

# Metaphors of Light and Darkness in the Holy Quran : A Conceptual Approach

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Alongside with Conceptualists (cf. Radman (1995), Wild (1996), Lakoff and Johnson (1999), Bisschops and Francis (1999), Avis (1999)), we maintain that metaphor – far from being a mere embellishment device – is of vital conceptual nature in religious discourse (cf. also Berrada 2002). We particularly examine the conceptual metaphors of light and darkness in the holy Qur'an and their significant value in promoting our understanding of the Divine.

When we deal with the language of religious discourse, we encounter metaphor par excellence. This is confirmed in some Qur'anic verses, such as Sura (39:23), and Sura (3:7). As a matter of fact, many Qur'anic passages must be interpreted metaphorically essentially because, as they are meant for human perception and comprehension, they could not have been communicated to us in any other mode. The reason is that we cannot understand or grasp ideas which have no equivalence in our experienced physical and cultural world. The other worldly is a realm which is totally incomparable to ours: it involves "what no eye has ever seen or ear has ever heard, or mind has ever conceived," as the prophet

Muhammad – peace upon him – relates in a Hadith Qudusi (No. 4779), (cf. Al-Bukhari (undated, Vol. 6:319)). Thus, were we addressed in an unconventional language, totally outside of what we are acquainted with, we would be simply baffled and the Qur’anic message would not pass through. Figurative language – including metaphor, simile, parable, metonymy and synecdoche – proves therefore vital to bridge the gap in enabling us to deal with the ineffable. It is thanks to metaphoric language that we may visualize, or form apperceptions of the other world – which lies beyond our palpable realm of experience. Light and darkness are two concrete domains that are metaphorically exploited in Qur’anic discourse with reference to Allah , to the prophet, to the holy Qur’an and to many positive qualities.

Metaphors of light and darkness are very common across many unrelated languages and cultures, and they are especially exploited in spiritual, religious discourse. The light and darkness duality is a source domain that is frequently used to illuminate less delineated and abstract target domains. Across many unrelated languages, light stands symbolically for life, happiness, wealth, wisdom, purity and spiritual elevation whereas darkness is laden with such connotative associations as death, gloom or sorrow, poverty, ignorance, impurity, and the underworld . In fact, light has been perceived as a divine attribute in many religions and divine manifestations are often perceived as «epiphanies of light»(cf. Werblowsky (1987:548)).

According to Tabataba’i (1991, Vol.15:121), the word light has acquired a more general sense, and has come to be used with respect to things whereby we discover or perceive other phenomena. Thus, the human senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) have come to be designated as light. Light, moreover, has acquired a more general sense, to include abstract, intangible phenomena. For example, the mind is considered as a light which illuminates aspects related to understanding.

In Moroccan Arabic this conceptual metaphor is not uncommon, as the following examples testify:

llah yiščel duwwək

May Allah make your light shine.

llah ynawrerək

May Allah illuminate you.

çla wejhu nnur dyał sidi rəbbi  
The light of Allah is on his countenance.  
(i.e., on his face are signs of piety and solemnity.)

?ašraqati lʔanwar  
The lights have shone.  
(The expression is often used in the context of politely  
welcoming a guest.)

lla:h ydawwiha çli:na  
May Allah illuminate us.  
(Light here is associated with happiness and well-being.)

lla:h ynuwwə r lik Triq ək  
May Allah illuminate your path.  
(i.e., may Allah guide you to what is good.)

kif nəçmel wa:š ləmaçmul  
mça lilti ?ana wəHdi  
la ftila la qəndil  
g ir dəww rəbbi

What can I do?  
I am alone in the night.  
There is neither filament of light nor lamp.  
There is but the light of God.

(This quatrain by El-Majdoub (quoted in Prémare(1986:149)) exploits this conceptual metaphor more innovatively. Were it not for the grace and bounty of Allah, he would be lost in the midst of the darkness of human corruption and greed.)

In praising the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, especially in Sufi (mystic) discourse, the light metaphor is often invoked to symbolise his mission of guidance of humanity to the path of Islam, as well as his bounty, his knowledge, and spiritual elevation and purity. In fact, light is one of the most favourite attributes of the prophet. Among the 201 attributes assigned to the prophet, we find «nu:run» (light), «sira:žun» (lamp), «misba:hun» (lamp), «muni:run» (illuminator), and «?annažmu θθa:qib» (the star of piercing brightness),

(cf. Al-Jazouli (2000:30-1)). Moreover, in addition to being described as «?alfažru ssatid”, (the radiant dawn), (Al-Jazouli (2000: 63)), the prophet is designated as “badru ttama:m” (the full moon), which is symbolic for its brightness and guidance to wayfarers. Other appellations subsumed within this conceptual metaphor include:

nu:ruhu min nu:ri l?anwa:r  
wa?ašraqat bišuça:çi sirrihi l?asra:r  
(Al-Jazouli (2000:54))

His light is from the light of Lights  
And by the rays of his hallow secrets, secrets have shone.

?alla:humma zidhu nu:ran çala: nu:rihi  
?alladi: minhu xalaqtahu

Allah, grant him light upon light,  
From which you created him.

Sufis believe that the prophet is a manifestation of Allah’s Light. This idea will be tackled in some detail in the ensuing pages (cf. Al- Ghazali (1980) in his detailed analysis of the Qur’anic verse of Light)).

This religious metaphor is not restricted to Arabic; it is frequently encountered in the Sufi lyrics of Na Mangi, expressed in Hausa language. Na Mangi refers to the prophet Muhammad as “lamp that illuminates darkness” (cf. Abdurrahman (1994: 8)), as a manifestation of the divine Light, which removes ignorance, deviation, and errancy. This is the doctrine of ?annu:r ?almuhammadi, the prophet’s light, which means according to Trimingham:

...the image of God in its primary entity, the divine consciousness, the pre-creation light from which everything was created. It was also called al-Haqiqat al-Muhammadiyya, that is, cosmic Muhammad in his absolute reality. The world is a manifestation of that light; it became incarnate in Adam, the prophets, and the aqtab, each of whom is al-Insan al-Kamil (the Perfect Man).

Trimingham (cited in Abdurrahman (1994:9))

The metaphor of light, moreover, appears frequently in Sufi's invocation of Allah. Al-Ghazali's quotation, cited below, gives a clear testimony :

O God, grant me light in my heart and light in my tomb, light in my hearing and light in my seeing, light in my hair and light in my skin, light in my flesh and light in my blood and light in my bones, light before me, light behind me, light to right of me, light to left of me, light above me, light beneath me. O God, increase my light and give me the greatest light of all. Of Thy mercy grant me light. O Thou most merciful.

Watt (1981:102)

The significance of the light and darkness metaphors can be clearly traced to the Holy Qur'an, which is the primary source of inspiration of Sufi theology and Madih – i.e., praise – lyrics. In the Holy Qur'an, allusion is made to Allah in terms of light. Consider:

?allahu nu:ru ssama:wa:ti wal?ardi maθalu nu:rihi  
kamiška:tin fi:ha: miSba:hun ?almiSba:hu fi: zuja:jatin  
?azzuja:jatu ka?annaha kawkabun durrijun ju:qadu  
min šajaratin muba:rakatin zaytunatin la: šarqiyyatin  
wala: garbiyyatin jaka:du zaytuha: yuDü?u walaw lam  
tamsashu na:run nu:run çala: nu:rin jahdi lla:hu linu:  
rihi man jaša:?u

Allah is the Light  
Of the heavens and the earth.  
The parable of His Light  
Is as if there were a Niche  
And within it a Lamp:  
The Lamp enclosed in Glass:  
The glass as it were  
A brilliant star:  
Lit from a blessed Tree,  
An Olive, neither of the East  
Nor of the West,  
Whose Oil is well-nigh  
Luminous,  
Though fire scarce touched it:

Light upon Light !

Allah doth guide

Whom He will

To His Light.

Sura (24:35)

Attabari ( 1984,Vol. 18:135) ,after citing some interpretations propounded by previous Qur’anic exegetes, favours Ibn Abbas’ explanation. By “Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth” is meant Allah is the One Who gives guidance to all His creation. His Light guides those who are in the heavens and the earth to the Truth and relieves them from the confusion of errancy. Attabari (p.135) equally advances a statement of authority by Anass Bnu Malik : «Allah says ‘nu: ri hudan’» ( i.e., My Light is guidance) ; (cf. Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol.3:280) for very similar views). Ibn Atta’ (quoted in Assabouni (1986, Vol. 2:340)) explains that the whole universe is darkness illuminated by the existence of the Truth (i.e., Allah). Were it not for the existence of Allah, nothing of this world would have existed. These are some of the orthodox interpretations to the opening of the verse; some esoteric interpretations are given by Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi, both of whom may be considered as philosophers and Sufi theologians.

Al-Ghazali (1980) believes that light when attributed to Allah is to be understood literally. It is a real light: «Allah is the highest and the ultimate Light» (1980:107). Allah alone is the most worthy of Light: He is the Real Light, the True Light. When used with reference to created beings and other manifestations of His creation, light is to be understood in a metaphorical sense. Al-Ghazali made a distinction between physical light, which is perceived through the eye – the organ of vision – and the inward eye – which is variously labelled «Intelligence, Spirit, Human Soul» (p.109). The latter is superior to the former, which is defective and limited in its perception of reality:

The eye perceives only the exterior surfaces of things, but not their interior; nay, the mere moulds and forms, not the realities, while intelligence breaks through into the inwardness of things and into their secrets, apprehends the reality of things and their essential spirit.

Al-Ghazali (1980:110)

It is the mind and its faculties that are capable, therefore, of getting a glimpse of Allah’s supernal light, not the eye.

Al-Ghazali, then, proceeds to explain what he calls grades or ranks of light. In the world of eye perception, we see the moonlight penetrating through the window of a house and falling on a mirror hang on a wall, the mirror itself reflects the moonlight on the opposite wall, which has become also illuminated by that reflection. We may definitely conclude in such context that «the light upon the floor is owed to that upon the wall, and the light on the wall to that in the mirror, and the light in the mirror to that from the moon, for it is the sun that radiates the light upon the moon» (p.118). These four lights, therefore, should be ranged or graded one above the other in terms of rank.

This observable fact, Al-Ghazali (1980:118) believes, can serve for analogy to the Celestial World. People of insight equally perceive degrees of the Lights of the Celestial Realm – the Ultimate Light being Allah, the Omniscient and Omnipotent. Moreover, all the creatures of Allah have determined rank and degrees of light, yet they do not ascend infinitely: «They rise to a finite Fountainhead Who is Light in and by Himself, upon Whom comes no light from any external source, and from Whom every light is effused according to its order and grade» (p.119).

This has led Al-Ghazali to the conclusion that the Real Light is the Supernal Light, Which is the Ultimate Light above Whom no other Light exists, and from Whom light falls upon all the created beings. Thus, Al-Ghazali states, in a convinced manner, that the word light when applied to everything else than the Supernal and Ultimate, Primary Light is «purely metaphorical», for they owe their light to an external source, and «to call the borrower by the same name as the lender is mere metaphor» (p.119). Consequently, «Real Being is Allah most High, even as Real Light is likewise Allah» (p.120).

Thus you see that the whole world is all filled with the external lights of perception, and the internal lights of intelligence; also that the lower lights are effused or emanate the one from the other, as light emanates or is effused from a lamp; while the lamp itself is the transcendental Light of Prophecy ; and that the transcendental Spirits of Prophecy are lit from the Spirit Supernal, as the lamp is lit from fire; and that the Supernals are lit the one from the other; and that their order is one of ascending grades: further that these all rise to the Light of Lights, the Origin and Fountainhead of Lights, and that is ALLAH, only and

alone; and that all other lights are borrowed from Him, and that His alone is real light; and that everything is from His Light, nay, He is everything, nay, HE IS THAT HE IS, none but He has ipseity or heity at all, save by metaphor. Therefore, there is no light but He, while all other lights are only lights from the aspect which accompanies Him, not from themselves. Thus the aspect and face of everything faces to Him and turns in His direction; and «whithersoever they turn themselves there is the Face of Allah.»

Al-Ghazali (1980:124)

This view reflects Al-Ghazali's general belief that the Real World (ça:lam ?alhaqa:ʔiq) is the world that we do not see or witness, the Spiritual Realm (ça:lam ?alyajb), and our witnessed, observable world of the senses remains but a metaphorical world. This approach, according to Abu Zaid (1997:199), was first held by Jahm Bnu Safwan (d. 128 H), and it has mystical implications. It implies, according to Abu Zaid, (1997:198) that the select people of insight can commune with the Celestial, Real World through the heart, a tool which belongs, nonetheless, to our lowly world. This knowledge is internal, not external; it springs from the heart. It is essentially through purification and meditation that the heart of a man becomes a mirror through which the Realities of the Primary World are reflected (cf. Abu Zaid (1997:198)).

Not unlike Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi (d. 638 H), (1981, Vol. 2: 139-140), believes that Light is one of the attributes of Allah. Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. It is He who illuminates them. He is the Absolute Primary Existence, from Whom other beings have come to exist and radiate. A similar view is held by Ali (1993:1015), who explains that «the physical light is but a reflection of the True Light in the world of Reality and that True Light is Allah». We can only conceive Allah in terms of our «phenomenal experience», and in the phenomenal world of our sense perception, light is among the purest things we know. But physical light has drawbacks, and it is limited in time and space, whereas the Light of Allah is beyond any limitations or defects ( cf. Ali (1993:116)) .

The Qur'an also attributes light to the prophet. Al-Ghazali (1980:117) stresses that all prophets are illuminating lamps endowed with «a transcendental prophetic spirit», through which are «effused the illuminations of the sciences upon the created world». Among the Qur'anic descriptions of the prophet via light, we may mention:

ja: ?ayyuha nnabiyyu ?inna: ?arsalna:ka ša:hidan  
wamubašširan wanadi:ran wada:çiyyan ?ila lla:hi  
wasira:jan muni:ran

O Prophet ! Truly We  
Have sent you there as  
A witness, a Bearer  
Of Glad Tidings  
And a Warner,  
And as one who invites  
To Allah's (Grace) by his leave  
And as a Lamp  
Spreading Light.

Sura (33:45-46)

According to Attabari (1984, Vol. 22:18)), this verse implies that the prophet is a Light that lights up the path to those who follow his guidance. A similar interpretation is provided by Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol. 3:478), who explains that the prophet's message is as bright clear as the light of the sun. The prophet has been sent to humanity to spread the spiritual truth of Islam – obscured by the ignorance of disbelief – and to bring glad tidings of Allah's Mercy and incite people to repent as well as to warn the heedless people of the imminence and severity of Allah's chastisement . In the Holy Qur'an, the word «sira:ž» (lamp) is used with reference to the sun in Sura (25:61), Sura (71:16) and Sura (78:13); in Sura (33:46), the prophet is perceived in terms of «sira:ž», which enlightens the whole world, and this clearly echoes the reference to the sun. According to Ali (1993:1256) , the comparison is apt and striking, for «when the sun appears, all the lesser lights pale before its light. And the Message of Islam, i.e., of the Universal Religion, is to diffuse Light everywhere».

The Qur'an is similarly perceived in terms of light. (cf. Qutb (1972, Vol.25:3171), and Tabataba'i (1991, Vol.15:121)). Al-Ghazali (1980:114) stresses that human knowledge and philosophy contribute to the illumination of facts of which people may be oblivious: "It is when the light of philosophy dawns that man sees actually, after having before seen potentially." However, the "highest of philosophies" is the word of Allah, in general, and the Qur'an, in particular. Consequently, Qur'anic verses in relation to "intelligence" have the significance of sunlight for the eyesight. "It is by this sunlight that the act of seeing is accomplished. And therefore the Koran is most properly of all called Light,

just as the light of the sun is called light» (p.114). Similarly, Ibn Arabi (cited in Al-Massri (2000:533)) also understands the Qur'an as light because it includes verses that "dissipate doubt of God's only power". In fact, many Qur'anic verses aim at convincing people of the existence of the One and His Supreme Might (cf. for example, Sura (2:258), Sura (4:82), Sura (6:76), Sura (10:38), Sura (17:42), Sura (21:22), Sura (21:63). Like a light radiating in the darkness, the Holy Qur'an is beaming into the darkness of delusion, uncertainty and insecurity.

In some cases, Qur'anic exegetes may differ as to the exact reference of light: they may oscillate between reference to the prophet, the Qur'an or to Islam. Nevertheless, consensus may be reached upon the exact reference of light in other verses. Consider:

ya: ?ayyuha nna:su qad ja: ?akum burha:nun min  
rabbikum wa ?anzalna ?ilaykum nu:ran mubi:nan

O mankind! Verily  
There hath come to you  
A convincing proof  
From your Lord  
For We have sent unto you  
A light (that is) manifest.

Sura (7:174)

Light here stands for the Holy Qur'an, as it is emphasized by Attabari (1984, Vol.6: 39), and Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol.1: 560) on the basis of statements of authority dating back to the prophet and his companions through reliable chains of transmission. The Sura above means that the Qur'an is convincing and undeniable evidence to the truth of Allah's Message. Similarly, in the Sura mentioned below reference is made to the Qur'an as the Book that makes everything clear and guides people to the right path of salvation.

walakin jaçalna:hu nu:ran nahdi:  
bihi man naša: ?u min çiba:dina

But We have made (the Qur'an)  
A Light, wherewith We  
Guide such of Our servants.

Sura (42:52)

Similar examples are to be found in Sura (3:184), Sura (5:15), Sura (22:8), and Sura (64:8). The previous celestial books are equally designated by the term light. This specifically applies to the Torah ( Sura (5:44), Sura (6:91)) and the Gospel (Sura (5:46)).

Moreover, in the Holy Qur'an, it is worth emphasizing, there is a recurrent metaphorical use of light to stand for faith, the truth, knowledge, conviction, peace of mind, tranquillity and blessing as opposed to darkness, which is symbolic of the opposed negative qualities: disbelief and heresy, falsehood, ignorance, hesitation, doubt, apprehension, damnation and curse. Consider:

ʔalla:hu waliyyu lladi:na ʔa:manu: juxrijuhum mina  
DDuluma:ti ʔila nnu:ri walladi:na kafaru: ʔawliya:ʔuhumu  
ʔatta:du:tu yuxriju:nahum mina nnu:ri ʔila DDuluma:ti

Allah is the protector  
Of those who have faith:  
From the depths of darkness  
He leads them forth  
Into Light. Of those  
Who reject faith the patrons  
Are the Tagut; from light  
They will lead them forth  
Into the depths of darkness.

Sura (2:257)

In the context of this verse, darkness, according to Attabari (1984, Vol. 3:21), stands for disbelief, for it veils the eyes from perceiving and confirming the surrounding reality. Similarly, disbelief veils the mind or heart (qalb or fuʔa: d do not exclusively refer to the heart; in some Qur'anic contexts they may stand for the mind.) from apprehending the realities of faith.

Allah informs us that He guides the faithful believers to peace. He saves His believers from the unendurable darkness and blindness of errancy, delusion, disbelief, doubt, and fear to the clear and vividly luminous path of the truth. As to the unbelievers, their assistant is Satan, who leads them astray, and misguides them to the path of ignorance and falsehood, which will ultimately earn them damnation in Hell-fire (Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol. :259) – cf. also Arradi (1986:39) for a similar interpretation).

ma?aluhum kama?ali lladi ?istawqada na:ran falamma:  
?aDa:?at ma: Hawlahu dahaba lla:hu binu:rihim watarakahum  
fi: Duluma:tin la: yabsiru:na

Their similitude is that of a man  
Who kindled a fire;  
When it lighted all around him,  
Allah took away their light  
And left them in utter darkness  
So they could not see.

Sura (2:17)

This verse exploits the conventional metaphor of light and darkness in a fresh and striking way. Here we have a comparison between some hypocrites and the fire-kindler. The hypocrites being illuminated by their open declaration of faith and belief in the prophet's message - while they inwardly doubted it - are like a fire-kindler being illuminated. The fire lit all that was around him, and then it was extinguished, leaving him in utter darkness. Allah will thus extinguish the light of hypocrites and leave them in their confusion and errancy, unable to recognize right guidance (Attabari's interpretation, (1984, Vol .1: 140-5) on the basis of quotations from Ibn Abbas, Qatada, and Adahhak).

?aw kaDuluma:tin fi: baHrin lužijjin yagša:hu mawjun min  
fawqihi mawjun min fawqihi saha:bun Duluma:tun baçDuha  
fawqa baçDin ?ida ?axraža yadahu lam jakad yara:ha waman  
lam yajçali llahu lahu nu:ran fama: lahu min nu:rin

Or (the Unbelievers' state)  
Is like the depths of darkness  
In a vast deep ocean, overwhelmed with billow  
Topped by billow,  
Topped by (dark) clouds:  
Depths of darkness, one  
Above another: if a man  
Stretches out his hand,  
He can hardly see it!  
For any to whom Allah  
Giveth no light,  
There is no light!

Sura (24:40)

This verse is to be contrasted with the verse describing Allah in terms of light, a verse which almost immediately precedes it ( Sura (24:35)), and the following verses describing the pious believers, who fear Allah (Sura (24:35)), and whose sins will be pardoned and who will be rewarded boundlessly by Allah (Sura (24:38)). On the opposite pole, unbelievers' deeds are hollow and spurious, nothing but an illusionary mirage (Sura (24:39)). Their deeds are worthless because they have deliberately turned away and denied the Bounteous' Light, so they are depicted as though engulfed in utter darkness. Sura (24:40) depicts a scene of overwhelming darkness, which has acquired symbolic significance. According to Alkilbi (1973, Vol. 3: 69), many interpreters have understood darkness to stand for the unbelievers' deeds, the deep ocean his breast, the waves his ignorance and errancy, and the clouds stand for the dark veil on his heart . Attabari (1984, Vol. 18:150) believes that the depth of the ocean stands for the heart of the unbeliever because it does not perceive the truth, the darkness of the waves designates the veil on the heart (and mind), eyes and ears (i.e. on the vital perceptive organs), which are locked and sealed to the light of the Truth. Ibn Kathir quotes Ibn Ka'b saying that the unbeliever is overwhelmed by darkness: his speech is darkness, his deeds are darkness, his entrance is darkness, his exit is darkness, and he is destined for the depths of the darkness of Hell-fire in Doomsday (Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol.3:286)).

Al-Ghazali (1980:148) believes that this verse applies to the person who refuses or turns away from the path of right-guidance and is engulfed in falsehood: «he is false, he is darkness; nay, he is darker than darkness». Accordingly, as there are degrees of light , leading up to the Ultimate Light, there are equally levels of darkness. Thus, according to Al-Ghazali, the deep fathomless ocean stands for this lowly world of “mortal dangers, of evil chances, and blinding trouble. The first billow represents the world of lust and sensual delight and ambition. The second billow stands for the «ferocious attributes», which drive people to wrath and its accompanying feelings of rancour, hostility, prejudice, covetousness, ostentation, and arrogance. Anger, according to Al-Ghazali is «darker» and more abhorrent than lust, for «swelling wrath diverts the soul from lust and makes it oblivious of enjoyment» (p.149). As to the cloud, it stands for «lying heresies», which veil the light of faith and the illuminating knowledge of Allah, and the enlightenment by the truth of the Qur'an as well as human insight. These layers of piled up darkness prevent the soul from the apprehension of the nearest things, let alone remote things. They obscure the unbelievers from the apprehension of the prophetic message and the wondrous

Qur'an, which are plain, perspicuous and accessible to our understanding. In short, despite the divergence in explaining the symbolic reference of each element denoting darkness in Sura (24:40), there is consensus on the negative connotations to be assigned to them.

In sum, light in the Qur'an stands for the divine, submission to Allah's guidance, Allah's grace and bounty, spiritual progress, faith, the truth, knowledge, joy and felicity and other positive qualities. However, darkness stands for evil, contumacy and misguidance, spiritual retrogression, atheism, falsehood, ignorance, disquietude, grief and poignant doubt, damnation and other vices and negative qualities. For similar verses tackling light and darkness symbolically, see Sura (5:16), Sura (6:122), Sura (10:27), Sura (33:43), Sura (39:22), Sura (57:12), Sura (57:13), Sura (57:19), Sura (57:28), Sura (59:9).

The dichotomy of light and darkness is further pursued in the analogy drawn between the contrasted elements of blind people and those who see. Blind people live in obscurity, for they cannot see the light, which, nonetheless, surrounds them. This stands metaphorically for the unbelievers, who do not see the light of the truth, which is apparent and clear. By contrast, faith is experienced in terms of sight, which is ineluctably associated with light. This gives rise to the conceptual metaphor FAITH IS SEEING, which is governed by the more general conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, a common conceptual metaphor across many unrelated languages:

maqşaçt walu (MA)  
I haven't seen anything.  
(i.e., I haven't understood.)

waş şafti şkançni (MA)  
Have you seen what I mean?

katt əcrəf kulşi wkatçama. (MA)  
You know everything and you are blinding yourself (to the truth).  
(i.e., you pretend not to have understood. For similar examples in CA see Al-Qurtubi (1996, Vol. 1:150).

In the Holy Qur'an, the believer is described in terms of a person who can see clearly – i.e., he can understand and abide by the light of the Qur'an and the prophetic message – as opposed to the unbeliever, who does not see or refuses to see the Truth, and thus lives in the obscurity of heresy, ignorance,

contumacy, and ignominy, for Allah has denied him the light of guidance (cf. Attabari (1984, Vol. 1: 115, 145-147), Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol.3:530), Azzamakhshari (undated, Vol.1:210), Arradi (1986:28), Alkilbi (1973, Vol.3:157), Ibn Arabi, 1981, Vol.1:24-26), Al-Qurtubi (1996, Vol.1: 149-150), Qutb (1972, Vol. 22. 2939), Assabouni (1986, Vol. 2:572), Tabataba'i (1991, Vol.15:123), Ali (1993:1304)). The Qur'anic verses are replete with metaphorical images employing the darkness of the blind and the veil covering the eye of the unbeliever and contumacious, as opposed to the illumination of the clear-sighted. In addition to the examples that will be listed below, the reader may consult: Sura (1:7), Sura (1:15), Sura (1:18), Sura (2:7), Sura (5:71), Sura (6:50), Sura (6:104), Sura (6:110), Sura (7:64), Sura (10:43), Sura (11:24), Sura (13:16), Sura (17:72), Sura (17:97), Sura (18:101), Sura (20:125), Sura (22:46), Sura (25:73), Sura (27:81), Sura (30:53), Sura (35:19), Sura (40:58), Sura (41:44), Sura (43:40), Sura (45:33), Sura (47:23).

waman ka:na fi: ha:dihi ?açma: fahuwwa  
fil?a:xirati ?açma: wa?aDallu sabi:la

But those who were blind  
In this world will be  
Blind in the Hereafter  
And most astray  
From the path.

Sura (17:72)

Those who have pursued the path of errancy in this life will not be granted the mercy and the grace of Allah in the life to come; they will be much more remote and astray from right-guidance (Ibn Abbas, Mujahid, and Qatada, cited in Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol. 3:52), see also Ibn Arabi (1981, Vol. 1: 724) for a similar interpretation). Attabari (1984, Vol. 15:128) draws our attention to the fact that the second instance of ?açma: was also read in the comparative form (\*blinder), which is not grammatically and semantically acceptable, since there are no degrees of blindness, when the word is applied literally in the context of absence of sight: blind people are all equal in that they cannot see anything. Blindness, according to Attabari, must, therefore, be interpreted in this context as not involving the eye: it is the blindness of the heart and mind of the unbelievers to the truth of Islam, and their ungratefulness to Allah's generosity and bounty.

qul hal yastawi l?açma: walbasi:r  
?am hal tastawi DDuluma:tu wannu:ru

Say: Are the blind equal  
With those who see  
Or the depths of darkness  
Equal with light ?

Sura (13:16)

This verse was sent down in the context of idolaters, whose gods or partners with Allah are themselves helpless, and are, therefore, equated with blindness and darkness. They are presented in sharp contrast with the Light and Sight of the Omniscient and the Power of the Almighty (cf. Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol.3:489)). Assabouni (1986, Vol.2:77-78) believes that blind people stand for the unbelievers, and those who see for the believers. Similarly, darkness stands for errancy and light stands for right-guidance. The disparity between errancy or falsehood and guidance to the Truth is as evident and clear as the disparity between the blind and the clear-sighted and discerning. Moreover, the gulf between errancy and right-guidance is as lucid as the wide gap between darkness and light. (Similar views are to be found in Attabari (1984, Vol. 13: 132)).

Finally, it is worth stressing that the source domain of death and its darkness is mapped onto the target domain of misguidance and ignorance. Thus, the structural metaphor DISBELIEF IS DEATH yields lexical metaphors of the sort:

?awaman ka:na maytan fa?ahyayna:hu wajaçalna:  
lahu nu:ran yamši: bihi finna:si kaman ma?aluhu  
fiDDuluma:ti laysa bixa:rijin minha

Can he who was dead,  
To whom We gave life,  
And a Light whereby  
He can walk amongst men,  
Be like him who is  
In the depths of darkness,  
From which he can  
Never come out ?

Sura (6:122)

According to Qutb (1972, Vol. 8: 1201) the verse may apply to the people who before the coming of Islam had dark souls and dead hearts, and it was the faith of Islam that revived their spirits and made their hearts receptive to the truth of revelation. Attabari (1984, Vol. 8:22) explains that the Sura refers to the person who was spiritually dead because of his unbelief, and by Allah's grace, he became capable of distinguishing good from evil. Similarly, according to Abu Hayyan (mentioned in Assabouni (1986, Vol.1:415)), the believer is likened to the person that is alive and that has a light that guides his way, whereas the disbeliever is likened to a dead person immersed in the depths of darkness. The spiritual journey between darkness and disbelief: light and faith is experienced in terms of a movement from death to life. This structural metaphor is still dominant in religious discourse. For example, Yussuf Islam (ex- Cat Stevens) titled one of his press conferences "Road to a New Life," whereby he meant that when he was immersed in the world of show business, alcohol, drugs, lust, ostentation and disbelief, he was spiritually dead. His conversion to Islam was for him a spiritual rebirth: he was born anew.

According to Ali (1993:369), "we rise from the darkness of spiritual nothingness to the light of spiritual life. And if we do not follow the spiritual laws, Allah will take away that life and we shall be again as dead." Ali's observation is more particularly apposite for Sura (6:95), listed below .

juxrižu lhajja mina lmajjiti  
wamuxrizu lmajjiti mina lhajji

He causeth the living  
To issue from the dead.  
And He is the One  
To cause the dead  
To issue from the living

Sura (6: 95)

For similar views, see Ibn Kathir (1995, Vol.1:150), Assabouni (1986, Vol.1:408), and Ibn Arabi (1981, Vol.1: 340 and 390), and for similar verses, see Sura (2:154), Sura (3:27), Sura (3:164), Sura (16:21), Sura (19:30), and Sura (30:19).

In this article we have stressed the conceptual nature of the metaphors of light and darkness. The source domain of light is pervasively used with reference to Allah, the prophets, the Qur'an and Islam. We have also emphasized that light is metaphorically used for positive qualities, like submission to Allah's guidance, faith, the truth, knowledge, joy and felicity, as opposed to darkness, which metaphorically conceptualizes evil, doubt, hypocrisy, falsehood, and damnation. The dichotomy of light and darkness, as we have endeavoured to show, is also exploited in the Qur'an through the frequent conceptualization of believers as clear-sighted and illuminated by the light of the revelation, as opposed to the disbelievers, who are conceptualized as blind people, who fail to perceive the truth.

Finally, on the basis of the metaphoric Qur'anic data examined in this article, we may clearly dismiss as too simplistic any view that attempts to reduce Qur'anic metaphors to the status of sheer rhetorical ornaments, which can be dispensed with and substituted with equivalent literal expressions without any loss in cognitive content. There is no denying that the language through which Qur'anic metaphors are expressed is of surpassing excellence. This linguistic value is to be considered at the appreciation level – i.e., when the investigator is concerned with the rhetorical effectiveness and the aesthetic impact of the metaphors on the Qur'anic audience. Yet the locus of metaphors is not merely in the language, but in the manner we conceptualize one domain in terms of another domain, especially for reific purposes.

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