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| **Date** | Wednesday, February 17 2016 |
| **Topic** | The Quran defines God: A commentary on the “Throne Verse” (Ayatu’l-Kursi) |
| **Part** | 1 |

***What is the solution for helping ourselves and the next generation to make religion relevant to our lives?***

Analogy: A Math teacher demonstrates how to solve an algebra equation where the final answer is x=50. A week later she gives a test to her students to solve the same equation. Student A solves the equation through his understanding of the lesson and thus gets the answer x=50. Student B never tried to understand the lesson, does not proceed with solving the equation but remembers the answer and writes x=50 only. Student C tries to solve the equation by demonstrating his work but makes some mistakes along the way and gets x=35.

***Which is the better student between B and C?***

* Student C is the better student because he tries to solve the equation, demonstrates his work, makes mistakes and comes up with an answer.

***Which is the worst student?***

* Student B is the worst student because he has not demonstrated any effort to solve the equation and simply copy pasted the answer.

Similarly, most of us affiliated with a certain religious background represent Student B (the worst student). We may have memorized what the scripture says without ever questioning it or studying it. We may go on carrying our family cultural “religion” because that became our norm. Similar to some youth nowadays that may pretend to believe, a way to compromise with their parents until they gain their independence and move out, we may also pretend to believe by imitation just to be on the safe side. Some of us may even reject religion altogether because it just makes no sense.

 It seems that the “educators” in our lives (parents, friends or Sunday school teachers) cannot answer the questions posed by the developing adolescent. Those questions are mostly shut down and deemed to be crossing the lines of “ancestral religion”. As a result, the questions are left aside and as we grow, we develop an understanding to which we become accustomed to. The older we grow, we start seeing the relevance of the questions we had but they are ignored and our practice of religion is still external to us. In either case, religion may remain irrelevant to our lives right now. **We may practice rituals under the disguise of religion but there is no feeling of satisfaction in our existence. Perhaps we are not even aware of our existence. Additionally, when you become accustomed to a way of life, you start feeling confident in it, a process called “normalization”.**

All these circumstances present a doleful reality arising from not being convinced in one’ own understanding of belief. Not feeling convinced in my being is a sign for me to look into my emotions, intelligence and endless qualities that I am endowed with. Human beings are made with the ability to reason, investigate and come up with their own conclusions; that is Islam.

* Study a verse. Reason for yourself and come up with a conclusion.
* Stop using scriptures as a point of support “This verse says so and so, thus it must be true.” Imitation never convinces anyone!
* Develop your own understanding that reaches your own conclusion.

Quran defines the Speaker, God through Its qualities. It is an invitation to me to find evidence of Its qualities in the universe and utilize my tools, human qualities and intellect to come up with a conclusion about God. Example, you may see a verse that says: “I am all Powerful”.

* **Imitation**= God is all Powerful because in the Quran God defines Itself as the all Powerful.
* **Personal Conviction**= As a result of my search for reality, I understand that the One that gives existence to the whole universe is in fact the One that gives me existence. I call this One the All-Powerful, God and thus confirm the Qur’an’s introducing God to me.

Quran speaks to us in order to encourage us to reason, make comparisons and derive our own personal conclusions which confirm what the Quran describes. Otherwise, my human qualities would go to waste.

* Look for every opportunity to think and understand that the creation of anything demonstrates that its Creator is Powerful.

**The Speaker in the Quran does not say that it will tell us something and we will not be able to understand it.** Unlike some religions which may claim, it does not say that only a select group may understand it. On the contrary, it speaks to everyone according to their capacity. Due to our laziness we may turn the scripture into a complicated matter that only the priests, imams or prominent clergy may understand. As a result, some religious understandings may claim: “you got to have faith to believe”. This emanates from their not reflecting, contemplating on the matter at hand and simply accepting matters blindly.

**Without reasoning, I, the human being cannot believe**. In other words, **Quran shows us the aim and it is up to me to investigate its traces within my own capacity. I am not responsible beyond my capacity.** We mostly misuse our aims pertaining to worldly gains only i.e. satisfying our animate side only. Example: “Universe seems perfect with a dead end.” Here, I reduce my life to temporary pleasure only, there is no concept of Eternal Pleasure and I am not using my capacity to understand the real purpose of my life. Thus, religion becomes an external (temporary) practice, similar to Catholicism nowadays (blind faith) or being a Protestant (reducing religion to only once a week ritualistic religiosity). Example: I go to church, attend the Sunday mass or I go to the Mosque and attend the Friday sermon. As soon as I am done, I go on living an unconscious life unconnected to my reality. I may be abstaining from alcohol but while drinking non-alcoholic beverages, am I conscious of my reality?

***What is an illicit action or thing?*** The short answer to this question is: Anything on which the concept of God, the Owner is not realized.

**This state of Consciousness is what Islam is:** the awareness that everything around me is connected to me because it brings me news from its Maker.

* Am I aware that anything I am coming in contact with is its Owner’s property?
* I cannot treat any created thing as my servant because I have no right over it.
* “*Abdullah*” means messenger/worshiper of God. That is, any created thing is a vehicle which functions as a means of communication between its Creator and me.

If I do not realize things as *Abdullah* (including myself), then I am denying the Ownership of God over me. This cuts me off from establishing a relationship with my Lord, the Owner of the universe.

***Does the Quran have the right to define God?*** Yes, because it claims to be His speech and the Speaker is speaking to me.

***Do I have to believe and accept it?*** No. I have to investigate here in this universe and use my human qualities (my existence) to reach the conclusion. The Speaker says that I am guiding you how to reach the conclusion or solve the equation as in the analogy given at the start.

Let us study ***Ayat-ul-kursi***, Quran **(2):255** piece by piece and see if I, the reader feel convinced about it.



***“God is He except Whom there is no deity”.***

There is no definite definition of God because the Speaker, God describes Itself through negation i.e. “what It is not”. It is giving guidance i.e. **I first must establish that nothing has any Divine qualities** ***(lailaha)***. **Only then I can speak about God** ***(illallah)***

***Lalilaha***= there is nothing in existence in this universe that has Divine qualities. Everyone speaks about God but no one speaks that there is no deity in the universe. How do I establish ***lailaha***?

1. Define God through negation.
2. Investigate the universe.
3. Use your human reasoning and come to your own conclusion.
4. Does anything have an Essential quality?
5. Nothing has essential qualities; they are all in need to be given existence.

THINK and STUDY the objects/events (atoms, particles…) around you. **Start with yourself:** *Do you have an Essential quality to produce your ability to speak?* *Is your mouth the Essential one or the tongue?* It may appear to you that you are the one creating the speech but in reality, you cannot make the speech come into existence.

* I cannot give existence to anything in the universe.
* I just follow/obey the order and the result is created.
* If I do not obey/follow the order i.e. if I do not use my tongue, I cannot speak.

As a result of my obedience (following the order in creation), the result is created by the One who creates and Wills it to exist. We usually fail in realizing that we are following an order because we do not question and it becomes a habit where we think we are the producers of our actions. Example: I move my hand today and now I have become accustomed that “I am moving it.” In reality I am asking the Creator to create the result for me by following the order in Its act of creation. That is the way I learn the order in Creation. It is because the order is created in such a way and I follow it. I did not give existence to the order.

* **THINK:** Who gave existence to the moving hand action?
* Air, my muscles, gravity… We need to seriously think!

Again, I can only believe in God through my awareness of a Cause of existence of everything, followed by negating the cause that nothing has any power or quality to give existence to anything I observe in the universe including my own qualities.

***Can you give existence to the qualities of your body cells?*** If my stomach does not work, I cannot do anything to make it work. What I can do is obey the order i.e. go to the doctor and take medicine. When scientists are researching through the already existing order which chemicals/medicine works for what, they are just learning the order in creation. When you take the medicine, your stomach starts working. *Who is doing what? Is the medicine making the stomach work or is it following the order? Is the order giving existence or is it the other way around?* I have to decide.

* Order is given existence.
* Order cannot be the source of existence; it is the result of existence given by the Existence Giver.
* **I have to keep this in mind and see that:**
1. There is no deity except God: ***lailaha***
2. Then I search for **illallah.**

**To be with God (in the presence of God) and to feel that you are the product of God is simple. It starts with lailaha.** The Speaker in the Quran says: “I am providing you with life”. The One who provides life is saying that from It’s perspective. What I have to say: “**My life has been provided by the Creator of this universe. That is what I call God”.** I cannot say “God provided me with life”, that would be repeating Its words.

Scriptures use descriptive language in order to make the message accessible to any conscious human being regardless of space-time. Most of the language is symbolic because my existence is the symbol or reflection of Its existence. We think mountains, stars, buildings… are concrete objects but in reality they are message bearers. I have to see them from my perspective that is why the Quran says they are *Mithaal*: allegoric, metaphoric teaching. I take this teaching and apply it to my own world, relate it to my human qualities, my feelings and come to a conclusion. That becomes my belief.

* Quran is educating, teaching me how to use my qualities…within this universe. That is why it must be allegorical speech so I can relate to it under any circumstances.
* The universe is a metaphor for the qualities of its Creator.

Everything is a sign/*ayah*. Example: Here is a cat. The cat is a symbol of numerous messages its Creator is sending to you. Cat’s existence is full of messages from its Creator. I have to look at it from *lailaha* perspective that nothing that I read from the existence of the cat is essential to the cat. That is how the cat is composed by its Creator. The message I get must be from the Creator of the cat, which I call God. I say this statement must be true. That is, if I start with *lailaha*, I can be sure that this statement takes me to God. Without establishing lailaha, I cannot establish *illallah*.

Nothing in the universe acts on its own. Everything is following the order in creation. Can an atom act arbitrarily? Can any part of the atom do something apart from following the order it has been put in/is a part of. They obey, are *abd* (follower/worshipper). *Abd* has no properties by definition i.e. I own nothing. My brain, ability to imagine, to reflect are all given to me. I cannot explain it otherwise as I or anything else in the universe cannot give existence to them. They all follow the order and are given existence. We are all worshippers.

*Are all the verses metaphorical teachings?*

That depends on what the purpose of the reader is. If it is to seek guidance, as on how to develop my perception of existence, then it is. However If I am convinced about God, i.e. after investigation I come to the conclusion that there is no deity (in this universe) but God (the Creator of the universe) (***lailaha illahu***), then the purpose changes in terms of how do I organize my life according to this understanding. Then the Quran also becomes guidance for the physical life. This explains why the purpose of those who read it to derive laws and rules only, for such people the Quran becomes a source of guidance in physical terms only based on the purpose of the reader, the makeup of guidance changes accordingly.