

Remembrance of Allah (*Dhikr*) and use of reason (*Fikr*)

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 13 May 2022

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿١٩٠﴾ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ
اللَّهَ قِيَمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا
سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ مَنْ تَدْخِلِ النَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْرَجْتَهُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ
﴿١٩٢﴾ رَبَّنَا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا ۗ رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ
عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ ﴿١٩٣﴾

“In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, there are surely signs for those who have understanding, those who remember Allah, standing and sitting and (lying) on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Glory be to You! Save us from the punishment of the Fire. Our Lord, whomsoever You make enter the Fire, him You indeed bring to disgrace. And there will be no helpers for the wrongdoers. Our Lord, surely we have heard a Crier calling to the faith, saying: Believe in your Lord. So we do believe. Our Lord, grant us protection from our sins and remove our evils and make us die with the righteous.” — ch. 3, verses 190–193

Just as ch. 2 of the Quran, *Al-Baqarah*, ends with a mention of some basic principles of Islam, followed by a long and important prayer, similarly at the end of ch. 3, *Āl-i Imrān*, in the verses quoted above, and continuing further on to verses I have not quoted, there are some fundamental teachings and important prayers. Those fundamental teachings are that Muslims must **firstly engage in a constant remembrance of God**, the purpose of which is that they conquer their own selves, became masters of their character, and overcome their wrongful desires, **and secondly, they must apply their minds and their intelligence to study the world around them**, the result of which would be that they conquer the forces of nature and use them for their benefit.

The above passage begins by informing us that those people who use their mental faculty of understanding will see “signs” in how the heavens and the earth have been created, and how opposite things, like night and day, alternate. Two things are said to “alternate” when one of them comes and makes the other one go away, and then the one which had gone away comes back to displace the other. And the “signs” which they find lead them to the conclusion that the world has not been created without a purpose. There is nothing in creation which just exists uselessly. Everything fits in somewhere, performs a role, serves a purpose, and its role affects other things. From seeing this in the physical world, the thinking people can realise that our human existence is also not without a purpose and aimless, and our deeds and actions have serious consequences. This is why they then say that they want to be saved from the punishment of the fire, which comes upon the wrong-doers.

The words here for “those who have (or possess) understanding” is *ūlu-l-albāb*. The word *lubb* (whose plural is *albāb*) means “mind, intellect, reason and understanding”, but of a very strong and powerful kind. According to the well-known Arabic dictionary of the Quran by Imam Raghīb, *lubb* signifies the pure and unadulterated faculty of reason which is free from any doubt, fault or emotion. It is written that this is a special kind of *‘aql* (which is the ordinary word for “reason”, “sense” and your power of “understanding”). So *ūlu-l-albāb* means people who think very deeply and have very powerful and analytic minds, more than ordinary *‘aql*.

The word *lubb* also means the core and crux of something, what is inside it and makes that thing what it is; for example, the engine in a car. Urdu speakers will be familiar with the term *lubb-o-lubāb*, which means the essential summary and gist of something. The human intellect, power of reasoning, looking at things and drawing conclusions, is called *lubb* of a human being because it is the core and crux of what a human is. What identifies a human as a human, and distinguishes him from other creatures, is his ability to think and reason at a deep level. But I may add that *ūlu-l-albāb* could also indicate people who reach the very heart and crux of the matter when they analyse something. They have penetrating minds which can dig down to find the root cause of whatever they are analysing.

The first verse mentions the alternation of the day and night, their switching from one to the other, alongside the creation of the heavens and the earth. Life on earth is dependent on night following day, and day following night. In nature around us, things happen at night which then prepare the world for the day. The Quran elsewhere tells us that it is Allah's mercy that neither the night lasts permanently nor does the day last permanently (28:71–73). We may think it will be good for us if the night, or a state of rest, lasted permanently, so we never need to work or exert ourselves. On the other hand, seeing the brightness of the day, we may think it will be good for us if the day went on and on, so that we are never in darkness, fearing and stumbling. But it is the difference between the night and the day which keeps life on earth in existence.

People may think that this statement of the Quran about the day and the night alternating is referring to what happens over a period of 24 hours. But there is another kind of alternation of the day and the night as well: in the summer, as now, the day is long and therefore the night is short, but after six months the day will be short and the night will be long. The long length of the day now, in May, is like the length of the night in November, and the short length of the night now is like the length of the day in November. The daily alternation of the day and night is due to the earth spinning on its axis once every 24 hours. The alternation of day-length and night-length between summer and winter is due to the earth orbiting the sun over a period of one year. This is what mankind learnt by pondering over why day and night alternate in this way.

There are many other examples of two opposite things which are inseparable and which jointly keep this world going. In an electrical battery, we have the positive terminal and the negative terminal. The difference of (what is called) the electrical potential between them sends a current from one terminal to the other, passing through the device, for example a torch, which we want to operate. Difference is *ikhṭilāf* in Arabic and this is the word used in this verse in connection with the night and the day.

Other examples of night and day, which follow each other like a joined pair, are: happiness and sadness, living and dying, work and rest, good and evil, and *hidāyat* (guidance) and *ḍallālat* (misguidance). One cannot exist without the other.

This verse says that those who possess understanding, the highest level of intellect, the *ūlu-l-albāb*, need to do two things: remember Allah, while standing and sitting and (lying) on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. The word for “remember” in this verse (*yadhkurūn*) comes from *dhikr* and the word for “reflecting” (*yatafakkarūn*) comes from *fikr*. Urdu speakers are familiar with these words *dhikr* and *fikr*. Our relationship with Allah is that we remember Him in our hearts and our relationship with the universe is that we reflect and think on how it was created and how it works. Both *dhikr* and *fikr* are equally important and go hand-in-hand. In the Muslim world in its early days, the thinkers, philosophers and scientists employed both *dhikr* and *fikr*. They were conscious of the existence of God and they reflected on His creation. Then after a passage of centuries, Muslims ceased to do *fikr* altogether and their *dhikr* became just a superficial recitation of words. At the same time, the modern scientific world was established in Western countries. In that civilisation there is plenty of reflecting on the creation of the heavens and the earth, but it is not accompanied by any *dhikr* or thought of God.

The above verses contain the prayer to God by the possessors of intellect and knowledge, who say: “Save us from the punishment of the Fire. Our Lord, whomsoever You make enter the Fire, him You indeed bring to disgrace.” How does that punishment come about? It is by neglecting either the remembrance of God or reflecting on His creation. Reflecting on the creation leads man to achieve power over the physical nature that is around him by finding out how it works, making inventions of all kinds, and bringing the world under his control. But without the remembrance of God, that great power over the physical world is used by man for his selfish gain, for the interests only of his own nation, and to commit injustice against others. This behaviour leads to fires of greed, jealousy and war raging in the world. On the other hand, neglecting the duty to reflect on the creation, as Muslim nations have done for the past several centuries, stops the progress of knowledge and causes ignorance to spread. They then fall behind the nations that have made material progress and as a result they suffer from disgrace and dishonour in the world, as well as self-harm, due

to their backward behaviour. No one looks up to them with respect, but they are treated with contempt as inferior.

Dhikr involves the use of the human heart and emotions, and *fikr* involves the use of the human brain and thinking. May Allah enable us to employ both these faculties which he has bestowed on us as human beings, *ameen*.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رُؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ-
