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| **Date** | Wednesday, November 18, 2015 |
| **Topic** | In the footsteps of the Prophet Abraham: |
| **Part** | 14 |

***“His [Abraham’s] people’s only answer was, “Slay him, or burn him!” – but God saved him from the fire. Behold, in this there are messages for people who believe!” Ankabut (29): 24***

Abraham’s message is clear i.e. Worship the Creator of the universe alone. This message teaches me to further investigate my interactions with the universe and be cognizant of what I worship. This personal process should help me deviate from following a certain culture or forefathers without using my human qualities. This verse presents a view of how people (in general) respond back to Abrahamic calling.

*Recap:* The callings of the messengers towards seeking the truth should be as clear as possible. As a messenger, no one should be forcing the acceptance of the message as it would be similar to enforcing rulings on someone. This would contradict the purpose of the message which is nothing but clear and simple invitation for people to worship it i.e. the Creator of the universe.

Religion is not a cultural acquisition to be used as a shield for people to stay behind it. This would be similar to attracting people to follow certain culture and taking refuge in it. The culture may seem attractive and religious but usually consists of traces of religion. **Again the message is so simple: Don’t worship anything other than the Creator of the universe.**

The verse is drawing our attention to not pollute the invitation while calling people to the truth. Before sending an invitation to anyone, I first need to introduce the Creator of the universe to myself. I first need to get rid of cultural influences and biases found in me. In other words, I need to work on myself as follows:

1. Search for the truth for myself. Convince myself as to why I should worship the Creator of the universe.
2. Only after I am convinced, I may introduce people to worship the Creator of the universe or help them with their search if they seek.

Please keep in mind that what makes someone a Prophet is the message he/she carries (not his administrative power). Agreeing with the message does not make one belong to the Prophetic community. Although the Prophets belonged to a certain culture or community, the Prophets do not insinuate people to join their community/culture. Historians write everything according to the community and culture. Some historians also write with certain agendas as desired per the king (authority). Most books on Prophetic lives (seerah books) do the same.

To follow the messenger, does not mean to follow the king (authority).

Historical synopsis: When Muhammad (pbuh) came to Yathrib (former name for Medina), he never asked for people to follow him. On the contrary, people asked him for help with their affairs because he seemed like a wise man. They understood that the Quraish did not value him and had rejected his wisdom. **If we read the scripture carefully, we find that no messenger demands any leadership position, it is given to them (i.e. the community appoints them in their profession).**  Therefore, Muhammad (pbuh) established the “Medina treaty” known as also “Medina Constitution” in Medina. The purpose of Treaty was mainly to protect the town against anyone who attacks it. In this Treaty those people who lived in Medina regardless of their religious or racial differences were given equal rights and responsibilities. There was no privileged position for the believers in Muhammed’s message against the Jews and the polytheists in the city.

Apart from this fundamental principle in the newly established city we see some interesting rules, for example:

1. Open and free market (i.e. anyone can come in)
2. No shouting or solicitation (i.e. no advertisements and open to negotiation, which is why “fixed price” is prohibited in Islam.) It is known that the richest man would come to the market and ask for the lowest price. He would only do such to establish a balance, prevent price gouging and thus help the poor people get the lowest price.

Practical, personal side of religion is different from societal side. We need to establish the principles within ourselves and adhere as much as we can to the agreed upon societal level principles. The principles cannot be established arbitrarily but as a result of my conscious choice i.e. I need to worship God alone as a result of my own free choice; society cannot force anything on me as far as my individual life is concerned. I need to work out the societal principles with my own principles. Every society has its right; societal rights are different from personal rights.

* Example: Society establishes that drinking coffee is harmful and wrong. If in my understanding, drinking coffee is not wrong; can I make the society agree to this? No.
* Example: In a town, can someone establish any house of worship? Yes. How about a business harmful for residents? No. It would trespass the rights of the society.
* Religious practices are free; no one can limit them, that is what we learned from the Prophet.

When Abraham called people to worship the Creator of the universe alone, they could not come up with any counter arguments. **Idol:** **Anything that I perceive to be as the source of existence of itself or something else.** Example: if I think that object A provides me with happiness, object A becomes my idol. Abraham encouraged people to the following:

1. to question the Source of existence of object/event.
2. not to assign objects/events as the one satisfying you.

Example: I feel good eating a lush green apple. Apple is not the one satisfying me. The Creator of the apple is satisfying me. Apple is the means of grace coming to me. It is employed by the Creator of the universe that is the “Point of Reference” (PoR). If I do not see this, then I am worshiping idols. If I establish my PoR on idols instead of the source of existence of them, then I cannot find the Creator of the universe. Then, I have to look for a creator from among the pieces of the universe itself.

Trying to defend religion on the basis of community values yields no fruits. Remember to always look into the existence of any object/event. Just call people to worship the existence Giver of the object/event of the universe, there will be no room for counter arguments which leads to what is depicted in the verse:

* “Slay/burn him”: that is reaction.
* **When I react, it’s obvious evidence that I cannot produce any counter argument. It means I have failed in my conclusions.**
* Aggression is the method followed by Abraham’s enemies. Anyone that reacts by imposing power, threatening life, killing, invading other people’s property is following the ways of the enemies of Abraham.

*What is the biggest idol in this epoch?*

* Nature and energy. If I cannot find the Source of existence of object/event, nature and energy becomes my PoR.
* Abraham broke all secondary idols. Example: water is growing the tree. Here attributing water as the Source of the growth of the tree makes water the idol.
* **Idols found in Mecca, as depicted in books were nothing but representing different tribes of that time. Islam came to break the notion of “tribalism”.** There is no nation state in Islam; there are only human beings with qualities.
* **If I apply this verse to my current epoch, whatever Abraham’s enemies did is what most communities are doing right now.**
* **If one does not have any substantial argument against anyone that speaks the truth, the counter argument is mostly “kill or burn” them.**
* **Therefore, present the message in a clear manner.**

The fundamental teaching system as taught in the Quran is based on *tawheed,* Oneness of God. A conscious human being can realize and thus acknowledge it, the Creator of the universe. Thus far, there are no mainstream sources that study Islam from the belief perspective. Example: *how do I establish fasting within the context of my relationship with the Creator of the universe? What does it have to do with my worship of it, where I am not just obeying it as a slave?*

Again, enemy of Abraham is the one who uses aggression (slay him/burn him) towards the other.  **If a person comes up with a counter argument, it means your argument is not clear enough. Similarly, using aggression means that the person does not have any answer and feels defeated**.

Conquering is not invasion (as annotated in history books), it is giving opportunity to people to pay heed to the message. If one is unable to defend their belief, one reacts with counter argument by attacking.

* Main principle of the Quran: if I am not physically attacked, I have no right/reason to initiate the physical attack.

***but God saved him from the fire:***

* Prophets did not come up with miracles to be saved from the fire.
* If a person can come up with a sound argument which cannot be met by a counter argument, then (his consciousness) is saved. In other words, his purpose of existence is fulfilled and is saved from the fire.

The point in the narration of these verses is guidance from my Creator right now.

* The fire (their hatred) will turn into your garden because the argument one puts forward is human, does not contradict one’s reality.
* Whether a person is threatened with death, their existence is with the Merciful One.
* **That is Paradise:** when one is connected with the Divine, one is saved. He belongs to the Eternal, Absolute One.

Thus, the real death for a person is when this person does not know the purpose of their existence. If I do not know why I live here, my existence becomes meaningless. The number of years that you live does not matter. What matters is if you connect your human side to the Eternal One.

* If I do not know that my human side is connected to the Creator of the heavens and the earth, then I am not in Paradise.

Look at fire and look at your reality. **Fire**: enemies of the Creator of the universe, what they do/have is fire. **Garden:** that is what I have; it is my guarantee, my happiness. I worship the Originator of the universe. I acknowledge it as my Lord. I am always with it whether I live one year or hundred years. No one can challenge my conclusion

* My Creator gives me surety in my conclusion, and I realize that I am really right.

God protected Abraham from the fire is not a miracle as stated by some commentators. Such understanding negates the fact that people can kill you in other ways. The point here is to know that the One who made you endowed in you assurance that you feel comfortable. Abraham’s consciousness was saved not necessarily his body.

* Analogy: John is accused of being a murderer and thus put in jail where he is tortured. However, in his consciousness, John is at peace because he knows that he did not commit the crime.
* Similarly, Abraham is at peace i.e. his consciousness is saved from the fire (torture) of the meaninglessness, purposeless existence etc. His consciousness is saved by the One that provides consciousness. The Creator has equipped me with the means that when I am doing something right, I feel saved from the pain of fire.
* Quran does not teach you how to save your body. If it was important then why does the Creator of the body give death and kill the body?
* The Creator promises that he will not kill your spirit, your spirit will be saved because your humanity will be saved.
* First and foremost, take responsibility of your humanity. The material side is taken care of by the One that provides it.

Finally, do not follow historical teachings. Quran is the speech of the Creator in order to teach you who your Lord is. The purpose of the Quranic teaching is to save my humanity which seeks answers to my human questions. The verse is teaching me how to find that which I ought to worship. We need to derive our own set of principles from this methodology.