

"Light Upon Light"

Interpretation of Quranic Ayat - Sura Noor



By Al-Waez R. D. Shariff
 God is the light of the heavens
 and the earth.
 The likeness of this light is a
 niche
 in which there is a lamp,
 the lamp in a glass,
 the glass like a glittering star,
 kindled from a blessed olive tree,
 an olive that is neither of the east
 nor the west,
 the oil of which could shine
 without being touched by fire.
 Light upon light;
 God guides whom He please.
 - Quran 24: 35

Before we endeavor to interpret
 the Qur'anic symbols, it is better
 to make it plain as to what we
 mean by the four garments,
 which our traveler has acquired
 from the 'Strangers at the Gates.'
 The first was his spiritual body,
 the function of which is knowing.

The second was his mental body, the function of which is thinking. The third was his emotional body, the function of which is feeling. The fourth was his physical body, the function of which is doing. He is endowed with certain faculties: fire, air, water and earth--the four basic elements, which compose the human body. The Quranic verse, with its own fundamental symbols is a manifestation of this truth. The mystery surrounding the whole of the verse must be appreciated at the very outset. God's divine light cannot be revealed directly to man. Why there has never been a direct divine revelation is a definite mystery, but this begins to be unfolded if a human soul by intense meditation reaches its ultimate reality. But so far as we are imprisoned within these physical shells, God shall always speak to humanity in parables.

Now we come ultimately to the mystic path to unfold this verse. To all those who wish to tread this path, I beseech: let us walk together in love and prayers and tolerance, so that we may fathom the deeper mysteries of God.

The hint given earlier by me can now be revealed more fully and clearly, that this verse and its five symbols stand for man's reincarnation upon this earth--and that within his body, mind, heart, spirit, and what we call 'Life' is hidden his Soul, the Light of God--and it is through his 'Life' upon the earth that he must search the inner reality and find himself and God.

Thus the Niche in the verse symbolizes his physical incarnation, his body or the temporal vehicle. But it is not an ordinary vessel. The Creator has blessed it by enshrining within it a lamp, within which shines eternally His Light. It is the presence

of this Lamp in man and only those who are aware of its Divine Presence, or have had its glimpse, can be said to have lived their lives truly.

The next symbol is the Lamp. The Lamp is the core of the spiritual truth, and which is the true source of illumination. Let us try to study this 'Lantern' which we all carry within ourselves. The Quranic symbols, which follow after the Lamp clearly show its structure, --the Glass, the Olive Tree, and the Olive Oil, the last being the real source of divine illumination. Thus the Lamp although far higher than the Niche is still at a lower level than the pure light itself. Thus with these five symbols, the life-energy as manifested within the human body becomes finer and subtler, that is, Niche is the body, the Lamp is the entire, whole, indivisible, indwelling spirit, sustaining, nourishing man, yet encased within the Glass with three significant meanings: (i) a transparent medium through which the light passes to illuminate the humanity and if it is in true harmony with the indwelling spirit can become the brilliant rising star of the human destiny; (ii) it is a protective shield against the lower and baser motives in man, and (iii) by failing to harmonize with the spirit, it may transmit a false image of the external world to the inner being. In a larger sense the glass truly and logically stands for the mind. Between the external world of the senses and the inner realm of reality, stands the mind. The Olive Tree is the source of the oil. I must admit that I found this symbol difficult to understand, and before we attempt its interpretation, we have to retrace our footsteps and attempt a brief recapitulation.

According to our logical thinking, we represented the human body as the Niche, whose function is to transmit to the human mind through its five sensory mediums, the external world. The Lamp is the entire life-force or the living spirit, whose first layer is the Glass or the mind, which is subtler and finer than the body. Its function is to record the data conveyed to it by the senses and to create out of its power of imagination a realm of knowledge. This line of thought I believe should lead to the 'tree' as the heart, which 'manufactures' the oil, the essential fuel. In the physiological sense the heart is very much like the tree. From the psychological point of view, it is the discursive spirit, which on receiving the data of reasoning from the mind, combines them and creates pure reason. It is also a seat of human emotions and feelings. The heart like the tree is a creation of two worlds. The tree has its roots deep down into the dark earth, and its crown uplifted to meet the finer elements from the above. So also the heart has lower animal instincts and yet it inspires man to strive for the supreme pinnacles of life. How does it do this? By producing and generating the essential fuel to ignite and enkindle the light of divine illumination, the Olive Oil. The oil produces the most radiant illumination in man. This is of course in the symbolic sense of man being the lantern. This fuel represents a spirit higher than the mind and the heart, for in its composition there is no base element. It is so luminous, that it seems to be as if self-igniting, and bestows the transcendental prophetic spirit to man. I believe it to be immortal and continuous in its memory, knowledge and wisdom.

But it awaits the ultimate spark from the Divinity, and until that spark ignites it, it remains dormant. At this stage our spiritual quest into the mysteries of this verse reaches its climax. This indwelling lantern, having the fuel and the glass and placed in a niche, shall only be ignited by the grace of God--this is clearly manifested in the words: Light upon Light; God guides to His Light whom He pleases. And when God's infinite love descends upon his spirit, he is awakened and enlightened from the deep slumbers of all births and deaths. That moment is a moment of reawakening, when man sees himself as Himself. That moment is a moment of rebirths, for man is reborn a superman, a prophet. That is his true birth, the birth of an ever living spirit, the dawn of Cosmic Consciousness, in which his past, present, and future all become one. In that supreme moment man achieves his ultimate Destiny--the Spiritual Union with God.

Ameen

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