Halaqa- Wednesday, June 5 2013

Topic: Religion without a Prophet, Is it really possible?

Youtube link: [www.**youtube**.com/watch?v=M8XMIxRZSOQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8XMIxRZSOQ)

It is a very complicated topic

* We are not coming up with jurisdictions
* Rather, we are going to make this as practical as possible

I doubt none of us is thinking about a religion without a Prophet but in the society we are living, we see that more than half of the people don’t see the need for a Prophet.

What should our attitude be towards these people?

* We are not here to judge them but what sort of understanding should we have towards those who don’t believe in a Prophet but have some sort of faith (they believe in God)
* When they say they believe in God, they feel secure in their religion
* But what about commandments or actions prescribed for living?
  + They may say: I listen to my heart
  + I am created by God and He gave me senses to organize my own life
  + I don’t need someone to tell me how to walk or how to eat. I can do it on my own.

We have grown up in a culture where belief in the Prophet and messengership is understood and taken for granted, but are we really aware that some people have never been introduced to the Prophet?

* In that case, what are their responsibilities since they have never really been introduced to the Prophet?

Example:

I have a classmate who is very religious and believes in God but does not believe in a messenger

* My religion is my belief in God (Their claim)
* I follow my conscience
* I listen to my heart

How do you present the belief of messengers to them?

* If you present it the traditional way, saying that Mohammed was the messenger for Muslims, Jesus for Christians, Moses for Jews, etc, your words might fall on deaf ears

The consequence of not believing in Prophets, results in them being left alone

* For the more sincere ones, they say they listen to their conscience

Is it sufficient if someone follows one’s conscience?

To what extent are people responsible to confirm that the Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God?

Example:

You are born into an ordinary American family. They are not very religious but from time to time they partake in ‘religious’ festivals.

* You grow up in this family and you hear about Muslims on the news
* How likely, do you think, will you look into the Prophethood of Muhammad?
* How engaged will you be?
  + You will unlikely be engaged in finding out about the Prophet
  + It is understandable that they will not be interested because of the negative news about Islam

As such, do you think these people will be responsible for confirming that Muhammad was the last and final messenger?

Look at Hitler, many people during his time, were strong followers of his party and even died for his cause.

* But if think about it now, we cannot even fathom that people would follow him because of all that we know about his cruel acts.
* How many of us have read about Hitler, his thoughts and seriously studied his life?
* Those who have read, after reading, are likely to become milder in their criticism or opinion of him
* But most of us, are unlikely to confirm our perceptions by delving deep into the topic.

As such, if people have heard about the misinterpretations of the Prophet and do not read about the lives of the Prophet, do we see that they are actually innocent within their own circumstances?

* They have actually not received the ‘clear’ message about Islam and hence to some extent are absolved of the responsibility
  + So for these people, their religion is based only on themselves and their ‘heart’ or ‘conscience’
* But how does the Quran regard people who do not believe in the Prophet?

What should our attitude towards such people be?

What do you think we should tell them, since they do not believe in the messengership of Muhammad?

* Not because they deny what Muhammad brought to them but because they haven’t received the clear message (Mubeen) that Muhammad brought

Will you encourage the establishment of a religion that is a source of terrorism?

* No, obviously.
* So, when a person says that he does not support Islam because it supports terrorism, be aware that the reason the person opposes Islam is due to his understanding that it supports terrorism
  + You too, will not support a religion that is a source of terrorism (EQUAL)
  + So what you need to do in this case, is to make it CLEAR that Islam does not support terrorism.
* Similarly, when a person says that he does not support Islam because it subjugates women, be aware of the underlying point being made
  + You too, will not support a religion that subjugates women (EQUAL)
  + So once again, you have to make it clear what Islam says

If any religion denies the right of a human being, it is more than right for you to deny that religion

* When a person stands up for these rights, the person is actually a man of justice
* Have we ever looked at people around us through such a lens?

When people around you keep their distance from you because they know you are a Muslim and in addition speak against Islam, what are you supposed to do?

* Establish common grounds
  + The Prophet, established a community in Medina amongst Muslims and non-Muslims based on common ground
  + Hence we should, establish a bond with people based on shared values
    - You may believe in something in the name of Islam whereas the other person might be doing it in the name of humanity
    - Establish shared grounds and don’t simply wave the flag of Islam
    - That is not what the Prophet did
    - He called them to establish the oneness of God

The word Islam means to submit yourself to God (the truth).

* The Prophet never called people to Islam
* Rather, he called people to believe in God, to worship Him and to not worship false idols who are all created by the Lord of the universe
* What is important is to call people to common ground, and not to your religion
* This is because people don’t know who Muhammad was and what was the function of Prophethood

When you tell someone to believe in Prophethood, you are in fact asking them to believe in religion

* Unfortunately in the society we live, religion is perceived as belonging to certain institutions
* People do not like the concept of institutions
* So we want to step away from drawing them to the idea of organized religion, because Islam as we learning in these halaqas, is not about organized religion as we see it today

People who think they are agnostic, are actually against institutionalized religion and in that respect, we are as agnostic as them because neither do we subscribe to what institutionalized religion preaches.

This might be very different from the common rhetoric we so commonly hear:

* “Come to Islam”
* “Islam is the way you should lead your life”
* Ironically, these rhetoric distance people more than they bring them closer because you are not sharing the message of the Quran and the Prophet

Another thing that we have to be aware of is the fact that the qualities and potential given to us, belong to our Lord.

* As such, we cannot really be proud of these qualities
* Instead, we should be thankful for these qualities
* Unfortunately, most of the time, we hear people saying that it is ONLY by listening to my heart that I feel that I should not steal, I should not hurt other people’s feelings, I should not kill, I should not tell lies, I should learn how to share…
  + When people say this, what are you expected to say?
  + These qualities have been given to you
  + One of your responsibilities is to use these ‘feelings’ to guide your choice of action
  + Another is to identify and be aware that your actions need to be connected to the Allah SWT
    - There you use the feeling within you to not lie, and always say the truth
    - But when you speak the truth, you will do it not just for the sake of ‘righteousness’ but because of your awareness of God
    - He has given you these qualities as a way to know Him
      * When we learn to know Him, the purpose of our life gets fulfilled and there is meaning in our action that goes beyond the glitter of this life

Do we need a Prophet to come and tell me that I should not steal, kill, lie, etc?

* No.
* You don’t need a Prophet to encourage you to do good things because you will do them anyway

If so, what is the function of the Prophet?

* The messengers bring the message of confirming what we cannot see and what we cannot know
* They link us to the unseen world

Everybody agrees that we should not kill, but what is your extra contribution to this idea (as a Muslim)?

* The Prophets are sent to us to connect us to the word of the Absolute creator
* Do we need to tell them in Islam killing is prohibited?
  + No, they do not need religion to teach them not to kill
  + They know it, of and within themselves, not to kill

By us constantly using the words, in ‘common ground’, we are actually encouraging people not to know about the Prophet.

* They say: I do not need a Prophet to encourage me to feed the needy ones or to teach me to be kind to my neighbor or to teach me how to take care of my family
* If you present religion under the language of ‘common ground’ in a way that infers that the need of the Prophet as being superficial or extraneous, you are doing Islam a disservice

How are we going to present Islam to people who hate Islam on the right grounds?

* Look at how the Prophet called people to establish oneness of God in their lives
* Establishing oneness of God means giving everything in this world to Him and using it in His name

For example, giving to charity

* There are many charitable organizations run by secular people
* We often say, that we too, have charitable organizations
  + But simply by establishing a common ground, we are not achieving anything
  + The secular organizations help everyone and in fact do more good actions than Muslim organisations
  + A lot of the muslim organizations keep saying, help your muslim brother
    - Which is right? To help only muslims or to help everyone?
      * Everyone.
      * The Quran does not say help your Muslim brother, it says help the needy
      * There is a verse that emphasizes on having non-Muslims living as your neighbor so that they will hear the truth from you
      * But we don’t really embrace diversity

When we see people who look ‘different’ we begin by becoming suspicious of them rather than call them to Islam

* Why do you only speak to your fellow Muslims?
* They are already guided.

We have to refresh our minds on this topic:

* There can be religion without Prophet if they have not received the message from the Prophet
* They have every right not to feel the need to look for a Prophet
* But note, that there are exceptions

If you read the Quran with an open mind, it is actually teaching you how to live in the presence of God in this world

* When the verses say do good actions, the Quran very rarely specifies which good actions
* All human conditions, as taught in the Quran through Prophetic examples and historical examples
* The Quran’s purpose is not to convert people to Islam

If you are aware that the Quran’s purpose is to put you in contact with the creator so that you may live in this world with the connection, because only then you can call people to Islam.

* However, if you label Islam as that which is lived by your respective communities, know that that’s not what the Quran says.

We have to know how to establish the common grounds as far as the Prophetic mission is concerned.

* If someone is giving to charity, we should commend it
* But as Muslim, we have to offer something more
  + The Quran teaches us to establish all our actions by connecting to our creator

Horizontal relationship: I am rich, there is a poor guy there and he needs my financial support so I give to help that man.

* This is not at all based on the Quranic teachings.
* If we present religion in the right way we really stimulate the need of the Prophet in people
  + Because he is the one who ties us to God

The Prophet is not the one who establishes a horizontal relationship between me and you

* That is not the prime purpose of the Mesengership
* We have to expect people to get to know what the messegnership of Muhammad brought to us. So present this aspect of messengership to the people so that they may feel the need for the Prophet

Most people agree that we should not kill or steal but we also know that there are many other things on which we disagree on, like the consumption of alcohol.

* If you reduce the teachings of the Quran to certain disputed matters like these, you are losing the big picture
* Of course you know that stealing is wrong, killing is wrong, preserving the environment is right but there are one or two matters (alcohol, pork, etc) that we do not know for which we need the prophet
  + It makes no sense
  + We are reducing religion to certain disputed actions
  + There is only 1 verse that tells me not to eat bacon
  + Most of the verses tell me to attach myself to God and tell me that this world is temporary and there is an eternal abode
    - We have to bring these topics into conversation

1 out of millon persons might kill people. Do we need a prophet just to guide the actions of this 1 person?

* We do not need the prophet for 1-2 disputed matters
* We think that we need the prophet to teach us how to pray, but that is a reduction
* People will not feel the need for the prophet
* But if we present the argument as the Quran does:
  + Who are we?
  + What are we doing here?
  + Why am I here?
* If we look for rules, we only see certain verses in the Quran and we are reducing it
* Rather, if we look for ways of life, we will see the whole Quran as a guidance to us

Is it more important to pray to God whole-heartedly or to pray to God by performing the ‘rituals’ and ‘acts’ of the Prophet?

* Don’t reduce the religion
* We generally do not present Islam as it is presented in the Quran
* Rather, we call them to our culture
* Being generous is good, but even churches do the same thing.

You have to establish belief in God, and then belief in the hereafter (Eternal Existence) and then how to live or build your world view accordingly and use your conscience (your heart says not to tell lies) to act in the name of your creator

* You don’t tell lies because you are acting in the name of your creator
* Belief in God and the books comes before belief in the Prophet (Surah Baqarah)
  + Without belief in God, you do nothing
  + We have to engage with creation out there so that we can really believe in God and it will not be hypothetical

Do we need the message from the owner of this universe? If yes, then we will seek a messenger to teach this to us

* 95% of religion is how to establish your worldview and live accordingly
* 5% is about actions and rituals
* Get your priorities right

مَّنِ اهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَن ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا

Whoever chooses to follow the right path, follows it but for his own good; and whoever goes astray, goes but astray to his own hurt; and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another" burden. Moreover. We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] ere We have sent an apostle [to them]. (Surah 17, Verse 15)

* If you choose the right path it is for your own good and if you don’t it is your own loss
* No one is going to bear the burden of another
* You are responsible for yourself so pay attention to your own human qualities
* Every when you are helping others, it is for your own good

Analysis of the verse: It started from one topic and ended with another

* We will never chastise any community until we have sent an apostle to them
* If the apostle or the messenger has not arrived, people are not responsible for religion
  + We mentioned earlier that some people have never heard the clear message so they are not deniers
  + Their rejection of Islam is not because they are denying the message
  + Rather they are upset with the certain false claims about the religion
  + If an apostle has not been sent to a community, the community is not responsible
    - It does not mean that they will not be responsible for killing, etc
    - Killing, lying, etc is about going against your own reality
    - The Prophet is not sent to tell you not to kill
    - The Prophet was sent to establish your relationship with the eternal life

You have to see yourself as a creature that belongs to the Absolute Being, who promises, that we will be kept in existence forever.

We are within the ‘infinite’ so this whole idea of ‘how old are you’ technically does not make sense.

* You have lived in this worldly life for x years
* But as far as your existence is concerned, there is no time limit because my existence belongs to Him
* It does not matter in which form, as a foetus, a baby,an old man or in the grave because my existence belongs to the eternal one
* He sustains existence and He is the self-sustaining One.

When we say we belong to God and we will return to Him, it means that our existence never disappears.

We have to define the Prophet as an instructor teaching me how to connect myself to the creator.

* If a community has not been introduced to the Prophet, the community is not responsible for attaching themselves to God
* They will only be responsible for their innate impulses (being pro-justice, not telling lies, etc)

This is extremely important because it shows me how and on which grounds I should introduce God’s religion to these people

Islam prohibits alcohol but there are many organization that are trying to stop people from drinking or taking drugs

* What is the difference?
* You must see your existence in terms of the eternal creator and you have to see yourself accordingly and you have to present God’ s religion at that level.

How do you respond to an atheist who asks: Why do we need a Prophet?

* The need for the Prophet is a common need for human beings as far as our human expectations are concerned
* People who say that they are atheist are actually against organized religion
* They may not want to name God and they name certain mysterious beings
  + We have to acknowledge that there are exceptions who make contrary claims
  + In general, people’s understanding of atheism is to be without religion
    - They do not deny God but they do not want to identify themselves with certain religious institutions for several different reasons
* But they believe in God
* We are human beings, we speak and we understand
* As God created this universe, and endowed me with the potentiality to reason and communicate with the universe, there must be meaning in it
* In order to teach me this meaning, the message must come to me at a level that I understand (through a human representation)
  + If someone says: I want to receive the message of God
  + All they have to do is to listen to the messengers
  + Similar to how we go to school to learn even if we have the textbooks

If my creator does not speak to me and does reveal the message in a way that I understand it will be a contradiction to my human quality.

This is why we need the messengers.

* The problem is that people who present religion, do it in a way that is not within the way or the purpose of the teaching of the Quran
* We have to be clear that when we present the message of God, we have to do it in a way that is appropriate to the message of God (to introduce me to my creator so that I can use all my human qualities to be in touch with my creator)

This universe is wonderful, it must have a creator, designer so I believe in God – a rational equation

* The Quran not only uses a priori statements
* It also uses a posteriori statements
* When we eat, we realize that He is taking care of me.

While I am eating, if I don’t pay attention to it, I will not experience that my God is treating me well.

* Just by telling people to say bismillah is no use
* You have to experience bismillah

We have to experience this belief dimension of our lives – this is what the Quran and the Prophet is teaching us.

* Don’t reduce the teachings to laws, jurisdictions, wars, etc
* Any powerful emperor can do the same thing
* The problem lies in our perception of religion

No prophet, no responsibility – it is very powerful

* It means, we have to bring the Prophet into our lives
* We usually don’t bring the Prophet into our lives except as an instructor of rituals
* It is easy because it does not need deep thinking and engagement
  + We don’t have to constantly be engaged and realize the constant awareness of God’s presence in our lives

In the outside world, belief in the Prophethood and religion becomes abundant if we strictly use him for rituals

* We should not make people feel that religion of God and the Prophet of God is redundant
* Look at what we are doing and see if we are presenting the Prophet as a way that disengages people or in way that compels them to look for the Prophet

We send to every nation a Prophet or a messenger:

* I do not know what other people’s responsibility is but I should learn that I must present the Prophet in a way that people feel the need for it
* If we leave them without the need for the Prophet, they will not feel the need for the Prophet, and I have not fulfilled my mission

But every nation has it’s own Prophet because there is a different way of God’ test for different people.

* Don’t concern yourself with that
* Know your purpose and do what you have to do
* Stop worrying about other people