

Quran: The Book of Guidance

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Excerpt:

In his talk, the Maulana explains the importance of commitment in the study of the Quran. In light of Quran and Hadith he elaborates that in order to retain the Quranic teachings and comprehend profound lessons; a believer must undertake to reflect on the Quran with complete dedication. A believer is required to undertake this on a daily basis and more so in the month of Ramadan so that he discovers the will of God, reviews mistakes committed in the past and assess what should be done in future to adopt the right course of action in life. To enable this, the reading of Quran has been made a part of a believer's routine by way of namaaz, tahajjud and other prayers.

Another misconception clarified pertains to the concept of "Khatm-e-Quran". The Maulana explains that this concept is a clear innovation and is neither found in Quran nor Hadith. Quran is revealed so that believers reflect over its meaning, discuss it and draw lessons from it!

The lesson:

Contemplating on the Quran is not simply a matter of understanding the literal meaning (as per the translation); the objective is to develop an understanding of the profound wisdom it entails.

Introduction

I would like to begin by citing an experience I had today morning. This experience made me understand the following Hadith

Quran ki bahut zyada hifazat karo kyunki, Us Zaat ki qasam jiske qabze mein meri jaan hai, Quran us se bhi zyada tezi se bhagta hai jis tarah unth us waqt bhagta hai jab ki woh apni rassi se khul gaya ho (Sahih Bukhari)

You have to commit yourself to the Quran; else it shall not be retained in your conscious mind.

The above Hadith is often understood in the context of those who commit Quran to their memory (*Hafiz*) and it is said that they must keep refreshing the Quran else they would forget it. This is an incorrect interpretation.

In reality, the focus of this Hadith is on the meaning of the Quran and not its words. A *Hafiz* simply commits to memory the words of the Quran and that is a different topic. This Hadith highlights that the meaning of the Quran, which is understood after undertaking a deep study, will not be retained in the conscious mind of the reader if he is not committed to the Quran. Let me explain this in the light of my morning experience.

I have a spiritual tree at the corner of my balcony and several times before I have given talks in its reference. Because I did not sit under it for a little more than a year, it faded from my memory! Today, while walking when I reached towards it and saw its green lush branches, I, rediscovered the spiritual tree! In other words, I remembered that which I had forgotten. From this I understood that the above Hadith conveys that a continuous study of the Quran must be undertaken so that its wisdom may be retained in the conscious mind of the reader. It must be realised that contemplating on the Quran is not simply a matter of understanding the literal meaning (as per the translation); the objective is to develop an understanding of the profound wisdom it entails. According to a tradition, the Prophet Muhammad said about the Quran

Its wonders shall not cease (Baihaqi)

The Hadith means that newer meanings of Quran shall continue to unfold so that it is lodged in the conscious and living memory of the reader. The act of reflecting has so much importance in Islam that Prophet Muhammad advised the Ummah to contemplate on the Quran, all year round, so that its teachings remain alive in their memory and they draw further lessons from it.

What is Quran?

Quran is a Book of Guidance. Man is born into the world in such a condition that he knows neither what he is nor why he has been put here. No convenient handbook accompanies him; neither are there any signboards fixed to the summits of the mountains to give him directions or to provide him with answers to his questions. Man has, in consequence, formed strange opinions about himself, the earth and the sky, being ignorant of the essential reality of life. When he examines his own being, it appears to him as an amazing accumulation of intellectual and physical powers. Yet, he did not bring himself into being, nor did he play any part in the making of himself. Then he looks at the world outside himself and a universe of such extreme vastness, that he can neither encompass nor traverse it, nor can he count the innumerable treasures it contains. What is all this, and why is it there? Where did this world start from and where will it all end? What is the purpose of all this existence? He finds himself completely in the dark on these subjects. Man has, of course, been given eyes, but all his eyes can do is see the outside of things. He has intelligence, but the trouble with human intelligence is that it does not even know about itself. Up till now, man has been unable to find out how thoughts enter the human mind or how the mind functions. With such inadequate faculties, he is neither able to arrive at any sound conclusion concerning himself, nor he is able to understand the Universe.

This riddle is solved by the Book of God. Today, the Qur'an is the only scripture beneath the heavens about which we can say with complete conviction that it gives us definite knowledge concerning all the realities of life. It makes man understand the meaning of leading a God-oriented life. In order to secure a believer's commitment to the Quran, throughout his life, Quran is arranged to be read in prayers – daily and weekly. Additionally, every day a believer must read and reflect on the Quran (*tilawat ba maana tadabbur*).

According to the Quran

Recite the Quran slowly and distinctly. (73:4)

This verse refers to the manner of recitation of the Quran, which is to 'recite paying full attention to the content'. Instead of reflecting, this verse is made the basis of debating whether the *Tahajjud* prayers should be offered in units of 20 or 8 when in reality, the verse has nothing to do with the quantity of prayers offered. It refers to the slow and thoughtful manner of Quran recitation so that it's meaning registers in the mind and the reciter is able to contemplate and understand it better!

A believer is advised to get up in the second half of night hours and undertake slow Quran recitation so that he is able to concentrate on its meaning. The verse neither refers to a form nor quantity because the real aim is to achieve contemplation on the Quran.

When a believer gets up at night, he would perform ablutions, read some units of prayer and would then sit to recite and reflect on the meaning of Quranic verses for a long time. Being the Word of God, the address causes the believer to feel the significance of what he reads! Any mention of God's majesty elicits within the believer a strong sense of awe and gratitude. Likewise verses pertaining to retribution, cause him to tremble in fear and pray for himself and others out of well-wishing! In my understanding, a contemplative study of the Quran must be undertaken on a daily basis so that its meaning is retained in the mind.

While discussing the much glorified concept of 'gender equality', I discovered a new dimension today. I inferred that gender equality is not the right approach because nothing in this world is equal. The formula given by Quran is:

Equal in status and different in creation.

I understood this by two verses of the Quran – one which refers to equality and the other which brings forth the difference. Though it is not literally explained in commentaries but this formula is far more understandable.

The month of Ramadan

The month of Ramadan is not to experience hunger but to discover and re-discover the Quran. The abstinence from food and water is symbolic of saving oneself from all kinds of distraction including food and water, albeit for a temporary period! It means that a believer must spend a month in the year where he saves himself from all forms of distraction and put most time in reading the Quran. The reality of Quran is *Aetkaaf*. The ten days towards the end of the month are a formal form of *Aetkaaf* where as the first twenty days are informal. That by saving yourself from distraction, you deeply engross yourself in the meaning of the Quran to draw guidance from it! Owing to the special relationship between Quran and Ramadan, observing fasts was made obligatory in the month when Quran was revealed.

Contemplating on the Quran

When man is born he does not know by birth, what is the purpose of creation. He finds himself in a world where he does not, prima facie, know the answer of the existential questions that face him – Who am I? What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of death? What is pre-death and post death period? What is the formula of success? We need to know all this but where should we look for answers?

Quran provides man with the answer to these questions. A preserved word of God, Quran is not a superior book. Many revelations had been made by God and committed to writing by His devotees before the advent of the Quran. Then what particularly distinguishes the sacred Islamic text from its forerunners? It is not just that it is complete and the other revealed books incomplete. To categorise the sacred scriptures in this way would amount to discriminating between the Prophets themselves which is certainly not right. There is only one distinguishing feature. The text of the Quran has never been tampered with, whereas all the other Books have long ago lost their original form and content, which has meant a serious loss of authenticity. It is this characteristic of the Quran – its perfect state of preservation – which singles it out from its predecessors as a unique vehicle for divine guidance and salvation, one which will retain its validity until Doomsday.

The preservation of the Quran was a laborious task requiring remarkable skill and dedication. As such, it was the most extraordinary undertaking of the age. This feat gains in importance when seen in the context of the loss of authority of previous texts which were not maintained in their pristine state. The Qur'an alone has survived as the completely preserved utterances of the Almighty.

When the Quran is read with this background in mind, it will unfold newer meanings! If you stand next to a road and observe people passing by, you would realise that all their efforts are directed towards earning money in order to make their lives better – better house, better car, better life for their family! Money therefore becomes the focal point of attention.

Quran on the other hand urges the believer to prepare himself for the life hereafter. For those who are busy harnessing the benefits of this world, the Quran says

Those people [who are unmindful of God] aspire for immediate gains and put behind them a Heavy Day. (76:27)

This line of thought is totally different from what we observe in the world around us. Thinking on the lines of the Quran and Hadith, I recently understood a different dimension of the following Quranic verse. It reads

We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low. (95: 4-5)

This verse means that man was created in the best of the moulds and then cast down in the lowest of the lows! Its meaning has not been very clearly explained in Quranic commentaries. I kept thinking about it and recalled a scenario from my village days. In the village, people used to catch fish with a net. I saw one such catch where a person caught a big fish and then carefully kept it on land, outside water. The fish turned about restlessly because it was outside its natural habitat. Being a water animal, fish cannot survive on dry land because its gills cannot absorb oxygen from air (unlike us). Fish therefore requires water for its survival. Through this incident I understood the meaning of the above verse. It indicates that though the habitat of man is paradise, he has been put in a world, which is outside paradise. That is why regardless of the progress he makes, man remains dissatisfied. Being away from his real habitat, man cannot find satisfaction. Despite being created in the best of mould and with best qualities, he lacks fulfilment because this world is not his habitat. In other words, the scenes that his eyes long to see, the taste his taste buds want to relish, the sound his ears want to enjoy and the people he wants to spend his life with, it all eludes him in this world. That is why the Quran says,

Surely in the remembrance of God hearts can find comfort. (13:28)

Prophet Muhammad said

Zindagi toh akhirat ki zindagi hai (Bukhari)

Real life is life after death.

So, those who develop their personality as per the world hereafter and work towards it will attain fulfilment upon being rewarded with paradise, his true habitat! This discovery shall revolutionise his life. He would evaluate his actions in the light of what is desired for him to achieve paradise. This is what is meant by deriving guidance from the Quran and seeking right course to follow.

All present-day Muslims are imbued with the psyche of complaints and grievances. Muslim media and conferences only complain and protest. When their reactions do not yield any result, they resort to extremism and when they fail in this, they commit suicide bombing.

If Muslims read the Quran with the psyche of being under siege, they would be astonished to read the following verse

“Whatever misfortune befalls you is of your own doing.” (42:30)

If the reader is sincere and reads this verse with an open mind, he will apply it to his own life and to the life of the Muslim Ummah. By doing so he will discover that anything which Muslims have suffered in the past was not due to anti-Muslim forces, rather it was entirely Muslims’ own mistakes. This discovery will produce brainstorming in his mind and he will decide with complete determination to convey this fact to the entire Muslim Ummah. The realisation can be summed up in the words of the following Urdu couplet,

Hum ilzaam unko dete the kusoor apna nikal aaya!

We kept blaming them; it turned out that the fault was our own!

Another verse in the Quran cites that

“God alters not what is with a people, until they alter what is within them.” (13:11)

If the believer is sincere in the true sense of the word, this Quranic verse is bound to make a deep impression on his mind. He will find the proper line of action for the future. He will decide that we have to completely abandon the language of complaint and protest against others because, according to the divine law, that will not work. We will have to bring about reform in our own lives. This is the precondition enshrined in the Quran. If we fulfil this condition, we will be able to receive divine help, and divine help is guarantee of all kinds of success.

Conclusion

It is so important for a believer to continuously contemplate on the Quran and course correct his life that God linked commitment to Quran. If a believer fails to keep the commitment, Quranic wisdom shall not be retained in his mind. The Quran is therefore a part of the daily *namaaz*, *tahajjud* and other prayers. The focus is not quantity but reflection on the meaning of Quran.

The ritual of *Khatm-e-Quran* is a clear innovation as it is neither found in Quran nor Hadith. Quran only refers to *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*. According to the Quran

This is a blessed Book which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to ponder over its messages, and for those with understanding to take heed. (38:29)

Quran is a Book of guidance that helps man draw correct line of action in light of Quranic teachings. A believer is required to reflect on a daily basis and more so in the month of Ramadan so that he discovers the will of God, reviews mistakes committed in the past and assess what should be done in future to adopt the straight path.

I keep thinking on Quran and Hadith and that is why new meanings unfold before me. This does not apply to me alone but is applicable to anyone who is willing to offer commitment.

I received a call yesterday and the caller informed me about an Islamic group that propagates drawing of religion from the Quran. I told him this is not enough because even Munkir-e-Hadith, Qadiyani and Baha'i give Quranic references. According to a Tabai who had seen over seventy companion,

Maine aise log dekhe hain jo baat ko ya alfaaz ko koi aehmiyat nahin dete the; admi ka amal dekha jayega na ki uska qaul (Al Muatta)

I have witnessed men who did not give importance to words; man's actions will be evaluated, not his words.

Reflecting on the Quran and drawing lessons is possible only for a true seeker! Those who are devoid of seeking spirit refer to the Quran only to justify what is in their minds. As such, they are unable to draw any benefit from the Quran. It therefore becomes important that a believer undertakes *pre-tadabbur* before doing *tadabbur* on Quran. This refers to breaking the layers of one's conditioning. If you read the Quran with a conditioned mind, you shall only seek to justify your mind's obsession through Quran. Though, undertaking *pre-tadabbur* is difficult but one who seeks paradise will do it! Quran says for paradise,

Jannat bahut hi qeemti hai (Tirmidhi)

Paradise is exceedingly precious!

In order to be rewarded with paradise, man will be required to begin by breaking his conditioning. For example, people think that if they recite the Quran, they will be rewarded. This is not the case. Mere repetition of words does not merit a reward in the hereafter. This conditioning must be broken. I remember the case of a person who was once travelling with me. He was well versed with English and Arabic and used to carry a pocket-size Quran with him. Curious, I asked him what he thought was the gist of the Quran. Surprisingly, he said he read the Quran for reward and never reflected to comprehend its gist!

Most people harbour this idea that reading Quran (without understanding) suffices for them to earn a reward but this is a baseless notion. Quran is revealed so that believers reflect over its meaning, discuss it and draw lessons from it!

I pray that God gives us the ability to read the Quran in the right manner, contemplate and get the blessings that are kept in it for us!