’s speech makes no sense apart from providing good counsel (*nasihah)*

By acknowledging that the Source of all existence including human activities and qualities is Him, my reading the Quran is a way to find out who the Source is.

Some people say: The order of the cosmos is attributed to an accidental event far in the past.

* We may confuse how events are happening BUT no one is able to come up with an explanation for the Source of **existence** within the universe itself
	+ They may say: Things are happening by chance BUT who is the Source of the phenomenon of, for example, change or adaption?

The Quran says: Are you looking for an answer to your question of the source of your existence?

* Our human qualities have been given to us and the book itself is reminding us to use these qualities (and asking us to ponder on their source of existence)

If we don’t question, how can we become a believer?

* Blind belief is a culture, NOT belief
* When I use my human qualities, I inadvertently ask questions
	+ So when the Quran presents itself as an answer to my questions, it perfectly fits with the way I have been created

In my search of answers, I read a variety of books.

* The Quran says that the Creator is He; the conscious being who creates everything
* We have to then confirm or reject what the Quran says

But if we don’t question FIRST – about who is the Creator – there is no way to arrive at an answer.

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**Sahih International:**He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, Knower of the unseen and the witnessed. He is the All- Merciful, and Ever- Merciful.



We tend to limit our understanding of God, as the Creator and leave it at that.

* Rather, we should strive to develop an understanding of God that is free of imaginations
* Our concept of God needs to be understood within our capacities

*Huwa Allahu:* He is God

* The Quran answers our need to know who He is

Step 1: We have to use our given faculties to question who/what the Source of everything is?

Quran responds: **He** is Allah (God)

* The who (He) you are searching for is God
* But this phrase itself, does not say much.

Analogy: Who spilled the milk?

Response: Joe spilled it.

* But who is Joe we have no idea.

Remember, if the Quran is meant to speak to human beings, it must speak to our human qualities.

In the next part, the Quran explains further: … there is no deity other than **He**

* …He, there is no deity other than He
* The Quran presents God as the One, other than whom, there is no deity
* Between the two He’s, lies the explanation about the whole world
	+ Deity: Something that is the cause of existence of another thing, regardless of its size and attributes
	+ If something can give existence to another thing, it is a deity
		- Attributing the existence of A to B
		- B is a deity
* But the Quran says: Nothing in this world that has the quality of a deity
	+ There is absolutely nothing in this world that can be the source of its own existence OR the source of existence of something else

**There is no deity other than He is NOT a claim**

* It is an invitation for us to find if anything at all can have the quality of a deity

Don’t begin by claiming that God is the Creator of the whole universe WITHOUT first establishing the existence of things in this world (atoms, plants, atmosphere, gravity, etc)

Step 2: We have to investigate and recognize that nothing in this world can be a deity

* No imagination necessary
* See and investigate your reality for yourself
* Only by negating the quality of a deity in everything around us, can we rationally confirm that the Source of existence of the entire universe is not in and of the nature of this universe. There must exist a Source of existence who and He (the Creator we are searching for) must have a **Self-Sustaining, independent existence**. Therefore, He must be Absolute (cannot be defined with any quality of the universe) and must be a Conscious Being, who is called God.

My belief in He as the deity can only be firm if I negate the power of deism in anything else.

* Such a methodology is what makes us step away from imagining God Himself because our responsibility remains in negating the power of deism in anything within the universe that we experience in our day-to-day interactions

While the Quran addresses who God is, it does not require the reader to leave this world (physically or in my imaginations) to understand who is God

* The Quran establishes who God is within our capacity

What we understand from the way that the Qur’an presents to us to conclude about God is that we should negate any of power of deism in the things within the universe, only then can we believe in the existence of an Absolute Creator.

Through investigating the existence of the qualities of the beings in the universe we can rationally conclude that these qualities point to the perfection of the qualities of their Creator.

* In order to know God, we first have to acknowledge existence
* Only when we accept existence, can we question the Creator of existence

If someone chooses to deny the very existence of a thing, then we can’t have anything to do with this person.

* We may complain about the existence of something that we may not like, but existence is real. The existence of a thing that we do not like is another matter to be discussed separately.

“There is no non-existence in existence”

* We cannot think of non-existence
* As soon as we begin to think of anything, it exists
* But nothing that exists in this world is a deity

Some spirituality traditions tell us:

* Don’t worship money, professions, property, etc
* While it is true that we should not worship these ‘things’, these traditions DO NOT tell us how to arrive at a conclusion that there is God and we have to worship Him alone.
* In the Qur’an, we are being told: “There is no deity other than He”
	+ Only He deserves to be worshiped because He is the Absolute Source of existence. Everything else comes from Him and is dependent on Him. He is the Owner of the entire universe.

If we can be successful in establishing existence and confirming that there is no deity in this world, we can acknowledge that we owe everything to the single deity who gives existence to this world and worship Him alone.

* If the Source of existence of this world was not all-knowing, He could not be the Source of existence
	+ Hence I can comfortably confirm that He is Al-Alim (the all-knowing)

The Quran introduces God’s qualities not based on who God is, but on our experience in this world.

- Through all our interactions, actions and experiences (all of which are manifestations of the qualities of the Creator), we are led to the Creator.

**He is God other whom there is no Knower**

**There is no wise one, other than Him (*la hakimu illah Hu)***

**There is no merciful one, other than Him (*la rahima illa Hu)***

**(think about all of God’s names and this same pattern follows because nothing is the source of the quality it manifests other than Him)**

Whoever the Source of my existence is, is the One who gives me the ability of speak

* Apart from Him, there is no source of existence of speech but He (*la mutakallima illah Hu)*.

Philosophers can never find an explanation for the “problem of evil” because their whole understanding of God and the universe is based on imagination.

* They take existence for granted
* When we take existence for granted, there is no base and foundation in anything else that is explained

If we do not question the Source of existence, how can we be true human beings?

* By skipping the source of existence, I will never begin to question “He,” God.
* The Quran then will make no sense BECAUSE the Quran is speaking to the one who is questioning the Source of existence.

Side note: Why is questioning at the core of our humanity?

We question so that we may know. Only when we know, can we act.

* All our senses have been given to us so that we may know and confirm the existence of objects in creation
	+ When I **see** an apple on the counter, I can be sure that it is there
	+ When I **hear** a baby crying, I can confirm that there is a child in the room
	+ When I **taste** a juicy orange, I can confirm that I am enjoying it
	+ When I **smell** the garbage truck going by, I confirm the existence of it

Example: We may say that we believe in God. But if you don’t know who or what God is, how can you believe in him?

* Without knowing God, your belief is in reality a mere imitation of culture
	+ Imitation is an option when it comes to matters of believing BUT it would contradict our innate human desire to KNOW
		- It would be like someone saying: I am going to be lazy
			* Yes, he can most definitely say it but it is contradictory to his vast human qualities and desires.

Questioning everything in existence (who is the Source of everything?) is the first step we have to take

* Otherwise, what we do is:

Claim to be believers WITHOUT questioning existence, without knowing where we got the idea of God in Whom we believe from, is baseless.

* + However, in reality, this is NOT possible
	+ **Without being a human being, you cannot be a believer**

One cannot be an atheist and then think about religion NOR can we be a theist and then think about religion.

* Only after thinking we reach a conclusion and this conclusion is what makes you an atheist or theist. Whether this conclusion is rational one or not, depends on how much we are free from biases.

There is no deity (nothing in creation can be the cause of creation) – *la ilaha*

But there must be a creator (because everything is brought into existence) - *illAllah*

If we don’t question who the Source is (He), we can’t be believers

* I observe the world around me and conclude that there must be a Source
* I look for the Source of existence and cannot find anything in this world (correct train of thought)
* Since there is nothing in this world, there has to be a Source beyond the capacity of this world (Believer)
* Since there is nothing in this world who is able to create, there is no Creator (contradictory to human rationality. For human rationality inquires into the source of existence of everything)
	+ A part of the thing cannot be the Creator of the thing itself

Analogy:

1. The building must have an architect because it EXISTS
2. I search for the architect
3. I study the building and see no architect in the building
4. I conclude that there is NO architect (I just contradicted my starting point)

 OR

I conclude that the architect must be not of the building but beyond the building since there has to be an architect.

* I cannot attribute anything in this world to anything in this universe (believer)

I am not trying to grasp the qualities of this ‘out-of-the-building’ architect

* I am just confirming and witnessing that the building cannot be the architect of itself, but there must be an architect because the building exists.

\*Going back to the beginning of today’s discussion, it was said that the Quran presents God in a rather ambiguous but in a certain manner, one that provides a definitive claim.

- Ambiguous: God is beyond this world, we cannot comprehend His Essence

- Definitive: He is the ONLY God. We can confirm His Existence

In order to be a believer, one must first be a human being first (i.e. using qualities of questioning, thought, inquiry)

- **Am I using my human qualities freely?**

Most atheists are not really deniers. They are rejecters of blind faith, as we see prevalent in the various religious traditions around us.

* Use human reasoning to try and discuss creation and existence.

Who is He?: He is, *la ilaha illa* Hu. This may seem to be at first “circular,” but an Absolute can only be defined through the process of negation. Infinite is not something we will ever be able to comprehend. What we are capable of, however, is to draw nearer to the Absolute by negating the power of creation in everything that exists.

1. Does the apple exist?
* I can convincingly say that the apple exists, because I see it. I confirm its existence through the sense of sight.
1. How does the apple exist?
* The seeds created it
	+ Can’t be. The seeds have no conscious will (*la ilaha)*
* Water created it
	+ Can’t be. Water has no conscious will (*la ilaha)*
* Sunlight created it
	+ Can’t be. The sun has no conscious will (*la ilaha)*
* Nothing in creation could have created the apple
* But the apple exists
* There has to be a Creator. The same Creator who created the seed, the water and sunlight because of the perfection and harmony I observe (*illAllah)*