Halaqa: Saturday – September 28 2013

Topic: The Rays

Islam helps me understand the universe and that the universe has meaning.

* Islam says: There is a manifest world (the universe) and this manifest world has meaning.
* Don’t try and understand the universe as far as the physical relationship is concerned
  + There is meaning behind it
  + That is why they creator comes and help human beings realize these meanings by presenting us with Islam

Learn to define religion within these concepts and not as something limited by cultural settings.

* Religion is essentially the teaching of God through His messengers

Are you religious?

* Yes. This world is very meaningful and I want to receive help from my creator to understand its meaning. That is what being religious means to me.

If the universe was a book, being religious is about reading the book (the universe) in search of meaning.

* The guidance I receive to decipher this meaning = religion
* Without guidance, all I do is to study the spacing of the words in the books (technical things, as what scientists do)
* Religion is God’s speech, interference in your life to understand His book (the universe)

We should present a broad understanding of religion from a theoretical perspective. Don’t create segments and define your religion by your culture.

* If our religion is defined by culture, then instead of listening to God, we only listen to certain cultural leaders
* It’s not about creating an ambiguous identity where religion is concerned but rather about understanding the broad scope of what being religious means.

Scientists: The universe is just a collection of fine events

Creator: Everything in the universe has meaning

Spiritual person: Accepts that the universe has meaning but I act according to my emotions

Religious person: Accepts that the universe has meaning and acts according to guidance from the creator

There is a voice in the universe that says: I am the author of the book (Creator of the universe) and I am going to teach you how to read it

* We have to investigate and see if what is being taught makes sense

I exist, I have life and I have senses with which I can communicate and question

* This is why people study the universe, as human beings
* When people think about creation, they are doing a human action
* The author of the universe says ‘go further’
  + This is where religion comes in
  + Creator: I am going to teach you the meaning of existence

But do we really need a teacher?

* All religious traditions will say yes
* But ask yourself: Do I really need guidance and speech from the one who created the universe (the author of the book) so that I may understand what this universe means
* The specifications of religion will come later but the first step is for us to be open to this voice that will teach us about the universe.

**He had also given me certain, verified belief, through which the bounty of existence may expand to the extent of the Manifest World and World of the Unseen.**

Differentiate belief from blind faith by verifying it:

By using my humanity to explore what is going on in the universe

* Can you verify that this universe is not the only existence that your creator is presenting to you?
* We are expected to verify

The way I have been created and through my human capacities I realize that there must be another world because my human capacities require it

* My human capacities want eternity, for example

The One who made me with the expectation of more, requisites that there must be another world.

* We have to realize that we are in expectation of an other world

One may not believe in resurrection. They might believe in reincarnation.

* But that too, is a sign of human need
* That my death must not be the end of my existence
* Is the act of creation deliberate of coincidental?
  + Who is doing it?
    - The author, a conscious will
    - The conscious will tells me that your death is not the end of your existence
    - What then, is He telling? Seek it out.

When you cook something and people appreciate it, you will feel good and you will make more.

* But if you make something and people don’t eat it, you will not make it again

Similarly, if you wish someone a good morning and they don’t response, you will not greet them again

* These are all signs to me, from my maker

As Allah says: “Be grateful and you will get more”

It makes sense, because I see within myself that when people are grateful I give more of myself!

Why are the human qualities given to us?

* So that I may know my creator

All the traces of ink in a book are printed to convey a meaning

* The author wants the reader to know what is in his mind so that the reader may understand what he means
* Similarly, He created the universe so that I may understand how He expresses Himself
* We are all sentences in the book of the universe, in order to know who my author is
* Read yourself as a book!

Without these foundations, your life will be meaningless.

* If someone does not read himself, in order to know his author, he is wasting his time
* The other religious activities come later
* Set your foundations right first

Reference to a study circulating online: <http://guardianlv.com/2013/09/studies-say-gratitude-makes-you-happier/>

How can we understand it from a belief perspective?:

To express one’s gratitude, exists.

When one expresses one’s gratitude, his happiness increases: this reality exists.

The one who gave existence to expressing gratitude AND the existence of an increase in happiness IS TELLING YOU ABOUT HIMSELF.

* Quran: If you express your gratitude, we will increase you
* That is how we created you
* We can confirm that this speech is coming from the one who created me
* This is what verified belief means

We have to go through the steps of understanding and experiencing the following:

Existence

Life

Humanity

Religion

Verified belief

Belief is NOT just about following your culture.

Make sense of this belief at the level of the person you are speaking to, be it a child or a senior.

* Don’t just indoctrinate otherwise we will have robots imitating cultures
* People don’t like losing their status quo/identity, which they have established for themselves (you don’t want to lose the title that you are a Christian OR a Muslim) and so we end up running away from the reality of their existence.

Questioning one’s attitude is the most beautiful but the most difficult thing because it pulls us away from our comfort zone.

How do we explain religion to the person who claims his religious affiliation based on miracles he experiences in his cultural/religious setting?

* The creator’s response to the earnest request made is separate from the person’s religious/cultural association
* The person’s prayer was answered NOT because of HIS/HER affiliation to a certain denomination BUT because of HIS/HER sincerity and submissiveness to the Creator
* The answering of dua is the order in creation

Knowing that he will respond to your prayer eternally

* When you make a prayer, are you aware that your earnest desires will be rewarded eternally?
* This depends on his/her understanding of the source of who gave him the answer to his prayer

If someone really wants something, it is within the order of creation that there will be a response.

* Be it an atheist or a Christian
* If you want a response that will satisfy your humanity, you have to look towards eternity
  + If someone wants from nature, you will be satisfied by nature
    - Whoever tills the field, reaps the harvest ; that is the rule
  + But what is required from us: **To be conscious of what we are doing and how we may satisfy our human needs**

If you just choose to satisfy yourself by nature, your humanity remains unsatisfied because once you die, all that you reaped in nature will disappear.

The order of creation: Whoever works, will get it.

* So even if you are an atheist, you will be successful if you work hard
* That is the order!

The difference lies in your reference to the source and how you see the source

* Who is creating it?

Analogy: You wanted some money. You dug into your pocket and found some cash.

You may conclude one of the following:

1. A friend put it in my pocket. The next time you want money, you will try and search for the friend. But that friend is not that. The capacity of your friend, limits your expectation.

* The money in your pocket ONLY proves the order in creation NOT that your friend put it in your pocket
* You might have got money BUT you are a loser in who you thought gave you the money

You work according to the order of nature. You receive the rewards only from nature and your expectations will only permit you to receive as long as your live.

But if you live with the awareness, that your reward is from the omnipotent creator, and you receive a respond to your prayer you will say: My creator, the omnipotent one rewarded me.

* All my qualities are satisfied
* Even if I die, my source continues to live on and He will continue to preserve me.

In Islamic tradition, the *karama* is given to people who are weak in *iman.*

* The *karama* are like rewards from the creator
* God’s mercy treats people according to their level
* Your value does not depend on your miracle BUT on the acknowledgement of your Lord
  + Who are you with in this world?

When you are successful, you might become self-conceited

* But you are limiting your expectations only to yourself
* Don’t seek karama because it might turn into pride
* But be grateful when you receive a blessing and recognize that it is the creator who gave it to you

Our responsibility is not to pay attention to what we receive BUT rather to pay attention to who and what the source is

* Who is doing it?
* If I say that God is favoring me, I should go back to Him and thank Him
* Keep it between you and God
  + Don’t display it
  + If you show it off, there is something personal going on

Oppression may be performed through power, knowledge, and virtue

* I am more virtuous than you. I am receiving more from God
  + I am oppressing you, by forcing you think I am better than you
  + It is a test of ego and we are actually submitting to our ego in such situations.

Know that everybody is treated equally in this world, because we are tested based on what we get from His bounties.

* Just because one person might have more than the other does NOT mean that s/he is better than the other
* Regardless of what you have, you have to be thankful to Him
* Being aware and recognizing the true owner and creator of everything is our real purpose in this life.

**He had also given me the knowledge and love of God within belief. Through this he bestowed a rank through the bounty of existence at which one may stretch out the hands to reap benefits, through praise and laudation, at all the levels from the sphere of contingency to the Necessary World and realm of the Divine Names. (next week, inshAllah)**