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| **Date** | Saturday, October 17, 2015 |
| **Topic** | The Ninth Word |
| **Part** | 7 |

Although the text is elaborating on the specific times of prayers, it probes one to ponder on the fundamental question i.e. *Why do we pray?* The answer to this question really depends on how we see ourselves in this universe. Some may define prayer as a way to communicate with the Creator by obeying Him. This may sound correct but there are several stages that are skipped in the statement of “obeying Him”. *What are you obeying to?* In any case, we need to dwell deeper into the meaning of our existence and the universe. In the previous sessions on this topic, we defined prayer as our need for expressing our feelings to the Creator. **Prayer simply means expressing my conclusion to the Creator.**

***Does the Creator need my worship?***

* That should not be my concern. I am the one in need of worship.
* Worship is expressing my reality before the Source of existence of the universe.

**FIFTH POINT**: (*continuation*)

The first paragraph was explaining my human reality. The existence of the universe in its entirety and order is perfect; however the universe becomes an enemy because it does not fulfill my human expectations. Usually, I do not see the universe as a sign pointing to the Perfect One. When the universe is compared to my human qualities, it contradicts my expectations because I realize that the universe is transient and it cannot satisfy my expectations. I am transient as well. Thus, the universe cannot satisfy my humanity. I may even feel disconnected from the universe. However, through this contradictory state, I can find out the truth.

The contradiction is useful for me to find out the truth. Human beings are created beings that are connected to the rest of the universe and beyond. In other words, our expectations go beyond the universe. What is excellent in our being is that we are given the ability to decipher the signs in creation. If we did not have abilities to get the meaning from what we experience in the universe, we would not be considered human. **Human beings question and investigate; our capacity always goes beyond the scope of this universe.**

* When one asks questions, the universe gives the answer by pointing to the Creator.

With this, I can conclude that the Creator must exist. He creates me with the ability to read letters and/or signs and get endless meanings out of only one letter and/or one small sign. The Creator provides me with information through the universe and responds back to my questions. As a result, the universe seems meaningful. **When the universe seems meaningful, only then do I understand that my humanity is meaningful.**

* If the existence around you is rendered meaningless, your existence inevitably becomes meaningless.

Surveying the state of our society, we find people engaged in jobs/activities/gatherings to keep themselves occupied primarily for 'worldly' and 'physical' purposes under the name of "religion" or ​"religious activities," but they may be essentially ​just worldly purposes.

* The innate conscious self that strives for a life of meaningful purpose (i.e. one that does not just perish with death but instead has continuity) is left unengaged at the back of our minds.
* While our innate conscience may occasionally surface, making us question our existence and the life we are living, we may numb it and thus deny our humanity, allowing ourselves to become busy with inane and meaningless activities.

***How to make existence purposeful?***

A purposeful life requires that I train myself to know who my Lord is through His disclosures to my human consciousness. In doing so, I am engaging my human self, that is, satisfying my 'spiritual' needs.  
  
***Second Paragraph*: “*It can be clearly understood from this how essential it is for a spirit in this state at the time of Fajr in the early morning to face a recourse to and present a petition to the Court of an All-Powerful One of Glory, an All-Compassionate All-Beauteous One through prayer and supplication, to seek success and help from Him, and what a necessary point of support it is so that he can face the things that will happen to him in the coming day and bear the duties that will be loaded on him*.”**

Spirit= my human self, my humanity.

***How can I know my Lord?***  
  
We have to use our human qualities - our senses and thoughts- only then are we able to decipher the 'signs' in creation. When we use our human qualities to decipher the “sign boards”, anything in the universe, we understand our existence better. As a result, we do not feel disconnected from the universe as our existence is totally connected to the rest of the universe.

* If I do not engage my human qualities consciously, my interactions with the 'signs' will be on a very animalistic level.
* Example:  *Fajr* time is a “signboard” by which we ought to realize that the sun itself cannot provide anything for us. As I look at the sun/daybreak and ponder, my human qualities guide me to understand that it must be the result of an All-Powerful Creator.
* The sunrise tells me that a new day is being presented to me. Furthermore, I desire to wake up to a new day not only for today but wake up to an “Absolute day.” I understand that the sun cannot provide that but the Creator of the sun can.
* *What does it mean to wake up to an “Absolute day?”*
* It means that I have to connect my existence to an Absolute Source. I have to face, interact and question how the sunrise comes into existence. The sunrise declares that it is not the one causing daybreak; it prompts me to use my human qualities to understand the Cause of the daybreak.
* The sun itself cannot provide you what you need. **The Creator of the sun is the One causing the daybreak.** This is the result of our investigation using our human qualities: to understand that this day break is the act of the Absolutely Powerful One.

Again, **the universe is a “sign board” pointing to the qualities of the Maker and I question who my Lord is?** This awareness is the Cause of worship. Through my human consciousness, I train myself in finding the Lord. The Lord discloses itself through the act of creation in the universe, which are the “sign boards” pointing to its Absoluteness. In the order established in the universe, nothing happens by itself.

It is narrated in the tradition that the Prophet (PBUH) and the companions were travelling somewhere and they came across some elderly woman who was sewing while spinning the wheels of the machine.

* The Prophet asked the woman: “*Do you believe in God?”*
* The lady was unaware that she was talking to the Prophet. She answered: “I am spinning this wheel and if I don’t turn it, the wheel doesn’t spin. Similar to this wheel, there must be something which spins the “wheel” of this vast universe, which is what I call God.”
* The Prophet (PBUH) addressed the companions: "*Alaykum bi deeni'l-ajaa'iz*”: “You should follow this old woman's way of reasoning for her belief."​
* **LESSON-**
* One has to investigate to realize that neither the human body nor the machine is the Cause of the spinning. **The old woman is an example for how to reason as a “human being”.** Although she is not considered educated per the society’s standards, she uses human logic.
* Have total submission as a result of reasoning and questioning.
* See an event --> Question its existence --> (Do not settle for superficial answers > Be led to an answer that points to the Eternal Source.--> Satisfy your humanity

The spinning wheel is a sign mirroring how the order in the universe spins: every day is changing, seasons are changing and we are changing as well.

* Someone is changing me, *is it my DNA?* No. **Nothing can change itself because it has no power to create (*lailaha*). There must be a Cause giving existence to everything (*illallah*).**

Some truths are really obvious when we use our human qualities in which case it is hard not to realize that this universe has an Owner. However, we usually seek refuge in a religious 'tradition' - usually one that we are born into. We do not use our human self to question, we settle with a simplistic concoction of religion since it seems to be correct. On the other extreme, people who totally deny God and His existence are unable to provide any satisfactory answer about the Source of their creation. That is also the outcome of not reasoning as a “human being”. We have to question everything that we experience in this universe. Example:

* *Why do you like the brownie?*
* It tastes good.
* *Why do you feel good?*
* Because I have the ability to feel good.
* We need to question: *How come I like the brownie? How come the good feeling exists?*

1. Brownie is a “sign board”.
2. “Liking” the brownie is also a “sign board”.
3. “Questioning the feeling” is a “sign board” as well.

* Our humanity works when we start questioning.

1. **Practical example to train our reasoning i.e. methodology:**
2. I like the brownie because it tastes good (an external event)
3. Why does it taste good? (question its existence)
4. I have been made with the abilities (sense of taste, memory, etc) to enjoy. My questioning, enjoyment, etc are all “signboards” (one layer of explanation to the phenomenon).
5. Taste buds allow for enjoyment BUT the answer is not satisfactory as it fails to take into consideration how our taste buds exist.
6. Who has created me with the ability to enjoy? (continue questioning as from #2)
7. My Creator, who is also the Creator of everything in this universe, is communicating with me and giving me this taste of enjoyment so that I may know Him as the giver and Source of happiness. (second layer of explanation as from #3; one that is more satisfactory as it comforts my desire to understand existence).
8. He is inviting me to know Him and to remind me about my existence.
9. The brownie offers temporary enjoyment but it is given by the One who owns enjoyment.

When we pray, we worship. The author states that **worship is a** **way of presenting a petition**. Going back to the example above:

* *Do you want the ability to enjoy the brownie and all other things you like to never fade?*
* Yes! That would be ideal.
* The One who created me has made me with this desire.
* *Where did you get all these desires?*
* The One who is spinning my wheel (giving existence to my being) made me with endless desires. I want to live with eternal pleasure. That is how I am made.
* The brownie is just a sign to remind me to write a petition to the One who provides everything for me. Here is my petition: “I really like the pleasure given to me from this brownie. I acknowledge you as the Provider of this pleasure which satisfies my existence which I desire eternally.”
* That is worship.

Worship = presenting your conclusions (petition) and acknowledging His Ownership

1. **Checklist for worship:**
2. I acknowledge my reality: I want to be eternally happy.
3. Through questioning for the source, I conclude that there must be a Creator.
4. I present my desires to my Creator.

Make it a habit to check the reason behind acts and transform them to worship:

* I am worshipping because I am a Muslim vs. I worship because I cannot find any other way to present my existence and desire.

**Imitation of religious culture is an enemy that I have to constantly fight against because it makes one lazy in investigating the reason why s/he is following any religious tradition**.​

* We want security for Eternity. Nothing can secure its own existence yet we try and create elements of imagined security in our life (insurance, ownership, education, etc)

I have to train on acknowledging the Creator because only the Eternal One can satisfy our eternal desires. When I enjoy something, I feel inclined to present my happiness (petition) to the One who provides it to me although I do not know who it is. In the example above, we search for the Maker of the brownie and express our desire to have this enjoyment eternally.

* Analogy: You go to a tech expo. Various exhibitors are displaying their new gadgets. You try and like a particular one and ask the exhibitor to give it to you. The exhibitor tells you to fill in an order form and the company will send it to you. You fill the form because you understand that there is a company producing the gadget.
* Similarly, worship is a petition, filling in the form i.e. sending my human desires to the One who introduces me to things I like in the form of a sample in this universe. Through sending the petition, I realize that only He can give me that which I desire eternally.
* You acknowledge your reality which leads you to acknowledge the existence of the Source and you express your desires to the Source that you want to be eternally happy.
* **When I turn to the *kiblah*, it must be a means of expressing my conviction about the Source of my capacity, which is the One who makes me**.

**Convictions are the strong feelings of certainty that my existence belongs to an Absolute Eternal One, which is belief**. Sadly, we have been trained to find security in our existence by attaching ourselves to societal values. The culture and its entities (kinship, friendship bonds…) found in any society will perish and therefore, this sense of belonging to a certain culture/community cannot help anyone feel secure in his/her existence.

* ASK: *What am I doing in this world?*

The fundamental message of the Quran is for everyone regardless of religious background, capacity level and age. On the one hand it may seem hard to decipher the message without any background in reading the scripture. On the other hand it may seem so simple. One needs to develop the fundamental belief within himself and work on solidifying it in order to strengthen his/her conviction. The stages are endless but the message is simple i.e. *Mubeen (clear)*. In order to go deeper, we need to work harder.

***(Third Paragraph):* *“The time of Zuhr just past midday is the time of the day’s zenith and the start of its decline, the time when daily labours approach their achievement, the time of a short rest from the pressures of work, when the spirit needs a pause from the heedlessness and insensibility caused by toil, and a time Divine bounties are manifested. Anyone may understand then how fine and agreeable, how necessary and appropriate it is for the human spirit to perform the midday prayer, which means to be released from the pressure, shake off the heedlessness, and leave behind those meaningless, transient things, and clasping one’s hand at the Court of the True Bestower of Bounties, the Eternally Self-Subsistent One, to offer praise and thanks for all His gifts and seek help from Him and through bowing to display one’s impotence before His glory and tremendousness, and to prostrate and proclaim one’s wonder, love and humility. One who does not understand this is not a true human being.”***

* *We should ask ourselves: What is the purpose of this world?*
* We may find ourselves with insensibility as a result of dislike of our state of being.
* As the day progresses and we get involved in mundane day-to-day activities, we may get irritable OR become so involved in our tasks that we get heedless.
* When we are comfortable, we may find ourselves in a state of negligence.

​

Insensibility caused by toil: It is very human not to be aware of our reality at every moment. For the majority, only after encountering certain unpleasant events does the questioning about existence arise i.e. *is it worth living in this life?* Example: When I am hungry and if I do not have food, I ask myself why I don’t have food. On the other hand, if food is available every time for me, I don’t ask that question. Clearly, the questioning generally comes as a result of experiencing “undesired” or “disliked” events.

When things go well in life, how many people question about existence? For a heedless being, a smooth uninterrupted life leads to falling into “unawareness” which engenders to following a culture (without much questioning) in the name of “religion”. Just as a river takes any boat with its flow, the majority goes along with the flow of the culture. This flow “kills” human spirit i.e. it stops one from questioning existence and results in unawareness of his/her reality. Such espousing of “religious culture” should be the “enemy” for anyone.

* Culture is easy to follow and an easy way to find comfort.
* Whenever we question the culture, there is disturbance due to the lack of a convincing answer to those questions.
* People dislike disturbance and hence are much happier maintaining a status quo.

As long as one realizes about his/her existence, one can establish the foundations of religion within himself. **Religion is the result of conscious awareness of oneself** (existence of taste, desires, feelings…). The conscious awareness needs to be worked on and that needs ALERTNESS:

* *What is expected of me in this existence?*
* *Why am I doing what I am doing?*

***How can I communicate with my Creator while I am eating the brownie?***

I can only communicate with the Creator through His creation (my realm) using the senses He has given me. Everything in this universe is created so that I may use it to communicate with its Creator *w*ho is also my Creator. **We make life difficult for ourselves because we do not want to submit to the Creator.**We put the responsibility of preserving our lives on our shoulders which cannot carry them.

Again, we need to question everything, including any humanitarian work i.e. *what does it mean to contribute to the world?* We usually run away from our reality and jump into helping others. **If you are aware of your existence, you will know that every existent being has the right to exist.** We have to respect that right. Only then can you benefit from contributing to the world.

* Analogy: when you turn the faucet on and let water come out, you can either benefit from it or let it go to waste. If you are aware that the water has the right to exist for the purpose of its creation i.e. it is the Mercy of its Creator, you benefit from it. If you are not aware of this reality, then you are wasting the water. Every drop of water has the right to exist and represents Mercy.
* *Would you want to throw away Mercy?* No.
* Similarly, respecting the right of others is inevitable once you know and have acknowledged that you and everything around you is created.
* **Use water wisely because water exists by the right of its own existence as it has been chosen to exist by its Creator.​ Since it is not our property we have to respect its Owner.​**
* Thus, instead of wasting our efforts under the pretext of contributing to the world, we first need to define ourselves i.e. we are created to help others: Let us start from the Source of our own existence and the meaning of the existence of all our senses. **Only after questioning my existence (senses, feelings…) do I communicate with the Creator and act in His name.**
* **When I am aware of this reality, the “inevitable outcome of this consciousness” contributes to the world.**

It is illogical to start your conclusion with the Creator as you do not know the Creator yet. Example: Instead of asking God, “*why did you create me?” (illogical),* ask yourself:

* ***Why am I created?***
* ***What is the point in my existence?***
* *Why is the brownie tasty?*
* *Why do I enjoy it?*

When you study how things come into existence, you communicate with its Maker. Its Maker has put all its talent/qualities in what it makes. Through communicating with the Maker of the brownie (while eating), I conclude that the Maker is the One making me happy, satisfying me… and He wants me to be pleased with Him. This Maker has the qualities of happiness, satisfaction and compassion…**This conclusion is belief in God.**