

By heart

My name is Zafir, I am a graduate from Nadmath Ul-uloom, an Islamic university situated in Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, North India.

I hail from a place in Bihar state, district Madhubani and from the village named Mulmul. I had my early education in my home only.

I started learning Arabic and memorizing the Muslim holy book, Quran, at my home.

Then, I joined the Muslim university, Nadmath Ul-uloom, Lucknow, in the year 1983.

Then, I passed a course which is called Almiat.

Then, I studied the literature of Arabic language.

After I graduated from Nadmath Ul-uloom, I went to a city called Ujjain.

Then, I worked in Ujjain as a principal of a school which teaches Islamic studies.

After that, I quitted from there and I came down to Bangalore city.

I worked for some time in an Islamic school in Bangalore.

Then, I became Imam in a mosque.

Then, I joined an Islamic financial organization, and he worked there for about 8 years.

I joined Al-Ameen College as an Arabic professor in 1992.

Q : And so, why is it so important to memorize because you told me that you know a lot of things and you can have it in your memory. In Islamic studies, memorizing is very very important. Why is memorizing so important?

A : The memorization of Quran is done with a purpose that if situation warrants and if the books in the physical form are taken away, then these people who have memorized can go together and recite them, check with each other, and again put down in the form of the book.

Q : But there are few chances that the book can disappear because now, there are books, there are computers, and you have always a book?

A : I say that memorization is a part of the Islamic studies which is there since Prophet Mohammad's days. Quran is a knowledge which is set down by Allah through an angel called Gabriel. He used to bring and recite it to Prophet Mohammad. Prophet Mohammad used to memorize that and recite it for his followers, and his followers used to memorize it, and some of them knew how to read and write, so they used to read and write; so, it has come traditionally over the period and further, this memorization becomes necessary because Muslims have the month of Ramzan in which, the whole month of Ramzan - 29 days or 30 days, they have to do special prayers called Tarami in the night and during this Tarami, the recitation of Quran is done orally by a person who has memorized who is called Hafiz and others will listen to him in a very systematic, organized congregational manner.

That is why memorization becomes necessary.

Q : *In France, a famous stage director called Peter Brook did a very interesting play about memory, about a man who was memorizing a lot and a lot of things very quickly and he shows this man was memorizing because when he was thinking to learn, his mind was in the little city where he grew up. So, he arrived to make connections with that city that seemed very affectionate and the things had to be memorized. I would like to know where is the connection between memorizing and affection, memorizing and childhood. How do you manage to memorize? How memory is working inside you?*

A : Memorization requires connecting things which I even want to memorize with something like a portrait, a photograph, a place, or affection. But "No, nothing like that in memorizing Quran." Quran is totally faith in Allah. Allah, what we call the God, has said "Whomever He wants to make a person memorize, he will only get that memorization, and not others." Therefore, when a person wants to memorize Quran, he will totally, totally believe in his creator, Allah. He does not connect Quran with any particular thing to memorize and with that faith, he goes on reading repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly several hundreds times and that becomes the memorization.

It is not connected to anything of the world. This memorization takes place when the child is about 5 years, 6 years, 7 years, 10 years, like that. There are children who will memorize even at the age of 5-6 years.

Q : *But It seems to be a little bit mechanical. Where is the thought in that sort of memorization?*

A : During the process of memorization, a child is made to read several times and there is no thought or he does not memorize also by knowing the meaning of that. He simply memorizes it by a process which is spread over the ears, not just in few days or few months because it is a whole book. So, he keeps on looking at the text several times and therefore, with full concentration does it and there is a belief, a faith, that Allah has said “You read and it is my job to preserve it in your memory.”

Supposing Allah does not want a person to memorize that, whatever he will do, he will not memorize. That is the faith. Allah has said in Quran to Prophet Mohammad “You read and it is my job, that is Allah’s job, to preserve it in the memory.” That is the thought which makes the person read that.

Q :*When you have memorized all this, when do you think about what you have memorized?*

A : First thing is to memorize the text completely which we usually call by heart. It is by heart. In English, it is two words – by heart. It is by heart, it is not by mind. After he memorizes the text, that child, will go into the Arabic text because Quran is in Arabic. He goes into the learning of the Arabic literature, the grammar, the usage, and when he does that, he comes to understand every single sentence what he has memorized or what he has recited. He comes to understand. First step is to memorize without attaching any meaning, any sign or anything or any happening at all – Memorize the text. Then, learn the literature of Arabic and then, when the person learns the Arabic literature and the meanings, when he once again recites that or reads that, he will be able to understand the complete meaning, context and the text of Quran.

He cites an example that - A child is born. He keeps on looking at mother and at father for a longer period of time. Only afterwards, he will understand that this is my mother, this is my father, this is so and so. So first thing is that he memorizes that this is a lady, this is a man, this is that – he memorizes and later, he comes to understand the things. So, by nature, it is to memorize first and then analyze it and try to understand later.

Q : Yes, you are true because my little cousin lost his mother and he was very very young, and when he saw his mother there, he could not understand what it was. He could not, and he was not crying because that thing was not his mother. She was dead. A mother is not like this. So, may be 2 years after, we were in the same room and he told me: "you know, I know I saw my mother and she was dead". But I would like to know, do you think there are several interpretations. You have always several interpretations of a book. A book, the sentence, they are not telling the same thing to everybody. So, what do you think about that with the Quran?

A : So you can be as probing as you can. I will answer that to the best of my knowledge.

I did not understand that.

Can you ask the question which is more probing. You can go deep and ask. But we will answer according to our knowledge.

Again, you can repeat your question.

Q : You know, you can make a book speak in different languages and have several meanings. There is a lot of interpretation of one book, of one sentence. How do you manage with this in Quran?

A : Quran which was given to Prophet Muhammad about 1400 and odd years back, the text is the same. Not a single word of the text is altered.

But, there are two things here. One is the meaning and the other is the interpretation. Meaning remains same. Interpretation changes from person to person. We don't go by the interpretation of a person because anybody who interprets cannot clash with the interpretation of Prophet Mohammad .

Q : *But how can you say that you are sure that what it means?*

A : To understand Quran and give interpretation, one should be a master in Arabic language because in Arabic language and literature, a small change will give a different meaning. Sometimes, a small change will give an opposite meaning. So, one has to be perfect in literature before giving any interpretation of Quran. Therefore, if any interpretation comes from a person, that is looked into by different people of that knowledge and say this is ok or this is not ok. There is a clash here and the clash should not be there with the meaning of the words in the context and the interpretation of the Prophet Mohammad.

Q : *So, there is a deep link between Quran and the Arabic literature.*

A : Quran is in Arabic language only. Supposing some Muslim is there in France, his mother tongue is French, but when he has to do prayers, namaz, then he has to recite Quran. So, he has to learn Arabic and memorize the Quran or memorize the Quran and then learn Arabic and then he has to recite. Anybody who is in any part of the world, the prayers are being done in Arabic language only.

Q : *But you know, there is a lot of people who don't know Arabic language and who are Muslims. Is that not a problem?*

A : There are many Muslims who don't know Arabic language. If you want to learn Quran, you have to learn pronunciation of the Arabic words. Only when the pronunciation is correct, the text will be correct. Regarding the meaning, he can learn meaning in any other language.

Q : *Yes, but it is the meaning which is given by some other people. It is not your own meaning, if you don't know Arabic.*

A : If there is a person giving a meaning, then that meaning will be checked in the context of the meaning given by all the previous scholars and Prophet Mohammad. If the meaning is alright, we will take it. If the meaning is not alright, we will reject it.

Q : *How do you know that the meaning is all right?*

A : The meaning of the text of Quran is understood in understanding the translation given by a person by understanding his understanding in Arabic language - how proficient he is in Arabic language and what translation he has made.

Q : *But faith is something very personal. So, you have to understand yourself and if somebody gives you the meaning, it is not so good. Don't you think that it is a problem when people don't speak Arabic and when they are learning Quran. How can they feel the real meaning and to be really connected?*

Because if somebody tells you, that is the meaning, the things can be changed.

The real meaning is when you understand yourself and not when somebody tells you "it means this." Don't you think?

A : What is understood among Muslims is that one has to learn Arabic language. There is no doubt about that and one has to understand the literature of Arabic language also. Then only, he will be able to understand the meaning of Quran when he is reading. Supposing one does not have, then he will look into those scholars who are really considered and recognized as scholars of perfection, and he will look into the meaning of those kind of scholars and one cannot give the meaning and interpretation just by reading it without knowing the language and the other interpretation by the recognized scholars.

Q : *You must be very educated to make that work. If you have to read what eminent people tells really...., how do you make Quran clear enough for simple people who don't have access to the culture?*

A : If one knows how to recite Quran, that would be enough. His faith is that. He has to understand that too. What is happening among Muslims anywhere in the world is that a child is given education on Islamic studies in terms of Quran, in terms of Arabic, and in terms of his local language. That we call it as Madaresa – not the regular school. In the same way, Arabic teaching is done. In the houses, the parents and the grandparents teach the children. So, the house becomes the first learning center for the child. Then, he goes into the Madaresa. That will start at the age of 2 years, 3 years. So, he will

start learning Arabic language, pronunciation, reading the text, and slowly, it builds up; it comes. Supposing a person who has not gone through these processes, a person who is modern educated, he is a graduate, he is a postgraduate, he is a doctor, he has not studied anything of this - then later, when he wants to know, still he can learn the text and read those translations, those interpretations in that language which he knows.

Q : *but you know, a lot of Muslim people don't do that process, but they don't go on Madresas studies.*

Q : I did not follow you.

Q : *In fact, a lot of people, they are not educated. They don't go to the Madresa, and they go to the classic study, very short. How is Islam connected with those people? How do they understand the meaning of Quran, how do they believe by themselves?*

A : I am here now; from here on, what I would like to do is make the people understand the Islamic principles, Islamic way of life, way of sharing, way of compassion, way of extending help, living together, having peace and tranquility, and living like brothers – this is the message that he wants to propagate to everybody and that is the message of the Quran.

Q : *I am sure that is the message of the Quran. So, you know, I would like to know a little bit more about the way of life which is given by the Quran because, if I understand, everything of the everyday life is given by the Quran.*

A : The daily life of a Muslim begins in the morning with prayers and then he gets on to his business – whatever he does, service, business, or anything like that – I work in this college as a professor of Arabic. I come here and go to my class and be honest in my work because God Allah is seeing me .So, without expecting any reward, any compensation, or any favoritism, I have to work honestly because a Muslim believes that Allah is always observing him and He will deal with people in a very just manner and in a very compassionate manner and this is how a Muslim lives day in and day out.

Q : *Yes, I would like to know – I have seen a lot of women of the Muslim society. Generally, they have to be covered and there is a special place for woman in the Muslim society. Why do they have to be covered and why do you think it must stay like this all the time?*

A : There are 3 points in this question. One is - the place of women in Islam – To understand the place of women in Islam, we have to understand the historical background in which Prophet Mohammad was born in Mecca. In Arab world then, women were treated like a commodity or anything. So, whenever you want to use it, use that and rest of the time, you throw it somewhere, let it be there. And then also, when the girl child was born, the father of the girl child used to take that girl child and bury that alive. That was the historical background in which Prophet Mohammad was born and then Allah said the messages through Prophet Mohammad that women should be treated equally. They should be respected. They should be given inheritance and thereby the position of the women got elevated from what was the treatment given to the women. Before, this is the historical background. So, in Islam, women enjoys the same position as men.

The other point – Hijab, that is an Arabic word. In Urdu, it is called “Purdah.” In English, it is “veil.” Allah has given the commandment in Quran that a woman has to cover or wrap up herself in front of the other men whom she can marry or that man can marry. That is the commandment of Allah. Why it is done is to protect the society from all the bad things that would take place. When a woman is not covered, she will be exposed to men and man will get attracted to a woman and develops illicit relationships. It develops all the atrocities at women, and therefore, the Hijab (veil) is made compulsory in Islam. What we see today, there is a rape here, there is a molestation there, there is a murder there – all these are because of exposing of the women to men.

Q : *So, you think that all these things are happening, because the women are not covered?*

A : Yes. Many of the atrocities that we see are because the women are not covered.

Q : *But don't you think that you want something more when it is hidden?*

A : Woman is like pomegranate. It is an example. When a pomegranate fruit ripens up, what is usually done is it is covered with a cloth. Why is it covered with a cloth, is because that the birds or the monkeys or the squirrels come and bite it and it does not get ripened and it is lost. So, that is exactly the situation of a woman. Therefore, when a woman matures, she starts showing up the signs on the body which is usually the attraction for a man. So, Islam says cover up yourselves.

Q : *Yes, but don't you think that because of the man's desire, the women are obliged to cover themselves. So, maybe, the men should make a work .on controlling themselves Don't you think?*

A : A woman is told to cover up herself because a man tends to look at a woman. As there is a Hijab, (Purdah) for women, similarly there is a purdah for men. The purdah for men is that by chance if the eyes of a man falls on a woman, he is forbidden to look for the second time or to look at a woman for a longer period. This is the purdah for men too. Supposing he does that, it is a great sin and he will be punished for that sin. So, there is a purdah for women and there is a purdah for men. When the women and men come together, there will be illicit relations and therefore, all these what we are seeing in the world today. I would like to add apart from his statements that now, it is scientifically proved that a man is attracted to a woman by sight, by looking whereas a woman is attracted to a man by closeness or contact or touch. That is the reason why in Islamic societies, men and women are separated.

Q : *Why do you believe in those old stories? Why do you think Christians believe in old story that we say about Adam and Eve? Why do you believe the story of Allah?*

Why what Allah wants, you want it also, why do you think it is true?Why?

A : Every Muslim believes is this – Prophet Mohammad was born in Mecca when the society was very bad - gambling, womanizing, drinking, looting, everything was common there. So, he was born in

that situation and he was so pious that he never indulged himself in any of these activities. He was so pure, honest, compassionate, and considerate with everybody, and everybody used to call him Ameen, trustworthy. He lived like this for 40 years. During these 40 years, he used to go and sit in the mountain and meditate and think why this is happening, who is the creator, who has made this world, and all that, and he was an illiterate – he was not knowing to read and write. He was not educated formally at all. At the age of 40, the prophecy was given to him. God said to angel Gibrail Gabriel and Gabriel gave the recitation to Prophet Mohammad and he said that “You have been chosen as the Prophet of Allah and then slowly, revelation started coming to him and he started telling the stories starting from Adam to Noah then Alik Salam, then to Bosa, then to Ibrahim, then to Isa, then Prophet. So, all these stories what he was telling were revealed to him by the angel by the commandment of Allah. A person who is so honest, who is so pure, who is so pious cannot tell a lie and therefore, whatever he said is taken as the perfect truth and we, every Muslim, believe in that.

Q : But why do you believe in that story that Mohammad was there and that Gabriel came and he told all this? Why do you believe in this story?

A :Dear son, here, I would like to tell you this. Prophet Mohammad told the story of Dead Sea.

Q :Is it about faith?

A :You can ask. I was telling you that – He had not studied anything of this. He was narrating the stories of Noah. If you know Bible, if you have read Bible, then, you will relate this.

Q : Yes.

Q : You don't have to go to any priest to ask.?

Q :But you know, the question I asked is - Why do you believe to this man? Why do you believe so strong to that? I don't want you to say that story because for me, it can be a story. For you, it is not a story. It is

another thing, but why do you think that story is real and that you believe in it so strong that you want to... ?

A : “Why do I believe what Prophet Mohammad has said is because Prophet Mohammad was illiterate. We call him “Umi.” In Arabic, it means illiterate. He had not studied any books to know the stories of the previous Prophets. He has narrated the stories of Noha. He has narrated the stories of Mosa. He has narrated the stories of Ibrahim. He has narrated the stories of Ismail. He has narrated the stories of Isa, Sulaiman, and Yosef, and a person who is narrating all these things without any knowledge should be sent by somebody very superior and who knows and has the knowledge of everything and these are all the historical facts. This builds up the faith that whatever Prophet Mohammad has said is not from his own but he is from the God Allah sent messages. Therefore, what all the commandments Allah has given, we totally believe and follow as a faith.

Q : *So, what is faith?*

A : Anybody’s Muslim faith, anywhere in the world is the same. The faith of a Muslim is.... So, faith is that - believe in one God. God is only one. He has no wives, no children, no relatives, nothing, and we believe in Prophets 1122 starting from Adith to Mohammad. We believe in angels, Gabrail, Mekhail, Israfil, Israel – some of these words you can make out. We believe in all these angels. We believe in books.

Q : *But you know, what I want to know is what is the belief?*

A : The belief is only this - that believing in all these things.

Q : *What means belief? What is the essence of faith? I don’t know what is the deep meaning of faith.*

A : His faith is that God Allah is only one and he is taking care of all the universe. He is running the universe.

Q : *How can you be so sure that it is and do you feel something about that and can you describe your feeling about this?*

A : I say that the faith, the belief, the conviction that I get is by looking at the universe that everything is created in order, everything is so perfectly done. So, there should be something or some power above all which is divine which has created all these things and which is running, maintaining, sustaining all these things. That is how one gets the faith, one gets the conviction, that there is something or there is some power much bigger than any one of us which is running this universe by looking into the universe. So, that big power is Allah and by looking at the universe, at the people, everybody is programmed to do certain things and this is how the cycle goes and it is where the cycle ends. So, that power, that creator, the sustainer, we call him Allah – that gives the faith. That gives the conviction for me to believe that there is Allah and there is some big power.

A ship does not sail by its own. There should be a captain for that to drive it in a certain direction. Likewise, there should be somebody very powerful who will be taking us around in a particular direction.

Q : *You have made a lot of studies. You must have a huge memory, very well done, because memory is a must.
So, you speak Hurdu ? Why don't you speak English???????*