**DARKNESS COMPARED TO LIGHT IN THE QUR’AN**

***A staff member of Al-Mawrid an institute for Islamic learning in Lahore, Pakistan produced an article which David Coffey edited as follows:***

***Images of Light and Darkness in the Qur'an***

By ‘Administrator’ (Author unknown)

What are the different images of light and darkness in the Qur'an? The word most frequently employed for light in Qur'an is "nur" (generally translated as "light"). For darkness, generally "zulumat" is used (translated as "darkness/darknesses") which is the plural of "zulmat". Its root is "z-l-m" which is also that for "zulm" i.e. "wrong-doing"[[6]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn6%22%20%5Co%20%22) and "injustice". The Qur'an always uses the plural for darkness i.e. "zulumat" and singular for light i.e. "nur". According to some interpretations it is because "the source of light is only one but the source of falsehood and the means to go astray are countless"[[7]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn7%22%20%5Co%20%22). Moreover, even a ray of light can pierce layers of darkness.

*The Encyclopaedic Index of the Qur'an* defines "zulumat" i.e. darkness as

(1) Opposite of light &

(2) Opposite of Guidance.

The Qur'an itself refers to light and darkness as amongst the first things to be created:

“Praise be to Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made the darkness and the light. Yet those who reject faith hold [others] as equal, with their Guardian-Lord. (6:1)

It is interesting to note that darkness is defined chiefly as the absence of light in most languages[[8]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn8%22%20%5Co%20%22). In the Qur'an, darkness is either due to the absence of light or guidance. Mention has been made of the darkness of the womb[[9]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn9%22%20%5Co%20%22) as well as darkness of the earth[[10]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn10%22%20%5Co%20%22). The faces of disbelievers on the Day of Judgement would be dark[[11]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn11%22%20%5Co%20%22). They would be deprived of the light of Allah's mercy[[12]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn12%22%20%5Co%20%22).

**Importance:**

**Of Light**

The most significant aspects of the Qur'an are linked with light. Thus (31:20) talks about light-giving revelation, (33:46) and (3:184) about light-giving beacon, (27:13) about light-giving messages, (17:12) about light-giving symbol of day.

**Of Darkness**

Darkness, in the Qur'an, is used as a visual image signifying lack of light as well as a metaphor for evil. Surah Falaq is a good example of how the literal and figurative meanings blend where protection is sought of the Almighty Allah from the evil inherent in the darkness of the night:

Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of the dawn. From the mischief of created things; from the mischief of darkness as it overspreads. (113:1-3)

**Contrast**

The above verses embody a contrast between light and darkness. The protection is sought from "the Lord of the dawn" from "the mischief of darkness as it overspreads."

**Duality of Aspects**

**Images of Light**

There are dual aspects of the images of light and darkness in the Qur'an. All light images are not positive e.g. the blazing fire of Hell does evoke a light image though it is not positive. The following image of torment for the rejecters of truth evokes a terrifyingly beautiful light image:

Depart you to a shadow [of smoke ascending] in three columns, [which yields] no shade of coolness, and is of no use against the fierce blaze. Indeed, it throws about sparks [huge] as forts, as if there were [a string of] yellow camels [marching swiftly]. (77:30-33)

However, all light images linked with "nur" are positive as Allah himself has been called the "nur" of the heavens and the earth in (24:35).

**Images of Darkness**

All images of darkness are not negative. For example, Allah has made night for man to rest in. Therefore, its darkness is beneficial. The expression used in this context is "that you may rest therein" in (10:67) as well as in (27:86) and (40:61).

**Parables of Light and Darkness in the Bible and Qur’an**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a parable is "(esp. in the Bible) story told to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth". The Qur'an also employs a number of parables to drive home its lessons. Zamakhshari comments that the "parables bring out the hidden imports, and lift up veils from the realities to the extent that the envisioned appears real, the imagination turns positively certain, and the non-existent exists."[[19]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn19%22%20%5Co%20%22)

The most profound amongst the parables in the Qur'an employ images of light and darkness. The foremost amongst these might be the one known as the light verse:

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 does guide whom He will to his light: Allah does set forth parables for men: and Allah does know all things. (24:34)

The above verse employs a beautiful metaphor with reference to Allah's light. In fact, Allah himself is "the light of the heavens and the earth". All light is from Him as is all guidance. He guides "whom He will to his light". The prayer of the believers in afterlife would be "Our Lord! Perfect our light for us, and grant us forgiveness: for You have power over all things." (66:8)

The profundity of the light verse could be realized from the fact that volumes have been written to discuss it, the chief-most being Mishkat al-Anwar by Ghazali.

The light verse is linked with faith. After a few verses, the opposing state of the unbeliever is presented. A picture of absolute darkness is painted which fact is borne out by modern science today.[[23]](http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/quranic-imagery-of-light-and-darkness%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn23%22%20%5Co%20%22) Just as for the believer, there is light upon light, for the unbeliever, there are depths of darkness, one above another:

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 hands, he can hardly see it! for any to whom Allah gives not light, there is no light! (24:40)

The very first parables in the Qur'an in Surah Baqarah (2:17-20) employ images of light and darkness as metaphors for faith and disbelief, goodness and evil. The light images are due to fire and lightning as mentioned earlier. Many interpretations, some widely different, have been given of these verses. True light is from Allah. The disbelievers wilfully choose to remain in darkness. In spite of having eyes, they have been termed blind as they shut their eyes from the light of true faith.

Darkness and Light – Archetypal Images – Present in Human Nature as well as World Literature

The question can arise in one's mind as to why the Qur'an employs imagery of light and darkness. The answer might be that both light and darkness are linked with the sense of sight. They are amongst the most basic of visual images. The ability to see in human beings is directly linked with light. Thus, light is revealing and illuminating.

**Light & Darkness in pre-Quranic literature**

Light and darkness is the central contrast that shapes all activities of life in the form of alternation of day and night. Dawn for man has always been synonymous with hope. According to Jung it is part of the Collective Unconscious – those archetypal images – that act like instincts to human psyche, which are universal and primordial.

**In the Bible**

According to the Bible also the first thing to be created by God was light and darkness:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. (Genesis: 1-4)

Conclusion

No aspect of the Qur'an can ever be delved to its full depth. The present article aimed at presenting simply an overview of the imagery of light and darkness in the Qur'an. It was found that light images pertain to different sources such as the heavenly bodies like the sun, moon and stars. Light is used as a metaphor for guidance. When the word "nur" appears, such a light image is always positive as it is an attribute of Allah Himself. Light would also appear on the faces of the believers on the Day of Judgement.

In the Qur’an, the Arabic word for darkness is *Zulm*, the equivalent of which in English is injustice and oppression. *Zulm* is from the root of “darkness” *(Zulumah),* which shows that it can refer to a form of social and spiritual darkness. Opposition and struggle against these forms of darkness is the responsibility of the Qur’an and the other heavenly books (such as the Bible).

In the Qur'an, the imagery of light and darkness presents abstract conceptions such as faith and disbelief, goodness and evil, virtue and vice, hope and despair, bliss and torment in a visual form. It shows that the entire mankind is divided into two groups: the believers who are in the light and the disbelievers grappling aimlessly in the dark. The technique of contrast highlights their different plight.

Duality of aspects is also significant with regard to light and darkness. While all light images in the Qur'an are not positive (e.g. the blazing fire of Hell), all images of darkness are also not negative. The darkness of the night provides repose to man. It is a time for prayer and meditation to the true believer.