

Compatibility between Faith and Nature

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With the strength given by Allah and the blessings of the Immaculate ones, I am beginning my talks in this Holy Month of Ramadan. As you know, the subject of discussion during these talks will be Islamic family morals and values. I pray to Allah, through the Intercession of Hadhrat Fatima Zahra (a.s.), to render this series of talks beneficial for the audience. The first talk presented today is the preface, which is to be followed with relevant discussions in the subsequent sessions.

From the study of the Holy Quran we learn that Islam is the faith of nature. This means that there is absolute compatibility between faith and nature. Allah says in the Holy Book: So set thy purpose for religion as a man by nature upright—the nature of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering the laws of Allah's creation. That is the right religion. (Sura ar--Rum, 30:30).

This means that Islam is the faith that wants its followers to tread the middle-path and that it is in accordance with nature and shall be there for all times. There is balance in Islam, neither shortage nor excess. This is also the reason that the Prophet of Islam (s) is the last of all the prophets sent to the world by Allah. There shall be no change in the fundamentals of faith in the future.

Today's discussion will mainly focus on 'nature'. Nature is commonly taken to mean creation. I invite rapt attention of my learned and knowledgeable audience. As all of us know, our knowledge is of two types. One is the knowledge acquired through instruction and the other is that which is acquired through instinct. An example of the first type of knowledge is a lecture given by a teacher to the pupils in a class. Another example is the talk that I am giving to you now that you are listening to, with rapt attention! This type of knowledge is related to, and directly proportional to, the wisdom or intelligence of the subject. The second type of knowledge is related to the instinct of the person.

This type of knowledge is not acquired or learnt, but is present in people. This knowledge is not related to the intelligence of a person but it is related to his instinct. For example: a person feels hungry and the hunger is satiated once he takes his food. To know that one is hungry or thirsty is also knowledge but this type of knowledge cannot be acquired through learning, it is present in people and has been placed in man by Allah. Man feels hunger, thirst, cold, heat etc. through his instinct. When he drinks water, his thirst is quenched. Instinct is also of two types.

One type of instinct is common to all animals, and is perhaps stronger in animals. The examples I have given are examples of this type of instinct. Instinct works without any intervention on the part of the person. With regard to instinct, when man exercises his discretion, it is called nature. Nature needs to be supported by knowledge and requires man to pay attention and exercise his discretion.

The Nature of knowing or understanding Allah

A human being possesses innumerable instincts. One of these is the instinct of recognizing Allah or God. This means that man always makes an effort to find God. Instinctively a person recognizes Allah. If the curtains are raised and man gets rid of his baser traits, he will find Allah just as a thirsty person finds water to quench his thirst.

This faculty of recognizing Allah has nothing to do with education and training. It is instinctive and results only from intuition. Every one of us has, at some time or other, experienced obstructions in our lives. There are occasions when we find ourselves totally helpless. On the face of it, there appears to be no place for us to turn. This is the time when, like a thirsty person, we find Allah. In the Holy Quran, in more than twenty verses, clear mention is made about this. For example: And when they board the ships they pray to Allah, making their faith pure for Him only, but when He bringeth them safe to land, behold! They ascribe partners (unto Him). (Sura 'Ankabut 29:65).

When a person is on the high seas and his boat capsizes due to the ferocious waves, and he finds himself cut off from all sides, this is when according to the Holy Quran, he recognizes Allah. He now pleads with Allah for succor. In this condition he calls the one and only Creator, Allah, and forgets his many gods. The calamity makes the person a monotheist, because all his attention is focused on one God. This is the crucial moment when a person finds Allah! At this moment the man believes in the Lord who is All-hearing and All-seeing, he believes in the Lord who is Beneficent and Omnipotent. The man discovers the 'absolute truth' in these adverse circumstances.

When a person finds himself confronted with calamities from all sides and says, "O Allah! You are able to do everything, deliver me. You know my predicament! You are kind to me! You are Most Merciful! You are Bountiful!" Thus when the person is in dire circumstances, he recognizes the one who is perfect, and in doing so he comprehends the unity of Allah and, as mentioned in the Holy Quran, calls to Allah only!

A hundred and twenty four thousand prophets came to this world, with the sole purpose of keeping alive this human instinct of recognizing Allah. This is the natural instinct that gets

revived in the hearts of men in times of need. The prophets came to keep this instinct alive, to make man reach that stage where he will always search for Allah. The purpose of the prophets, the pulpit, the prayer niche (mahrab) and worship is to ensure that man always remembers Allah. In Surah Taha, Allah illustrates this point thus: Lo! I, only I, am Allah. There is no god save Me. So serve Me and establish prayer for my Remembrance. (Sura Taha 20:14).

How will you understand that there is only one god? To understand this, you will have to pray to Him. This is because performing the prayers (salah) is communicating with Allah. According to the ayah, the pulpit and the prayer niche are for the sole purpose of attaining nearness to Allah and to understand His Omnipotence.

A hundred and twenty four thousand prophets came to this world with their messages. Their aim was to ensure that man recognised Allah and didn't forget Him! Man has to be as restless in search of Allah just as a thirsty person searches for water! O man, you too should always thirst for your Lord. If people strive to see through the eyes of their hearts, they will always have communion with Allah! They will attain a status that is highlighted in the Holy Quran as follows: Man whom neither merchandise nor sale beguileth from remembrance of Allah...(Sura An-Nur 24:37)

If man becomes Allah's true servant, then no impediment can ever hamper him. If we cannot see Allah with the eyes of our hearts then, as the Holy Quran says, there is a curtain pulled over our eyes!

If a person becomes a truly dedicated creature of Allah, then he will not experience any impediments in his path. If we cannot witness Allah through the eyes of our hearts then, the Holy Quran says, there is a curtain that is in front of us. If one doesn't search for Allah in the way a thirsty man searches for water, if Allah doesn't reign supreme over his heart, then know that some curtain is drawn over the eyes of the heart. If these curtains are raised, the person will find Allah, because finding Allah is embedded in human nature. When man finds Allah, he finds that he is insignificant, he is nothing and humbles himself in front of his Lord.

Prayer is Instinctive

Prayer is also instinctive. Fasting during this Holy month of Ramadhan is in accordance to man's nature, because when man recognizes his Lord, he wants to get closer to Him. In the Holy Month of Ramadan, fasting brings man closer to Allah.

We notice that some people draw a lot of pleasure fasting in this felicitous month. Imam Sajjad (a.s) used to express extreme happiness at the commencement of the month of fasting. As the month drew to a close, he used to cry.

A person who has recognized his Lord, and has removed the curtains from his heart gets so much pleasure from offering prayers, that nothing else can compare with it. He enjoys it so much that according to Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a.s.): "Offering two genuflections (rakaat) of prayer in the night is more dear and superior to me than all the good in this world."— Wasail Shia, Vol 5, Page 286

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq says that if someone offered him all the riches of the world for not offering the two rakaat of the Night Prayer (Salatul Layl), he would refuse to accept it! The reason for this rejection is that the Imam (a.s.) is aware of Allah. He has attained proximity to Allah and is aware that absolute humility before the Creator is achieved with salah. Being charitable is not difficult for him because it gives him pleasure. When a person reaches this stage, he sacrifices not only his worldly belongings but also his own life and dear ones in the way of Allah.

The Holy Quran has observed in this regard: Who forsake their beds to cry unto their Lord in fear and hope, and spend of what we have bestowed on them. No soul knoweth what is kept hid for them of joy, as a reward for what they used to do. (Sura Al Sajdah 32:16,17)

The Holy Book says that there are some people who have recognized Allah and have drawn aside the veils of the heart. These are the people who leave their beds in the darkness of the night and stand for salahul layl, and spend out of whatever Allah has given them.. The delight one experiences by reciting salahul layl and being charitable can be understood only by those who have reached this stage. When a person recognizes Allah, salah and sawm (fasting) come naturally to him. Deriving joy from salah and fasting become natural for him.

He not only pays khums and zakat, but is willing to sacrifice everything in the way of Allah. Sacrificing himself and his children comes naturally to him. He does not need to be told to fulfill his obligations. On the contrary, fulfilling his obligations is a routine thing for him. If a person is able to recognize Allah the way He should be recognized, then he strives to offer salah, fast and pay khums or zakat. Now he will wish to circumambulate the Kaaba.

He has his sights on performing the Sai (the obligatory rounds) between the hillocks of Safa and Marwah. He wishes to do everything that pleases Allah, whom he has recognized! It is He who is ruling over his heart. Nothing else will find a niche in his heart when one has achieved this level of dedication. All the mandatory and optional worship become instinctive for him. He recognizes Allah with his heart's eyes as one instinctively recognizes hunger and thirst.

Some people can perceive, instinctively, all perfections in Allah, and thus love Him. These individuals have such profuse love for Allah that, in sheer impudence, when Ibn Ziyad confronted Sayyida Zainab in his court saying, "Have you not seen how Allah has treated you!"

she stood up and said, "Do you not perceive? Are you blind? In Kerbala, I saw nothing except good from Allah. I have sacrificed my brother for the sake of Allah, whom I have recognized." When an individual finds Allah, then Jihad, Amr-bil-Maroofof (enjoining righteousness) and Nahi-an-il-munkar (forbidding evil), befriending Allah's friends and shunning His enemies becomes instinctive for him. If a human being wishes to remain a human being, it is necessary for him to fast. Fasting brings one closer to Allah.

If a person desires to become complete he has to get close to Allah. Then all other obligations like khums, zakat etc. will become his instinctive practice. In a nutshell all Islamic practices become instinctive for the Mu'min.

If we wish to attain this stage, we should purge all the curtains from our hearts, recognize Allah and strengthen our beliefs. One should not allow his beliefs to weaken. If anyone in this gathering finds salah to be a burden, he is ill. Sometimes people are hungry, but they don't know that they are hungry because they are ill. He is not interested in food, even though he has not eaten for two days. Because of his illness, the instinct for hunger has been suppressed. The person who listens to these lectures in this Holy Month of Ramadan, but is not motivated to give charity, is sick too. He is like a person who has not eaten for a couple of days and still has no inclination to eat.

He has reached a stage where heavy curtains have veiled his heart; these are the curtains of being engrossed in the world, of bad traits, of repeatedly sinning. He has reached a stage where salah, which has been described as the food for the soul, gives him no joy. He cannot even correctly fast, an act which connects one with Allah and is a source of delight for the perfect man.

Once, during the time of the Holy Prophet (s), a lamb was slaughtered and its meat distributed. The Prophet enquired whether anything was remaining. Someone told him "Only the neck is left, everything else has been distributed for the sake of Allah". The Prophet said "No, you should say that everything else is there, only the neck has been wasted, because the neck has not yet been given." Being charitable, doing tawaf (circumambulating) of the Ka'ba, being friends with the friends of Allah and being the enemy of His enemies are things which don't require to be proven.

You must have proof and evidences for your beliefs. There are many people who can explain the philosophy of Mulla Sadra well, but does this mean that worship comes naturally to them? These things don't require education. Some illiterate people are better than philosophers because they have cleansed their hearts. They have been successful in illuminating their dark hearts because of their love for Allah. Because they perform the obligatory and recommended

worships, and especially because they avoid sin, their hearts are enlightened by Allah. Their example is like that of iron in fire. When iron is put into fire it becomes so red that it cannot be distinguished from the fire. What is required is to avoid sin and purify oneself.

Importance of Prayer

Lo! I, only I, am Allah. There is no god save Me. So serve Me and establish worship for My remembrance. (Sura Taha 20:14)

In this verse, Allah points the way to His creatures for achieving His remembrance through prayer. If man wishes to see Allah, he should do it through the vision of the heart. Similarly he can hear Allah through the medium of his heart! The way to achieve both these faculties is through sincere prayer. Man should establish a strong rapport and link with his Lord. This is done through establishing prayer - that is Iqamat as Salah - this is what brings man closer to Allah quickly.

The mandatory prayers must be offered at the earliest, during the scheduled time for each prayer. I also fervently appeal to this knowledgeable gathering that in the ongoing month of Ramadan they should offer the optional Night Prayers (Salaat al-Layl). In this Holy month, prayer should be the source of communion with our Creator, Allah! Lucky is the person who establishes communication with Allah during this blessed month. It will be like conversing with Allah. How can one converse with Allah?! It is possible through recitation of the Holy Quran! Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a.s.) says: O servant of Allah! When you recite the Quran and reach where it says 'ya ayyuhal ladheena amanu,' you should say 'labbayk, labbayk' [that means 'Yes, O Lord! Yes, O Lord!']

There are lots of people who, when they hear 'ya ayyuhal ladheena...' they hear only through their mortal ears and not the ears of their hearts. One who hears the word of Allah through the ears of his heart; verily he can say 'labbayk!' What is the purpose of dua? Dua is to establish close rapport with Allah, it is conversing with Allah! While offering prayer you, particularly I mean the youth, should not let your thoughts wander - whether you have had sufficient food or not, whether the prayer will be answered or not! The prayer should be offered with utmost sincerity, wanting Allah to say, 'labbayk, labbayk!' The Holy Quran, in many a place says, "call out to Allah and he will answer you."

One meaning of this statement is that if you call Allah, your prayer will be answered. But the fact is that Allah answers the prayers according to the abilities of the supplicant. If the supplicant has asked for something harmful, Allah gives him better than what he has asked for!

'Ud-ooni astajib lakum' - O My creature! Continue conversing with Me!

Prayer is definitely the best way of conversing with Allah. In the salah, reciting the Surahs is Allah talking to the supplicant. In the other parts of the salah the supplicant talks with his Lord. The greatest pleasure in this is for the lover of Allah. The persons whose hearts are ruled by Allah derive the maximum pleasure from their prayers