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| **Date** | Wednesday, September 23, 2015 |
| **Topic** | What does slaughtering an animal in Eid-ul-Adha signify? |
| **Part** |  |

It is a well-known saying that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. Every day the universe demonstrates endless manifestations in creation. What makes a day precious for an observer really depends on his/her interaction with the universe. Our feelings and emotions make up our experience. **My duty is to seek meaning from these experiences.** On the ninth of *dhul hijjah*, I am expected to commemorate the story of Abraham as narrated in the Quran. It is a reminder that I need to refresh my mind through this remembrance. In other words, my praying and supplication should be done to deeply reflect on the meaning of my existence.

In general, we are expected to engage our feelings with that of Prophet Abraham, a great example who teaches us how to use our human qualities. When it comes to going on hajj (pilgrimage), we need to understand the meaning behind the different rituals. We also have to understand what each physical monument signifies. Example: What makes the *ka’ba* beautiful is the memory that the *ka’ba* carries in its being, which represents the Oneness/Absoluteness of God. Abraham’s experience with his son took place in where *ka’ba* is now, or, was when it was built first, the center of understanding of tawhid (Absoluteness of the Creator, God). *Ka’ba* gets its significance from Abraham’s experience with his son. The black stone is precious in regards to the meaning it carries. It is the altar that Abraham used to perform his duty of sacrificing the son. The black stone reminds me this very dramatic appreciation of Abraham’s sacrifice of his most precious property in this world: His son. A symbol signifying the foundation of acknowledging God by declaring that nothing else has any value in and of itself, which can be summarized as “*la ilaha*.” We commemorate this practice by visiting the place of sacrifice: Ka’ba and the black stone among its building materials.

If you really prepare yourself to get to the purpose of your existence, you will reach the destination of becoming aware that nothing has any real value in and of itself i.e. **believe and submit only to the Real Owner of everything, God**. To become a believer in God, you have to go through these preparations as presented to us by prophet Abraham. That is what makes these days precious for us. **In performing the pilgrimage, one’s aim is to achieve and retain the “tawhid” state of mind.**

 A lot of statements in the Quran may seem paradoxical. Example: Only God guides whomever He wants and misguides whomever He wants.

* These types of Quranic messages are teaching us that whatever is created in the world is created by “One” God. It may appear that actions are ours BUT **the act of creation only belongs to God.** We just freely choose, whatever is created as a result of our choice is created by God, but the burden of choice remains with us.
* Example: Fire can be used to cook something or harm something. Whether we use fire for a good purpose or a bad purpose, the created result comes from the act of God.

In the universe, human beings only discover what is already in the universe, these discoveries are called “new inventions,” they do not create them. However, people may employ these inventions for harmful activities. When they do so, they misuse their freewill and the result gets created by God, i.e. God’s will. **Human beings cannot create anything; our every action comes into existence as per God’s will: We can only do an act with the permission granted to our free will by God. We have to take care of our free will. We all know that within the given conditions of this universe whatever we ask the Creator gives it existence. That is the given condition of the order of the creation of the universe.**

* Permission of God (*bi’znillah*) = giving qualities to the things and bringing them into existence. (the power to burn is given to the fire by its Creator)
* Everything is created as a result of the will of the Creator. (Act of burning is created by its Creator).
* Freewill: I choose to use fire whichever way I want; the result is either good or bad for me.

God does not “will” to harm anyone. It is our own choice that may harm us. The world itself cannot make anyone a believer or a disbeliever. The universe manifests the qualities of its Creator. It is up to us to benefit from the signs manifested in the universe and point it either to the Absoluteness of the Creator or refer it as a random happening.

The following may sound like a riddle but we have to solve it. **Anything which is outside of us cannot have any effect on us.** For example: I may perceive the class to be boring or I may say that my job is stressful. I am free to interpret the events whichever way I want. I am not the one creating anything in the universe.

* In reality, nothing is boring, stressful or to be hated.
* **It is my interpretation of a particular event which has an effect on me.**
* **As a result, I find myself harming or benefiting my own being. The event itself is within the order of creation.**
* **I need to focus on the relationship between my interpretation of the event and the created event.**
* **Everything that is created outside affects me according to my interpretation of it.**

I need to shift my focus to get a right attitude towards creation.

* **REMEMBER:** Everything created is created by God. In its creation, it CANNOT be bad at all.
* **DANGER:** Criticizing creation is the result of my misinterpretation of it. If we have to criticize anything that we do not like we need to criticize our interpretation of it as regarding that thing as a bad thing. This ultimately points to criticizing the Creator for giving us the freedom, which is obviously wrong. No-one wants to lose her/his free will.

My experience in this universe depends on my attitude.

* **Example:** I experience spoiled food.
* **REMEMBER:** The spoiled food is not bad. The wisdom in its creation is that I should not eat it. There is more wisdom to it, instead of stocking up, I should finish whatever I have and then buy more as needed. I should be thankful from learning through this wisdom.
* **DANGER:** Being angry with the creation of spoiled food.

***Khairihi wa sharrihi minallah*** (in the existence of the bad lies the existence of good) i.e. spoiled food is “***shar*** *(bad)*” for me, but it’s a sign from the Creator telling me not to eat it. Everything created is “***khair*** (good)”.

Again, the external can never have an effect on me because it itself needs to be created by God. The Quran teaches us that everything we experience is the result of our own choice. If something good happens it’s from God, that is how God creates and teaches. If something bad happens to you (which is according to your perception), you have not used your freewill in the right way. **You have distorted your responsibilities**. Through this “bad feelings” we are taught that what we have chosen was bad.

If there is a continuous pattern that you observe in your life, there is a lesson in it. It is an indication that you need to pay attention to something. Let’s say you keep getting rejection letters from employers. It teaches you to prepare yourself better or it teaches you to search for an alternative path which may suit you better. Use your freewill in the right way to get the wisdom from repeated events. We are totally entitled to interpret events in ways that help us stay positive. Example: Since we have no knowledge of the future, we should not speculate about the future, we just try to learn from the created result what direction I should take for my next step in practicing my free will. Although, I may not know what would have happened, I should understand that there is wisdom behind every act.

**“God is the Lord of the universe" must be the result of my experience.**

When I use God as a proper name, I need to have a real reason to use it as such.

Example: If I say: “the engineer”. Another person would ask: “which or what kind of engineer?” I need to emphasize: “the engineer of this “laptop”.

* Believing in the Creator is my conclusion of the act of creation that I experience in the universe.
* This prompts me to give an attribute to God, i.e. the Creator of the universe, the One who prepares the universe, the One who gives me existence… **These attributes consolidate our understanding of God.**
* Experiencing the attributes makes the belief in God concrete. Otherwise, the idea remains imaginary, in a vacuum. Imagination is assumption without evidence.

In prayers, I acknowledge God as the Source I experienced earlier. While I am praying, I am putting the acknowledgment into practice as a way of consolidating my conclusion i.e. We worship You alone, God the creator of every single thing in the universe. To do so, I must have experienced the universe. That is why belief comes as a result of our observation. The universe will have meaning according to my experience and conclusion of it.

Most people dislike the idea of reporting to a higher authority in order to avoid the accountability. Example: when a scientist discovers something, he is just discovering the order in the universe. Amazed, he realizes that the universe has a perfect order but he may refuse to accept that the universe has an owner as it would logically require him **to accept that he has an Owner.** This notion of an Owner would require him to give account of all his accomplishments to that Owner. This mostly happens when people want to declare their own independence and so they deny their existence abruptly. These are human weaknesses. **We have to be brave enough and confess our weaknesses but we should never deny the truth.**

* My responsibility is so simple: I just have to acknowledge that I have a Creator.

In summary, whatever is created is a sign from the Creator and we need to take it as a lesson. Most of the time we fail in perceiving the signs because we fail to see what constitutes us as a human being. We are miraculous creatures given endless qualities. If we do not understand something out there, it means that we are not using ourselves effectively and we are being “lazy”.

Let us understand the following verses from ***Saffat (37:100-111)*** according to the teachings of the Quran (Abraham slaughtering his son):
 ***“My Lord, grant me a righteous son.”***

* Abraham desired to have a son so that his lineage of transmitting the message would carry on.
* *WHAT IS MY SON?*
* We have to define it for ourselves. Perhaps a good job, a righteous spouse…
* I am asking God to give me something.
* Everyone wants a son(s) i.e. an object(s) they desire.

***“So We gave him good news that he would have a patient son.”***

* I am asking from my Lord to fulfill my expectations and I start seeing signs that my expectations will be fulfilled.
* When I get it, I am all excited. That is good news.
* You receive a call from the employer asking to interview you. That is your good news
* External object is “patient” i.e. it has no conscious free will. I am the one with freewill. I can treat it as I choose.

***“Abraham said: My son I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?”***

* THIS IS NOT THE TEST!
* It is an opportunity to understand my stand in the universe before the Lord of the universe.
* **Here is MY OPPORTUNITY:**
1. *When I do get the “son”, do I see it as a gift from my Lord?*
2. *Does the “son” become my object of worship?*
3. *Was my expectations from the job really what I intend on desiring?*
4. *Can anyone guarantee that this job will satisfy my expectations?*
5. *Do I desire to be in touch with the One who gave me the object (the “son”)?*

The One who gave me the object is my Lord. **My opportunity is whether or not I am consistent in taking this “object” as a means of acknowledging my Lord’s Dominion over me**.

NOTE: Most of the times we ask God to give us an object. When we get it we forget about God as we start relating ourselves to the object. The object then becomes our Lord. My test really lies in attaching importance to either one of the following options:

1. Attach importance to the object itself.
2. Attach importance to the One who gives the object to me.

Here is where we may **FAIL** in benefiting from any opportunity:

* Making the object the Source of our satisfaction.
* Combining both options together, which is not possible as it would result in a logical fallacy.

Abraham went through this process and it is inevitable for me to go through this process as well. Only option 2 works for me, which can also be used as a connector to option 1 i.e. it serves me as a reminder of the Lord’s Mercy and Grace over my existence.

Let us check ourselves with some exercises:

*Which is my object of worship, the son or the One who gave it to me?*

1. *Do you love youth?*
* It is given to you and it will be taken away from you.
* CHECK**:** *Do I worship youth or do I worship the one who created the youth for me?*

1. *Do you love health?*
* When you are sick, you ask for health. When health is restored, you are satisfied.
* **This is an opportunity to train ourselves:** *Do I worship the health itself or the one who provides the health for me?*
1. *Do you love life?*
* Life is temporary; it can never fulfill your expectations.
* Your **opportunity to educate yourself**: *Am I directing myself to life itself or to the One who has given me life?*

The One who provides you with life is the Creator of the universe. Life is given to you to realize that the One who gives life is the Absolute One. It is a call for us to realize that only the One who fulfills our expectations is the One to be loved.

***“And when the boy was old enough to work with his father,”***

* Abraham is happy with his son helping him out.
* Now you got the job and money is rolling into your account. You feel content as it is helping you with your expenses (rent, loans, tuition…)

***“Abraham said: O my son I have seen myself sacrificing you in my dreams.”***

* Abraham is realizing that his son is transient; his son will die one day. They are both going to die. He feels a dilemma.
* *Is it possible for the object and myself to be separated?*
* After a couple of years on the job, you start getting bored. The reality is that you start visioning the transient nature of objects, i.e., in a couple of years the objects may no longer be available. You yourself will retire.
* That is the reality check: gray hair, wrinkles, arthritis, health problems… are signs that everything is transient. We cannot trust the objects as satisfying our being.
* These are signs that tell me the reality of things. We have to sacrifice the transient things we worship as Abraham did with his son.
* The signs (in Abraham’s case dream) help me realize that everything is temporary.
* Even if you love them, you cannot trust them.

***“The son said: O My father, do as you are commanded; God willing, you will find me steadfast.”***

* Object I am holding is patient i.e. it totally obeys and accepts the command of its Creator. The son is ready to submit.
* **The problem is with me: *Am I willing to sacrifice my son(s)?*** That means, am I realizing that my “son” cannot be the one who is taken as the source of satisfaction? My “son” has no independent effect apart from my attachment of importance to it.
* ***Am I patient/happy/ready to leave my false Gods?***
* Object totally submits to the Command of its Creator. Objects exist as they are willed to be.
* The problem is with my freewill: *what I am choosing?* ***What are my objectives in this world?***
* *Am I choosing the object over the Creator of the object?*

***“And when they had both submitted to God and he had laid down his son on the side of his face.”***

* Detaching myself from the objects and attaching myself to the Creator of the objects is **“submission”**.
* I understand that it is not the job that I need to worship but the Creator of the job that is satisfying my being.
* **When I am ready to submit myself, everything works perfectly.**
* It does not mean that I should resign from my job.
* I just need to submit to the Creator by realizing that whatever comes is from my Owner.
* Don’t be sorry for anything, it is decided by the Creator.
* Whatever my Creator grants me I should be happy with it.
* I can only worship the Creator, not the object.
* If I am not going to trust the One who creates me, who else can I trust?

It’s hard for people to slaughter their “son”. *Is it possible for any parent to literally slaughter their own children?* Even atheists would be unwilling to do so. Only when I detach myself from the created things and attach myself to the Creator, can I sacrifice the objects and put them in the altar, the black stone, which represents *tawhid realization in one’s “****mind, hearth***.” The black stone is where Abraham practiced ***lailaha***: **Nothing in this world can be worthy of worship i.e. I have to slaughter the objects (detach them from my heart.)** That is why we go around the *Ka’ba* (the heart of the earth) to commemorate that this event took place there.

***“We called to him, O Abraham you have fulfilled the dream.”***

* Now the communication starts between Abraham and His Lord because the relationship has been established. He detached his heart from the son and attached it to the bestowal of the son.
* When I realize that my existence belongs to Him, I do not bother about anything else.
* ***The Creator is my “wali*,” intimate friend.** This relationship has been acknowledged.
* When I am ready to receive the command of the Creator, I will find Him next to me.

***“This is how We reward those who do good.”***

* You have followed the Creator’s way of creation and have submitted yourself (objects: youth, job…) to the Creator of those objects.
* That is the right decision.
* As soon as you realize it, you fulfill the dream of being acquainted with Him. That is the reward.
* I trust my expectations and hope with Him.
* You realize: Life is transient but the Creator is not.
* **I understand that I belong to the Eternal One.**
* **Reward is within my realization**.

NOTE: As soon as you take the right attitude, you start realizing that the reward is there within your realization. **Your Paradise is within your belief i.e. when you submit your being to your Creator.** When you find yourself as a drop in the ocean that is Paradise. Belief includes in it the seed of Paradise. After resurrection, the seed grows into a real tree, the tree of *Tuba*, which represents Paradise, where we enjoy our life. A garden will grow out of the seed. This is not an assumption but acknowledgment of the truth and submitting to it.

***It was a call (opportunity, training) to prove true character;***

* Educate yourself, whether you are ready to submit to the truth.
* If you admire the job or are proud of it, it means you failed to utilize the opportunity for yourself.
* The problem is that I am not submitting.
* God gives the opportunity to find the truth.
* God is Absolute (*Ahad*). He is not sitting somewhere enjoying by “testing” us. This contradicts His essence.
* I “test” myself: do I have the right attitude before the Creator?

Example: When I am hungry, I eat food and get full. The next day I get hungry again and eat food again. The following day, I get hungry and it’s a pattern. These are signs that help me realize that it is not the food that is satisfying me but the Creator of the food introducing Himself to me as the Provider. I have to be grateful to the Creator of the food not the food itself. **I can only trust the One who sustains the universe, the Absolute Nourisher.**

When you find God, *is the food taken away immediately from you?*

* No, its effect on your heart as to be the source of satisfaction starts dissipating slowly.
* Similarly, youth will go but my Creator still gives me existence.
* Both youth and old age is created by the same Creator.
* With this, I understand that the objects/events are not satisfying me. The Creator is giving me the opportunity to find the truth.

***“We ransom his son with a great sacrifice”***

* A lamb was given to Abraham, he did not lose anything.
* Just like Abraham, I need to realize that I am not going to worship the “son” nor take it as the object of hope.

***“And we left him be praised by succeeding generations”***

* My Source of hope is my Lord.
* I need to take lesson from Abraham so that I can also be in peace.

***“Peace be upon Abraham,”***

* Abraham will be in peace.
* He is with His eternal Creator.
* He educated Himself to be a submitter to God i.e. believer.
* Abraham and the son will be treated according to their capacity. I am treated according to my capacity.

***“That is how We reward those who do good.
Indeed, he was one of Our believing servants.”***

* Eternal life will be according to how one submits to God.
* The reward is the degree i.e. how much I submit to God.

Stories in the Quran can only make sense when we relate them to our practical life. It becomes a teaching and a guide for my real life experiences: my Creator is speaking to me in order to guide me right now. These are the days we have to experience what Abraham experienced i.e. every moment is an opportunity to make progress and practice *tawhid*. With this consciousness we are ready to slaughter our “son” and prepare to receive Eternal happiness i.e. Paradise by attaching our minds and hearts to the Absolute Owner of the universe.