Wednesday, February 25, 2015
Topic: “Satisfying our hearts with “how”? (How the Quran teaches us to reason *part 8*)

 ***“Do they not look at the camels, HOW they are created? And at the heaven, HOW it is raised?
And at the mountains, HOW they are rooted and fixed firm? And at the earth, HOW it is spread out?” Ghasiyah (88):17-20***

*When you read the Quran, do you relate the content of the verses to yourself?* If you look at the above verses, it is easy to contextualize the Quran. For example: “Camels” is the mode of transportation at the time of the Prophet (pbuh); our mode of transportation is totally different now. The problem arises when we try to understand the Quran by reducing it to a certain era only.

At the time of the Prophet, certain “words” were used in the text for a particular purpose. And so, we need to update the interpretations of those “words” so that it pertains to our conditions “now”. There is a limit to that: we cannot twist the grammatical structure of the text in the name of “modernization” to adapt it to our own expectations i.e. political/socio-economic aspects of our life. We may only update the content of the interpretation of the text without interfering with the message of the original text.

***What is the Quran expecting from us when reading these verses?***

Quran tells us that things are created. As a result, we either agree or disagree with the message.

* For example: *“*Camel” is an animal found in Arabia and so it is applicable to the contemporaries at the time of the Prophet (pbuh). Because we do not live in 7th century Arabia, we can study any object that attracts our attention i.e. mountains, stars, and horses… to observe *how* the things are coming into existence?
* Theses verses encourage us to get evidences from the universe and legitimately come to our own conclusions instead of imitating.

Quran emphasizes that it is a continuous revelation to the Prophets who are sent to their people. Although we are receiving the Quran through the mouth of the Prophet (pbuh) via “Angel Gabriel”, the words are ultimately from the Creator. **“Angel Gabriel” is the postman**, the Prophet receives revelation and transfers it to the people and demonstrates the message in his own life. We have to look at the Prophet as the first person who puts the message in human life (practical). The Prophet tried to teach the people around him as much as they could understand. He never forced anyone or made anything difficult for the people and was always kind in his speech even when he was angry. Example: The Prophet never yelled at anyone, if in rage, he would mostly say: “wasn’t the guidance of God enough for you, why are you talking about tribal conflicts, superiority/inferiority…?”

* We must follow the same attitude i.e. never make things difficult for anyone (including ourselves) and manage our anger by keeping it in check with our reality.
* Hadith: Educate your slaves, teach them how to behave and marry them.
* “Narrated Abu Burda's father: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said "Three persons will have a double reward:

1. A Person from the people of the scriptures who believed in his prophet (Jesus or Moses) and then believed in the Prophet (ﷺ) Muhammad (i .e. has embraced Islam).

2. A slave who discharges his duties to Allah and his master.

**3.** **A master of a woman-slave who teaches her good manners and educates her in the best possible way and sets her free from slavery and then marries her**." ***(Bukhari, Vol. I, Book: 3, Hadith: 97/A)***

* “Slaves” in this era could be translated as any concept that we may have about an acquaintance in terms of being better than them. For example: In certain cultures, it is taboo to marry someone outside their cultural background or cast system. As a result of educating your slave i.e. teaching your worldview to them, the Prophet made sure that the concept of “slavery” gets dissolved.
* Lesson: Through his teaching, the Prophet is equalizing the Oneness of God, which culminates in our social life as everyone and everything is equal in front of God. He is gradually teaching us our reality without hurting anyone.
* The Prophet is the instructor/teacher of the content of the Quran.

Quran is a universal message which cannot be historicized. The danger lies when we feel that it is an amazing book revealed to a certain civilization only. As readers of this day and age, we have to experience the Quranic message applicable to our conditions and get mesmerized at it within our capacity. If we lived in the 11th century (CE), we would study the mountains according to the conditions of that time. Example: Ibn Sina’s book, “the Canon of medicine” was taught all over the world for almost seven centuries. Ibn Sina was investigating how the human body works i.e. studying creation with “how” questions. He certainly was a great physician/mathematician/logician/philosopher of his time but now, his work is outdated. Similarly, we need to apply the same approach while investigating the Quranic teachings.

* The main aim of the Quran is to teach us the fundamentals of belief and how to put this belief into practice. Quran almost never gives description on what to do practically. The Speaker asks the reader to study the creation and observe how the things are coming into existence within their own space-time.
* In order to get answers to “how” questions, we need to update our studies with new data, understand the Quran with the context of this available data, and not change the aim of the Quran. When you are analyzing, you can never take the examples or the meaning of the verses that are applicable to that specific society. This is very essential as far as the Quranic message is concerned.
* Example: When we look at an animal (per the verse), we have to look at it for the purpose of our existence and see how it is created. As a result, we conclude that we are created, we have a Creator, there must be an Absolute Conscious Will giving existence to us and connecting us with this creation.
* When we understand that the universe has One Absolute Creator, we are all created beings and are His products, we reach the purpose of our existence.
	+ - * Be satisfied that you are made by an Absolute Conscious Being; the things are coming into existence through this One Source of existence.

***How do we go on about updating the content?***

Quran gave the example of an animal which was very practical to the life of the society then. And so, we have to give example of an animal which is similar to the society now. **Just taking one animal as evidence in one’s life may lead to belief confirmation.** Since the camel was important around the 7th century Arabia, “dog” is now important as it is a pet found in most households. Similarly, dates were the fruits accessible at that time, now “apples/oranges” are the fruits to reflect on for someone living in New York. Everything in the Quran ultimately leads us to conclude that creation glorifies a Creator; every creature in the universe has a purpose and they all take us to acknowledge the Absolute.

Scholars of early centuries did not question the legitimacy of the Quran because the text was accepted by the general public of their time. In this day and age, we have been exposed to secular education and so we need to question everything. We need to change the methodology in approaching the Quran. ***How?* By updating the content i.e. we need to use evidence that applies to our lives “right now”.**

Question: *How do we apply the verse* ***naffassat-e-fil ukad*** *(tying knots/black magic/whisperings) to our lives now?*

***Ukad*** means knot, it is like whisperings being blown on to us, on to our knots (decisions/contracts with the truth) in order to undo/ revoke them. Although they may seem to be not directly connected to us but we are the recipients of receiving these whisperings when we are open/vulnerable. We need to be on guard for who is whispering, bringing the message and inspiring us so that we may get affected.

Around that time, the magicians use to do certain tricks, *what kind of magicians are we encountering now in our lives?* Anything which indoctrinates people, the magicians of this time are the media, indoctrinating us so we may follow a certain world view that benefit a certain number of people. These are the ***naffasat*** (whisperings) being blown on us. Example: The staff of Moses swallows all magicians’ ideologies. *What is representing Moses staff now?* Use your “reasoning” to swallow all the “magicians” or made up stories, do not blindly be fascinated by their flowery presentations.

There is a difference between an object and the qualities of the object but ultimately, everything is created including its qualities. Example: Earth is an object which rotates; the rotation is another event. We think of “magic” as some event acting on its own.

In conclusion, the Quran emphasizes us to look at creation several times, not as a command but as an extremely important task. Even a drop of water needs to be reflected on, see how it is coming into existence and so you will know more about the ocean and its qualities. *Who do these qualities belong to and what does the drop of water ultimately points to?* Similarly, look at the mountains as they exist now and study them, see how they come into existence. In every instance, we can see the signs of the qualities of its Creator.