Halaqa: Wednesday, October 2 2013

Topic: De-anthropomorphisizing The concept of God

The title may seem a little technical but essentially it means distinguishing God from our human qualities.

A common narrative across the monotheistic religions: God has created human beings in His image

* While it is a beautiful concept, it can be dangerous if we aren’t aware of what the narrative includes
* We are created in His image but He is not limited to what we can perceive

While we can only understand God from our abilities and human qualities, our qualities serve as a **yardstick** to understand what God is

* I can see, so the One who created me, must have the ability to see
  + This is the starting point towards understanding God
  + But don’t stop here
  + To say: Since I can see a distance of 500m, He must be able to see a distance stretching to infinity would be wrong because we are limiting His ‘seeing’ capacity to what we define ‘seeing’

God has breathed his spirit into human bodies

* + We have something from God, and through it, we recognize God
  + It is through these given qualities that we know Him
    - We like compassion. The feelings have been given to me and through it I can understand that God, too, likes compassion.
    - He gave it to me, after all.
    - But God’s sense of compassion is of a different nature
    - I look around me and see how God manifests His compassion
      * The ways baffle me because He is Absolute

Use our qualities to know God but not to develop the concept of God, because then we will start anthropomorphizing God.

* While we can know Him through our qualities, we cannot define Him with our qualities

Commonly said: We are a drop and God is an ocean

* A false analogy
* A drop has the same qualities as the ocean except that an ocean is much bigger in volume; an ocean comprises a gazillion drop
* It would be false to describe God’s qualities within the nature of a drop
  + Although your power of sight is necessary to conclude that God also has the power of sight, it would be false to simply enlarge your qualities and map them onto God
    - Don’t imagine God as a mega-version of yourself

Our day-to-day relationships take place within certain conditions

* When I start thinking of God’s attributes, although I enlarge His capacity, I will only think of His capacity within the same conditions
  + If I like this, God must not like it too
  + I don’t like wars. If I have the power to stop it, I could. God has the power to stop it, but He doesn’t so He must be a bad God
    - When you draw such parallels, you are in fact anthromorphosizing God because you are limiting Him within the same nature as yourself

Every drop has the same qualities as the whole ocean

* We need to rid ourselves of seeing God as a XL man (a super-sized me)
* He exists within a different nature

We have to distinguish the nature of my qualities and the nature of God’s qualities

* It is very difficult to step away from de-anthropomorphisizing but we have to train ourselves to do so

Birds fly. Wind blows. Human beings walk. My brain thinks. I write.

* Look at these actions
* They are all taking place in the causal chain (within the order)
* An order has its own system and the order is given
* We exist within a cause and order system
* **We can only use already existing elements in our actions**
  + We are all consumers
  + My brain is given to me and I use it
    - I cannot create it

**In the creation, God’s actions are not taking place by using the already existing elements**

* He does not grow the tree by using water
* He does not create a fruit from air

A mother feeds her baby with already existing sources of nourishment. She does not create it.

* She uses the already existing compassion within her self
  + She did not give existence to free choice or compassion
* We are only using existing qualities

How does the creator these existing elements, create these elements?

* Does He use existing elements OR does He create them from anew?
* *Tanziyah (*Glorifiying God from the qualities we attribute to Him)
  + Quran warns us against using the qualities in creation to Him
  + God is free of all attributions we ascribe to Him

If I didn’t have a hand, I would not be able to hold. If I didn’t have a circulation system, I would not be able to breathe.

* I am utterly dependent
* I am needy
* It seems to me that God uses air and the various elements because things are made up of elements BUT we have to be careful of falling into this dubious form of reasoning

What we observe in this world is the continuation of time

* A tree grows daily
* We see that it consumes air, water, etc and is growing
* BUT in reality, it is growing as we observe it in time
  + **Time: continuation of the act of creation**
  + If the act of creation stops coming together, nothing will grow
  + Because of the continuation of creation, we see things as growing

The fact that we exist in the subsequent moment forms the idea of time

Compare two moments in time

* Both moments have precise order and everything in the moment has been given creation independent from the other moment
* We think that one moment changes into the next
* But in reality, the first moment has been given existence independently from the second moment
  + **Every moment is a new creation**

Creation is taking place in a new place every moment.

Each frame in a video reel is composed of a separate moment. When we put them together, we see that person is performing an action.

* The universe is given existence at every moment
* We don’t see things from a moment to moment level
* We just see the big changes (example: from summer to fall)

I am able to see at this moment

* Who is responsible for my being at every moment in time?
* At every moment, all of creation needs to be given existence as well

We have to be careful not to confuse God’s act of creation with our form of action

* We use already existing elements
* God, on the other hand, gives existence to everything independently at every single moment

We usually think of creation in a static form! We need to beware from thinking as such.

The universe is subject to continuous change.

* When I change something, I change it within the already existing elements
* But my changing something is happening within time
* The existence of each moment is taking place independently

People either get amazed at this type of creation and worship God completely OR deny it completely and say that everything is happening by chance

* If you are somewhere in the middle, you are not exactly thinking clearly
* Either everything is created from God OR every single thing in creation has the power to create
* There can be no in-between

The One who creates the universe is NOT using already existing elements. He is giving existence anew at every moment

* Look at the microscopic world
* We see the sequence of manifestations and from this sequence we conclude that the universe is given existence by an Absolute Source
  + It seems that He does not need any new elements
  + But we have to be aware that every moment is different and at each moment, everything is created anew

In time, a new creation is coming into existence

At every moment, every thing is glorifying that it is being created WITHOUT any exception.

Don’t confuse our way of dealing with God’s way of creation.

We use already created elements

God creates from new elements at every moment

I see 500m

God sees unlimited distance

* It is not the right way of understanding God
* Our being limited is in now way descriptive of God’s qualities
* We use existence but God gives existence
  + He is of an entirely different nature
  + It must be so because He exists beyond this universe

This world, as it is, demonstrates to me that this source of this existence must be Absolute and not within this universe

Whatever exists is given existence by an Absolute Being

God describes Himself by using *huwa* (IT)

* This source, attributes your being and the existence of other beings, to His act of creation WITH NO EXCEPTION
* Without understanding this, we cannot really worship God

To worship God necessitates a concept of God that is beyond our imagination and beyond the nature of this world

* He is simply the source of everything in this world
  + I can move my fingers because I have been given the ability to by Him
  + We belong to Him and we are from Him

Don’t be misled by the concept of time

Narrated by the Prophet (SAW): God told me that they should not curse time because I am time

* Whatever you see in this world is taking place in the realm of time, which is given existence by Him
* Time cannot destroy you because time has no external existence
* Time is continuous creation, and so if you are cursing time, you are in essence cursing His creation

Quran: Nothing is destroying us but time (Surah 45:24)

* We give an external existence to time and say that time is aging me
* But what is time?
* Time is constantly created
* We say that we are the products of time/age
  + These are all illusions
  + They don’t have a real existence
    - What is real is that every moment is given existence
    - Every moment needs a source to exist

The universe is given existence within order

* The order is subject to change BUT the orderer never changes

We have to attribute the outcome to the source. Don’t blindly talk about the source without observing and confirming its reality.

I cannot make anything by myself. I am using all the abilities given to me

* say *la ilaha*
* Establish the foundation because without it you cannot say *illAllah*

Once you have said *la ilaha* and establish that nothing is happening magically and mysterious, the reality that everything exists confirms that there must be a creator (*illAllah)*

**When you realize that God is incomprehensible, that is the moment you comprehended God**

We are expected to comprehend the incomprehensibility of God.

Don’t used defined words to define God

* He is beyond any descriptions
* But, just because you cannot describe Him does not mean that you cannot confirm His existence

You can believe His existence as the Absolute Being by observing the world around you and concluding that His existence in incomprehensible.

“Surely His Command, if He wills a thing, is only to say to it, “Be!” and it is.”

Yasin (36):82

**036.082**

http://allahsquran.com/read/images/chapters/36/36_82.gif

http://allahsquran.com/read/images/spacer.gif

God speaks in the Quran and describes the events in the world as such.

We have to observe the universe and see if they are really coming into existence by command/His will.

Can anyone give existence to anything by their own will?

* No.
* We use already existent things
* There is nothing in this world that results simply from your will
  + You will not to die but you will still die
  + Can the sub-structure of cells will something and it comes into existence?
    - No

This verse says that there is nothing in this universe that gives existence to anything as a result of will

You want something. It is created out of his will.

*La ilaha* DEFINES *illAllah*

* Nothing gives existence just because it wills it to be
* The creator of the universe is creating as a result of will

This universe is coming into existence with no effort equally as easy for Him to create one atom and the whole galaxy

* He is just willing and it is happening

Only the One who is giving existence to the world is not exalting Himself. He wills something to happen and it happens.

We are going through stages according to the plan of Creator

* We cannot attribute the creation of the seasons to anything else
* What we observe in this world is nothing by the order willed by the creator
* God speaks to me to guide me

Every moment in my life is a different stage that is being given existence by the same source

* He is the One who is putting us through these different stages
* The stages are not important but we have to realize that He is the One in-charge of these stages
  + We are aware that we are going through stages in our practical lives and that all the stages are being controlled by the Creator

Night and day/ Ice and stone ages/ everything is given existence by the same source

* God is teaching us, through all these descriptions, that everything we observe in this world is His creation