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| **Part** | 8 |

Prayers cannot be established without feeling the need for guidance, feeling the need for help, seeing one’s impotence. Prayer is to offer praise and thanks, proclaim one’s wonder, love and humility in response to all the gifts we receive. When someone does not feel this need, prayers become a duty and give rise to the concept of a Master and “slave” relationship between them and the Creator. The need to feel guidance must be sought after. Only then can we “free” ourselves from the misconception of being tied to a Master and “slave” relationship. By no means does worship denote obeying the Master. The feeling and need comes as a result of realizing one’s own reality through experience in the universe, i.e. **I am needy and in need of sustenance, my existence is provided by an Absolute Source.** This “realization” automatically leads to “worship”.

Example: If someone gives you a gift, your immediate response is to say thank you in “appreciation” of the gift. Similarly, I should be grateful for the gifts given to me by the Creator. I have the option to use my freewill to either thank the Creator or not. In this regard, the Creator has set me free. I am free to ignore the Source of my human qualities which is nothing but distorting or rebelling against my human nature. Guidance lies in my “appreciation” (feeling). Therefore, if I distort my human nature, I suffer the consequences of not heeding to the guidance.

When I perform the prayer, I am the one that benefits from it, not the Creator. Example: A friend lets you stay in his apartment while you are away and texts you to help yourself in the kitchen. You are free to prepare the meal with all that is provided in the kitchen whichever way you want. However if you chose not to prepare food, you stay hungry and suffer the consequence. The meal is for you, not the friend. We cannot say, “The host ordered me to prepare the dinner and eat it, I am the slave of his order.” Similarly, every act we do in the universe is for our own benefit. There is no ordering or command but it is purely guidance for me. The Creator provides us with guidance in terms of benefitting our humanity. If I follow the guidance, I will be happy. That is something that I achieve by sticking to my reality.

I have to be honest within myself and use my given freewill in the right way. The guidance tells me that there is evidence out there which I can confirm. It implores telling me not to be lazy, to be honest and use my abilities to confirm the reality. My Creator sends guidance to make me realize my reality i.e. the abilities are not mine but they are given to me as a token to appreciate the Source. Prayer is a prescription: if I follow it, I will be happy. The act of praying should be the outcome to my experiences.

At every given moment, the Creator communicates with me and provides me with guidance via three different but integrated channels. The ultimate “destination” of these channels is the same. I use my abilities to understand what is right/wrong in creation and take lessons from it.

1. Act of creation.
2. Verbal speech.
3. Representatives of the message

#1 refers to what we observe in the universe where everything is a sign. There is constant communication at every moment which we realize when we are aware and pay attention.

#2 refers to verbal communication which I expect to receive since I have been endowed with the ability to understand it. I have to look for this verbal teaching which introduces me to the One who made me.

#3 refers to the Prophethood. Although, the idea of having Prophets may seem to be a historical notion, I am in need of a Prophet. He may not be available in person but his heritage is there. In my time, there is prophetic guidance still functioning, I need to look for it. By learning from the disciples that represent the message, I understand that I am made with a need to hear a verbal explanation and personal demonstration of the effect of the meaning of what I observe in this world in my personal life.

I need a representative of the message to help me understand or explain the Source (as a human being) without being under the influence of external factors.

In the example above, if a guide comes and shares with you that if you follow your own reality and adjust your self accordingly (as supported by the speech of the Creator), you will feel like myself.

Analogy: You are studying nursing to get a degree. Without the degree you cannot get the nursing job. When you complete your program and get the degree, you become qualified to be a nurse. While attending classes in the program, you start learning and you feel confident that when you get the degree, you will be a qualified nurse.

* Similarly, we are training here practicing our reality under the guidance of the Creator. We are journeying here to transition to another type of existence. With everything transient around me, I realize that there must be something afterwards. My journey cannot end here. As a result of seeing traces of death (resurrection), I confirm the existence of an afterlife.



*“Say: ‘Unto whom belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth?’ Say: ‘Unto God, who has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy.**He will assuredly gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection, [the coming of] which is beyond all doubt: yet those who have squandered their own selves-it is they who refuse to believe [in Him]”*Quran (6:12)

Hereafter is a feeling of being resurrected: I am expected to understand the reality of the promised day while I am here in this world and confirm it. That is what guidance is for me: to be honest within myself.

* How can you explain death? Death is the only way to explain this feeling that there must be resurrection otherwise it is meaningless to be given all this training in this universe.
* My Creator provides me with the ability to realize that this universe is purposeful and a place for me to learn the reality. That realization is guidance. As you are learning to become a qualified nurse, don’t you feel the need to use your skills to practice what you learnt? As you grow in your life, you feel prepared for a profession. We are preparing in this universe for the hereafter.
* My reality (*fitrat*), in a pure state unaffected by cultural influence, should guide me. I can easily understand that my Creator is speaking to me to guide me.

No one can become a believer without investigating. We have to search. The sense of curiosity is to be used in order to search for “guidance”. I may use my freewill to squander the sense of curiosity for other purposes.

If you are looking to understand your reality, the Creator must give you verbal explanation of guidance because He made you with the ability to understand from the guidance. The Prophets came to people that were in search of guidance. **Never think of religion within cultural context. Think of religion within your human reality.**

There is one instance where the Prophet proposed some allegiance statements to the people of Mecca. This is an example of how guidance is not forced upon anyone. There is an option and if one takes it they will benefit. The pledge was for the people to benefit from and in this scenario it was specifically addressed to the women. One of the items of the pledge stated: “do not kill your children”. This means that women need to educate themselves in belief matters in order to ensure that they do not kill the intellectual curiosity within their children, which in turn may damage their cognitive development in search for the truth. Another interesting statement of the pledge was not to grieve with excessive outburst crying over someone’s death. One of the women did not accept that particular item immediately and told the prophet (pbuh) that she has a prior obligation related to that statement. The prophet agreed and said its fine. The Prophet is giving guidance and set people free to follow what they deem fit. He never forced anything onto them.