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| **Date** | Wednesday, September 16 2015 |
| **Topic** | In the footsteps of the Prophets: The Path to monotheistic religion |
| **Part** | 9 |

***RECAP:*** Anything which cannot sustain its existence cannot be the Lord. We are mostly under the impression that an object is being sustained on its own. **To be created and to be sustained may seem similar but are two distinct concepts.** The first refers to the fact that everything is created or given existence. The second refers to the fact that whatever is given existence is also being sustained in its existence; this appears to be “time” according to human perception.

We are in this universe travelling together with other types of creation on the globe of the earth, just like in a spaceship. The globe of the earth is moving continuously. I am also moving in it, although it may not be apparent. As adolescents, we noticed physical changes in our bodies. That change did not happen overnight as we are continuously in motion. *What does travelling together at the same time mean?* More so, *what does time mean?*

* **Things are being given new existence with new qualities, and thus their existence is being sustained. We observe this phenomenon as “time”.**

With the “passing” of time, things are being brought into existence with new qualities. These things may look similar because of the slow pace in the way of their being brought into existence, which appears to be change/movement. But in reality, they are not exactly the same. Example: yesterday’s pineapple is not the same as today’s pineapple. Today, I am created with a new existence different from yesterday’s existence. **I am not sustaining my life; I am not sustaining my existence**. **If I were the one sustaining my existence, then I would be claiming to be my own Creator, which is obviously a false claim. To say so would imply that I am declaring myself as an independent being. This is absurd and DANGEROUS,** to think that if I could sustain my existence, then I would be able to create and sustain anything.

* **Even if I am aware that I cannot create anything, it can be a tricky acknowledgment**. It either leaves me stagnant or leads me to believe that I am the one sustaining the created things. Simply put, God created me and now I can preserve my life or I am on my own “struggling” with upheavals of life, God created the garden and I am the one taking care of it…
* *Who is satisfying me in my daily pursuits?* If there is no act of sustaining, is the earth carrying me by itself? *How did this order come into existence?*
* **Knowing that I cannot create anything can leave me incomplete in the belief process. I need to investigate further to realize that** **I CANNOT SUSTAIN MY EXISTENCE!!!**
* My existence is sustained by the One who creates me. At every moment, my existence is absolutely not dependent on me.

Everything is subject to being brought into existence. Nothing in this universe can sustain its own existence. The **act of creation** and the **act of sustaining** cannot be attributed to anything in the universe.

* *Is there an atom that can sustain its own existence form one moment to another?*

Like us, Abraham was looking for the truth. Abraham shows me that I have to go through stages in this quest for searching for the truth. **We have to be convinced about the worth of this quest because the one who studies the Speech of God either in the form of creating or verbal expression certainly attains conviction.** Abraham keeps emphasizing the usage of human qualities that are innate in us. We need to use ourselves to attain conviction.

*How does one go on studying?*

To read any text critically is crucial otherwise we will never realize our own biases. Most people do not read the scriptures critically fearing as though they may challenge the word of God. Needless to say but it even frightens scripture readers. In reality, the more you challenge a text, the more you will expand your understanding of it. **The text itself is not being criticized when we read it critically but my attempt to understand it should be critical.**  The Quran needs to be read critically otherwise we will just keep confirming our “inherited” “unquestioned” understandings and thus, we will never grow. **Repeating what we hear from others is not confirmation.** Critical reading helps us reconstruct and reconfirm our concepts. Even if my previous belief is correct, **reading the text critically will give me more evidence/insight to improve myself.**  Otherwise I will never correct myself and I may even misunderstand the author. **I am responsible for my understanding of the text, not judging about the author of the text.** Either way, reading scriptures critically or not does not make anyone righteous. **Our conclusions from our readings make us what we are: How much we internalized from our readings of the scripture is our righteousness.**

The obstacle in this quest is the fear of challenging our previous life. If I come up with a new conclusion today, it is hard for me to let go of my previous understanding. **“Yes, I was wrong yesterday.” It is the most devastating conclusion that one’s ego does not want to face.** Challenging our previous understanding and correcting ourselves is the only way to seek the truth. **To hold the truth is not the point, to seek the truth is the point.**

* No one can claim to hold the absolute truth.
* We have to accept that we need to improve ourselves until we “graduate” from life.

Never give up searching for the truth. Be content to realize that you were wrong. Whatever you are, you will be better than yesterday. That is the progress/perfection we ask for, that is why we keep praying, saying approximately 40 times: “**please guide me to the straight path**”.

* If we feel that we are already on the right path, *why are we asking to be guided then?* **We have to be careful not to be a** **HYPOCRITE, i.e. when we think that we are already on the right path and do not need guidance, but still say,** “**please guide me to the straight path**”**!**

**Human Beings are searchers, not claimers.** At one moment I may feel to have found the truth and the next moment I may totally change. **We have to be open to change. That openness is the way to read the text critically.** Since I cannot claim the absolute truth, I have to be open to reading the text critically for myself, not to criticize the author. **If I am not critical, then I maybe submitting to myself under the title of “I submit to God”. EGO LOVES it!!!**

No one can follow scriptures completely as revealed; I can only make sense of it as much as I understand. What I understand is my conclusion which may be totally different from what the Speaker actually is saying. I am only concerned about whatever I read and make out of it. If it makes sense to me, I benefit from it and it gives me confidence. It helps me develop my understanding of my own reality. As long as the source is consistent for me, I keep reading it in order to consolidate my consistency within my own conclusion.

* The right guidance should definitely make sense to human beings.

***“Then, when he beheld the moon rising, he said: “this is my Lord!” – but when it went down, he said, “Indeed, if my Lord guide me not I will most certainly become one of the people who go astray!”***
**An ‘am (6):77**

**What is Lord:** Whatever created me with the quality to look for the truth. Whatever created Abraham with the quality to judge creation around him i.e. the setting things cannot be the lord.

* I cannot assign the created things to be my lord, there must be a Lord.
* Looking for the Lord is intrinsic to human nature.
* Abraham’s reasoning echoes how we are made. (A priori conclusions, innate to our human nature prompt us to seek the cause of anything which occurs: *what is the cause for this?)*
* Search for the cause.
* Listen to your innate qualities, you will find that they cannot deny your existence.

**If my Lord guides me not**: This sounds puzzling. I don’t know who it is but I feel that whoever made me with this feeling of seeking guidance, will surely guide me. I have to look for it.

* To search is human.
* To say I believe, I am done is not human.

In Islamic literature, there are different vocabularies employed to differentiate the degrees of realization, some of which are as follows:

1. Belief in God
2. Knowing God (*alma’rifa*)
3. Loving God (*muhabatullah*)

1. Belief in God: The universe is made. There must be a Creator. I am made and the One who made me should guide me. At this level, I am aware that I am made with certain qualities and I want to get to know this Maker. In the analogy of the car from last week (*refer to the notes from 09/09/15*), at this level we start the engine.

2. Knowing God: *Which kind of Creator is He?* I need to identify the Creator. Now we need to drive the car i.e., at this level, I need to start getting acquainted with this Creator. **Not only do I need to confirm His existence but I am in need of recognizing His qualities.**

* In this second degree of realization, we are driving the car i.e. developing our ability to get to know the Creator God who turns out to be the Lord, Sustainer. This eventually leads us closer to the destination (Eternity).

(In these classes, we are working on establishing a relationship with God, 2nd and 3rd degrees.) **As we get to know Him, we can only love Him when we become acquainted with His qualities.** In order to establish a loving relationship with Him, I need to work on becoming aware of His qualities, otherwise my love of God will end up being an empty feeling.

* Love of God must be the result of believing in God, getting to know Him and becoming acquainted with Him. Only then we understand that He is a loving Friend, loving Provider, the only One who deserves to be loved.

In the process of driving, I am asking to be guided. I am introducing myself to the One who has given me my abilities and qualities. I do not know who it is but through these qualities I am looking to get to know this Giver of my qualities. Abraham teaches me to be honest in my being. His own being said to him that he is made of something. Abraham search for it and keeps asking to the stars, moon and everything: *Can you be my Lord?* Similarly, we need to keep investigating:

* *Can water be my sustainer?*
* No. water molecules need to be created. There may be droughts and so water cannot sustain its own existence?
* *Can my employer be my sustainer?*
* The economy is unstable, companies are going bankrupt; definitely my employer cannot sustain me.

**The quest for looking for a Lord is intrinsic in me:** I am looking for a Lord who gives me existence within the context of the universe. Just as Abraham is realistic with his own being, we need to be consistent within ourselves. Keep questioning continuously until you get satisfied. There is no end to the satisfaction level. Pretending to have obtained the full belief stops us from investigating, and as a result, we do not make progress. Whatever I conclude has to be my own conclusion. I cannot reflect my conclusion with the author’s conclusion because I can never know the author’s intention.

Finally, I am hardwired to seek guidance; I cannot get out of it. I first need to get to know who God is in order to understand that He is the loving Creator.