

## *God's light in the Holy Quran and the festival of Diwali*

**Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 13 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)

The topic of this *khutba* is prompted by the Hindu festival of Diwali. The third day of Diwali, which is the most significant of this 5-day festival, is tomorrow, 14th November 2020, when the goddess Lakshmi is worshipped by the devotees. I have collected a few basic facts from research and Hindu sources which are as follows:

- “It [Diwali] means a row of lights and indeed illumination forms its main attraction. Every home — lowly or mightly — the hut of the poor or the mansion of the rich - is alit with the orange glow of twinkling diyas — small earthen lamps — to welcome Lakshmi, Goddess of wealth and prosperity.” (Widely available statement; see for example Sri Siva Vishnu Temple in the US: [www.ssvt.org/Festivals/Diwali.pdf](http://www.ssvt.org/Festivals/Diwali.pdf))
- “Diwali is celebrated by all Hindus, but is the most important festival for merchants, bankers and businessmen, because the main religious event is the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth in Hindu mythology.” (Oxford Dictionary of World Religions)

- “People open their doors and windows and light lamps to invite Lakshmi in.”  
(National Geographic Society)
- “...several key Diwali traditions are centered around money it is considered a particularly auspicious time to acquire new assets and make new investments.”  
(Forbes Business Magazine, 17 October 2017)
- According to the Brahmin Society of North London: “The houses and its surrounds are illuminated with oil lamps so that Lakshmi can see her way clearly. On this day of Lakshmi-Pujan, Indian merchants and bankers open their new account books... and after ending the financial year offer worship to Lakshmi.”  
([www.bsnl.org.uk/meaning-diwali/](http://www.bsnl.org.uk/meaning-diwali/))

The next verses from the Quran are as follows:

فِي بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ ﴿٣٦﴾ رِجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيهِمْ  
تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ وَ  
الْأَبْصَارُ ﴿٣٧﴾ لِيَجْزِيَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا وَيَزِيدَهُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

“(that light is) in houses which Allah has permitted to be exalted and His name to be remembered within them. Therein do glorify Him, in the mornings and the evenings, men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of the due charity — they fear a day in which the hearts and the eyes will turn about, that Allah may give them the best reward for what they did, and give them more out of His grace. And Allah provides without measure for whom He pleases.” —  
(24:36–38)

The three key points of Diwali: (1) its association with light, (2) people’s homes into which God is invited and enters, and (3) wealth and its acquisition, and its accounting, are found in this entire passage of the Quran (24:35–38).

Verse 35 begins by indicating the importance of light. It 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. When someone is very closely associated with some quality or some field of work, or is very prominent in it, he becomes known by the name of that quality. This is also a linguistic feature in Arabic and also in other languages, for example in English. So Allah is Himself called “the light of the heavens and the earth”. That God is no God Who cannot provide light. He has given us physical light with which we see the heavens and the earth and He has given us intellectual light with which we understand the operation of the heavens and the earth. He has also given us spiritual light, in the form of His guidance through the prophets, by which we see what should be our relation with God (“the heavens”) and how should we behave towards the people and things of the world (“the earth”). And this last form of light is the chief subject of the Quran. It teaches that it is God Who *gives* light and human beings who *receive* light from Him.

The light of God is described here in the Quran as being like light from a lamp placed at a high place, shining like a star, so that just this one light can reach everywhere and to all. The flame of the light of God is protected within a glass enclosure. In other words, the teachings of Islam sent by God are protected from being extinguished.

Light needs fuel, and fuel of this light of God comes from a “blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western”. In a well-known short chapter of the Quran, ch. 95, Islam is likened to the olive or *zaitūn*. The olive is a symbol of peace from ancient times among many nations. It means that the teachings of Islam are based on *peace*. The words “neither eastern nor western” indicate that Islam is not exclusively associated with the east nor with the west but is meant for all mankind. The Christian religion, although originating in the Middle East, became Western based soon after, and the religions of the world to the east of Arabia are associated with the east.

It is added here that this oil or fuel gives light even without being ignited. All forms of generating light involve the process of burning something and heat is also produced as a result. But the fuel of the light of Allah produces only light, without

burning or heat. Usually religion has a considerable amount of *heat* associated with it, examples of which are: *fiery* speeches by preachers, *heated* arguments between followers of different faiths, and *easily enflamed*, *quickly outraged* religious sentiments. But Islamic teachings are *light without the heat*, and that is how they should be presented.

Then this light of Allah is described here as “light upon light”, *nūr-un ‘alā nūr*. Now the scriptures that came before the Quran are said in the Quran itself to have contained light. It says this about the Torah in 5:44 and the Gospels in 5:46. So these words “light upon light” may mean that the Quran then came as light upon that earlier light. These words may also mean that there is no end to the light of guidance that we receive from the Quran. Whenever we receive any such light, it is not the end because there is yet more light in store for us to receive in future.

The next verse tells us about the light which comes from God *entering into houses*: “houses which Allah has permitted to be exalted and His name to be remembered within them”. How God enters into a house is through its dwellers bearing Him in their minds. It is such houses that in God’s sight are raised high and lofty, and not buildings which are large and tall in physical size. More than just remembering His name, these occupants are such people “whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of the due charity”.

The Quran here teaches that the light of God enters those houses where there are people who do not put earning wealth above their duty to God and their duty to fellow human beings. The desire to acquire wealth is legitimate, in fact necessary. But the same God Who legitimizes wealth, and ordains it for us, also teaches us to view its acquisition in the right perspective and proportion. God is One, and He does both things. While making money, we must keep uppermost in mind the remembrance of Allah (remembering His teachings of honesty, truth, and fair dealing), and our spiritual duties (such as prayer) and our duties of doing good to other human beings (charity). Regarding this last point, there is a concept in Western capitalism known as

social responsibility in business, which is that a business does not exist merely to make a profit but it also has responsibilities to society which it must fulfil . This concept is indicated here in the Quran.

Lastly, it is stated here that “Allah provides without measure for whom He pleases.” The word for “measure” is *hisāb*, which means accounting by means of numbers and figures. As already quoted, at Diwali “merchants and bankers open their new account books”. The Quran here says that Allah provides without restricting Himself by any human accounting or measurement. There is no limit or end to the amount of material provisions that people can obtain from God by making efforts. But apart from this there is another wealth that people can earn which cannot be measured by any form of accounting, and that is spiritual wealth. And the way to earn that is by remembering that there is an account of your deeds which has a balance on its invisible sheet, and that is more important than the balance of monetary profit and loss recorded in a business ledger.

May our Hindu friends and fellow-countrymen be safe in their celebrations of Diwali and may God create light in their hearts just as they light physical lamps for their celebrations.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ،

إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ۔