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| **Date** | Wednesday, June 29, 2016 |
| **Topic** | Chapter “Read” (*iqra*) |
| **Part** | 1 |

The Creator creates everything with a purpose. It has endowed me with endless qualities. When I read, I understand. When I listen to music, I get emotionally engaged with how I feel. It speaks to me through my feelings, emotions and human qualities in interaction with the universe + It speaks to me verbally through the scripture and tells me something. It seems there is a personal connection.

The universe is a guest house and we are being entertained here. Everything in creation is entertaining me. Everything is perfectly created. We are created as a baby and are raised in this guest house, become adult and then are given death. We all know that we have certain stages to go through. If we create artificial needs for ourselves, we spoil our perfect creation as it goes against our human nature. Example: we may neglect looking at creation around us and instead spend our time off at the gym trying to look good. Suddenly, we hear the Owner of the guest house speaking to us. He has always been personally speaking to each one of us but we were mostly plunged into worldly entertainment only. Although, there is nothing wrong with entertaining yourself but one has to be mindful to acknowledge the Host of this guest-house every step of the way.

If someone speaks to me verbally, it must be very important. ***What can I expect from Its speech?***

**“Read in the name of your Lord Who creates.” Iqra (96): 1** 

**“He creates human beings from a clot.” Iqra (96): 2** 

First question: *Who is my Lord?* *Do I have a Lord?*

It is important to understand that the speech is talking to me in my current situation right now. It is guiding me that I have a Lord.

Second question: *What does it mean to read in someone’s name?*

Let’s start with addressing the second question with an analogy. When Jack gives $100 to Mary, he asks her to give $ 50 to Paul. In other words, Mary is acting as a vehicle on behalf of Jack. She gives $50 to Paul in the name of Jack. Mary cannot claim OWNERSHIP over the money.

***How do you read something in the name of its Owner?***

From the example, we see that Mary has rightly acknowledged the true owner when she gives the money to Paul. Similarly, in the universe, the creation must be attributed to the rightful owner.

1. Creation is not mine. The tree in the garden belongs to the Creator of the whole universe.
2. I see beauty in the creation of the tree. Tree is just a vehicle conveying beauty (quality) to me.

Let’s work with the tree.

*Who creates the tree?* It’s Creator.

I see the tree growing. I see leaves coming out of the tree. *How is all this happening?*

Answer 1: Tree is growing the leaves. This means that I am reading the leaves in the name of the tree.

Answer 2: The leaves are made to grow on the tree by the One who gives existence to the tree and the leaves. This means that I am not reading the leaves in the name of the tree. Since I know the tree is created, I conclude that the tree and its leaves are created in the name of its Creator. (correct!)

***What is wrong with answer 1?*** I am attributing the growth of the leaves to the tree. Can the particles of the tree plan the future of the tree and produce the leaves? Can the leaves have any knowledge to communicate among themselves and decide their location? No. The particles themselves are in need to be created. Everything in the universe says: “I am dependent on my Creator and I am in need to be created”. Therefore, read everything in the name of its Creator.

Now, the Owner of this guesthouse says: **“Be careful! Read everything in My name as I am the One who brings everything (including the tiniest particles) into existence”.** The One that creates brings everything into existence with Its Power, Knowledge, Wisdom, Will, Mercy, Balance and all other endless names. So read it in Its name. It means creation belongs to It only and thus needs to be “read” in Its name only. The leaves are developing by the All-Powerful One.

Thus, I have no right to say that the leaves are developing by themselves. Particles do not have any qualities to produce the qualities that we observe in the tree. Now, take a look at your body, hands, brain, hair…don’t you see the manifested qualities of its Maker in it. When you read the qualities that are communicating with you, you find out that they belong to your Lord, which is your Owner, Host and Sustainer. The One who gave me my abilities/senses (qualities), encourages me to use them to decipher all qualities in creation. All these qualities are given to you by your Creator. Now use them as tools to discover how Its qualities are manifested in objects that you are communicating with.

Throughout your secular studies, you thought that you have been reading. However, have you ever read in the name of the Creator while having your secular education? For one day, one hour, one minute or even a second? ***Have you been taught that while reading, you have to discover the qualities of the Owner of an object (let’s say a cell in your science class)?***

* No, never has the true Owner been mentioned in my science class.
* We all have to convert to Islam. That is, we have to convert our 25 years of baseless secular education (based on materialist interpretation of the creation) which is nothing but an insult to the Creator. Reflecting on the Oneness of the Creator and Muhammad as Its Messenger once in my life does not keep me alive or satisfy me in my existence.
* Think: ***Aren’t we insulting the Creator of the universe by saying that the tree grows by itself?*** In our example above, had Mary given the money in her name and not mentioned Jack’s name, how would Mary be honest to the trust?

We learn from secular studies that the cells develop themselves into organs and organs form the perfect living being. Are we attributing the power to give existence to the cells and organs? Furthermore, we are indoctrinated with thinking that the brain produces feelings. How can the brain produce feelings? The brain itself is made up of cells. ***What are we doing?* THINK ABOUT IT SERIOUSLY!** ***Are we attributing existence to its Real Source or not?***

We go to the kitchen in the guesthouse of this universe and find some food. We say: I am hungry and it smells nice. I eat and say I am lucky because I found food on the table today. *Isn’t this an insult to the One that prepares the food, the Real Provider of the food?*  The Host/Owner of this guesthouse starts Its Speech with this message: **“Be careful, read in the name of your Lord, the Creator who creates”. *What does it mean?*** It simply means that I should not attribute the qualities in this universe to anything else other than the Real Owner of the property.)

Let us contextualize the Quran i.e. read it here and now.

1. This verse speaks to me according to my conditions right now as I am here.
2. I am not receiving the message from an Angel but I am reading a book i.e. the revelation Prophet (pbuh) received which is recorded/documented (referred to as *mushaf*).

**TAKE ACTION--We need to turn the *mushaf* into *Quran*.**

Mushaf= Speech that the Prophet received which is recorded as a text.
Quran= something that is “read” i.e. reading the Speech of your Creator here and now.

Here is a brief historical background which has been mostly narrated when this verse is mentioned. It is said that a man named Muhammad lived some 1400 years ago in Mecca. He was very disturbed with the tribal wars and general corruption (stealing property, injustice…) of the society. As a result, he went to seek solace in a cave known as *“hira”.* An angel came to him and ordered him to “read”. **As a guidance seeker, *what should I make out of this?***

* Firstly, where is “READING CREATION” in this historical background?
* Secondly, the “angel part” should not be my concern now because I am not experiencing the historical event in my practical life. Only after confirming the text as being the Speech of my Creator, I can make sense of the “angel” who transferred the Eternal Speech into a verbal sound and inspired it to the person who is trustworthy to apply it in his life and convey it to those who are ready to take it
* Thirdly, every other person worries about corruption in any society.

Now, what we are left with is an “essential missing dimension” that not many people think about (at least outside these classes) i.e. **Muhammad is a person who is concerned with the meaning of creation i.e. existential concerns:**

* *What is the purpose of life?*
* *What do I do with my endless feelings and emotions?*
* *Why do I get emotionally hurt from corruption/injustice/family relationship?*
* *Why do I exist?*  I have no idea.
* “Please someone tell me. The stars just twinkle, they do not talk. The wind does not tell me either why it exists”.

Since there are no answers to be found in this universe, he was constantly searching within himself. **Speech comes: “Read in the name of your Lord who creates”. Since he had questions, answers came to him i.e. revelation. Thus, answers come to the man who is obsessed with existential questions.**

***Should I be concerned with this event that Muhammad experienced?*** Yes, because this event starts off with Muhammad’s own personal concerns. ***To what extent should I be concerned with this event?***  (*Why do we believe in Prophethood is another subject?)*

* This person is the person who represents the pinnacle form of human questioning.
* This person is the representative of a human being who represents all sorts of human questions and concerns.
* The Creator gave answers because Muhammad had most comprehensive and advanced level of human questions at the highest level.
* He deserves to be chosen for answers so he will be the best teacher.

*Have I seen Muhammad*? No. *Have I realized which kind of concerns he had in mind and heart?* No. *Am I aware of his conditions?* No.

Thus, within his own conditions, he experienced the answers to his human questions and put them into practice. **But answers are universal because answers are given by the One who creates all creation including you and I in it.** **The more I have questions, the more answers will I get.** If I have no questions, answers will not make sense to me. That is, if I have 1% question, I will get 1% answer from the guiding speech, the answers Muhammad received from his questions i.e. revelation.

First part of the guiding speech: “Read in the name of your Lord who creates”.

Not knowing how to read is another issue. If you reduce reading to reading letters of a written text only, then you think you do not know how to read. However, when you realize that reading means to get meaning and comprehend from creation, then you start reading in the name of your Lord “who creates”.

Prophet (pbuh) did not shy away from sharing this first guiding speech with the Meccans who were open to listening. Since the guiding speech is not confined to a certain time-space, it becomes a **universal message i.e. applicable to me right now as it was to them then**.

***How can I benefit from this guiding speech in my practical life?*** Neither reject the reality that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) experienced the guidance from the Creator in his lifetime according to his life condition nor accept that the Quran needs to be read within its historical context (confined to time-space). ***At the same time, can we ignore its historical context?***  No, this is the reality of the revelation revealed to Muhammad who practiced the guidance in his practical life.

Yes, the speech was addressed to the Messenger Muhammad **but now I am addressed:** **“Read in the name of your Lord who creates.”** I need to apply this speech to my current conditions. Example: at the time of the Prophet, camels were everywhere. In our conditions now, pigeons and squirrels are everywhere. Thus, we need to read act of creation in the name of the Creator of the squirrel or pigeon everything I interact with creation in my given conditions. That is how we can get guidance from the Quran without denying its historical context and bringing it to our own conditions right now.

We need to learn how to read the Quran as the Speech of my Creator speaking to me now within my conditions in the middle of high rise building. Since the message is from my Creator, it speaks to me now knowing my conditions as well.

***When did the Creator create the universe?***
Answer 1: some billion years ago.
Answer 2: I do not know because it was already in existence when I came here.
Answer 3: Now. (Correct!)

**The Creator is speaking to me RIGHT NOW. I am responsible for my existence RIGHT NOW. I need to read in the name of my Lord RIGHT NOW.**  Jack needs to read in the name of his Lord RIGHT NOW!

When I read the Quran, I am reading the speech of my Creator RIGHT NOW because It is the Creator of the universe RIGHT NOW. Therefore, the Quran needs to be defined as the Speech of the Creator of the universe for every sane human being.

The majority of people is not concerned with their existential questions nor read creation in the universe. We are mostly busy with a mundane routine. Home🡪Gym🡪Office🡪Home or Home🡪School🡪Hangout🡪Home. **Even now, most of us do not realize that the universe exists. *Where are we? Have you ever questioned that?***

If someone has not been concerned with these questions, they cannot benefit from the Speech of the Creator. The Speech of the Creator is ever-present i.e. Absolute. That is, you cannot confine it to a certain time-space. Some scholars argue that God spoke to Muhammad in 610 CE. ***How can we constrain the Speech of the Creator to a certain time-space? What about now? Isn’t God speaking to me now?***

**In order to be able to read the Speech of the Creator, I need to be aware that the universe is created by the same One who creates me right now. That is, I am being sustained at this very moment.** The piece of creation that took place 1400 years ago has been created by the same Creator that creates the universe right now. Therefore, I cannot restrict the Eternal Speech of the Creator (Absolute Speech) to a certain time-space. *What am I going to do then?* As far as I am concerned, **whoever sustains me right now, the One who is sustaining me right now is speaking to me right now saying: “Read in the Name of your Lord, who creates you right now”.** This insinuates that I should not look at creation merely just as creation. For example: a pine tree is not just a tree happen to be there. It is a deliberate act of creation, an exhibition for me conveying its Creator’s qualities to me. I have to find the qualities manifested in the existence of the pine tree and read the pine tree in the name (i.e. qualities) of its Creator. That is, after observing the pine tree, I should conclude that: **“The Creator of this pine tree is the All-Beauteous One.”**

**REALITY CHECK: Now, you may realize that you have been living in this world like a dead man i.e. We have never read creation in the name of its Creator! Yes, we have wasted our lives/time thus far!**

We go on enjoying simple things such as food in the name of the food itself or in the name of the gathering. Example: Last night, the Iftar food was delicious. There is no mentioning of the Creator in this event. *Have I not insulted the One who created the delicious food showing that It loves me, It is a Merciful/Compassionate One, It knows my needs and wants me to trust It and not get disappointed?*  Yes, I have. So how then do I dare say let’s pray? I just ignored God while eating food, how can I think of praying? What will I be acknowledging or better yet what will I express contentment about? Do you see the contradiction? Ignorance, my friend is horrible, it is not human at all. I am insulting my Owner, it’s a big crime and I need to STOP!

This first verse brings a lot of points to our attention. We have to read the speech of the Creator as we read the attributes of the Creator manifested in creation.

* Ear is listening to the Speech and the eye is seeing where it is manifested.
* What you gather from listening and hearing, you then confirm: **“yes, trees are made beautiful by the All-Generous One for me, so I enjoy them because I am Its guest”.**
* That is how to turn the *mushaaf* (recorded Speech of the Creator) into the Quran (live Speech of the Creator for me RIGHT NOW so I will understand creation alongside the guidance I hear from the Speaker’s voice.
* Historicizing events/revelation kills my present life experience.
* The Prophet experienced this message as we are expected to experience it within our own conditions of creation RIGHT NOW, so that the Speech will be alive, fresh and Eternal.

**Second verse- “He creates human beings from a clot”.**

What clot (‘*alaq*) means should not be my main concern? A clot is something very insignificant. Everything in creation is developed from an insignificant (primitive) form of creation and made into a perfect creation. Then, it is taken away from creation. Even galaxies are created from an atom that develops and then it disappears.

**Lord**= **Rabb**= **the One who develops, brings out, makes one thing from one point to another, continuously making it perfect and sustaining it.** With this understanding, we can never say that even death is the end of perfection.

***How can I understand “death”?***

Analogy 1: In an assembly line, parts are put together to produce a product, assemble in a packet/coffin and sent to the market to be used by consumers. As far as the assembly line is concerned, the completed shipped out product is dead. Similarly, human beings are being trained here to be shipped to another abode where they will practice what they learnt here. Everything is perfected here to be transferred into its real practical usage, just like the product.

We may think that we are getting old and losing our perfection. **We may be getting old in this creation but in reality, we are becoming more perfect in experiencing creation i.e. reading the name of our Lord.** We are learning more and more to prepare ourselves to practice what we learn. When I am ready, I will be shipped so I will experience what I have learned in my human qualities here in this universe.

Analogy 2: Two twins are in their mother’s womb. The one that leaves the womb first comes into this world. The other one, considering is conscious, thinks he has lost his brother/sister. Similarly, when we die from this universe, our loved ones may think that we are gone without realizing that a transfer to another abode has occurred and that they will soon join us.

Death is the transfer from one abode to another. It is marking the perfection, not the end of existence.

* **Don’t be frightened of death, get ready for perfection, and improve your humanity.**

Analogy 3: The placenta of a mother is discarded when the baby is born. Similarly, body is discarded when the soul is taken away from the body and the body dies.

Creation is always demonstrating that what seems to us as a starting point for anything that comes into existence is not the “cause” of the “effect.” Example: I cannot say that the seed made the tree because the seed is seen as insignificant as compared to the tree. In most of our secular studies, we are taught that DNA has everything encoded in it. How is that possible? Just as a book which includes all the information in it, needs an author, similarly DNA cannot be given information by itself and must have an Author.

* Think: Can the particles of an object be the Creator of the object?

***Have you ever considered that you were a primitive cell?*** And now you are a grown adult. *How did the development occur?*  Don’t attribute your being to your previous being saying I am developing. Realize whose qualities are manifested in your being now. Only then will your creation be realized in the name of your Lord i.e. when I see myself in the name/qualities of my Lord who created me and put me stage by stage so I understand that at every stage Its Will is the decisive power. Nothing can decide about the future. *Do we know about tomorrow? Do particles know? Who is operating over you?*

In conclusion, I am not growing by myself, my Lord is reforming me (my creation), It is creating me anew today. Yesterday, my creation was more primitive. My Lord is taking me through my journey of existence. I just need to read creation and see the Creator’s names manifested in this universe.