

God's light in the Holy Quran (2)

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 20 November 2020

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ ۗ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ ۗ الزُّجَاجَةُ
كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ ۗ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ
تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ ۗ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ ۗ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ

عَلِيمٌ

“Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. A likeness of His light is as a pillar on which is a lamp — the lamp is in a glass, the glass is as it were a brightly shining star — lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil gives light, even though fire does not touch it — light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He pleases. And Allah sets forth parables for mankind, and Allah is Knower of all things.” (24:35)

I am continuing the topic of the last *Khutba* and will draw attention today to some other points relating to this verse of the Quran. As I said then, this verse begins: “Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.” It doesn’t say, “Allah is the Creator or the Maker of light”, but that Allah *is* the light. Everyone knows that the teachings of Islam make it absolutely clear that God is one and that nothing of His creation can be God or share any attribute with Him. This is why no reader of the Quran could ever take this statement to mean that Allah is the light that we see in this world, and that light should be worshipped as God. Everyone knows that it means that He is the Creator of light. The Quran is indicating here that, in earlier religions, wherever there is a statement which mentions some person or thing in this world as being God or like God, it does not mean that that person or thing is the same as God. It is still only a creation of God, but it serves some important purpose for which God has created it.

For example, Jesus is reported to have said: “The Father and I are one” (John,

10:30) and “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John, 10:38). Now, just as the Quran’s words “God is the light of the heavens and the earth” do not mean that light is God, this statement of Jesus does not mean that he is the same as God. In fact, it is also recorded in the same chapter in this Gospel that his Jewish opponents, who tried to throw stones at him, said to him that they were punishing him “because you, being a man, make yourself God” (John, 10:33). Jesus replied that in their own scriptures persons holding authority or judges are called “gods”. The passage he referred them to is in the Psalms and it says: “You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High. But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler” (Psalms, 82:6).

Commenting on this passage it is stated on one Bible teaching website:

“This passage is saying that God has appointed men to positions of authority in which they are considered as gods among the people. They are to remember that, even though they are representing God in this world, they are mortal and must eventually give an account to God for how they used that authority.”

(www.gotquestions.org/you-are-gods.html)

Turning back to the verse we are discussing, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has written about it in some of his books. In his book *Barahin Ahmadiyya* he has given an interesting and different explanation. I summarise it here in my own words. He writes that the statement “Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth” means that Allah is the Creator of everything. Darkness is associated with *not existing* and light is associated with *existence and life*. Thinking about this, it occurs to me that if you enter a dark room you cannot see anything in it, but when you switch the light on, everything, as it were, comes into existence as it reflects that light towards your eyes. Hazrat Mirza sahib writes here that these words mean that everything which exists owes its existence to God, and there is nothing, except Him, which exists in its own right, by itself, from the beginning of time. This is the light, meaning existence, which God has given to everything and everyone, unconditionally. As to the next words, “A likeness of His light is as a pillar (or niche, *mishkat*) on which is a lamp”, he says these refer to a light which only those receive who are capable of receiving it. And

those are the prophets of God, the greatest and most exalted of whom was the Holy Prophet Muhammad. This is the light of revelation from God. The location of the lamp is the broad mind, or wide “breast”, of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and the lamp is Divine revelation.

God created physical life on earth. That life was brought about by the physical light of the sun, and it still needs that light for its existence. Then to give human beings spiritual life God gave them another light by raising His prophets, ending with the Holy Prophet Muhammad. This light is mentioned in the Quran as follows: “Is he who was dead, then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in darkness from which he cannot come forth?” (6:122) According to this verse, being in spiritual darkness is to be *non-existent and dead* in the spiritual sense. The light of revelation from God raises people to spiritual life.

Then we have: “the lamp is in a glass, the glass is as it were a brightly shining star”. This glass is the pure, unsullied heart of the Holy Prophet, which is like a brightly shining star, whose light could be seen in the person of the Holy Prophet. Then we have: “lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western”. Hazrat Mirza sahib writes that this tree is the Holy Prophet’s nature and personality. His being “neither eastern nor western” means that his nature does not tend to either extreme, but is always moderate. Here he contrasts this with the law of Moses and the teachings of the Gospels. The law of Moses insisted on always imposing punishments for evil and it stressed the importance of the outward acts of worship. Opposite to this, the Gospels taught leniency and forgiveness in all circumstances, and stressed the necessity of hiding good actions, and not doing them in public. But the temperament of the Holy Prophet did not go to extremes either in punishment of evil or its forgiveness. He believed in exercising whichever was appropriate to the circumstances. So the Holy Prophet was chosen by God to receive the kind of teachings that accorded with his own inner temperament and inner light. That is how the lamp of the revelation which came to him was fuelled by the tree of his personality.

Then we come to the words: “whose oil gives light, even though fire does not touch it — light upon light.” This refers to the fact that the Holy Prophet, even before receiving revelation, was exuding light through his own natural makeup and his fine and high qualities. And when revelation came to him, it was light upon the existing light. Hazrat Mirza sahib writes here that the light of revelation to prophets, with which they guide other people, can only descend upon a heart possessing light by its nature. It cannot descend upon hearts that are in darkness.

It may be noted that in the Quran both the Holy Prophet and the Quran are called “light”. It says: “Indeed, there has come to you from Allah, a *Light* and a clear Book” (5:15). Here “Light” means the Holy Prophet as the “clear Book” is mentioned separately. In another verse it is said: “O people, manifest proof has indeed come to you from your Lord and We have sent down to you a clear *light*.” (4:174). Here “light” means the Quran because it is said to be “sent down”. Again it says: “So those who believe in him and honour him and help him, and follow the *light* which has been sent down with him — these are the successful” (7:157). The “light” here is the Quran, as it is described as having been “sent down with him”.

Jesus is reported in the Gospel of John as saying: “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (ch. 8, v. 12). But he also said later in the same Gospel: “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (ch. 9, v. 5). And later on he said: “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you” (ch. 12, v. 35). Jesus realized that his mission was temporary. After him came the light of the Holy Prophet Muhammad which will always be entering houses where people put duty to God and service of mankind above acquiring worldly wealth, as stated in verses 36 and 37 of ch. 24.

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكُفِّرْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-