

From the Spiritual Tree

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Introduction

"From the *Spiritual Tree*" has often been the theme of my talks. This *tree*, planted adjacent to the balcony of my house had shed all its leaves and I thought it would never be the same again but the recent rains brought it back to life. Leaflets sprouted on the branches and in a short span of time it became sprawling green again. This occurrence gave me a great lesson. The coming back to life of the *spiritual tree* was a manifestation of this verse of the Quran:

Among His signs is this: you see the earth dry and barren, but when We send down on it water,
it stirs and swells: most surely He who gives it life is the giver of life to the dead;
Surely He has power over all things. (41:39)

Gist of Spirituality

As I sat underneath it thinking, I realized the gist of spirituality. Let me explain it with an illustration. Oceans are reservoirs of water. Since this water is salinated with ten percent water content, per se it is not useful for man. To make it fresh God instituted a global process of desalination through which sun's heat evaporates water from the oceans and leave behind the heavy salt. These vapours form clouds and lead to various forms of precipitation. The separation of salt from water therefore yields fresh water which is useful for man. Similarly, everything has a spiritual and a material content. If man develops the keen insight to identify and segregate the material content, he will be able to fully imbibe the spiritual content which remains behind.

While rain is a global process of separating salt and water, man must separate the spiritual and material aspects of an event on his own. This requires him to activate his thinking process. He must learn to recognise the spiritual and material aspects of entities. For example, in order to reach his destination, man must make his mind and fetch himself a form of transport. This is a physical incident. However, there is also a spiritual content in this: If one thinks, '*Can a mountain, planet, star reach anywhere by moving about like man.*'

Thinking such inculcates a deep sense of gratitude towards the blessings God has endowed man with. Man's mind is the most unique aspect of his creation, one that sets him apart. Man can plan and do activities unlike any other creation in this universe. Discovering himself such would arouse such thankfulness and thrill in man that would remove all frustration from his mind.

Man is the recipient of countless blessings

God has bestowed innumerable blessings upon man. The act of talking for instance is apparently a physical event but two planets cannot talk to each other. A star cannot approach another star to strike a conversation. But man can. The reason why present-day man lives in despair and frustration is because he has not discovered these items of gratitude. Despite spiritual food being available everywhere, man is unable to absorb it. He remains forever ungrateful to God.

Let me take another example. The absorption of oxygen in our body may appear as a physical event but this natural phenomenon of intake of oxygen has a great lesson for man. Every moment, oxygen is made available for man so that he can survive; he need not carry an oxygen cylinder with him to breathe! Neither has man paid any price to avail this nor does he receive any bill towards its consumption. If man realizes this he will not fall prey to negative emotions, his heart will only remain grateful to God.

Remembering the blessings of God

The law of nature makes provision for it to receive desalinated water for its sustenance. Man however possesses a mind capable of conceptual thought and to receive spiritual food, he must *de-materialize* available items on his own. Segregating the material from spiritual aspect, makes mind tension-free and capable of receiving spiritual inspiration. Unfortunately, man seldom thinks and therefore remains bereft of spiritual realisation despite being in a world endowed with spiritual lessons.

Yesterday, I was called to deliver a talk at Delhi on a very difficult topic - *Ecology and Spirituality*. As I was proceeding towards the lecture room, I was extremely anxious and prayed to God saying,

Khudaya, aagey badhne ki himmat nahin, peeche hat jaon iski ijaazat nahin

As my lecture got over, I received a very positive feedback from the audience. While my going there was a physical event, it made me realise my helplessness (ijz) and became a source of spiritual food for me.

Art of De-materialising

Every item in nature has two aspects – material and spiritual. This indicates the need to de-materialise so that the spiritual aspect can be fathomed and man can receive divine inspiration. Let me illustrate this with an example. Philosophers propagated the idea that '*God is in everything*'. This presumption was not correct. This is because every particle consisted of 'divine content' only in terms of 'lesson' and not in terms of being a manifestation of God Himself. The biggest disadvantage of such an approach was that it rendered dematerialising impossible.

For instance, saying "*I see the reflection of God in every event*" does not suggest that God is manifested in those occurrences but it points towards the existence of a divine content in terms of signs and lessons that the event proffers. For example, some days ago I was eating grams in the breakfast and I recollected that the horse in my house used to eat it too. I thought what is the difference between the two events? Horse knew only the material content of the gram whereas as I ate, I was thinking about it too.

This made me discover that God has indeed blessed man in innumerable ways but the one thing that is very special and uniquely given to man is – sense of pleasure (*lutf / lazzat*). Whether it be while he beholds or touches, man derives sense of pleasure in everything. No animal, planet, mountain possesses a sense of pleasure. Animals have two major concerns – safety and food. They derive no particular taste from the food they eat.

For instance, drinking pure water gives immense pleasure to man's senses. No drink can match up to the taste of such water. Animals drink the same water but do not find pleasure in it; they only quench their thirst from it. For example, after killing its prey, the tiger feeds on its blood. This makes the tiger very thirsty so it finds a source of water; drinks it and goes off to sleep. The tiger does not derive pleasure out of it; his actions are merely instinctive.

On the other hand is man, whether he eats; drinks or listens – man is able to derive pleasure from his activities. In other words, man derives pleasure out of his worldly activities. Sense of enjoyment therefore, is a royal blessing bestowed upon man, one that no other being in the entire universe experiences. Thinking about this blessing alone and being grateful can rid man of his frustrations.

Man seeks fulfilment of his desires

A western philosopher has written that it appears that man is a stranger in this vast universe. It seems that neither has man been made for this world, nor has this world been made for man. Both seem mismatched.

Man is born with unlimited potential, yet in the present world he finds only a very limited use for it. According to his nature, man wants to live eternally, but very soon, without his leave, death arrives and puts an end to his life. He harbours an ocean of desires in his heart, but these desires are never fulfilled. He houses a life of dreams in his mind, but these dreams are never realized. In this case, there is no difference between a poor man and a rich man. Why are man and the present world so mismatched? We can find our answer if we understand God's Creation Plan.

The reality is that God – the Creator of man, has created man according to His plan. The existence of man is such a unique phenomenon that no other such example can be found throughout the vastness of the cosmos. Man is rightly called the 'best of all creations', which means the best and most meaningful 'being' among all the things created. Such a 'meaningful being' cannot have been created without a purpose.

God intends that man spends a period of trial in this present, imperfect world and subsequent to this, according to his deeds, he will earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world, another name for which is Paradise. The Creator of the world has created this world, as one half of a pair — the present limited world, in which we pass our lives after birth, is the first half; and the next eternal world where we live after death is the other half. The Creator of man has thus created him as an eternal creature and has divided his life into two stages — the *pre-death period* or the limited life in this world and the *post death period* or the eternal life after death. The limited period before death is meant to be a test for man, while the eternal period after his death will be the period for his reward or punishment, based on his performance in the test in this life. This is the scheme of existence for this world as devised by its Creator. The real aim of creation is to select those who are fit to inhabit the world of Paradise.

Paradise is the name of the ideal world; the desire for which is lodged in the hearts of every man and woman. It is Paradise where the personality of man shall achieve fulfillment in the fullest sense. Man with his entire existence is desirous of this very Paradise and Paradise with its entire existence awaits him. It is that world, where a creation such as man attains his complete fulfillment, where he thinks the way he wants to think; where he sees what he desires to see; where he listens to the sounds that give pleasure to his ears in the real sense; where he touches those things which gives him the highest degree of pleasure; where he has the company of those people who make his life highly meaningful, where the winds are life-giving zephyrs for him, where he eats such food as he eternally craved for and he sips such drinks as are only beautiful figments of his imagination today. Thinking about this is so thrilling that it makes man forget all his worries.

While travelling, I once saw a group of men stuffed in an unreserved bogey. Despite the adversity, they had a strange and palpable satisfaction on their faces as they talked about their families whom they shall soon be united with. This made me realise that if man understands that the present is not an eternal world and he is here only for our test, he would be free of all worries. The fact that after this world, a beautiful paradise awaits him is in itself a thrilling thought. Such a person will not feel the pangs of being in an unreserved bogey because he knows that not before long he would be re-united with his loved ones.

Towards the end

Dematerialization allows man to remain peaceful. Those who do not know the art of dematerialization, pay a very heavy price by succumbing to tension, despair, hatred, revenge or malice. For thousands of years, man yearned for spirituality. Proponents of monism sought to find God in His creations but they could not because the existence of God was independent of His creations. Others attempted to seek God by looking inwards, but they too remained unsuccessful.

As per my understanding, spirituality is another name for intellectual development. I once read an instance about an old Sufi. One day, his son returned home later than usual. Upon asking, the Sufi got to know that the son accompanied his acquaintances to a garden. At this, the Sufi reprimanded his son saying he should not have wasted his time such. Instead he should have remained indoors and read the rosary.

The Sufi clearly was unaware of the art of dematerialization. He could see the material aspect but not decipher the spiritual content of occurrences. He could only see the visit to the garden as a pass time but could not understand that trees in the garden impart a big spiritual lesson. In growing from a seed, the tree manifests the conversion of potential into actual. Similarly man must recognise his potential and convert it into 'actual'. While a tree is able to 'grow' as a result of the law of nature, in order to grow spiritually, man must activate his conscious thought.

Man has to be self-made. He must tap his potential himself; no one else can do it for him. Man lives in a world that has positive food all around, yet he harbours negativity. Here I am reminded of my meeting with an affluent Non-Resident Indian in the United States. During our conversation, I told him how the Western nations were our benefactors because the modern-day developments were a result of their hard work. In saying so, I harboured a feeling of well- wishing towards the West and in return of their contribution, I felt morally responsible to do dawah work with them. My acquaintance unfortunately was more perturbed on account of their moral values and did not bother to acknowledge their contributions. This is a very dangerous approach because negativity depletes man's conscience and renders him unfit for dawah work. Just like a speck of dust suffices to render water unpalatable, similarly a negative thought tarnishes man's thought process. Man must therefore introspect very often so that he can identify positive aspect of events and consequently develop his intellect.

Recently a beehive has been erected on a tree, in front of my house. As I looked at it, I realised that these bees traverse miles to suck nectar from nectar-bearing flowers. When an insect can know where to go for the nectar, what about man? Spiritual nectar abounds his surroundings, man only needs to develop the ability to extract this nectar and leave the rest [negative aspect] behind just as the bee does. Developing spirituality such will enable the conversion of potential into actual and allow man to receive inspiration from God. Blessings such as sunlight, air and water are available to all but inspiration is a special blessing that does not come man's way unless he strives for it.

Moreover the responsibility of dawah work cannot be discharged if one is negative. Only a completely positive person can accomplish the task of dawah work. Unfortunately people remain unaware of the spiritual food that abounds him. This is due to lack of thinking in people.

Thinking is a form of worship. Just like Namaz and Roza, *Tafakkur* and *Tadabbur* are forms of worship as they lead man to discover the greatness of God. In fact, all other forms of worship assume worth only when man actively thinks while performing them. In other words, *ibadat* [worship] with thought becomes *super ibadat* [super worship].