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| **Date** | Saturday, February 6 2016 |
| **Topic** | The First Flash—Prophet Jonah’s supplication |
| **Part** | 2 |

The available sources on Occasions of Revelation (OOR) or Asbab-ul-nuzool are weak in their mission to conveying the truth. During Prophet’s time (pbuh), the Companions did not make an issue with OOR i.e. on which occasion a verse is revealed. The Companions just applied the content within their own selves/lives. Later generations wanted to get a hold of conditions, keep them under control, not for personal reasons but to put a limit to the issues people struggled with. What were the issues?

* Example: Jonah realizes that he is among the wrongdoers.

Common Reactions:

* What did Jonah do wrong?
* So Jonah was a prophet. Is it possible for Prophets to commit sin? Etc.

As a result, the Quran became a source of information to retrieve answers to such trivial matters. These matters became the problems people struggled with and therefore, most scholarships were based on solving the OOR issues. During 4th or 5th century, **historians** started narrating OOR events. By definition, a historian is a collector of information and tailors it according to his understanding of the verse within the condition of the Prophet (pbuh) without really experiencing it himself. **We cannot tailor information according to the OOR without experiencing it.** Congruently, hadiths experts (Muhaddisoon) took a more meticulous approach to help solve problems. They were more detailed with their data to certify the narration (authenticity). However, that still requires going back centuries ago. These caused a lot of problems:

1. Historians narrate information they hear or they found recorded in any source without questioning the authenticity of the sources.
2. For authenticity matters, hadith experts struggled a lot to justify their own narrations.

Scholarships cannot be based on uncertified narrations. Hence, the Quran became a source of retrieving “information” which leads to more problems. In OOR, an event is mentioned as an answer to questions not exactly the ultimate purpose of the Quran.

* Quran is a universal message for myself which I need to experience within my given conditions.

For proper analysis of OOR, one has to know the context of the conditions such as who asked the question, who else was present… Neither the historians nor the hadiths experts were first hand witnesses to the OOR. Tabaari, a famous historian claims that he collects information which the reader may either find precious or as a fabricated story. Since people love to hear stories, some scriptures have been based on historicizing every event mentioned.

* We love listening to stories and the juicy details within.
* Instead, we ought to reflect on the stories as reminders for ourselves.

**We need to stop focusing on the historical facts because it does not add any value/benefit to fulfilling my life's purpose (i.e. knowing my Creator and living for the Eternal life). Furthermore, historical facts can never be fully proven since the event has passed.**

Example: A person presented a case to the Prophet (pbuh). The Prophet addressed the situation through reciting a verse (the verse may or may not have been revealed on the spot or may have been revealed prior to it). Let’s say the event took place in front of your eyes.

* Who is speaking in the event?
* The Creator of the universe.
* Who is It speaking to?
* The Conscious human being.

**My perception of the event is only applicable to my conditions. In other words, the verse speaks not only to the inquirer but to everyone who reads the Eternal Speech of the Creator any time in any place. We should ask:**

1. ***Does it make sense to me right now?***
2. ***How can it benefit me in the situation I find myself in?***
3. ***How can the text/story help me steer clear of mistakes?***
4. ***How can events be understood with respect to my own condition?***

We have to bear in mind that whether the event happened or not is not the point. Quranic stories are not being narrated for the sake of events. There is (has to be) a purposeful wisdom behind the stories that is being communicated. Through the narrating of the event, the Speaker is teaching me something related to my conditions right now. Again, I need to benefit from it for myself instead of getting lost in the event. **This is directly related to the definition of the Quran i.e. a guide for me. How do I define myself with the message it brings.**

The Creator's speech is meant to be a universal guide. The person who narrates a specific OOR, in fact, (if it is really true,) speaks through a specific event/situation. We need to connect with the message as relevant to me, because by definition the Qur’an presents itself as a universal message.

***Why stories?***

* I must hear the revelation from the mouth of the representative (Prophet) of the Speaker of the universe and apply it to myself.
* My Creator is telling me a story through Jonah (pbuh) in order to guide me now.
* OOR is an “excuse” for the Creator to introduce Itself to me and make things relevant to my existence.

Some scholars concentrated on just the history while a few others concentrated on the relevance of the message. Regardless, I must try to understand the Quran within its own entirety with the help of people who tried to understand the Quran professionally. We all need teachers who can contribute to our understandings. **What the teacher conveys should not go against the Eternal speech of God.**

Among some scholars, famous name for the Quran was ***Kalaam ul Qadeem***= **Eternal Speech**. They wanted to teach the general public that what you are reading is ***Eternal speech.*** Do not confine it to a certain time space.

* Quran is the personal address to me from my Maker.
* I need to confirm everything within i.e. see the event within my own conditions.

When people asked questions concerning matters related to personal lives, scholars derived legislative laws to put an order in the Muslim community. While trying to solve problems in terms of helping people organize their lives, scholars started to look at the teachings of the Quran from jurisprudence perspective. General public started thinking that any intellectual activity concerning understanding of the Quran means learning jurisprudence. Thus, institutions focused on jurisprudence matters emerged. That is how belief foundations (Quran’s main teachings) lagged behind and scholarships around it were never fully established. As a result, religion got reduced to a means of deriving jurisprudence rulings and that is how Islam has been perceived.

***So, when is a historical perspective needed?***

* The legal rulings of the Quran can never be assumed to be exhaustive. We constantly need the scholars to define and re(define) the terms.
* No one can be 100% sure that his way of legislating a law is absolutely true because it all depends on specific conditions of the society, the matter at hand, and the capacity of the one who is legislating.
* The laws are most certainly applicable and in these instances it is the job of the scholars to uncover historical conditions so that they may define boundaries of the definition.
* Gambling is prohibited, but what is gambling?
* Alcohol is prohibited, but what are intoxicants?
* We need scholars to delve into history so that these terms may be practically understood.

Our claim of being Muslim is only arbitrary. You are as much of a Muslim as much as you submit yourself to the truth and the Prophetic guidance.

* **Muslim-ness is a manifestation of our state of being; it is not a title or an association**.

Now, I am left with how to be convinced about the worldview that the Quran presents: *How the stories in the Quran must be read, which is what the text (below) is presenting.*

**The First Flash:** **“He was cast into the sea and swallowed by a large fish. The sea was stormy, the night turbulent and dark and hope exhausted. But it was while he was in such a situation that his supplication (below) acted for him as a swift means of salvation:**

***There is no God other than You, Glory be unto You! Indeed, I was among the wrongdoers (21:87)***

**The secret of his supplication’s power was this: In that situation all causes were suspended, for Jonah needed to save him one whose command should constrain the whale and the sea, and the night and the sky. The night, the sea, and the whale were united against him. Only one whose command might subdue all three of these could bring him forth on the strand of salvation.**

* I am not concerned by the type of sea or fish.
* I am not in the belly of the fish (literally), but the verse still applies to me i.e. the Speaker is speaking to me right now.

The speaker (Creator) is reminding me that:

1. **Causes are suspended.**
* Any material/physical reliance that I may have (job, family, social structures, etc.) are not the true means of salvation.
1. **Your sea is stormy**.
* your belief is not at peace
1. **Your night is turbulent and dark**.
* your humanity is in darkness
1. **Your hope is exhausted**.
* your human qualities are exhausted

Listen and reflect to the words of the Creator speaking to your humanity, not your physical situation.

* The speaker is telling me about my reality.

You may or may not feel being in a desperate situation. However, you must realize that the One who speaks to you knows your conditions, speaks to you in order to guide you and give you directions.

* The One who speaks to me, knows me and my situation.
* He speaks to me to guide me so that I may be safe/saved and not worry about my future.
* He is referring to my reality so I should not merely listen to His words as a story but I need to understand the words as a guide.

Alas, we mostly miss this reality because we have reduced our existence to that of a living creature only.

* We concern ourselves valuing material objects and thus alienating our awareness towards our human qualities. Example: I progress in my profession without practically relating its practice to my humanity.
* In reality, everything we do is in relation to our humanity. We just need to be aware of it and focus on the **objectives of our lives: *what is the purpose of my existence?***
* My objective is to understand my reality and use the Quran to aid me.
* Quran guides the purpose of my life.

**CURRENT CONDITION:** I have a lot of human questions to which I do not have answers to. That is, **my human side is suffering from meaninglessness**. The cure to our humanity's darkness is that we must understand and internalize Prophet Jonah’s supplication.

* The Speaker tells me that I ought to understand this reality i.e. “there is no God other than It”
* **I need to teach myself this reality only then I can get out of meaninglessness.**

We are being called to communicate with the speaker through our human qualities, not our physical and animalistic qualities.

**Ask these questions and tackle them. Do not suppress the need to answer them:**

1. **Where did I come from?**
2. **Who made me aware of my human side?**
3. **Who put me in my desperate need.**

Again, we need to seriously reflect on these questions that plague us. Do not seek to silence them by:

1. **Denial and escapism**: One life live it!
2. **Artificial engagement/Religious escapism:** Perform rituals as a 'back-up' by establishing a barter with the Creator.

In doing 1 and 2, we artificially release ourselves from the need to work on our humanity. If we are not interested to work on our humanity, the Quran cannot speak to us.

* Commonly heard rhetoric: 'God is there. He will take care of it' but then why are we given all these feelings and qualities?
* **Emotions are human qualities given to us. We have to question these qualities and its purpose.**
* Our love for our parents cannot save them from death.
* Our love for our children cannot save them.

Atheists vs. Secular Believers

- The former are not doing anything with regards to their human qualities.

- The latter are falsely numbing their human qualities.

***How do I seek guidance from the Speaker?***

* First I need to realize that I am in darkness. I cannot afford to ignore my reality and claim that I am a believer.
* I am given human qualities for a purpose. I cannot go on living in this universe without acknowledging my reality.
* The nature of this universe is transient which goes against my nature of wanting Eternity.

***Who can help me get out of meaninglessness?***

* The One who owns me.
* There must be Something that must give me Eternity which is not found in this universe, which is eternal itself.
* Social identity is external to me (belonging to a community) and cannot save me.

**Causes=**any material means and physical reliance that I may have such as family, social structures, etc. which I think can save me but cannot save me. **Just like Abraham, I need to knock down the fatherly figure (causes) in my understandings.**

* No one can help me besides the One that gives existence to the whole order I observe in the universe.

We are in need of the One who controls our existence. If there is someone who can save you from death permanently in this world, then rely on that person. But there is no one. Eventually, we will all die despite the fact that my humanity desires eternity (this is the darkness that is within us all). Who then can truly guarantee my eternal satisfaction?

* This ignites the search within us for a solution and cure to 'darkness'.
* That is the only way I can be convinced that this Creator is taking care of my Eternal needs right now.

Similarly I am also in need of the One who will truly keep my loved ones from suffering. The only One who can save everything is the One who controls the whole world. Although we do not want our loved ones to leave us, it WILL happen, I cannot help anyone. The sense of love towards another creature needs to be questioned in terms of its existence. That is why all causes are suspended as mentioned by the author, which means that **I need to attach my existence to the One that gives existence. There is no other way to be saved from meaninglessness!** Our human qualities are in need of a savior. **Seek and establish a relationship of submission with the only true Savior.** These strong and powerful emotions are given to us so that we may know the intensity of our need for the Creator and his salvation.

In summary, I have **an aim (eternal happiness)** and I am going to **use my human qualities (as guided by the Quran) to reach my aim**.

Analogy: David is looking for the safest car seat and follows the national rulings and recommendations and hence has decided on XYZ car seat. Research has been done and they have advised which is best to ensure safety. David says: “I want safety. I turn to the experts who have researched safety and take what they advise at face value. I 'trust' them and have 'faith'. But can the XYZ car seat guarantee the safety and remove my fear of danger?

* Not really.
* Similarly, **I am looking to secure my eternal life** and want to adopt the best way so I turn to the experts. They have done the research and have advised on how to make prayers and actions more meaningful. However, receiving information does not guarantee to secure your eternal life unless you yourself personally conclude that those actions are the answers to your own human feelings. You need to make sure that these are your own conclusions as well.
* You can follow the expert’s advice about the car seat but you cannot follow any external advice as far as your own concerns: ***Who or what can guarantee the security of my eternal life?***
* Again, you can perform the actions as researched and prescribed. **But if you do not engage your human qualities while you are performing them, the actions have no true meaning.**

Unlike rules about our 'physical' life, rules about religion need to address our human qualities in addition to our intelligence. *How?* **By using and training our humanity through our actions so that our lives may be purposeful and meaningful.** Otherwise, without engaging human qualities to acknowledge the Source of our qualities, actions and empty rituals lead to a dead end.

Without introspection into our actions, we may become more rigid in our claims. As a result, one may become a more arrogant scholar. In this respect, "trusting the scholars" does not save us. What saves us is our own relationship with our Owner and using the senses He has provided us with in order to know Him. Finally, if you truly benefit from a teaching, share the experiences with others.