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| **Date** | Wednesday, April 20, 2016 |
| **Topic** | Belief in Prophethood: Different Purposes in Reading the Quran |
| **Part** | 1 |

My perception of the universe changes according to my expectations. If I am distressed, I do not get excited from the existence of the universe, although the universe has not changed out there. If I am hopeful, then I can see the beauty manifested in the universe. Similarly, any descriptive text that I come across acts the same way. That is, the text in any scripture changes meaning according to my own expectations. Nothing has the power to change the objects/events in the universe but I can certainly change my interpretation of events/objects according to my own mirror within. This by no means implies that I have changed the reality which exists; on the contrary, I am given the freewill to change my perception of the reality.

* The scriptures help us change our perception of the universe.

When I expect to benefit from any text, according to my expectations, I benefit from it. Nothing has to be right or wrong. Nothing is essentially wrong unless I deliberately misinterpret it. If I want to learn about something specific pertaining to my physical life such as how to cook chicken, then the scripture is not for that purpose. However, for my existential questions where I need guidance, I just need to refer to the scripture and get guidance pertaining to my questions (specific detail). Obviously, I do not get more from the scripture which is unlimited in its guidance because my expectations were directed towards getting guidance for that specific detail.

If I reduce religion to believe in God only (i.e. I believe in God, the universe is created by an Absolute being), then this confirmation alone does not help me with feeling secure in my being. One may have the right understanding of God i.e. the Creator of the universe but that alone does not guarantee that you are on the right track or that you are utilizing your freewill in the right way. Every moment we are utilizing our freewill and making choices. **It does not necessarily mean that because I believe in God that my choices are right.**

In order to do something in the right way, what are we going to do? No one can ensure that they are making the right choices. That is why we learn to make the right choices through trial and error hoping that the Creator will guide me in the right way. However, the guidance is always there in both my mistakes and right acts. Our responsibility is to only utilize our freewill in the right way which means acknowledging the Owner of the choices presented to me and subsequently the result is created for me.

* *Do you feel the need that your Creator must help you in your decision making process i.e. provide you with guidance?* YES.
* *Is the society or culture leading me to make the right decision related to the purpose of my existence?* NO.
* *Have societies found the truth?* NO. Societies usually keep refining their norms on secular bases.

It seems that today I deem something to be right and tomorrow I realize that it was wrong. Ultimately, no one can be sure of the right decision. Hence, the need for guidance takes place within you. I feel that it is better that I receive guidance from my Creator in how to deal with matters and organize my life in this universe. This feeling is given to me and a proof that the One that creates me and gives me this feeling must guide me.

Some people are developing more self confidence that they can find the truth on their own. Since the more they feel confident in their decisions as far as fulfilling the purpose of one’s existence is concerned, the less they need God to interfere in their life. This trend is prevailing and is mostly referred to as “spirituality”. They are not denying God but they trust their instincts (decision process) alone by listening to their conscious (expectations). There are two problems with this approach:

1. How can I trust myself alone?
2. How can I define what consciousness requires of me?

**When I feel the need for guidance, God must give me guidance; I can check it through my consciousness.** This consciousness is created by Him and given to me. When guidance comes to me, I use my human qualities (instincts) given by the Creator and have a consultation with my consciousness. There is a compatibility between my consciousness and the guidance of my Creator.

The alternate side of spirituality is people following the rules of a certain culture. This majority of people wait for others to tell them what to do and what not to do. As far as they are concerned, as long as they are abiding by the rules presented by the society, they feel satisfied. They miss the relationship between what they hear from the scripture and what human capacity experiences. Is there any way to confirm what they are following is really the right way? They may not think: *"Am I following the right principles of life?"*

*How can I make sure that the rules presented to me are the right ones?* Imitation does not make me feel secure in my life. Have I investigated the legitimacy of the ruling i.e. whether it is coming from the right source and rightly interpreted?

There are rules of course from the Creator who must guide you on how to use yourself and the universe. ***Do we feel the need that the Creator must come to my help in order for me to make the right decisions involving the fundamental matters?***

There are two types of rules:

1. Personal
2. Societal

***In order to follow the juridical rules (fiqh), what is required of me?***

* I need to be a believer. That is, belief and submission to the scripture is a pre-requisite to following rules. (At this stage we are not talking about the criteria of one’s belief. It is beyond the scope of this topic.)

We, the believers, generally tend to follow religious rules based on our cultural and ancestral norms instead of first establishing belief.

* The first step is to investigate the purpose of your existence.
* This investigation should lead one to a point/worldview that requisites guidance from your Creator.
* Only then can the rules found in Scriptures have true meaning.

If a society takes religion for granted, they will establish rules that are superficial and not consistent with their worldview (because a sound worldview has not been established). **Almost everyone accepts the existence of God. Beyond this claim, there needs to be an investigation of one's own purpose of existence.** Unfortunately, most people relegate the questioning, more so seeking solutions to practical matters to scholars without an understanding of the fundamentals of belief for themselves.

After believing in one God, people usually want to organize their life according to religion. Now, a profession emerges i.e. religious jurists. Just as you would consult a tax lawyer to advise you on how to pay taxes, similarly people reach out to religious jurists for matters. *Do you think the jurist has to present the law together with her/his belief in the reality/truthfulness of the legitimacy of the law he is presenting to you?* No. The rule is simply referred to some verse or precedence. **Therefore, it is I who has to be convinced that whatever I am doing has a legitimate base for my own understanding of the world.** Hence, a worldview has to be established based on my human nature and I must be convinced about it. A ruling only makes sense as far as an individual is convinced of its relevance to his/her existence. Unfortunately, most people follow rules without being convinced about it because they do not see any other way. They are under the delusion that they have to follow the rules as it is a religious requirement and that if they do not follow rules, they think they are denying God (an impossible act for them). **For such people (mostly in the majority), belief in existence of God is the foundation as opposed to belief in the truthfulness of the scripture they are following, confirming that it is indeed from their Creator.** That is why it is imperative to establish a belief system.

Telling people what to do is “learning”. If you ask a jurist why I should fast, they will bring in examples from the scripture, previous ijtihad (rulings of the previous scholars), Qiyas (syllogism), Prophet’s companions’ statements, the school of thought you are born in. Or they will simply say it is the law, the Prophet said so or this verse mentions it. All these answers lack the belief foundations which require one to ask important question (see below). Historically, the Islamic education system (madrasa) got reduced to Islamic laws only where people learn just Arabic rules and grammar and rulings previously set by the scholars, to issue verdict (fatwas). Why? *Because Quranic teachings which requires one to establish belief foundations got forgotten.*

**Important questions that most of us are not asking!**

* What is the purpose of your life?
* What kind of evidence do you need to establish your belief system?
* Who is the source of your emotions?
* What does a Prophet mean?
* Why should I follow the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)?
* How can I be sure that he is a messenger?

If you believe in God as the Creator but jump to believing in following the rules established by religion, it will result in an imitation of rules. **There is a big gap between believing in God and following the rules that needs to be filled in with belief training.** Establishing evidence is NOT about narrating a line of authorship (giving reference to an established rule or syllogism) but rather requires that we establish a line of belief that makes sense to my consciousness.

The lack of convincing evidence makes individuals stubborn to the rules they follow and thus they radicalize towards their culture/ religion which gives rise to religious tribalism, self-declared righteousness. This attitude is nothing but ignorance which is terribly dangerous. Unable to communicate a convincing train of thought, the only line of defense that is communicated is 'my religion is the best.’ The fact is that the Prophet fought to eradicate racial and religious tribalism.

Quran establishes belief system and the Prophet practiced the belief system but in the Prophetic traditions belief matters have not been narrated. Why? Because people could only narrate what they witness in the physical side of the behavior and wordings of the Prophet. Consequently, this resulted in concentrating on the rulings (fiqh) side of matters only. Belief education of the Prophet is not mentioned in any Prophetic traditions, (seera) books. Additionally, no one can actually narrate how a person feels. For instance, there was a staggering increase in the number of believers after a series of certain historical wars as narrated in some narrations of the life biography of the Prophet. Since people studying seera books only paid attention to how to do rituals and practical matters, it never occurred to them to investigate how the number of the followers increased so quickly? Seera books fail to mention that people were busy with spreading the message through “belief education” as a result of which, the number of manpower increased. Even in this day and age, there are not that many people looking to be taught Quranic teachings and say: **“Teach me the belief system please!”**

There are two things:

1. Real cause of actions (illa)
2. Wisdom in the action (hikma)

Some people support their religious rituals with wisdom loaded language such as fasting is cleansing for the body or praying helps me get a peaceful mind, just to name a few. Here wisdom is used as an incentive.

According to the fiqh rules, if I do any action according to wisdom only, it’s not valid. In Fiqh, illa is the valid reason. Examples:

* Why do you fast?
* Because the Quran says so.
* Why do you believe in the Quran/Torah/Bible?
* Because I understand that it is the Guiding Speech of my Creator.

In order to make it valid, you justify it by referring it to a Scripture. This becomes a self-circulating sense of reasoning. We need to go beyond this superficial and acutely meaningless reasoning mechanism. In order to have a valid reasoning, one needs to establish an action in accordance with one's worldview. **Each and every action we perform needs to be because of our belief system** and not merely because of a religious ruling OR an inherent physical benefit.

If I have a solid reason/source that convinces me that I have to pray/fast, then that is why I pray/fast which becomes the real cause of action. That is why I have to establish a solid understanding of God before accepting the awareness that God guided me to fast to fulfil the purpose of my existence. There is no such education on belief matters in the general culture.

The Prophet (pbuh) did not start his teachings by establishing legal rulings.  For a good part of the initial years, revelation was about the following principles:

* transience of this universe
* paying attention to your existence
* not being proud
* establishing equality
* taking care of orphans and the needy ones

Establishing conviction in one's belief was of the utmost importance. The abolishment of slavery based on the principle of equality was one of the primary reasons why people embraced the teachings of Islam.