Wednesday, April 10 2013

Title – Love of God: What does it really mean?

YouTube Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQFJadnGmhA&feature=c4-feed-u>

It is a beautiful subject, but it is very delicate because it is not easy to handle

* You cannot speak about love in concrete terms but at the same time it is not a legend, so don’t make it abstract
* Love is something very real
* But in order to understand and experience love as it truly is, we have to engage in a process of deconstruction of our past knowledge/prejudices

What of love of God really means and how can I establish it in my life?

* What are the stages?

**Slide 1: Do those who pay tax love the state? If there was no punishment for not paying the tax, how many people do you think would pay the tax?**

Do you believe in God? Yes

Do you love God? Yes

* It is difficult to express it but you will say yes

If you love God, what are you expected to do?

* You are expected to remember Him
* The love for Him should be a natural motivator for your actions and you should not be influenced in your actions based on the fear of ‘punishment’

We perform actions because of fear or because we are expecting a reward but rarely out of love

* What is the reason for your actions?
* In order to perform an action out of love, you have to first be in love

*It is commonly heard that one love should love unconditionally (i.e. without any conditions attached)*

* *So even if there was no reward you would still love*
* *What stands at the core of this idea is the fact that you love an object/person not for what it physically appears to be. Rather, your love transcends the transient and you love the object for the qualities it represents.*
* *And because the source of the qualities are eternal, your love for these qualities can have no condition*

What is the sign that you love God?

* You will be conscious of what you are doing

**Slide 2: Does obeying the rule mean that you love the ruler?**

As far as our religious activities are concerned, my obeying the rule is not a sign that I love God

* Obeying the rule should be separately dealt with
* My praying, fasting, performing other religious duties does not equate to loving God

For most people, performing religious actions are for 2 reasons

1. Fear of punishment
2. Expectation of reward

* It has nothing to do with love of God

If you say that your actions are because you love God, you are on very shaky ground.

We are learning to deal with the matter of love in an abstract sense.

Do we all love our mothers?

* Yes, we may have disagreements at times but at the core we still love our mothers

How can you explain the love you have for your mother?

How can you explain the love that you have towards things you like in this world?

Seek to understand the nature of love.

* The existence of beauty, is a sign/witness of the existence of love for human beings

Perfection and beauty are loved for no reason

* It is automatic, in built in us
* This just how we are created.

Love is in built in our being

* And similarly in animals. We can see it in how animals care for their young
* In the essence of creation there is love
* Connection between people, things, animals, plants are all signs of love

Every species has been created to love something that they are constantly in pursuit of.

* *A lion chases after a deer, not because the lion loves deers but because the lion has been created with a sense of hunger and has been inbuilt with a sense of love for deers to satisfy this hunger*

Whoever made this world, has created love as an intricate and essential element within in.

**Slide 3: Beauty is loved for no external reason**

You go to work, in expectation of a pay (external reason)

I take medicine, in order to get healed (external reason)

Loving beauty, however, has no reason

* We have the sense of love innate within us
* Also, as we witness amongst animals, we see that they too experience love innately through their connection with each other and the environment

If love is all around, what is my responsibility then?

* I have been given this quality love so now my responsibility lies in the way I love the things

I have been given eyes and the power of sight so that they may see

* Do I have a responsibility in the way I use my eyes?
* How am I using my free will?

I have been given time – How am I using it?

I am not responsible for the way my stomach/heart/kidney/liver/brain, etc functions – it is created to work.

* I am responsible for what I feed myself but I have no say in how my stomach functions or does not function

Love is inbuilt in me naturally and I have a responsibility to recognize the source of this love and to take responsibility for what I love.

Love has been given to me, for a purpose – and I need to fulfill this responsibility and purpose for which love has been given to me.

Love is essential to me, it is natural – I don’t have to develop it, just like the power of hearing.

* But we are responsible for how we use this feeling that has been given to us

Why do you love avocadoes?

1. Taste – delightful to the tongue
2. Nutritional qualities – very nourishing
3. Design is beautiful

* Can I conclude that you don’t love avocadoes but rather you love its taste, nutritional qualities, how it looks, etc?
* Saying that you simply love the avocado is not really accurate. What you love are the **qualities** of the avocado.

We say that we love our mothers – but in reality, we love our mothers for the qualities that characterize who she is.

* Mother represents compassion, mercy, sacrfice, unconditional love
  + We don’t really love our mother’s flesh but her qualities

We are created with the ability to love not the object itself but the qualities of the object

* When the object itself disappears (death), we dispose of the object with respect
* But, my associated feelings still remain

Recap: We said that love is internal and it is essential to our existence. We are hard-wired with the feeling of love but we are responsible in the way we use it.

If someone says, I love avocadoes – I remind them that, no, you don’t love avocadoes.

* You love the qualities of the avocado

As far as my free will is concerned, where does my responsibility lie in directing this feeling of love?

- **I have to be sure that I am not obsessing myself with the object but rather I have to concentrate on the qualities of the object** (Stage 1)

I have been given the power of sight – it has been GIVEN so it is not something for you to proud of

* Rather, you are responsible to use your given power of sight to look at things that are useful to you and not those things which are harmful to you

QN: What one person may determine as useful can be very different from what another person determines as being helpful?

* How do we decide how to use our free will?
* Is it only through education?

You love your parents because of their compassion

* What we should do, is to pay attention to the reason behind our love for ‘objects’ and deconstruct the reasons for love
* By extracting the qualities, we are separating form from function and we are attaching ourselves to the creator of the qualities

Detachment, as is commonly used in popular media, is essentially putting this into practice

* If we identify the qualities which make us love something/someone, we are in reality detaching ourselves from the object itself because we are forcing ourselves to be aware of the fact that what we love is the quality and not the object

Disassociate yourself from the objects – not by practicing ascetism because if you do not experience the transience of this world, you cannot aspire for eternity

* Only through recognizing that this world is transient, and experiencing that I do not really love transience and temporary thing, I realize that I am hard-wired to love eternity

You love all of creation, not because you must, but because you are aware of the qualities in all of creation and the fact that these qualities have been given by the Almighty

* This is our responsibility when it comes to love; we should strive to see and appreciate the qualities in everything we encounter

Stage 2: Deconstructing the qualities

* How do you relate them to yourself?
* How do you define them?
* How do you understand them?

“I love avocado because of its taste”

* Love is essential and it is internal
* We cannot develop love because of external reasons
* We have to find out the inner reason within ourselves why we love the quality ‘taste’
  + What is taste?
  + What is desire?
  + What is nourishment?
  + How do you describe them?

What are these qualities? How do you perceive them?

* Whoever made me to love beauty, must be the source of existence of beauty

Relate everything that you see, to yourself

* Whoever made me with the power of sight, made the objects to be seen
* Whoever made me hungry, made the things that nourish me
* Whoever made me in need of compassion, made my mother in a way that she is compassionate to me

Do you like being tidy, orderly, punctual?

* If you have the sense to love the orderliness and perfection, you notice that there is perfection in the universe
* There is a connection between me (as a lover of beauty) and the things that are beautiful.

How do you explain the connection between you and the objects (which have certain qualities)?

How do you explain your existence?

* You are made in a purposeful way
* Things which have good qualities and communicate with me, also have a purpose
* Design says: I have been made purposefully and my qualities have been given existence by a creator

Stage 2: Design is the manifestation of the qualities of the maker of the object

* He made it within a perfect design

Whoever made the avocado, has the quality of a designer

* All the qualities that is given to the avocado, comes from the designer

Religiously – these qualities are called asma-al husna

Main subject is to understand what love is and how I can use my sense of love.

I love tasty food and beautiful things

* I should understand that beautiful things are made by somebody who has the quality to beautify things (al-Jamil)
* **Every quality in this world is a manifestation or reflection of the qualities of the maker of this world**.
* The qualities we see and communicate with the objects around us are actually qualities of the maker

In studying all the various sciences (chemistry, physics, biology), we are actually simply discovering the qualities that already exists in this world

* And all these qualities point to the creator

How do you know that God is All-Powerful?

How do you know that God is the source of all beauty?

How do you know that God nourishes me?

* I am experiencing it
* All the food we eat has been arranged for us
* I have been given certain qualities and the food I will eat has also been given certain qualities.
* These qualities communicate with one another
* And our human consciousness should question the source
* Who arranged this? Who gave these qualities to the atoms?
  + The atoms do not know how to make taste, design, etc because they do not have a conscious aspect or a will. As such there must be a designer who gives these qualities to the atom/object

All praise belongs to the lord of the world

* Whoever created this world in general (all the qualities I see in this being) belongs to Him
* These qualities reveal to me the reality of their existence and tell me the reality of their existence, that they have been made by a source who is the Designer and who is the Creator

At the second stage, what are we going to do with our sense of love?

1. Divorce the objects from the qualities

* Dump the object and concentrate on the qualities

1. From the qualities go to the creator of these qualities

I like/don’t like avocado

* Ask yourself: Why don’t you like/dislike avocado?
* Who gave you the capability to like/dislike
* What are the qualities in an avocado that I like/dislike?
* The qualities have been put in the avocado so that my attention will go to the source of the qualities

I dislike greed/jealousy

* Don’t you love the doctor when he tells you what kinds of food to stay away from so as to benefit your health
* Similarly, God has created us in a way that we do not like jealousy
  + The sense of disliking jealousy has been given to you so that you may steer clear of being jealous.

You need to remain conscious in order to experience the love of God

You don’t love hearing lies – the quality of disliking lies has been given to you by your creator so that you will not do that.

You love the giver and the source of that sense

* But your attitude towards the senses can be different
* You may like or dislike the quality (for example, you like sweet things and dislike salty things)
* But regardless of whether you like it or dislike it, the quality has been given to you by your creator and your creator is the source of the quality
  + Your free will, then determines how you actually use these senses
  + You may dislike to hear lies (quality has been given)
  + Ask yourself why has God made you dislike lies
  + When faced with a situation, you can either CHOOSE to lie or tell the truth
    - What you choose is up to you (you have been given the free will to do so)
    - But, those who are God-conscious, will use their free will by contemplating on the righteousness of the action, in accordance with the QUALITIES given to them.

Therefore, love of God requires you to be constantly aware that everything you do and interact with has God at its center.

* We have to acknowledge and be thankful of the One who created me with the sense of dislike for lies
* I love Him because He teaches me

He is the one who teaches me not to love wrong things, irrational ideas (random happenings), etc

* All these senses have been given to me by my creator to guide me

Question: Why do you love these qualities and why would you stop loving these qualities?

Answer: It is hardwired within me. Similar to how you can’t ask ‘why do I see?’ you realize that love for qualities are innately a part of who I am.

* Love is essential and not EXTERNAL
* Love does not need an external reason for it to operate
* We are made to love

Question: How can you reach that mindset of not loving the transient?

Answer: It requires awareness.

* Practically, when we love something (avocado), we only enjoy it temporarily.
  + I eat and avocado, savor it and once I’m done eating it, my enjoyable experience ends
  + However, I realize that I am not made to love transience
  + I want this feeling of enjoyment to continue, to be eternal
  + This is when, I must train myself to love the qualities and the creator of the avocado’s qualities.
* If I know I am going to die in a minute, what will I do?
  + Will I go and start shaving? Clearly not.
  + But because I assume that I will live longer, I carry out my actions accordingly
    - We attach temporary eternity to things and then we attach ourselves to those things
    - We think our cars will last forever and love our cards instead of loving the creator of the car’s qualities and function

It essentially boils down to a lack of awareness in our actions.

* We have to train ourselves to be aware that it is not the avocado which is evoking an enjoyable feeling but rather the qualities of the avocado
* And to be aware that the qualities of the avocado are not created out of nothing but rather by a Creator
* Therefore, by attaching yourself to the creator of the qualities you are in reality attaching yourself to the Eternal One who is creator and owner of everything and your enjoyment in the avocado is no longer transient.

[ Each moment is transient. This very moment will pass but what will make it count is if at every moment I am connected to the Eternal Source because by being connected to Him, I am connecting myself to the creator of the very next moment right up till eternity]

The source of the qualities (designer, creator, nourisher) is Eternal and I direct my sense of love to the eternal soruce of these uqualities

* This is how we should develop our sense of love

It is not complicated

* Rhetoric is beautiful and so commonplace (I love God) but there is no real experience
* We have heard things like: ‘Some people do not just love God, they have an intense, longing love for God)
  + Yes, there are degrees but everybody can experience this love
  + Do not jump from the object to love
  + Rather see yourself through each step
    - Object

As long as you have free will (to teach yourself anything), you can teach yourself this process BUT it needs paying attention to.

We believe in God, and we want to love God but we do not know how to love God.

Usually, loving God is transferred into obeying his views

* Most people say, if you love God, you have to perform x,y,z actions
* It is not wrong, but it is not love of God.

Hence, it is important to first deconstruct the idea of love

* Obeying rules is not the sign that you love God
* This does not mean that you should not obey God
* But when it comes to love, it means being constantly aware of His qualities and how they are interacting with you.

When you have a bunch of flowers, you appreciate its beauty

* But what does it mean?
* It is a message from your creator who is saying: Here I am, giving you pleasure
* You should then say: You love the creator of the qualities in the flower and to the extent that you are longing to receive and to connect yourself to the qualities manifested in the flower that much you will be in love with God.
* Don’t say, I love flowers (flowers are plants and plants are made up of atoms)

Love is automatic.

* You should not just say ‘I love God’
* Rather, God is connecting Himself to you through all of creation
* Your sense of love is from God and your consciousness will be connected to you as the manifestation of the quality of God who is the creator and who is Al Wadud.

God is love – the rhetoric is beautiful and correct but how do you explain and experience it?

* We have to decipher this common language

Now, when you say, I love God, you can go one step further:

My creator is making me realize that He is Al-Wadud and I am a product of the loving one

* Whoever created this world, is revealing Himself to me
* From your own experience, see if you can be aware of how God is making Himself known to me

You own nothing. Rather you are just using your free will (which has been given to you) to acknowledge the reality that everything s the product of your creator and everything belongs to Him

* The sense of Love is from Him
* By acknowledging (by my free will) that the sense of love does not belong to me (la ilaha) I can come to the confirmation of (illAllah)

We have to constantly practice this and train our thought processes.

You are seeing

You are hearing

* We are expected to use our free will to navigate the direction of my choice
* I should not hear people’s gossips, for example

Hadith: None of you believe in God, till He loves me (the Prophet is speaking) more than his father, his children and all mankind.

* Joke: What a selfish statement!
* What does the statement mean?
  + The Prophet SAW embodies the best qualities and hence loving Him the most would mean

Definition: But how does he embody the best qualities?

* What qualifies the best qualities?

‘He has the best qualities’ – in what way?

We love the avocado not because we love the design BUT rather we love the avocado’s design because the avocado’s design points to the designer

* Therefore it doesn’t matter what the design of the avocado is, or the difference between avocado designs.

We love the avocado, because of it’s creator – ULTIMATE point of conclusion

* My creator wanted me to love Him, and hence He has made me love the avocadoes

It does not matter how the avocado looks or how the apple tastes BECAUSE all qualities are created so that they point to the designer.

Similarly, when it comes to the Prophet SAW, it doesn’t matter what the qualities are that we are referring the Prophet with but rather, that these qualities point to the Prophet .

The Prophet means – what he represent.

* Do not misunderstand the information
* He is a Prophet not because of the qualities he embodies as a human being BUT because of who he represents.

When the Prophet gives $1, he gives it from a point of acknowledgement of the source of the money as the creator of the whole universe who is absolute - because he represents Messengership.

It is different in comparison to let’s say when Bill Gates gives $1 million, and if he gives it without acknowledging the source of the money and instead takes credit of the wealth to himself.

We have to change our perception of the Prophet.

We should not be saying things like- He is the best chief, He is the best husband, etc

* But rather, what makes Muhammad, as a Prophet, distinct from the others is what he represents
* He represents the MESSENGER of Allah
* Which means that in all His actions there was an acknowledgment of the source of creation.

Try and establish the foundations of all sloganic language

* When you say Islam, you are speaking from your own vocabulary and your own experiences BUT you are speaking to people who do not share your experiences
* It might be correct but you have to train ourselves in our language
* Train ourselves to use a language that is common to all human beings and not just people who come from Muslims background

We should be able to convey the same information, in the same language, to all people

* Where do these objects get these qualities? (UNIVERSAL)
* Where did the avocado get its qualities? (You do not have to be a Muslim or a Christian to understand this question?)

Islam, is a human thing – it is not something as we have been trained to understand.

We need to humanize God’s religion for human beings

* Deen-ul-fitrah

When we love something, we think we love it because we are getting something externally but in reality it is just an extension of our egotistic tendencies.

The Prophet, any prophet, did not attribute his qualities to anything other than the creator of the universe

* If any prophet, does not attribute his qualities to the creator, he is not a prophet

If we say that Jesus performed his miracles by himself – then he is not a prophet

* We should say, ‘I love Jesus’, because they teach me how to attribute their qualities to the creator and teach me how to divorce all qualities that they posses from themselves.

This is how we should read hadiths of the Prophet

* A missing dimension in Islamic teachings

What makes a Prophet a prophet is one who attributes all qualities and actions to the Creator

Don’t get caught up in trying to compare prophets

* Rather just work on trying to understand yourself in this world so that you can benefit from the teachings of the various prophets
* We have to first set out foundation righ

Do not use borrowed language to explain your religious standing

Summary of the halaqa: How do we establish love of God and how do we make it practical for ourselves?

Everything is in the Quran. We are trying to understand and confirm it.

* Do not borrow blindly from the Quran without confirmation
* We are expected to be convinced of our belief
* Belief needs confirmation and not blind imitation