

An intellectual journey

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Sunday, May 01, 2011

Introduction

Usually people undertake journeys at physical level, but I convert my travel into an intellectual and spiritual experience. Travelling becomes a great form of learning for me as it provides opportunities for new experiences, new observations and new interactions. Journey therefore, becomes a study done in a live study room.

Unfortunately, most people are not able to convert their physical journey into a spiritual one because of lack of sound thinking. Unaware of the correct way of thinking, most undertake a journey into the material world full of distraction, which deprives them from spiritual experiences. For example, these days, as a part of the in-flight entertainment, a television screen is placed in front of each seat. A healthy man seated next to me in the flight picked up a quarrel with the flight attendant because the television in front of his seat was not working. I was astonished by this incident and realized that distraction indeed is the biggest barrier in man's quest for realization of truth.

In this world, every occurrence is a potential point of reference. Being unaware of this wisdom, people waste their time in shopping, outing and entertainment. For instance, my journey from home till the alighting point at the airport became in symbolic sense, a journey of life and death. I thought likewise, when the journey of my life comes to an end, angels will arrive to take my soul away in the flight of death.

God created nature with potential and human mind with an ability to convert potential into actual. For example, man's journey began on foot. He discovered wheel and inventing different forms of transportation reached the invention of a ship and an aircraft. One can become far more grateful to God, if one personalizes the objects of thankfulness. For example, if I think that the bicycle, the car and the airplane were created for me, it would lead me to a feeling of universal gratefulness (*shukr*.)

Unfortunately, people only see what they have. If you have one car and someone has two, you would think you have nothing. I once visited Morocco and came to know that the King possessed 500 cars. Someone will even have a car factory so whatever you have, will always

be perceived less. But if you personalize what the entire humanity is benefitting from, you will be able to do big shukr. When we think on these lines, we become grateful for what the entire civilization possesses. If man would then want to give words to his emotions, a complete knowledge of vocabulary would also fail him!

A different world

When I alighted at the impressive Dubai airport, a wheelchair was ready to ferry me till the point of exit. I was brought until where a luxurious car stood, which then drove me to a splendid place of stay. This became a point of reference for me and I prayed to God that when the life of this world ends, He may grant me much more than what I have received here. The life before the Airport symbolized the pre-death period and the life after Airport became symbolic of the post-death period. It was then that I understood the meaning of the following verse

Our Lord, grant us good in this world as well as good in the world to come, and protect us from the torment of the Fire. (2:201)

In the above verse man prays to God, the Giver of blessings to grant him greater blessings in the world hereafter. Such thinking stems only if man leads his life away from distractions. Instead of making an event a point of reference for dua, you instead make the dua a point of reference. Such a dua then assumes the form of worship. According to a verse in the Quran

Say your prayers in My remembrance (20:14)

According to another verse in the Quran,

Believers, remember God often. (33:41)

Remembrance (*Zikr*) therefore, is an intellectual phenomenon and not a physical one. It is an intellectual exercise, pre-condition for which is saving self from distraction.

Saving self from distraction

Saving man from distraction is so important that God established its illustrative example through the first man and the first Prophet, Adam. God placed Adam in paradise and allowed him freedom to relish all bounties and blessings available; with the only restriction that he must refrain from approaching the Forbidden Tree. Adam was therefore allowed to partake of more than 99 percent blessings and was only to abstain from approaching the Tree, which was less than 1 percent of what he already possessed. But Satan enticed Adam to approach the Tree and made it appear more alluring than all that he possessed. Eventually, Adam gave in to the temptation and ate the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. As a result, he was expelled from paradise. The lesson to be learnt is that man already has in possession 99 items of blessings, however one item will always remain amiss. In order to save him from distraction, man must shift his focus from the “less than one percent,” which is as disastrous as may lead to expulsion from paradise.

Distraction deprives man from getting spiritual nourishment. But there is no technical formula for saving mind from getting distracted except for regular introspection.

While in Dubai, I met many who had learnt no lesson from Adam’s example and were re-living the same mistake by focusing energies on the missing one percent. Despite having all material comforts, they were so distressed that most even broke down before me.

Changing times

The journey to UAE in April 2011 was very different from my previous journeys. Thirty years ago, I visited UAE to participate in a meeting, which had both Arab and non-Arab attendees. During my speech, I clearly denounced the actions of Muslims in the name of jihad because indulging in violence had distracted the Muslims from availing the umpteen dawah opportunities that were opening up in the modern world. Unfortunately, the audience’s reaction to my words was very violent so much so that they wanted to kill me.

During my visit this time, I spoke about the evils that stemmed as a result of the violent activism of Muslims over the last so many years and unlike my previous experience, everyone was in agreement with me and accepted the wrongs that were committed. Even the questions that were posed before me reflected their inclination towards dawah work.

This event made me realize how much the times had changed. The unmatched devastation wreaked by terrorism has made man realize the importance of peace. Having seen the damage with their own eyes, has made the present-day Muslims undergo re-thinking. They are beginning to understand the importance of dawah work and have been able to recognize the opportunities that galore for its accomplishment.

Dubai is said to be a junction of cultures from the East and West. It is a place where every day is an opportunity; a fact we experienced during our stay in the Hotel. As our team members approached the Hotel Manager, he agreed to place the Quran at the reception. Within the same day, people of various nationalities took away many copies of the Quran. Ironically, the maximum number of the Quran were taken by Danish citizens; even though present-day Muslims hold Denmark as a conspirator. This event was a glad tidings and indicated that Denmark is a fertile ground for Dawah work. Muslims must become mature enough to understand that cartoon is an aspect of modern journalism and defamation is not the intent. This attitude will help them to remain undistracted and realize the available dawah opportunities.

I was in-discussion with some learned Muslims who said that while they found my explanation understandable they failed to understand why it was different from the message propagated by the earlier clerics. I said that the yardstick to measure the correctness of what is being said is Quran and Hadith. When I asked them if my literature met this criteria, they gave an affirmative response. I quoted a tradition from Bukhari according to which, three periods are considered to be the most authentic periods in Islam - **Qurun** (Prophet Muhammad), **Mash-hood** (Companions), **Laha bil khair** (Tabaiyeen). However, it must be understood that the Islamic literature was put together by the Mutaqaddameen who came

after these three periods. Hence the later-day interpretations need to be deliberated upon with much forethought.

For example, according to a principle in Fiqh

The retribution prescribed for *Shatm- e Rasool* (blasphemy) is capital punishment (even without justification.) But because this principle was instituted after these three periods, its authenticity cannot be established. The ultimate yardstick is therefore to judge it in the light of the Quran and the Hadith.

Dawah work

Advances in modern-day civilization have ushered in a new era where people are mentally prepared to accept rational thinking and logic. This gives renewed courage to man to believe that confrontation is now a thing of past.

The literature of this mission has spread far and wide through multimedia and various forms of communication. Through internet, readers are able to read Al-Risala magazine even before its physical copy is posted to them. During one of my interview sessions in Dubai, a well-known scholar from Pakistan was being parallelly interviewed. As he spoke, he sounded like an Al Risala mission representative. Upon enquiring, I came to know that his familiarity with the Al Risala mission was a result of his having read all the available literature. Such occurrences give us a new hope.

We must bear in mind that Doom is fast approaching and each one of us has a responsibility to fulfill.

It is the will of God that before the life of this world comes to an end; each person is made aware of the Creation Plan of God. It seems that God has hastened the speed of the dawah journey so that His Will may come to pass. To match pace with the developments, we will have to recognize these opportunities and avail them. Opportunities will remain in a potential state and it will be upon us to convert them into actual. A deer in the forest does not go towards its predator to become its food. The hungry animal has to locate food on its own.

According to a Hadith tradition, there existed a group of people before the Prophet Muhammad, called *hunaifa*, who knew not how to pray. (*Seerat ibn Hisham*)

Today, the whole world has turned into “*hunaifa*.” Some are *active* seekers while others are *passive* seekers. As the civilizations progressed, man attained all material comforts but there was one thing, the desire for which was lodged in his heart but he could not attain it. This was the desire to know another version of the truth. If he is actively aware of this longing within him, he is an active seeker; else he is a passive seeker.

Dubai is a very well developed country. Despite its excellent infrastructure and unlimited opportunities to earn money, I found that its inhabitants were dissatisfied from within. A wealthy Arab businessman came to meet me but during our conversation, I felt that he wanted more than what he possessed – he wanted to discover truth or reality. The day when I was checking out of the hotel, the manager came and bent his head for blessings. As we alighted at the Airport, the airline cab driver also came and bent his head forward. This is the case of every man. Each person is a seeker, either potentially or actively.

May God keep us engaged in Dawah work and shroud us in His blessings!

Question – Answers

Q1: I have learnt many things from you. While many in Pakistan, speak your language but you are different from everyone else. Who is your teacher?

A: My teacher is God, Himself. I pray to God day in and day out and seek Divine inspiration. Books are a secondary source of knowledge for me and divine inspiration is my primary source. There are two pre-requisites to become the recipient of divine wisdom. These are - to indulge in prayer and save self from distraction. Any person can experience this by seeking true guidance through prayers; he will be showered with Divine pearls of wisdom. The problem is that neither people pray (do dua) nor they save themselves from distraction.

Q2: What is distraction?

A: Distraction cannot be explained in mathematical terms. Once man embarks on the journey to Truth, he must see the obstructions that lie ahead and cast them out of his way.

According to a tradition of Hz. Ayesha, Prophet Muhammad used to make every occasion a point of reference to remember God. This is possible only when the mind of man has awakened to the degree such that in each passing moment, he is able to realize the greatness of God. For instance, if a person realizes that the biggest form of worship is shukr or acknowledgement, he will instantly kill any instance that inculcates negativity or unpleasant experiences.

Let me give you an example of how I extract items of thankfulness from daily occurrences. Water is supplied in Dubai from sea. Despite this, the tap in my suite had sweet water all the time. I was overwhelmed to think how God empowered man to create a technology to de-salinate the sea water. I also encountered a potentially negative item when I got to know that in order to have my bath in the hotel, I will have to use a bath tub as there was no provision for a bucket. In order to save myself from negativity, I ignored this occurrence and rather did not have a bath for all this while. Developing the art of thinking therefore is the only way to save oneself from distraction.

Q3: Your speeches revolve around a central idea – that man must raise his intellect by saving himself from negativity. All clerics talk about form but you give them a start from spirit, why can't people see this?

A: For years, I strove to understand the central theme of the Quran. After a long search, I have realized that the first verse of the Quran is its central theme. In other words, acknowledging God and expressing gratitude before Him is most desired by Him. But the question arises on how will this happen in a world where we live in unpleasant situations and keep experiencing negative events?

Hamd or expressing gratitude is a positive response and if man lives in a negative world, how will he remain positive? Thinking over this, I realized that to recite “Al hamd” or Praise God is actually to learn the art of negativity management. A true Alhamdulillah can be recited by one whose heart is free from all forms of negativity. It is implicit in this expression of gratitude, that to say it truthfully, man will have to forget unpleasant experiences so that he is capable of giving a positive response. I got a clue of this from the following instance where Prophet advised a person to not be angry. I wondered if anger is in our control. Even Prophet used to get angry but the right thing to do is to not become negative when you become angry. Anger may come and go without leaving negative stains.

Q4: Tazkiya –e afraad, aehyaye dawat aur taamir e millat – are all similarly required?

A: Tazkia and Dawah are both religious works. Taamir e millat is a community work. Tazkia is to purify your mind of the unpleasant experiences that take place in the world; Dawah work is to make man aware of the creation plan of God. Dawah is not connected to community pride.

Q5: What is the reality of – kashf and elhaam?

A: No where do Quran and Hadith say that *kashf* happens; formulated at the time of Sufis, it is a baseless idea. There are two ways through which God communicates with man – Wahy (or revelation), which is received by the Prophets and *Ilqa* and *Ilham*, which is inspiration that can come from God to any purified soul. The veracity of Wahy (revelation) is established as it is directly received from God.

Q6: We are living in a society occupied by the Quranists. These are people who deny the authenticity of Hadith and are gradually gaining wide acceptance. How must we “cope” with this situation?

A: The perspective of “coping” is not right. If you come across any such person, then out of well wishing, you must give him books and interact if possible or else do dua. Such people are actually a case of deviation from the right path and must not be looked upon as conspirators. You can help them only if your heart has a spirit of well-wishing for them. You must therefore, strive to make them understand that theirs is a case of deviation. Once they understand this, they will be able to embark upon the corrective course of action.

Q7: Reading Al risala magazine answered all my questions. Is it correct to think so?

A: Marefat (God-realisation) is a subjective occurrence and man must become grateful for it. There is nothing right or wrong about it.

Q8: How have people become positive about dawah work?

A: The world has changed and so has the mindset of people for doing dawah work. While on one hand, our literature has spread to places like an intellectual campaign; the present situation in the world has taught man the importance of ensuring that peace prevails.

Q9: Some people talk much but deliver very little. What is the disadvantage of such an approach and what can be done for rectifying such behaviour?

A: *Aap duniya ke daroga nahin ban sakte* – we cannot do anything save counsel and pray. Changing the situation was not even in the purview of a Prophet, so how can we expect to accomplish it?

Q10: Sleeping habits in most of the people are such that they sleep late in the night and get up even later in the morning. How can such a behavior be corrected?

A: One should sleep after the *ishaah* prayer. Prophet did not like if people struck conversations and sat up till late in the night. This is because only if one sleeps early will one be able to get up early. The refreshing mornings make nature come alive and such atmosphere is completely conducive to seek inspiration from God. Since it is the best time of the day, walking in the morning can also be called *walking tahajjud*.

Q11: How can we convert the negative experience into positivity?

A: Negative experience is inevitable but such instances account for “1” percent and not “99” percent of the total incidents. For example, the upsurge in the Arab countries was being led by people who were healthy and well off, yet they rebel because a single item may be amiss. In paradise, Adam had more than 99 opportunities but he focused on less than 1 (Forbidden Tree) and it resulted in his expulsion from paradise. This was the lesson established by God.

Q12: Hadith has that in later times, the Muhaddas will become a guide. Please explain

A: “Muhaddas” means “someone with whom you can talk;” clerics believe that Muhaddas would be the one to mysteriously receive guidance through the angels of God.

According to my study, God sent Prophets to guide mankind and Muhammad was the final in this long series of Prophets. Without guidance from God, man cannot attain realization. Even science claims that it gives but only a partial knowledge of reality. In absence of a Prophet, God chooses a person who may be referred to as the “Muhaddas” – for receiving guidance from God and transmitting it to man.

There are two methods through which God inspires man – One is “*Wahy e Matloo*,” which is received by a Prophet alone and the other is “*Wahy e gair matloo*.” The second form of inspiration is received by man so that he is guided out of the jungle of information and is able to correctly differentiate truth from falsehood.