Halaqa - Wednesday, May 8 2013

Topic: How to Read the Quran

We have been concentrating on reading the Quran in order to understand and to receive guidance from it.

Today, we will have a completely different aspect of reading the Quran.

We will focus on reading the Quran during prayer

* Are we supposed to reading the Quran in prayer in the same way as when we read otherwise

People confuse the reading of Quran for the purpose of prayer (prayer book) and for the purpose of understanding our reality (as a guide book).

The Quran has many aspects and inshAllah, if we pay attention to it, we will find that the Quran responds to human needs from many aspects.

Today we will concentrate on reading the Quran for prayer purposes

How can we read the Quran, within our sense of worship?

How can we communicate with the speaker in the Quran through reading His speech?

When we pray, we are actually reciting the speech of God.

Analogy: Someone falls in love with a person from another country. Person A knows nothing about person B’s language, culture, preferences, etc.

* How are you going to propose to person B?
* Person A might say, I will go find a translator to help convey my message. You write what the translator says on a piece of paper and convey it to person B.
* You are saying something to person B in her language
* Person B understood what you are saying BUT person A has no real understanding of what he just uttered

When you go to a translator, and ask the person to teach you how to say ‘I like you’, the translator will give you the words to convey your message BUT the translator will not be able to understand how you are feeling.

* The words will just be words
* Words can only have feelings if you know what you are saying.

If Person A was a genuine lover, do you think Person B would mind at all if you didn’t know the language but was able to genuinely demonstrate interest in you?

* Yes, for future purposes, it would be beneficial if they both learn each other’s languages BUT the point is:
* LANGUAGE IS NOT THE BARRIER

If person A knows mandarin, but is not genuinely interested in person B, even though he might be fluent in the language, person B will be able to see through that.

Sincerity is what counts.

Communication takes place not necessarily through language!

When we stand up for prayer and recite a passage from the Quran, we ought to be aware of what we are reading and what we are doing.

* You are reading the speech of God
* You are responding back to your Lord with His own language that I do not understand
* My **intention** is to respond back to Him (this is what prayer REALLY means)
  + He provided everything for you and you are responding back to Him
  + When sunsets, you are going to God to share with Him your feelings of the day.
    - You want to express your pleasure in benefitting from His grace

You may not know Mandarin, but you want to express your love for the girl.

Similarly, you may not know the language of your Lord but you want to express you gratitude and happiness for the events of the day. So you use His language, which He has sent down for you, and communicate it back to Him.

* You many not understand the language, that is ok
* What is important for you to get your intentions right.
* There are some verses in the Quran (about legal injunctions, etc) and people wonder what is the point of reading such verses during prayer?
  + You are not reading verses about thankfulness, gratitude, etc
  + The content of such verses seem irrelevant to your prayer
  + But is it?

Although you don’t know what exactly the wordings are, you know some of the expressions and sentences that Person B uses.

* You may not know the meanings but you know that she uses it and she knows it
* When you tell her these sentences, she will be able to identify with those sentences.
* The sentence could be an expression she commonly says to her mum
  + It has nothing to do with your interest in her
  + All it does is that it shows her that I’m with you, I know you.
  + You are establishing communication with her by showing her that you are sincerely interested in all that she says and does.
  + You are showing your interest in her private life and indirectly you are expressing that you love her even when she is engaged in activities not related to you.
  + And you speech is something identifiable by her because in actuality it is HER own speech.

Similarly, when we read verses that SEEM IRRELEVANT (rules of inheritance), we should understand that we are using the words of the One with whom we want to communicate

* This is your guidance for me and I respond to it
* When you are praying, you need to be conscious
* I am using your language and I am responding back to.

We should never confuse studying the Quran and using the Quran to respond back to your Lord, while in your prayer.

* These are two very different phenomena

How does the Prophet teach us about the fundamental elements of communicating with our Lord

* What are the things that we ought to be aware of?

Hadith:

**It was narrated that I heard the prophet of Allah, Muhammad SAW say: Allah said, I have devised the prayer between myself and my slave into two halves. My slave shall have what he has asked for. When my slave says: Alhamdulilahi rabbil alameen (All the praises is to Allah, the Lord of all that exists), Allah says: My slave has praised and my slave shall have what he has asked for.**

**And when says: Ar-Rahman nir Raheem (the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful), Allah says: My slave has extolled me and my slave shall have what he asked for.**

**And when he says: Maliki yawmid deen (the only owner and the judge of the day of recompense), Allah says: My slave has glorified me and this prayer is between me and my slave in two halves.**

**And when he says: Iyaaka na’budu wa iyaaka nas’taeen (you alone we worship and you alone we ask for help), Allah says: This is between me and my slave and my slave shall have what he asked for.**

**And the end of the surah is for my slave.**

**And when he says: Ihdinas siraatal mustaqeem Siraatal ladheena an ‘amta’ alaihim Ghairil maghduubi’ alaihim waladaaleen (Guide us to the straight way, the way of those on whom you have bestowed your grace, not the way of those who have earned your anger nor the way of those whom went astray), Allah says: This is for my slave and my slave shall have what he has asked for.**

One aspect is that we are establishing contract between ourselves and our Lord.

* But it is more than just a contract.
* There is an acknowledgment from the worshipper’s end and from Allah’s side

\*back to the analogy of the relationship between Person A and Person B

* When the lady hears the loving language of the boy, she will respond lovingly
* She knows that he does not know what he is saying but she sees that he is making the effort to speak in her language
* The boy reads a poem written by the girl as a way of showing his interest in her, although he does not know what the poem says or means
  + The girl will most definitely be pleased at the effort made by the boy

Whatever you say, you will get a positive response from the One who is addressed:

* We have to be aware that rather than the meaning of the sentence that we recite, it is more important to have the awareness of what you are doing
* Your consciousness should not be the result of knowing the meaning of what you recited
* You need to establish consciousness in your action first (your prayer as a response to your beloved God)
  + You love Him and are happy with Him so you want to recite His words back to Him
  + You may not know the meaning of words but your intention is to convey your pleasure to Him by reciting His words

There are 2 types of scholars:

1. Transferring knowledge from the book to you
2. Read the book, learn something from it and make it a part of their reality. They confirm what they read and get excited by what they read.

Scholars who belong to the second category say: Don’t think of the meaning of the text you are reciting in prayer.

* Your knowledge of the text does not matter in prayer
* Your awareness of your action in prayer is what matters
  + Even if you know the language, your knowledge of each verse is limited because all humans have limited capacities. Now, by transferring this limited understanding to the author of these verses, you would actually be doing yourself a disservice.
  + You are restricting the meaning to your limited knowledge
  + The other person, on the other hand, who is reciting with the clear intention that it is to please His Lord and it is not about him and his understanding of the meaning, is not restricted and bound by limited understandings of meaning
  + So, rather than focusing on the meaning of the verses, always focus on the intention behind the action of worship (i.e. responding to your Lord)

Scholars (experiential) from the second category (not merely the knowledge transferring types), any tafsir of the Quran is a limitation.

* They read the Quran with the awareness that God, whose Book this is, is transferring to me the limited knowledge and perception of the text
* When you read the tafsir of the Quran, what we all should be aware of is that we are reading the limited explanation of the text
* The information from it is endless
* Tafsir’s help me to understand more than what I knew but I must be aware that this is the word of God and this is the comprehension of the author, who himself has a limited understanding of the text.

If someone reads the Quran in the name of worship BUT never tries to understand it, the person is trying to escape from a bigger responsibility.

You definitely have to make an effort to understand the language BUT in prayer, it is a different point altogether.

* We have to understand, however, that while we are performing the prayer we are reading the Quran as a way to respond to His will
* When the sunsets, He has called us to Him so that we may express our experiences
  + This needs consciousness and awareness
  + Not a fixation with the meaning of the text

What is generally practiced in the religious community is that rather than studying the meaning of the text, people read the words and listen to them and express satisfaction from a ‘physical’ level.

When we read God’s word, we should not be content by its melodious sound or soothing effects. We should not busy ourselves in these superficialities and escape from taking Allah’s words as a guide.

Read/listen to the Quran with awareness that it is a guide from God.

In Ramadhan, the Quran was sent as a guide and as a mercy for humans. We have to try and understand what the guide is saying.

We should not use it negatively. Don’t escape from the responsibility of understanding (not imitating) the Quran.

Reading the Quran, is really about studying the Quran.

* Kul huwa Allahu Ahad; Understand, be aware that He is God and that He is unique. He is One and Absolute.
  + Kul DOES not mean ‘repeat’
  + Quran was not revealed to be a book of imitations
  + KUL means an injunction to understand
  + KUL represents the messengership
    - The intelligent beings, change your worldview according to this

We should be careful for what are we reciting the Quran.

Since the Quran is revealed in Ramadhan, we should expose ourselves more to the Quran BUT don’t forget that it is a guide.

* Do not simply just read and recite it
* You have to use it as a guide
* Muttaqeen means someone who reads the Quran and making an effort to understand it.

The Quran needs to be studied.

The Prophet used to recite the Quran but for hours at end he would speak and talk about the Quran.

* To become a Muslim, you have to understand and confirm the message
* Ramadhan is a time to engage with the Quran and confirm the Quran more.

The hadith is telling you that regardless of what you say, there is a response from God.

As such, we have to be conscious of what we are doing while we are praying and be sure that God understands the language which you are reciting, because you are reciting His language.

When we recite the Quran in prayer, we are essentially reading His words back to Him. We are reading His poem back to Him to show that I am with Him and I am responding back to Him.

Part 2:

75:16

*Sahih International*

Move not your tongue with it, [O Muhammad], to hasten with recitation of the Qur'an.

[75:17](http://quran.com/75/17)

[to top](http://quran.com/75#0)

75:17

*Sahih International*

Indeed, upon Us is its collection [in your heart] and [to make possible] its recitation.

[75:18](http://quran.com/75/18)

[to top](http://quran.com/75#0)

75:18

*Sahih International*

So when We have recited it [through Gabriel], then follow its recitation.

[75:19](http://quran.com/75/19)

[to top](http://quran.com/75#0)

75:19

*Sahih International*

Then upon Us is its clarification [to you].

Do not move your tongue in haste repeating the words of the revelation. F or behold, it is for us, (the royal us) to gather it in your heart and to cause it to be read as it ought to be read. Thus when we recite it, follow you its wordings with all your mind and then behold, it will be for us to make its meaning clear.

What is this verse talking about?

* In connection to the hadith we discussed, it said that in the prayer when you recite the verses, the respond will come from God
* It means that it is not you that is going to make the meaning of the text you read, clear, it is on God to make the meaning clear (mubeen)

What these verses are saying?

* Do not move your tongue in haste
  + We cannot read the Quran as merely a product of memory.
  + When you recite the ‘poem’ of the Chinese girl, do not try to concentrate on the meaning of the text in the Chinese language
  + Rather, concentrate on your situation/your feelings
    - Why are you reading the poem?
    - To establish a positive relationship between you and the girl

Similarly, why are we reciting the faitha during the prayer?

* To respond back to God by using His language to communicate your feelings to God
* Communication is the point NOT repetition of the words or the condensed meaning which you derive from the words.
* It is not WHAT you read it is HOW /WHY you read
* If someone is reading the Quran and is solely paying attention to the sounds of the Quran without pondering on the purpose, you are just ‘moving your tongue’
* Rather than concentrating on my relationship with the girl while reading the poem, I am concentrating on the pronounciations of the Chinese word
  + He is more interested in ‘sounding good’ than he is in the purpose of the recitation

You lose your sense of worship if you focus on the words NOT the purpose behind your recitation of these words.

What you are doing while reading the Quran is more important that what you are saying.

* It does not meant that I am not going to study the recitation rules of the Quran but that is OUTSIDE of your prayer moment
* During the prayer, you are responding to your Lord as much as you can pronounce
* Study the Quran, not while you are praying.

F or behold, it is for us, (the royal us) to gather it in your heart and to cause it to be read as it ought to be read

* If some people cannot pronounce certain words, let it be
* It does not matter
* You can try and practice outside of the prayer but in the prayer, it is more about the connection (purpose) than the action itself.

When you recite the message of the Quran, be careful of what you are saying

* Do not get engrossed in the meaning of the word
* Focus and pay close attention the action you are engaging in. You are communicating with your Lord.

It is upon God to respond to you.

* Don’t bargain with God
* He will understand what you are doing, according to the consciousness of what you are doing
* You have to practice to have this awareness
* Concentrate not on the meaning, but on your action (you are speaking to your Lord)

When you say ‘alhamdolilahi rabbil alamin’, do not think of the meaning of the text you are reciting but be aware that you are using your Lord’s words and communicating with Him.

By saying ‘allahu akbar’, before starting prayer, do not focus on the words. Rather, you are glorifying God and acknowledging that you are now standing before Him.

If you are used to the meaning of the words, then so be it, but do not use the prayer time to learn and contemplate on the meaning.

God says that it is upon ‘US’ to recite it so do not busy yourself with the recitation. Rather, focus on the purpose of your action. Why are you saying what you are saying.

“So when We have recited it, then follow its recitation.” 75:19

* Be aware that the Quran is being revealed to you, to your memory, and you are just speaking it.
* We are commanded to follow that which is being revealed to us in our minds.
* The Quran is telling you, just recite it, as if it is being revealed to you at that very moment
* Listen to what your tongue says. It is from your memory and the ability to recite from your memory is given to you by your Lord.
* By reciting what has been ‘revealed’ to you in your memory, you are following the recitation.
  + ‘Whatever your tongue says, your ear must hear it’

Be aware of what you are saying:

* You are receiving revelation from God and you should respond in a positive way

Analogy: You want to express your interest to the girl. Your translator tells you the words you should be saying in Mandarin. When you are conversing with the girl, all you have to do is utter those words which you have been taught by your translator.

Go figure out what it means before or after your conversation. If you start thinking about the meaning of those words while expressing them to the girl, your emotions are not going to get across. Focus on the ‘emotions’ – the reason behind why you are communicating with the girl.

Similarly, when in prayer, you are reciting the words revealed to your by your Lord to express your gratitude to Him. You are communicating with Him using His words. Don’t try and decipher the meaning. Focus on why you are talking to Him and who you are talking to!

In prayer, when you recite verses, you are essentially expressing yourself through verses revealed to you by your Lord.

* Remember, nothing, not even your memory is controlled by you
* It is He who is revealing His verses from your so-called ‘memory’.

The main point of the topic is:

* When you recite, you should listen to yourself and what is revealed to you.
* God is reciting it to you so follow the way that it is recited to you.
* When we recite it, follow the revelation

Just concentrate on whatever the imam is reciting – do not try and figure out which verse, etc.

* You are in worship. Focus on the action and communicate with your Lord.

What are you doing when you are praying?

* You are standing before God and receiving what He has revealed to you and you are reciting back
* Just be aware of what you are doing and the position you are in
* Whether you hold the Quran in prayer, or follow the imam, or read from your memory is NOT what matters
* What matters is HOW you respond to the action you are performing.

You are going to die. You have 10 mins left. How will you pray?

* Would you rather pray 20 rakah or 2 rakah?
* What matters is sincerity in prayer NOT speed.

In prayer, you are worshipping. Be aware of that.

By focusing on the content of what you are reciting or the number of rakah you are praying, contradicts the idea of worshipping.

* Spend the 10 minutes that you have to be with your Lord.
* Do not lose yourself in the vocabulary.
* Follow the recitation, be aware of what you are doing
* Do not worry about everything else because it is up to God to reveal the meaning to you.

Concentrate on the verses above.

* Do not get entrapped in translations about Gabriel and the Prophet etc
* Ask yourself why you are reading the Quran now
* It is God’s speech to you, engage yourself with it.

Are you just imitating the imam?

* Concentrate on your position
* The meaning is upon your Lord
* Just take notice of your position

You have to listen to yourself in worship. Be aware of what you are doing because God will reveal the meaning to YOU.

* Just concentrate on what you are doing
* Don’t lose yourself in the type of the recitation
* The explanation is not upon you, its upon Him

From now on, when we are praying, focus on what you are doing

* I am the worshipper and He is the One worth worshipping
* I am just expressing my status in front of Him
* I am expressing my reality (abd) to my mabud
* You are Lord, I am needy
  + In this position, I say Allahu Akbar
  + So naturally, in His name you start (Bismillah)

When you recite, God already responds. Just be aware that God is with you and God knows the meaning.

* Do not restrict your prayer with your own meaning

I want to communicate with Him by telling Him that all the blessings I received today, with no exception, are from you.

* This verse tells us, don’t worry about the meaning of the verses you read
* Just be aware of your action and the reason you are standing in prayer.

Do not historicize the Quran, nor alienate it.

* Quran is the speech of God to me
* I received it through the Prophet, yes, but this speech is to me
* That is why, we have to constantly ask: What does this verse have to do with me?
* If any interpretation alienates the speech of God from my life, the whole purpose of the Quran is contradicted

You cannot really imitate the tafsir of the Quran.

* We have to be able to experience what we read.

You can understand the verses in the Quran (Surah 75) by reading the hadith mentioned above

* You can directly experience it
* It makes sense to you
* What else do you need?

Do not try and imitate what the imam says during prayer.

* When the Quran recites the Quran, the congregation is expected to listen to him. Why?
* The more we concentrate on our position, the better we will understand the Quran
* Religion is not a social issue
* Who I am, is my religion
* Religion is nothing but your world view; where you locate yourself in this world
  + Who are you in this world?
* If you interpret religion, not as who you are, but as a set of rules, you are alienating yourself from religion
  + We need to know who I am and why I exist
  + This is religion

Historical translations are just information. I do not need information. I need guidance that will help me in my understanding and my role on who I am.

Don’t look for information. The information age is over.

Think about the hippy movement – people got fed up with TVs and technology etc because it was not adding anything to their lives.

People are already experiencing the perils of information overload

-Some are shutting off fb because they can’t stand the useless information it offers

As a mother or father, what is important is the kind of personality you have developed, NOT the information you have gathered.

* They will not be listening to you
* They will watch how you behave
* Are you really experiencing your humanity and enjoying your existence?
* If you are a grumpy and angry person but a preacher, you will fail.
* Do not try and teach INFORMATION, RULES, WORDS, etc
* Be a human being (not an instructor)
  + Live your reality
  + Just communicate as a human

The age of information is passing. People are gravitating towards experience and meaning. They are looking for answers.

Information is cheap, everybody has access to it.

Religion: Connection between you and your Lord.

* What are you doing to communicate with your Lord?

When we try and approach knowledge internally, Allah will send you means to the best external ways (information) rather than you seeking the external knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself.

* Importance of being aware that you ought to perform actions for the sake of Allah.

Story of the Qibla.

* There are lots of people who are there to correct the way you do things
* The information, in and of itself has NO value
* What is important is your intention
* It doesn’t matter where the Qibla points!
  + What matters is your intention to turn to Qibla
  + Your intention is to turn in the direction of the Prophet

Your intention is to express gratitude to your Lord. You did not know that the correct word was alhamdolilah. Rather you thought it was astaghfirullah.

* Do you think you will be punished?
* What matters is your intention!

Imagine a 3-year old child who hasn’t learnt how to speak properly and fumbles in how he says thank you, you still understand and you appreciate his effort. You even enjoy the cuteness in how he says it.

Similarly, in your case what matters is intention AND not the physical words itself.

We need to experience today’s subject.

* You cannot delianate the action itself
* You have to practice and experience it.

“It is for us to make the meaning clear” – we cannot make the meaning clear. He does it.

Just open your heart and check your intentions. Be aware of your relationship. He takes care of the rest.

* He is the One who is Merciful to YOU
* We have to show our gratitude.