­­­­Halaqa: Saturday, May 11 2013

YouTube Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2WL29JNLdo&feature=c4-feed-u>

Topic: Aims of our lives

The Words, pg 140.

The summary of the aims of your life consist of nine matters:

* If you go back to the previous paragraph in the book, we are referring to our life in the ‘human’ sense and not in the ‘animal’ sense
* Conceptualise the matter within human qualities
1. **To weigh up on the scales of the senses put in your being the bounties stored up in the treasuries of divine mercy and to offer universal savings**
* The author does not mention why he specifically used certain words but as readers we have to pay attention to the importance of the words
* We usually the words, being grateful. But the author is not saying that we have to offer thanks but he says, we have to offer UNIVERSAL thanks.
	+ This adds another dimension to our understanding of offering thanks.

Before concentrating on this word, we have to pay attention to the phrase, ‘the bounties stored up in the treasuries of divine mercy’

* Where is this treasury?
* What does the author mean by ‘divine mercy?

The treasure is to be scaled up by our senses.

* Your senses make you an ‘alive’ human being
* I have to see my life as the scale of senses put in my being

Example:

* If I do not use my senses, it means that I am dead
* If we don’t use our senses to weigh up the treasuries of divine mercy, we are dead
* We have to use our senses.
* If someone does not really experience through his own senses, he cannot be thankful

Theoretically we say, *alhamdolilah* but how it is really operating, we may not know.

Experience the manifested form of divine mercy

* If we do not experience the divine mercy we cannot really transform this divine mercy into a universal thanks
* If we do not really use our senses, as scales to weigh up the manifested divine mercy, then we cannot experience our words
* While we are praying we say *alhmadolilahi rabbil alamin* but this requires an assertion.
	+ Are you thankful? If so, what are you thankful for?
	+ We have to be sure of what we are doing when we utter these words.
	+ We have to be conscious of what we are saying and what we are doing
	+ While we are not praying, I have to be filled up with excitement that divine mercy is with me
	+ When you feel align with these emotions and you offer your prayers, you are then presenting your universal thanks to your Lord.

Being thankful is unique to human beings only.

If you don’t use your senses in connection with the creation out there, how can you even be aware that you have these senses?

* We have to practice our senses by connecting with creation

You cannot thank God out of the blue, for nothing.

* Make it real for you
* To make it real, you have to get in touch with creation
* This relationship with creation is UNIVERSAL

What is the capacity of your senses? How are you going to utilize them?

* We have to weigh with the scale of our senses
* What are we going to weight?
	+ Divine mercy

We have numerous senses. Think about the capacity of ONE sense.

* The capacity of each sense is unlimited.

When you eat something, you get an instant pleasure from its taste.

* Do we have the capacity to see the source of this taste as absolute?
* We are human beings, but unfortunately, we may not appreciate our human capacity.
* If someone expects to learn what the aim of their life is, he needs to first define the qualities and capacities within him.
	+ You can only be thankful for that which you know you have
	+ This needs realization

The human senses open us up to eternity.

We are used to borrowing ‘sloganic’ language

* I am thankful for God, but HOW?
* How am I expected to be thankful to God?

We have been given senses with the capacity to realize that although the senses experience limited manifestations of divine mercy, they can know that the mercy I experience is unlimited.

* The taste that I enjoy from eating one fruit OR the pleasure that I get from being around a child, etc allows us to delve into the unlimited source

When you eat an apricot, you enjoy its taste and like its smell.

* How do you explain the existence of that particular apricot?
* In order for an apricot to come into existence, what is needed?
	+ The whole universe
	+ Whoever has created that particular single apricot must be the creator of the whole universe
	+ The whole universe is subject to continuous change
	+ The source of the existence of the universe must, out of necessity, be Absolute. Otherwise it cannot be responsible for the existence of this continuously changing perfect universe.

Human capacity acknowledges the divine mercy (transcendental, cannot be limited with this world only)

* The source of the world is beyond this world. He cannot be limited by definitions and limitations of this world.
* This is divine mercy

We can only become a universal thanksgiver IF we use our senses and experiences in all our encounters.s

* It seems really simple BUT you will realize that many of us cannot even fulfill this first aim of our life.
* Your appreciation of the taste of the apricot and your communicating of your appreciation is all part of this universe
* Things are not independent; don’t make it.

Be clear on how we can have universal thanks.

* Although I am eating one apricot, you can present universal thanks
* If you are thankful for one apricot, your thankfulness is not universal
	+ However, if through your experience with one apricot, you connect with the source of the apricot, your thankfulness is universal.
1. **To open with the keys of the faculties placed in your nature the hidden treasuries of the sacred Divine Names**
* The first aim require us to scale (how big, how large Divine Mercy is)
* Whereas the second aim requires us to OPEN up the faculties

First we understood that the source must be Absolute, Divine (beyond the source of this universe)

* Any manifestation of mercy we experience in this world by must Absolute
* The second stage prompts us to open this door of Divine Mercy
* Now, we can be more specific.

At the first stage we say:

* Whatever is happening in this world must be coming from an Absolute source
* The Absolute Source is not entirely well defined.
	+ Because I cannot be thankful to the apricot tree for giving me the taste that I enjoy because I know that the particles in the tree do not give rise to the taste in me
	+ They do not have free will or know how I am crated
	+ I cannot be thankful to the body of the apricot
	+ They cannot have a conscious choice

If I cannot be thankful to the fruit, the tree, the earth, who do I thank?

* I realize that whoever created the universe is the creator of my abilities as well and He is entertaining me
* This makes sense
* So, I am thankful to the source of the existence of this universe
* But who the source is and what His characteristics are is still vague and abstract.

In the second step, we open the door of the sacred Divine Names and get close to the qualities of the source.

* Generous
* Merciful
* We first need to acknowledge the mercy manifested and only then can we come to the conclusion that the source must be a merciful one

Example: Mothers are compassionate

1. I have been treated in a merciful way
2. By someone who is merciful.

If we go into the source of the mercy we experience in this world, we will realize that it is the result of the merciful, compassionate maker in this world.

* We are personalizing our relationship with the creator of Mercy
* The One who is entertaining me, is a merciful One because I am experiencing His mercy

You know your source is a Merciful One and you can use your human faculties to open the doors of the name of God.

Not only does the Quran say that you have to get to know God with His names, but also, that all the beautiful names belong to Him and we should make our prayer and supplication to Him with these beautiful names.

These are the stages we need to incorporate to do that!

Getting closer to our creator in a more personalized way

* You will be in the presence of God thorugh knowing and naming His qualities

That is why the names of God in the Quran are repeatedly emphasized.

When we say *bismillah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim,*  we can know these names as much as our interaction with His names.

The names need to be acknowledge through experience

* You cannot acknowledge through knowledge
* They need to be used as a result of our experience

Your grandparents might have you that God is merciful

* That is knowledge but it is not enough

We have to go through the stages so that we can be sure that the owner of this universe is really merciful.

* It needs to be through your own experience.

If an experience has not been tested with your qualities and your senses, the experience is not yours.

Beijing is the capital city of China – knowledge

Visiting it and seeing how it functions as the capital city of the country is an entirely different experience.

* The experience is yours

This is why God has given us all these sense so that we can use them to experience the manifestation of His names

* It cannot be external
* You have to internalize and personally experience the qualities of your creator

How can you experience that your creator is the mercifully one? (second stage)

* We are getting closer to knowing whom we are worshipping.

Belief should not be left only to knowledge

* We learn from our culture that we are muslims, that we are followers of a religious tradition called Islam
* This is all external knowledge/information
* You have to investigate it

Can everybody investigate it?

* If someone tries to investigate certain religious tradition and tries to understand within his own experiential world, he may fail
* But the Quran and Islam challenges in this sense
	+ We are told to put it into our own personal experience we will not fail, you will confirm

Since we call ourselves Muslim and the followers of Islam, we readily accept this challenge

* Don’t we say that Islam is absolute correct and we can confirm it without imitation?
* Don’t we say that Islam is not a cultural thing

Religion X says don’t follow your mind, follow what the clergy says.

Islam says experience it, yourself.

* That is a very big challenge
* But that is how you can confirm your own reality

That is why in Islam, we should not imitate, we should confirm.

We should not borrow faith from culture but we should make it something of certainty through my own personal experience.

How? Follow the Quran

When you read Surah Fatiha, you start with:

In the name of God, the most-compassionate, the most merciful.

* Quran says to make the experience yours
* Try and you will find that everything which exists in this world (a particle, star, me) can be explained only when it is attributed to an Absolute Source which is merciful and compassionate.
* Everything comes into existence in the name of the creator who is the owner and originator of this universe
* You can confirm it.
* That is your belief.

Separate belief from knowledge.

Knowledge has no value in and of itself. You have to confirm it.

When we are referring to ‘life’ we are talking about life from our human perspective and not for animal instincts.

* Animals and plants both have life
* But in this instance, the book is speaking to us in our human capacity
1. **To consciously display and make known through your life** (human qualities) **in the view of the creatures in this exhibition** (the millions of different animals, endless number of creatures are being exhibited) **of the world the wondrous arts and subtle manifestations which the Divine Names have attached to you.**
* It is very important for us to realize where we are in this world
* We are living in an exhibition hall
* At every moment, different art pieces are being exhibited
	+ Just because we don’t pay for ‘entry’ we don’t realize the value of the art pieces
	+ When we go to museums and pay for art pieces, we should realize that these are all ‘imitators’ of the true exhibition
	+ The artist was only imitating that which he saw/interacted/imagined
	+ But all of that was GIVEN to him and existed in the grand exhibition of life already

*Diversion – Hadith: Even if you are not a part of a community, as long as you love the community, you become with the one that you love*

Divine Names are reflected through creation and in order to perceive these names, we have to recognize the exhibition in the world and see the Divine Names displayed in the exhibition and within us

Example: There is a famous exhibition and a very successful artist displays his art in the exhibition.

1. We have to communicate through our senses and faculties that are endowed to us
2. We are looking at the qualities manifested in the art and we appreciate it (we have been given the qualities to appreciate it)
* You are appreciating the beauty through the mirror of your faculties
* The two qualities are compatible; you enjoy and admire beauty ONLY because you have been given the faculty to admire and enjoy it
* They confirm the existence of each other; that is why human beings are described as the vicegerent of God on Earth (khalifa)

Exhibition Hall displays the art of an artist

* The artist appoints somebody to detect the qualities of himself as manifested in the art paintings
* The artist tells the person: Please, go and investigate and see the qualities in the art with the qualities you have been given and on behalf of me, declare it (This is what Caliph means)
* If you can appreciate the art, you will use certain vocabulary terms that are applicable and descriptive of the art piece to describe what you see
	+ But if you don’t have the words, all you can say is ‘nice’ and ‘interesting’
* You are proclaiming the qualities of the artist of the drawing
* In that role, you are functioning as the vicegerent of the artist

Every individual person is qualified to be a vicegerent of the creator BUT not every person is successful

* In order to succeed you have to use your faculties
* Everybody has been given the potential to become a caliph
* You have to realize that your qualities are created by the same source who made the universe as an exhibition
	+ He manifested the qualities of the art there
	+ He gave us the qualities to communicate with the art and be conscious of its beauty
	+ The artist has made it in such a beautiful way (in reality, we are glorifying the artist)
		- We have to be conscious that the ability to appreciate the qualities out there have been given me who created the exhibition hall
		- I can declare and glorify the creator in the name of owner of the exhibition hall (Allah)

I will not say that I am a very clever person, etc BECAUSE I realize that all the qualities have been given to me.

Invitation from the owner of the exhibition hall saying: O human beings, come here and declare the qualities manifested in these pieces of art, in my name

* I have to say: The artist is the Beautiful Artist, Perfect Artist, etc through the abilities given to me
* This is the only way for humans to act as a caliph (representative of God on earth)
	+ Otherwise, we will understand Caliph as the fact that we are authorized to use the universe and we end up exploiting it.
	+ People who don’t ascribe their qualities to the creator of the universe, they say:
		- We are conscious human beings
		- The plants, animals, etc are for us to benefit for my worldly, bodily needs ( not for my human needs)
		- But in reality, they are abusing the qualities and trust given to them.

You are using the qualities to satisfy you own bodily and egotistic requirements.

* I am going to make the most powerful weapons and subjugate everybody to my own ruling
	+ This is what is happening to the world today
		- Humans are exploiting everything in the universe for themselves AND not acting as a representative of God

We should appreciate the art but declare the qualities that we see in the name of the creator of the exhibition hall.

**Never ever forget that we are only part of the exhibition.**

* Observers are part of the exhibition
	+ You own nothing
	+ We pretend that we own stuff BUT in reality we own nothing

What is going on in a civilization when God’s guidance is not taken as a source of guidance?

* You get lost
* You justify your actions to fulfill your egotistic ambitions and to gain power

Mighty is right VERSUS right is might

* Revelation says that if you use your abilities in the right way, the more that you will be rewarded
* You will get pleasure out of your interaction in the right way
* You acknowledge that your source is your Lord
* You feel secure in this world
* Your lord is the eternal One, the owner of the universe
* Who can damage you if your protector is the creator of the whole universe

How to live in an urban world without letting the heart harden?

Analogy:

* I am a poor guy, I have only 1 dollar
* I am a rich guy, I have a million dollars
* There is no difference between both of them where the ‘human’ aspect of their creation is concerned
* They are both claiming their wealth or lack of wealth to themselves!

Regardless whether you are living in the countryside or in a urbanized city, what matters is how you observe and perceive the society around you.

* You could be living in a farm but all you are concerned with if the volume of harvest you expect
* Similarly, you could be living in Manhattan, working in a high-rise building and all you are thinking about is how to make millions of dollars
* Both scenarios are set in different locations but both characters have the same outlook on life

Your attitude with the rest of creation depends on your outlook on life.

The amount of money you have is not important

* What matters is who you attribute the money to?

You can be a believer even in a concrete environment but you need to train yourself.

In a traditionalist environment, you can become more traditionalist and in a modern environment, you might be swept away by modern ideals BUT what matters is how you stand and position yourself.

Yes, it is easier to see the manifestations of the beauty of the merciful one in the countryside than in downtown Manhattan BUT can’t you not see a tree or a butterfly in Manhattan?

* If you want to see it, you will see it

The concrete buildings are made by humans and they have been made to acknowledge God…

* Allah has given the ability to humans to make high rise buildings
* There is an element of civilization not paying attention to God’s act of creation and directly trying to avoid it

In the countryside, the farmer might be veiled by the earth and be entirely concerned with the produce from it and does not see the beauty in the exhibition hall

We have to guide ourselves by the guidance in revelation from God

* Study revelation to establish who I am and where I stand in this world
* Don’t borrow rituals

Seeing God lies in the eye of the beholder.