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| **Date** | Saturday, November 7, 2015 |
| **Topic** | Prayers |
| **Part** | 10 |

It is pointless to think that one has to know the Creator in person to be in communication with Him. Let’s say someone gives you a prepared meal. You say thank you, eat the meal and find it to be fulfilling. Your spontaneous reaction is to be grateful to the Provider of the food. Similarly, the Creator of the universe entertains conscious human beings with endless events/objects. If I ignore to express my feelings to the Creator of the universe then I am not in tune with my reality. **Belief is facing my reality and expressing it**. Although, I do not know who made the meal in person, I am sure that I am given it consciously by a Conscious One.

Belief can only become substantial when I stop imagining the Creator of the universe in person. The **nature** of the Creator of the universe is unknown to my created existence. However, the **existence** of the Creator of the universe is known to my existence. His existence is manifested through His qualities manifested in the universe.

The Prophet teaches us to experience creation and then express our reality to the Creator of the universe. Example: through narrations, we find that the first thing the Prophet used to do when he woke up was look at the day break. Only when I am conscious while interacting with the universe, can my prayers become meaningful.

Here is how prayer is summarized, usually acknowledged at the beginning:

* *Subhanaka:* We (I, along with other beings) glorify you. All glory belongs to you.
* *Allahumma:* O my God, the Owner of the universe, you mean everything to me.
* *Wabihamdika:* I praise you!

ASK: *If I don’t have anything to praise, what I am glorifying*? I need to concentrate on my reality as I am created within the conditions of my existence, everything happens here. I am responsible to acknowledge my reality as much as I am aware within my conditions. The summary of the prayer can only be internalized once I fully open up to creation.

***Continuation: The Words, page 55, Fifth Point (sixth paragraph):***

When evening strikes, we realize that the day is gone. Similarly, my life will also come to an end. It is known that the Prophet would rush for the evening prayers. Why did the Prophet teach us to perform the *'Maghrib*' prayer as soon as the sun sets?

* An immediate response to an immediate sudden drastic change in the world witnessed. (Imagine you witness the set of the sun the first time in your life. How bewildering it would be! You would never guess that the sun will rise again! –Do not use your present information that the world is round, turning etc. The first time you are witnessing it happening.)
* I should not delay the opportunity to affirm my reality along with other beings i.e. I am going to die (just as the day comes to an end)
* Yes, this world will close and another world will be prepared for me.

Analogy: Graduation is a time for celebration when the student is qualified to graduate from an institution. It signifies an end of one's education. We participate in the ceremonies with lots of happiness although we know that many relationships will end. We are happy with the 'end' because we are excited for the 'new creation' (i.e. jobs/career, further education…)

* Similarly, in order to be qualified to graduate from this universe, we ought to train ourselves to acknowledge our reality.
* We should study in this universe and get acquainted with creation and the manifestations of the Creator: I am created with the ability to learn from creation what they are referring to through their existence.
* Adjust yourself to the Creator (just like how we study to prepare ourselves for life post-graduation). But know that the life of this universe is just temporary
* When one graduates from this universe, the celebration is turned to a mournful one i.e. funeral because of our shortsightedness.

The time of sunset serves as a reminder that our friends in this universe are not permanent. The only One who is absolutely permanent, the Originator of this universe, is the one who is bringing us through the seasons in our journey.

* **REMINDER**: Do not attach yourself to your parents/friends/events/places
* Each maghrib time is a reminder that we will leave each other one day. Therefore, do not attribute creation of sustenance to close family members or to a job.
* Establish close relationships but be aware of the ephemerality of all our relationships and connections EXCEPT the connection with the Creator

Every day we are given the chance to experience our reality as transient beings.

* Generations come and go.
* Bubbles expand and deflate.
* Seasons change.
* Sun rises and sets
* Everything is transient except the One who gives existence to transient things.

Every day we experience the history of life through its different phases. We have to maintain a focus on our situation and reality.

* Do not get caught up in meaningless pursuits of finding extra information that won't be of any benefit.
* Some people are concerned with 'adding material value' to their life in this world but not understand the reality that everything in this life will perish.
* **Your responsibility is not to grow the tree BUT to plant the seed**.
* It doesn't matter when the universe will end, focus on yourself and build your belief (iman.)
* 'So what if the universe (or, your life) will end in X number of years?' ‘What is the point of celebrating birthdays? Are you celebrating the getting closer to your death?'
* **The number of years is not of important but what matters is that there will be an end.**
* The time of Maghrib reminds you of your reality that your life will come to an end. Instead of focusing on worldly, meaningless milestones, focus efforts on things that matter.

Bowing in prayer and reciting the verses such as that in Surah Fatiha ('we worship’) is a way of acknowledging that everything has an end.

* **Prayer is a declaration of one's experience.**
* To experience is more important than to declare otherwise you have nothing to declare (actions).

Religion does not belong to a certain “group” or have a “specific identity”.

* Religion is one's own reality otherwise when we label religion and restrict it to certain practices and traditions, we are secularizing religion.
* We have to train ourselves to truly experience and interact with creation.
* Use your feelings which have been given to you as a guide.
* Connect consciously with these feelings and interact with creation.

When people leave 'institutionalized religion', they are actually leaving the culture of that organization because they are unable to establish a reality within that institution.

* We first have to establish our own personal conclusions. Only then can we come together as a group and share our experiences and understandings.
* If I follow 'inherited' religions of a certain tradition, then it cannot be my conclusion.
* I am free in this world because my Creator gave me this sense of experiencing freedom i.e. **Belief in God is a declaration of your freedom from everything else!**
* We have to first realize our freedom. Only then can we truly submit to the giver of freedom, the Creator.

Often heard: 'You have to pray because it is a commandment'

* This isn't prayer but an act of slavery. **Prayer needs to be a result of your belief.**
* Religion has nothing to do with inheriting a certain custom. **Religion is about acknowledging your reality.**
* My reality is to be free, I want to be free.
* Only when I am free can I truly connect with my Creator since nothing else is holding me back.

Common terminology: Religion has restrictions

* Example: From within yourself, you have freely declared that you will only eat what is yours and not what belongs to others. In this regard, you are establishing your own restrictions.
* What one person may see as a restriction could in fact be a result of another person's belief. That is why belief is one’s own personal conclusion.
* Reducing religion to rules and regulations is human- made.
* The so-called rules in religious teachings are words of guidance offered to us
* It is up to us to investigate these guidelines.
* Only once I can identify and apply these guidelines to my human self, will I apply these 'rules' meaningfully i.e. belief.
* Analogy: A senior doctor shares his experience for medicinal prescriptions
- These are guidelines and suggestions for the younger doctors
- It is up to the young doctors to investigate these prescriptions and make his/her own decisions for their specific patients.

*Can prayer then be termed as a restriction?* No. Rather, it is an expression of my experience.

* Example #1: When I witness the day comes to an end (time of Maghrib), I am reminded that my life will come to an end. I see that everything is transient and nothing in this world is permanent. I am drawn to the Source who is changing this universe. The Source is demonstrating all His qualities to me. From the changes I witness, I am witnessing that He is great. **When I witness the greatness, I express my emotions in the form of a prayer**.
* What could be more natural than expressing myself? Similarly, when I enjoy good food, music, art, I express my emotional reaction.
* For some, when they eat food, they do not enjoy it. If so, they do not express any awe toward it
* Religious actions NEED to be a result of one's own belief, conclusion and experience.
* We have to first establish our belief.

*Where and how can we establish the fundamentals of our belief?*

* After concluding that my Creator should answer my questions I turn to the Quran, guidance sent by God, and apply that to see if I can experience those words.
* **Acting without belief (being convinced) is slavery!**
* Don't be a hypocrite and submit to culture instead of focusing on your own belief.
* We should only act as a result of our conviction
* If we act according to an authority (without aligning it with our own belief) we are being hypocritical with ourselves.
* Being hypocritical is worse than disbelief for in the former state, one is totally blinded from the truth.

Question: *How can I train myself to be in awe of Creation that I witness so that it makes me want to acknowledge His Creation?* Sometimes, we scan through creation and do not truly experience His manifested qualities.

* Answer: We need to use our senses within ourselves to observe and experience the creation. Reflect more on your interaction with the universe, starting with your very own existence i.e. how come you exist? Where are your feelings coming from? Why do you get excited or mournful at specific times? We are given existence to experience and interact with objects/events in the universe.
* If we distract ourselves, how can we be 'turned on' by Creation?
* In reality, every object/event carries a message pointing to the Source. We are made with the ability to get the message. The more we work on getting the message which points to the Source, the more we find ourselves in awe of creation. Going back to the graduation analogy above, we cannot celebrate unless we have trained ourselves. Think about it, there must be a reason for the universe to be created with different day/time/season/epoch scale that we constantly observe. Every moment we are given endless opportunities to learn and develop, which is growth within oneself i.e. strengthening one’s belief.

Again, religion and belief is personal. Whereas I can take a medicine prescribed by a doctor and do as he says, because medicine does not require a personal search. We can learn from other people through the examples they show BUT it should never be for judging them, it must be only to take their experience as an example for me.

* I take lessons for myself and make my own conclusion.
* As long as a person is submitting to his/her reality as much as he/she is aware, the person is in submission.

 Question: I witness Creation and I am in awe of the beauty of autumn leaves. *Must I seek a way to respond or acknowledge this witnessing? Why isn't it enough for me to just witness and proclaim His ownership and greatness without performing specific actions?*

* Answer: Because the Creator in His guide (Quran and the Prophets) for me, guides me on the best way to express my acknowledgment. Just as a spectator at a concert applauds with total body gesture (both his hands, facial expression and standing up on his feet) as a way of expressing his joy to the performance of the artist, similarly, I am made with the ability to express myself in different ways using all my human qualities. The outward expression is a reflection to the inner feelings. The Prophetic teachings help me realize what is already within me i.e. the ability to fully express myself (including physical form) is very human. Why that particular mechanics, I am not sure? Perhaps these are uneasy positions that can only be performed before the Merciful One. Think about it, no one likes to put their heads on the floor or bow down for anything else or anyone else besides the Source of their existence. Furthermore, by turning to Ka’ba (which signifies the Oneness of God), I am made to acknowledge my reality alongside with other beings i.e. declaring that the aim for every created being is the same, which is connecting to the Source of one’s existence.

Finally, do not get caught up in terminologies.

* Here are the Key terms to what was discussed:
1. belief as a requisite before actions (without having a convinced belief, actions are slave-like in nature)
2. sunset serves as a daily reminder of this universe's ephemerality
3. when I witness this reminder, I acknowledge my reality and express it through my prayers.