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| **Date** | Wednesday, April 27, 2016 |
| **Topic** | The Purpose in Reading the Quran |
| **Part** | 2 |

*Recap:* *Why am I reading any text?* My intention in reading the text changes the meaning of the text as far as I am concerned. If I read it to get answers to my existential questions, then it must provide me with such answers. I may be aware that I am created by God but in my practical life I do actions according to my own choices (influenced by the culture/society that I have been surrounded with).

***Is it possible to worship God by believing in God only as the Creator?***  No. Here is why:

Worship is a connection between you and the Creator i.e. acknowledging the Creator. *How am I going to connect myself to It?*

* I can only connect myself to It if I have an organic relationship with It i.e. by understanding that my senses (my tools to connect) are given to me by It, I have to adjust my senses to get to know It (which is really Its choice).
  + My senses are given to me by It in order to do/feel/think/eat/drink/hear….
  + For instance, the sense of loving or despising is given to me in order to question its existence i.e. where did I get this feeling so I may use the feeling to know who my Creator is.

***What am I going to do with my endless qualities?*** They are given to me to be utilized to get to know my own self. That is, I am created and I must have a Creator. People who do not acknowledge God, also use their senses. **Where a belief differs is in the awareness that these senses have been given so as to know their Creator and establish a worshipful relationship between God, the Creator, and me, the creature.**

* Attributes of God may be learnt through religious sources or more organically through reflecting on my human senses.
* We may read about the attributes of God and learn about Its characteristics in religious scriptures. But, in order to truly know these attributes, we have to experience them in our physical being (this is done through our human senses).

***How will I put this acknowledgment of the Creator in my practical life?*** For example: when I see a flower, I am inclined to feel enjoyment because I perceive the flower to be beautiful. *Why?* Because that is how I am made. **My appreciation towards flowers is GIVEN to me. I need to reflect on the source of existence of this feeling**. *Is the flower the reason for the existence of my sense of excitement?* No. **The flower is made for me to experience enjoyment but I need to be aware that flower itself is just a means to trigger the sense of enjoyment within me.**  Flower is not the cause of producing the sense of enjoyment that I am endowed with. My Creator is giving me this feeling to make me realize that I am unable to ‘CREATE’ any experience. **The Source of existence of my experience is the Source of existence of the whole universe.**  **Most of us do not reflect on this ‘feeling’ beyond that fleeting enjoyment.** My senses have been given to me as a ‘trust’. I need to use them to know the Source of their existence.

* Belief in God without me connecting my senses/feelings to It yields no result in my life.

Belief in God is necessary but not sufficient. Otherwise you will reason as follows: “The flower I saw this morning got me excited”. The Source of existence of anything is the Source of existence of the whole universe. As soon as I realize that just believing in God is insufficient for my practical life, I need to work on myself and go through the following stages:

* Stage 1: Universe is created by a Conscious Source.
* Stage 2: I am part of this universe
* Stage 3: I have been created by this Source who created the universe
* Stage 4: I am not just a biological, physical entity. I find myself with senses
* Stage 5: My senses are given to me.
* Where can they come from?
* Stage 6: What is the purpose of my senses?
  + Turn to religious scriptures.
  + Check if the text is compatible with your senses/feelings. How? By using your human qualities.
* Stage 7: How should I use my senses?
  + Turn to the teachings of the Prophets who are trained by the Creator to instruct human beings how to use their senses/feelings.

**CONCERN:** The universe must have a Creator is a reasonable conclusion but is not enough to convince my human consciousness.

***Ask: Where can my qualities/senses come from?*** If I study the existence of anything, I will find out that there is no Source of existence of anything within this universe. ***Do I feel that? How do I explain that?*** Question the Source of existence of this feeling because you are a human being and you are given the ability to question. I am given existence together with my senses. My senses do not have prior existence to my existence, just as the qualities of matter do not have prior existence to the matter itself. The senses are given to me by my Maker and I have the choice to investigate further by asking: Why are the senses given to me?

**TO DO:** We need to develop an approach to ‘religious sources’ by first exercising our ability to question.

***Ask: Is the speaker in the text my Creator?*** I have to be sure that the guidance offered, is the guidance of my Creator. How can I check that the guidance in the scriptures is from my Creator?

Example: I want to study biology.

* Through the years, I keep learning about the human body. As I learn, I practice what I learn in the laboratories.
* I do not just take what the professor says at face value.
* Accordingly, I come to a conclusion that what I was taught is true or not.

While seeing HOW things are happening, I also have to ask WHY things are happening?

* Example: A tree is growing/ humans are developing
  + Answer 1: This is how the universe is. It is just like that.
  + Answer 2: The universe has been made in this way. The Creator of this universe explains why He made the universe the way He did in the scripture. The Creator is the only One who can provide the answers to my ‘WHY’ questions.
    - Since “WHY” questions exist and since there is no way to get the answer to “WHY” questions within the universe, these answers must be provided from beyond the realm of this universe.

In the example above, the tree cannot answer my "why" question as it is unconscious. Nothing in the universe can answer my “why” questions ***(lailaha)***, The Maker must answer my "why" questions. **But I have to go through the "how" question first.** This Maker must give me the explanation from beyond the limit of this universe. **This is why revelation is necessary so that I may know about: WHY does what I observe exist?**

**By asking the WHY questions, as a result of our observations, we are able to know our Creator. We come to a realization that this existence cannot be by its own and that it cannot exist by itself. It has a Creator and He is the creator of everything including my feelings and expectations.**

* At that moment of realization, I should turn to my Creator because I have realized that everything is under Its control and Its conscious choice. The existence of the universe witnesses this reality. The transient experience in each moment is a way for me to know its Eternal Source. **I come to realize that this transient universe is nothing but a means of conversation of the Creator with conscious human beings.**
* I understand that my experiences, interactions and emotions are a means of revealing what my heart truly seeks: Eternity.
* I understand that my yearning for a permanent existence is under the control of the Creator of my feelings.

**The Role of “Wisdom” (*Hikmah*) in Legislative/Juridical Matters.**

Most people follow scripture without questioning it. Some people follow their own instincts without the need for guidance. In both cases, there is no organic connection between creation and the Creator. Since human beings are learners, one should find out what qualities are manifested here in the universe. Why these qualities are given to you? In other words, why have I been endowed with senses? (as discussed above)

How Fiqh rulings take place as we know it now (this is the task of the jurists):

* Quran and Hadith are sources from which jurists derive rulings about the religion.
* Example: We pray because jurists find that the Quran says we have to pray.
* According to judicial ruling, the benefits of praying are only an incentive to pray. The benefits cannot be the reason behind the ruling.
* The reason behind our ritualistic actions is either because the action is mentioned in the Quran or was practiced by the Prophet.
* Verses in the Quran that talk about rulings are limited and account for at most 5%.

Majority (the 95%)of the verses in the scriptures are addressed to human questions about the world they observe and emotions experienced. Scripture speaks to human beings so as to guide humanity to develop a right understanding of existence.

**Juridical approach-- Latest revealed verses must be taken into consideration; the principle of abrogation must be accepted.**

* Jurisprudential (judicial/juridical) approach reads scripture to get rulings. The pre-requisite is to testify the Oneness of God and Muhammad (pbuh) as Its Messenger (shahada) i.e. the idea of belief. Afterwards, a person is ready for rituals and rulings.
* A very common example out of several abrogated verses: In earlier revelation, there was no mention on forbidding alcohol which was being consumed in society. Later verses, as belief foundations were established, revealed not to approach prayers while drunk/intoxicated. The latest revelation strictly forbids drinking alcohol. Thus, jurisprudential approach must accept abrogation otherwise it cannot issue rulings.

**Generally speaking, the lates revealed verses must be taken first as the basis for ruling. The Quran (Mushaf) is read from beginning to end as it is compiled now.**

* Why? Because you have to follow the latest version of the revelation. The later chapters are the latest development in revelation.

**Belief Approach**

**Reading the Quran and Hadith to get guidance from matters related to belief.**

* How can I benefit from the speech of the Creator in order to guide me?
* How should I understand my position in existence?
* Why am I in this position? Explain to me.
* Why should I believe in it?

We have to first be convinced that the Scripture we are using is really the Speech of my Creator before we accept any ruling derived from it. I have to be convinced through the guidance of the Quran if it makes sense to me. If the scripture is the guidance of my Creator, my human questions must be answered. Most of my human questions are about existence and not about rituals. We need to change the way we approach the Quran and other religious scriptures. Instead of focusing/following the rituals stated in religious scriptures (which only comprise a minority of verses), we have to first turn to them in search of answers to our human questions.

We have to seek out a scripture that is the speech of my Creator to me, that answers my existential questions. The disease of adopting a ‘top-down’ approach (from Judicial to belief) towards religion that accepts cultural norms without question has pervaded all aspects of religion. It is a result of this disease that we find a growing class of people who are falling out of religious traditions because it does not make sense to them as the religion is presented to them or, on the other spectrum, a group of people who are heralds (and defenders) of a religious tradition in a way to feel secure about their existence.

***How ‘religious’ parents raise children currently?***

Example# 1-

* Child: Why do we live in this world?
* Parent: Jesus saved us
* Child: How do you know that?
* Parent: Because that is our belief and the Bible or God says so. “We cannot know better than God”
* Child: But why?

Example #2-

Children born to Muslim parents

* Parents tend to be very steeped into sending their kids to Sunday School where they are taught Arabic and all the legal jurisprudence pertaining to the religious rituals or some ethical behavior.
* The foundations are generally missing and they do not work on establishing belief.

We need to stop using religious scriptures only as a means of justification for our actions (We do XYZ because the Quran says do XYZ). Rather, we need to first use our human senses to reach a conclusion about the authenticity of a text. Only then can we apply the rulings stated.

In summary, here are the two approaches:

1. Legal (juridical) approach: Because you are a Muslim, you have to follow the Quran.
2. Belief approach: Because I am a human being in need of answers, I accept and follow the Quran as it perfectly answers my existential questions.

For the **belief approach**, the scriptures are used to answer our existential questions. For the **legal approach**, the scriptures are used to get rulings. This approach is not wrong. However, it gets its legitimacy only after I have reached a state where I confirm the belief teachings of the Quran. **Rather than rejecting juridical approach, I have to substantiate it with belief approach.** Once I find that the answers in the Quran perfectly answer my existential questions, I accept the legal injunctions in the Quran as guidance from my Creator. **Rather than criticizing the legal approach, we need to supplement it by emphasizing the belief approach so that we will be able to reach a place where we are convinced that the scripture is a GUIDE from MY CREATOR.**

Guide in terms of providing answers to my existential questions whereas ruling focus on the practice. The practice makes sense only when it is the result of one’s belief i.e. the person is convinced within himself and lives accordingly.

Example: Why do I give 2.5 % of my wealth to the poor?

* The Prophet (pbuh) advised it, so under the guidance of the Creator, it is given.
* But first, we have to establish, the following:
  + Does your understanding of existence necessitate a Prophet?
  + Are you sure he is a Prophet of your Creator?

All the verses of the Quran needs to be questioned and must be reasonably approved by anyone who reads them. To look for wisdom is inevitable but I have to be convinced from the guidance of the Quran for my own self. My confidence is based on the Source being the guide from my Creator. I should ask as I read the Qur’an: "Why do you say this to me?" Why questions should be answered at every stage. Reasoning is required and logical consistency is expected. That is, because I am convinced, I confirm the Quran to be the speech of my Creator. Example: If I am sure that My Creator is the One making me love **beauty**. I conclude that He must be the One who loves **beauty**. Only then can I confirm the Scripture when I read in it stating that God is the One Who Loves beauty. All scriptures are external unless I go through the process of confirmation at every moment of my reading them.

Finally, the Prophets are employed to teach us how to practice our rationally accepted conclusions in this world of matter and body. I have to realize that I do not consist of soul only. I have my body to communicate with matter in the universe i.e. my soul needs the body to be acting as a full human being. Similarly, the universe consists of matter as well so I can communicate with it.

The Prophets are here to teach us what the Creator’s permission is. That is, everything glorifies Its magnificence. Example: if I drink grape juice, I am aware that it is a beverage presented to me by Its Creator who happens to be the Creator of my taste buds and so I drink it with Its permission because neither my tongue nor the juice (both material side) belongs to me.

Let’s finish up with one last example. When I am hungry, I do not just say that God is the Nourisher. I need to eat the food to experience the Nourisher and while I experience the food, I conclude that the Creator of this food and my hunger is God, the Nourisher.