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| **Date** | Wednesday, May 11, 2016 |
| **Topic** | Belief in Prophethood: The Purpose in Reading the Quran |
| **Part** | 4 |

The biggest question in this day and age is to figure out how to integrate one’s belief with practical life. Belief cannot be independent from my practical life. That is, I cannot separate my being from the rest of the universe. Every event in the universe exists within the whole context of the universe. Just as an ophthalmologist studies the whole human body to become an eye specialist, similarly, one verse of a text (scripture) or one event mentioned in the scripture cannot be studied independent from the whole text. We have to contextualize the Quran as mentioned. That is to say, when we read the Quran, we have to read each verse, chapter, point, etc. with a lens that is in tune with the aim/foundation of the Quran.

* Aim of the Quran is to establish Divine Unity (Absoluteness of the Creator) i.e.:
1. To make known to human beings who the Owner of the universe is.
2. To make known to human beings that there are guides (Messengers) available in this universe.
3. To make known to human beings the transient nature of this universe; this prompts one to yearn for Eternity (hereafter).
4. To make known to human beings that they are here to fulfill the purpose of their existence which is to get to know God and communicate with It by using given human qualities.
* This extends to teaching human being the concept of “justice” i.e. everything must be treated according to its purpose. For instance, it would be unjust to say that bird is an animal. Instead, **bird is a created message for me, glorifying its Creator’s qualities in order to demonstrate them to me**.
* Quran requires from us to establish justice in our lives.

Example 1: *How do I understand slavery within the whole context/purpose of the Quran?*

**The answer:** As far as my relationship with my own self (human qualities consisting of senses, feelings and emotions + physical being) is concerned, which is how I view myself in this universe (i.e. my belief= I need to be sustained), slavery needs to be understood within this frame of thought. That is, to emancipate myself from worshipping/obeying/acknowledging my own self or any other created being and materials object as having the power to sustain.

* I can worship God only (i.e. the Being that sustains me). I am not an independent entity of my own. My entity belongs to the Creator.
* **If I have an Owner, how can I ask others to obey me? If I have an Owner, why should I obey others? This contradicts the aim of the Quran**.

**Quran=** guidance to why I exist and the speech of the Creator to every single human being, that which the Prophets present to us.

* The Quran must speak to me right now. I do not need to go back some 1400 years ago. It is an ever present Speech of my Creator speaking to me at this given moment.

One should never try to answer any practical question without taking into consideration the aims of the Quran + this world is a transient training abode. This is what the Prophet presents to us. **If I do not internalize the concept that this universe is a training abode, then what am I expected to be trained about?**

* *What is the purpose in training?*
* I need to train for the purpose to get to know who my Lord is.
* **This training becomes the belief practice in my practical life.**
* Belief practice is my worldview and thus physical practice of life follows accordingly. This should take into consideration the Quranic worldview as much as I have trained myself in.
* I need to develop the Quranic worldview which helps me acknowledge my real status in this universe.

Let us first look at the fundamentals. All rulings belong to God. I have no right to say that all desires and expectations that I experience belong to me. I would contradict myself stating that because I am created. If we don’t even understand the fundamental teachings of the Quran, we should not comment on the practical aspects of the rituals performed. All our actions should be understood with respect to our worldview based on the guidance offered by the Creator i.e. as much as I can understand.

All juridical terms mentioned in the Quran need to be understood from a firm belief stand point.

* Instead of just saying ‘I do X because God says so’, we need to first understand who am I (my real status in relation to God)?
* Although I claim that I am a Muslim/a believer of the Quran, my understanding of religion may well be shaped by culture.
	+ As a result, I may interpret judicial rulings in the Quran with reference to my present-day cultural context; I need to be cautious.
	+ Quranic rulings make sense only within the Quranic worldview
	+ Therefore, it is necessary that we reorient our worldview and re-contextualize judicial rulings with regards to the Quranic worldview.

Quranic view helps me define myself i.e. who I am and who the other objects are. Accordingly, I will define concepts such as slavery, inheritance… All our ‘possessions’ (money, food, relationships, time) need to be used according to the rules established by the Creator.

* Why?
* Because, everything belongs to the Creator and I understand that they have been bestowed on me as a “trust”. Hence, we can only use it as its Real Owner wants us to use it.
* Thus, if people realize that what they have belong to God only, they cannot belong to anyone else, neither can they claim that someone belong to me. This is the fundamental teaching of the Qur’an.
* Conclusion: Ultimately, the concept of slavery, contradicts the teaching of the Qur’an.

Example 2: As head of the household, it does not mean that I have the right to impose my doings on my spouse and children. They are a trust, with everyone belonging to the same Owner. I have to acknowledge this fact that I do not own what is given, it is a trust and thus I cannot appropriate it to any way I want. We cannot use “trust” without fulfilling the purpose of its existence. For example, the money that I receive, I need to acknowledge that money is given to me in the form of a trust by the One that creates the whole universe.

* Similarly, I cannot use or dispose the most insignificant object as I want **including a loaf of bread that I find for free.** Again, it is a ‘trust’ from my Creator.
* ***How can you achieve such a worldview?***
	+ By understanding the **reality** of this world as per the teachings of the Quran.
	+ The present day civilization (or that of past generations) should not become my imitated worldview.
* I have to establish a worldview that makes sense to me according to the conditions in which I have been created.

Example 3: *How can we understand the verses about inheritance under the Quranic worldview?*

* The property belongs to God.
* In general cases, there is a way of dividing the inheritance (two to men, and one to women)
	+ What is important is that we have to use whatever is allocated according to the Owners’ principles.
	+ Everyone needs to use the property disposed upon them only in the name of the Owner, the Creator.
* I have to use what I have been given as a trust from my Creator. (I have no right to waste one penny!)

With a materialistic mentality that thinks, more is better/luckier, merrier, I will understand example 3 as:

* Inheriting half the property is an underprivileged position.
* But in reality, what matters is NOT how much I get but rather**, how I use that which I have been given.**
	+ Check yourself: Am I using that which I have been given according to the WILL of the Creator of the property, i.e. is my exercise of will based on a sound worldview?
* If we internalize this understanding, we will not be ‘arguing’ over how much each one of us gets because the importance lies in how we use that which we have.
	+ **Nothing truly belongs to you; it is not important how much you have.**
	+ All that we have is just a means of training to know our Creator
	+ The more you have, the more responsibility you have in acknowledging the Creator in each morsel of that which you have. (And you thought that it was easy to be a millionaire! Think again!)
	+ **To have more property, is not a privilege, but rather it means an increased sense of responsibility.** Example: Bob is a lazy boy. His rich father dies and through inheritance Bob becomes rich and is responsible for all that wealth. Only when Bob puts this reality within the context of the Quranic worldview, can he live according to the Will of the Owner of the property. The Owner is the One Who distributes the responsibilities and the property according to the responsibilities assigned by It. The Owner puts the financial responsibility on men and assigns more property to them.

My belief training lies in:

1. how am I going to treat the “trust”?
2. how will I develop my consciousness of the Owner of the trust?

Example 4: ***Why do you pray five times and not six?***

* Think about the answer from an *illah* (The ultimate cause) perspective, not a *hikmah* (wisdom, worldly benefit)perspective
* Every act has an endless number of wise reasons. We need to understand our actions with respect to our worldview.
* My worldview requires me to acknowledge my Creator
	+ Therefore, I pray five times because my Lord asks me to (as a result of acknowledging my createdness).
	+ When I bow, I refresh my position of submission to my Creator and acknowledge my reality as an *abd* (worshipper)
	+ I am consciously using my free will according to the will of the Creator instead of using it with no sound blueprint
	+ **You have to define who you are before you can say ‘I am doing this act because God says so’ (i.e. defining God)**

***How do you know that God is the Creator?***

* If there was no created being, we cannot know who the Creator God is
* My definition of God can only arise as the result of knowing who I am
	+ I am created, therefore I have a Creator.

Fundamental teachings of the Quran: before I can define myself, I cannot define the Creator. That is why the Quran starts off with encouraging the reader to think about creation. Ask: Have I ever thought of the mountains, my being, rivers…etc. Only through the universe will I develop my God consciousness otherwise I cannot develop it.

***What is your TRUE position in your daily life?***

* Going back to example 2: Are you the head of the household and can act independently OR have you been made in-charge by the Creator and hence you need to act according to His rules?
* Whatever power of administration position is given to me, I need to be aware of who I am while administering my position in the family, society or organization.

Again, we have to understand the general teaching of the text and view each particularity with respect to the general claim.

* Each matter in the Quran needs to be analyzed with respect to ‘belief’.
* Trying to understand the teachings of the Quran according to our respective cultures will not allow us to truly yield the *illah* (the ultimate cause) perspective
	+ What is the belief perspective?
	+ The Quran is the word of my Creator and the speaker is speaking to my human qualities so that I may be able to use that which He has given me for its rightful purpose. That is, to know who I am and who is the Creator of my body and all of my human qualities.
	+ For example: If someone believes that to be the head of the household is a privilege, this person will never understand that the head of the household is to be followed. Why? Because s/he does not see that the head of the household has a responsibility of managing affairs at the Will of his Creator. For a person who realizes that everyone in this world is expected to understand that we are here on earth to get to know who is our Owner/Creator is and attach our being to Him, then for this person to be the head of the household is a responsibility toward the family members whose rights are to be respected as assigned by their Creator. Only through this consciousness that a person acts as an Agent of the Creator and respects the rights of the family members. If someone does not have this consciousness for him to be the head of the household will be an opportunity to exercise his egoistic desire over the other family members. This is the reason why those people who have no sense of being a Worshiper of God never understand that to be the head of the household is an enormous responsibility. They will think that it is privilege and they can exploit it as their egotistic feelings require. That is why people with a secular mind set cannot make sense of Qur’anic rule of inheritance or being a head of the household. For them they appear to be completely against “human equality.”

With the belief approach, my relationship with the Speaker of the text is unknown to me at the beginning and builds gradually. **Read the text critically:** *What are you teaching me?* *Can I confirm it?* *How can I assimilate this teaching within my own being?* Revise/review yourself. Locate your understanding of a particular point with the whole context of the Quran.

Belief approach follow these stages (continuation from 05/04/16)-

**9) Up to this stage, the readers are not very much aware that they are a part of the universe (the whole picture). And their human capacity is also created like the rest of the universe.**

Often-heard: A single human being is like the whole universe because we are able to perceive and comprehend everything in this universe based on the faculties we have been given.

* Everything that I observe (external to me), is in reality, within me because I have the ability to perceive it.
* If there was no existing universe, the human being would mean nothing as there would be nothing for me to be conscious of. I would never be able to practice my human qualities. That would mean, I would not be able to realize even that I am a human being. Similarly, if there was no human being, the universe would mean nothing.
	+ The existence of the human being and of the whole universe is complimentary.
* I cannot disassociate myself from the universe
* My human existence must also be understood in its totality
	+ I should not segment my existence into thoughts/body/senses/emotions/etc
	+ We exist in this universe both physically and spiritually

Without the laws of the creation (the way the Creator creates the beings,) I am unable to perceive the objects in the universe. And also the opposite way of thinking is true: Without the physical objects I am unable to perceive the laws of the creation. This means, I will be unable to know the qualities of the Creator, thus, I would not be able to know who I am, and where my existence came from.

Similarly, without my physical body, my feelings and thoughts would mean nothing.

* I have to use the organs given to me in order to perceive the creation that has been adorned for me
* If I do not establish a physical connection with the universe (engaging my senses), I cannot experience that joy/satisfaction/worry.
* **My spiritual life necessitates a physical life!**

If I do not use my physical capacities, I cannot establish a spiritual connection.

* Spirituality on its own is baseless
* It has to be combined with the physical.
* We have to use our physical senses and **through these physical aspects, establish a spiritual connection.**

**10) After realizing this, they now try to see the correlation between the universe, the Scripture (the word of God) and their human qualities.**

The qualities that I observe in this universe are also mentioned in the scripture. Example: I see beauty in the creation of sun rise/sun set. I wonder how it is coming into existence. The scripture describes the same act of creation and prompts me to question further on the Source of existence of the sun? I conclude that the Source is not of the nature of this universe. This conclusion is in conformity with the scripture that says that the Source of existence is Absolute.

**11) If they (those who follow the “Belief Approach”) agree with the Scripture that its fundamental teaching is acceptable for them, they confirm the Scripture as the Word of the Creator.**

This is the stage that they treat the Scripture as the GUIDE FROM THEIR CREATOR.

I can only confirm the truthfulness of the scripture as the word of my Creator when I see all the pieces fit together perfectly.

* If I can be sure that whatever the scripture says makes sense to me with respect to the universe I observe, only then can I trust the scripture to be true.

I need a guide that will teach me how I should use my human physical qualities.

* Example: When I feel hungry, I want to eat
	+ But how should I eat? What should I experience while I am eating? What is the purpose in eating?
	+ It makes no sense for me to keep eating purposelessly every few hours.
	+ I ought to reflect on my need to eat i.e. physical need and relate it to the Source of my existence. That is, acknowledge It, with each physical bite.
* **Since I have understood that my physical existence is interconnected to my spiritual existence, I realize that I also need guidance to how to use my physical body.**

Belief in God is necessary in that we understand that this universe is created and the Creator must possess the qualities of wisdom, perfection, beauty, love, etc.