Halaqa: March 23, 2013 (Saturday)

YouTube Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHgktxFhiH8>

Source: The Words Pg 139

**O my senseless soul and foolish friend! Do you suppose your life’s duty is restricted to following the good life according to the requisites of civilization, and, if you will excuse the expression, to gratifying the physical appetites?**

**Do you suppose the sole aim of the delicate and subtle sense, the sensitive faculties and members, the well-ordered limbs and systems, the inquisitive feelings and senses included in the machine of oyur life is restricted to satisfying the low desires of the base soul in this fleeting life? God forbid! There are two main aims in their creation and inclusion in your essential being.**

“Senseless soul and foolish friend” – not an accusation to the person

- Rather, the friend could be your attitude or your sense of understanding

- And senseless soul because the soul isn’t making use of it’s faculties as it should (just like how if you had eyes and said there was nothing to see)

- Soul IS not the same as spirit (ruh)

- In this phrase, we are referring to the soul as the baser self (nafs)

“Civilization” – the world at large

* By definition, the author is not against civilization
* Rather, civilization represents a type of life that is led by the community without the foundations of revelations
* In today’s language we may call such societies secular, materialistic, etc

Revelation: The message from the creator of this world, which draws our attention to the source of this world

* A constant reminder to what exists beyond this world (al ghaib)
* Al ghaib does not mean unknown but something that is beyond human perception
  + Example: When you look at a book, you see pages and you see signs in the form of ink
    - The meaning is ‘ghaib’ if I do not have access to understand the signs
    - But if I go deeper and use my ability to decipher the scribbles, I will be able to extract the meaning from it
  + The message that the Creator sends to us through the messenger, draws our attention and calls us to see what meaning we can extract from it

The messengers come and tell us that there is meaning beyond everything, which exists in this world

Civilization (materialism) says that everything exists at it is

* Rather, through the messengers we are told that everything has an additional meaning
* So, deriving meaning from plain civilization should not be our aim

“gratifying the physical appetites”

* Do you think we are here to simply eat and enjoy
* As human beings, we should look for further meaning behind events because we have been given the ability to question them

On the topic of the ghaib:

Some people may say that since we cannot know it, it doesn’t matter. We should simply carry on our lives and ignore that which we do not know and accept things ‘blindly’ or for granted.

* Just because I cannot fathom the totality of the ‘ghaib’ experience in this world DOES NOT mean that you have to accept it blindly
* The Quran always speaks about ‘yu-minuna bil ghaib’ (they believe about that which exists beyond this world)
  + BELIEF REQUIRES CERTAINTY/CONFIRMATION
* Ghaib is something to be confirmed and something to be certain about

Problem with taking things for granted:

* If someone’s understanding of religion is simply to perform the prayer and fasting, then that’s all they will do
* We, however, have to understand that the teachings of the Quran empahsize that we have to be sure of we are doing so that we can be in connection with the Absolute
* No one can tear you away from your certainty
  + You may claim to be trained in the field of medicine and another person may believe you
  + But within yourself you will know your limitations and that your claim is not ‘full-proof’
  + However, when it comes to belief, you either have it or don’t
  + And once you have established certainty in your beliefs and in your actions, nothing can strip you away from it.

Because I have been given the ability to ponder on the meanings embedded within all that is around me, shouldn’t I use it?

* + - How are you connecting yourself to the source and how sure can you be of it? (this is what ghaib really is)
    - The terminology of ghaib (as something beyond our perception) is not wholly accurate
      * We can perceive and be sure of what is beyond the universe

Book analogy:

* I can conclude that the author of the book has stated a specific meaning through his scribbles
* I can thus communicate with the meanings introduced through his writing
* Though the author may seem ‘ghaib’ for me since I do not know who he is, I can still communicate with the author through his book
* Ghaib is not beyond your perception. It is within your perception but you have to engage the faculties you have been given.
  + Ghaib is something ‘out there’
* Your understanding of the meaning in the book is restricted to your interaction with the book
  + And the questions that you ask

Our duty is to clear ourselves from our pre-established prejudices and to not impose our own understandings on the words used by the author

* Try to understand what the author means with the words he uses with reference to his context

Self denial, does not mean annihilating your self but rather about taking care not to impose your pre-conditioned judgments/understandings on that which you encounter.

* This is one of the most essential ways when reading any texts.

This is sugar. I like it.

Within the existence of sugar, ask yourself why do you like it from a universal level?

* Everything has a meaning within a universal context
* If we constantly seek this higher level of meaning, we will be able to strip away from the limitations we gate ourselves within.

You cannot impose the dictionary meaning of a word on a word in the scripture. We have to try and see beyond our limitations.

* But first we have to acknowledge our limitations

The attitude, behavior and sayings of the Prophet are to be understood by me because I am interpreting his attitudes and sayings.

* So even in understanding the Prophet’s sayings, I am imposing my limitations on it
* We have to be aware of the limitations we impose on our understanding
* Once we can be aware, we can expand our scope of understanding

Quran is not a history textbook. Rather, through the Quran, God is revealing to us meanings and guidance by examples of events in history.

We can never completely get rid of our inner limitations but rather, we should be aware of our limitations so that when we are interacting with the Quran and with the universe in general, I try and understand things without biases as best as possible.

\*But know that you will never be free of biases. However, the constant awareness of our limitations will enable us to widen our perspective of understanding when interacting with the book.

Prophet means *rasul Allah*

* I have to look at the Prophet’s exemplary behavior within the context of him being the messenger of the creator of the universe
* Hence, it is very important that we de-historicize the Prophet
* We have to see the universal aspect of the Prophet’s life

When you expose yourself to the teachings of the Prophet, you should never forget that he is the *rasullAllah* so there is definitely a dimension of the event that connects his action to the eternal source.

* If you do not see that dimension and reduce the event to a historical context, you are looking at an event that was practiced by Mohammed ibn Abdullah and not *RasulAllah*
  + So when you read any story narrated by the Prophet SAW, train yourself to read it with the perspective that he is the messenger of Allah.
  + The story might be presented in a very metaphorical way which makes it seem like a fable, but we have to train ourselves to see that the metaphorical example is being presented to us by the messenger of the creator of the universe
    - Only then the story becomes meaningful and we do not risk losing ourselves in the event itself.

We are not denying his creation as the son of Abdullah BUT his mission in this world is to connect me to my creator.

A common question that was posed to the Prophet in relevance to his actions: Is this a revelation from God or is it something you thought?

* The way you are created should also be related to the creator
* You do not have to receive a message from your creator apart from the way you are created
* The way you are created is a message from God
* Everything in you is a message
* You do not have to receive a special verbal message
* Just the way you exist and behave in this world is a message

Any action you perform can be transformed into an act of worship as long as you recognize the creator’s role in your actions.

If you are aware of the fitrah that has been given to you – of observing your creator in all that you do – then you will constantly be in connection with His message

For every action that the Prophet performed, He connected himself to His creator.

* So when we try and replicate his actions, we have to bear in mind that the actions we commit ourselves too, should not be performed blindly
* Rather we should be aware of the connection of each action with our creator
* Only then are we following the ‘sunnah’.

Qn: Given that my conditions are different from that which the Prophet faced, can I still perform actions as he did?

Ans: We should strive to understand the Prophet

* If you don’t know what the Quran is saying and what the practice of the messenger of God is , you have to connect every action with the awareness of God
* We cannot really know everything that we have to do but by understanding the Prophet’s way of life we can draw nearer to that ideal
* Within the culture he was living, the Prophet always had the connection with his creator
  + You have to see the dimension of the Prophet’s action which connected him to the creator

Example: The climate requires that you wear something light

* What matters for you is that when you follow the conditions of the climate, are you worshipping God or not?
  + Are you really realizing that the condition (snow, rain, heat, wind) is created from God and you are obeying the conditions He created?
    - When reading the Prophet’s words, we need to be aware that we are reading to see how the Prophet maintained a connection to God through his various life situations
    - The life situation per se is not the crux of your lesson
    - The way the Prophet responds is the lesson and that is what we should strive to replicate with CONSCIOUSNESS not through IMITATION.
    - I have to see the dimension of the event that connects to my creator
      * By following this methodology, I can connect myself through the events that take place, to my creator and transform it into an act of worship
      * But if you do not see the Prophet’s actions as that performed by the messenger of God but rather merely that of an Arab, you will be following a philosopher, educator or behaviorist

Our definition of the Prophet is essential

* How do you define the Prophet?
* It is important that we remain aware of the connection with God throughout all of the Prophet’s actions.

In the action of the Prophet, did you see the connection of that event with the creator?

* Have you established this when you read the hadith?
* If not, you are already lost
* We have spent many years trying to understand the text BUT we do not read the text with the consciousness that it has been DIVINELY revealed.

Recap: Ghaib never means unknown or beyond perception. Rather, it is within human perception. But what we do is that we reduce human perception to the capacity of the five senses and hence claim that the ghaib is beyond our perception. We have to rethink our definitions.

**Our false ideas**: We have been told that religion is something to be heard, narrated to you. It is not something that you conclude and come to your own conclusions.

* This is why people see religious traditions as that involving going to a venue and hear speeches uttered of a pulpit.
* Rather, transform your definition of religion to involve you conscious actions
* Internalize what you read/hear and seek to confirm or reject it to make your belief YOURS.
  + Don’t do something because you are told to do it
  + Think about how you can internalize praying

For example, even if you did not hear that you have to pray, it should be in your nature that you respond to what your are receiving. You may not know how but you still feel like you ought to respond.

Do not reduce the Prophet to a messenger of ‘actions’. He was not sent to give you physical actions. Rather, the Prophet is *Rasul Allah* which means that I have to see his actions as connecting with the creator of the universe and similarly strive to achieve that connection.

The message to pray 5 times a day from *Rasul Allah* is a call for me to connect with my creator. Establishing the connection is *salah.*

* Unfortunately, what we do is that we pray without first establishing any connection
* We simply pray because we think that since we Muslims we should follow the Prophet’s actions
* But remember that actions without meaning is imitation and serves no purpose
* And the meaning in all of the Prophet’s actions was CONNECTING TO ALLAH (*rasul Allah).* So strive to establish the connection first.

Do not forget the dimension of your actions that connect you to your creator.

Qn: We will never have the same experience as the Prophet had with His creator so how can we learn from his actions?

* Remember, that everything is going on within you.
* No one is saying that we have to experience what the Prophet experienced.
  + Rather what we are learning is how we should read the Prophet’s hadiths.
  + Always remember that the Prophet is the messenger of God.

Prophet says: You have to be compassionate to those who make mistakes

* Why do you have to be compassionate?
  + When you see someone making a mistake, you also become compassionate NOT because you are imitating what the Prophet did but because you are aware that the Prophet’s was compassionate because he was in connection with our Creator who is the All-Merciful one. Hence, the Prophet’s actions reflect his connection with the creator.
  + Similarly, my actions need to reflect my relationship with my Creator
  + If I am consciously aware that my creator is the All-Merciful One and that He has been merciful to me on countless occasions, won’t you automatically be merciful to the one you are interacting with?

Prophet’s actions 🡪 Understand/Become aware of how he connected himself to his Creator through that action 🡪 When faced with a situation that requires an action, think about the Prophet’s actions 🡪 Seek to understand how the Prophet connected with Allah through that action 🡪 When performing that action, make sure you have first established the connection because otherwise the action is plain imitation and it will be no different from from following the actions of a learned scholar (in contrast to *Rasul Allah)*

\*Importance of reading the divinely inspired texts with the right attitude from the very beginning.

* When reading the Quran, be aware that you are reading the message of your creator
* The message of the creator of the universe
* So when you read a sentence out of the Quran, you have to see the relationship between your self and your creator through the guidance of the sentence
* If you don’t attach yourself to the creator (read the Quran with awareness that it is a guiding message from the Creator) and reduce the text to its literary meaning, you are not really following the Quran
  + Rather, you are only following YOUR CULTURE

Following civilization – following matters directly without establishing any connection, following your own instincts

* Rather if you are aware of all actions and perform them in His name, that is worship
* I am hungry, I eat (mundane; civilization) (Eating to satisfy your need)
* Rather when I am hungry. I become aware that my creator has given me this need. I am aware that He has provided me with food. I use my free will to obey the command of God because I am aware that all of creation is attributed to God and He is commanding me to eat
  + Everything is going on within yourself
  + It is all a matter of awareness
  + Result: Eating to satisfy my creator.
  + This needs recognition of your creator and of your being in touch with the universe.

Look at all dimensions through their vertical connection with the creator and not solely through their horizontal connections with you.

We are not trained to see matters of religion in this context.

* To us, we have been taught that religion is essentially imitation