

A Journey from Darkness towards Light: the Qur'anic Perspective on the Concept of Light - Part IV

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Abstract

Explaining certain verses in which the term “light” is used, the author tries to provide a deep understanding of some merits of light. God gracefully grants a spiritual sort of light to the faithful as a result of their beliefs, righteous deeds, and virtues. The faithful who enjoy the spiritual light are qualified to be taken from darkness to light, to remember God, to lead a good life, to be guided to Paradise, and to ask God to perfect their light on the Day of Judgment. The light of the faithful is given in this world; but it becomes completely manifest in the next world.

Keywords: *light, remembrance of God, transition from darkness to light, good life, perfection of light.*

The following verse is classified among the verses that deal with our transition out of darkness into light:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ
رَحِيمًا

It is He who salutes you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darkness into light. (Qur'an 33:43)

According to this verse, God and His angels send salutations to the believers to take them from darkness into light. So both God and the angels send salutations, but the act of taking from darkness into light is attributed only to God. It is only God who can ultimately and independently take us from darkness to light. Now let us explore the meaning of sending salutations in more depth.

When asked about the meaning of the salutation of God, the angels, and the believers, Imam Kazim (a) replied:

صَلَاةُ اللَّهِ رَحْمَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَصَلَاةُ مَلَائِكَتِهِ تَرْكِيَةٌ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ وَصَلَاةُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ دُعَاءٌ مِنْهُمْ
لَهُ

Gods' salutation consists in mercy from Him. The angels' salutation is their asking God for forgiveness for the Prophet (s). And the salutation of the believers consists in their praying for him. (Shaykh al-Saduq 1406 AH, 156)

The mercy from God here is a special divine blessing that takes us from darkness to light.

What does angels' salutation mean? Angels are not able to give light or take us from darkness to light by themselves, but they have this ability and concern for us that they ask God to forgive us. Angels are in charge of administering the affairs of this world. Each of them has their specific roles: one is in charge of death, another is in charge of rain, and so forth. The Qur'an says, "And by the angels who regulate the affairs" (79:5). But besides this type of tasks, they ask God to forgive the believers:

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ
 آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ
 عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ - رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتِ عَدْنِ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ
 وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ - وَقِهِمُ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَمَنْ تَقِ السَّيِّئَاتِ
 يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ رَحِمْتَهُ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

Those who bear the Throne, and those around it, glorify their Lord with praising and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: "Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and save them from the punishment of hell. Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You have promised them, along with whoever is righteous among their forebears, their spouses and their descendants. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise. Save them from the ills; and whomever You save from the ills that day, You will have had mercy upon him, and that is the great success." (Qur'an 40:7-9)

The angels are so kind and caring that they ask God to forgive the believers in such a nice way. They even ask for the family of the believers

who have a minimum qualification and faith to be forgiven so that they can join the believers.¹ The verse indicates that after the angels ask God to forgive our sins, they pray for us to be saved from the “ills.” ‘Allama Tabataba’i explains that these “ills” are the fears and troubles in the Hereafter.

Afterwards, the angels state that those whose sins will be forgiven achieve a great success: salvation from difficulties, being forgiven, admission to Paradise together with their beloved ones. This is a great success. This is what the angels pray for us; this is their salutation for us.

¹ On the possibility of one’s family joining him in going to heaven, the Qur’an says:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ زَهِينٌ

The faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith – We will make their descendants join them, and We will not stint anything from [the reward of] their deeds. Every man is a hostage to what he has earned. (Qur’an 52:21)

There is a very beautiful hadith here that says at the Day of Judgment a person would be judged and decided to go to heaven, but his wife and children were not as good as him. He would say to God:

عملت لى ولهم

Whatever good I have done was for me and my family.¹

Similar to this world, when you earn something it is also for your family. So God gives the reward to his family, too, without reducing anything from him. This is one of the signs of mercy of Allah.

Also, God talks about the angels asking for forgiveness for the believers:

تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْ فَوْقِهِنَّ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ
لِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَلَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

The heavens are about to be rent apart from above them, while the angels celebrate the praise of their Lord and plead for forgiveness for those on the earth. Be aware that God is indeed the most forgiving, the most merciful. (Qur'an 42:5)

The previous verse was about the angels who carry the Throne and the ones who are around it. This verse, however, is general, showing the way angels send salutations to us. As a result of God's salutations and angels' salutations (that is, their asking forgiveness for us), we will be taken from darkness to light. Now the meaning of Qur'an 33:43, which we were trying to explain becomes clear: it is through a process of forgiving and purifying that God takes us out of darkness into light.

The Different Sources of Light and the Light of Faith

Now, consider this verse:

أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ عَلَى نُورٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ مِنْ ذِكْرِ
اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

Is someone whose breast God opened to Islam so that he follows a light from His Lord [as he who is heart-hardened]? So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of God. They are in manifest error. (Qur'an 39:22)

It is clear that if one wants light, he has to let the sun shine upon him and remove the veils. According to this verse, the one whose breast is opened by God for the light of Islam is not equal to one whose breast is not opened and thus has no light. Then God says woe to the people whose hearts are hard. “*Qasawa*” is being hard as a stone, and hard-heartedness is considered as the opposite of the “openness” of the heart in this verse. Now, the verse indicates that what makes the difference between these two states of the heart is the remembrance of God. Some people just cannot remember God, because they are not qualified; their hearts are very hard like a stone. But those whose hearts is opened can remember God and receive light.

Consider another verse:

أَوَمَنْ كَانَ مَيْتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ
لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave? To the faithless is thus presented as decorous what they have been doing. (Qur'an 6:122)

The life mentioned in the verse is not biological life; rather, it is the spiritual life, which is mentioned in 16:97 as “*hayat tayyibah*” (good life):

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْتَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً

Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life.

A person who achieves this kind of life has light with him all the time: when he walks on the street, when he goes to the classroom, when he goes shopping, and when he is at home. If we were just able to see how a believer is with light and how an unbeliever is absolutely in darkness, it would be enough for us to change our life. An unbeliever may look happy, but this is because he is ignorant and used to darkness; just like a person who is in a dark room and when you turn on the light, he shouts out, “Turn the light off!” They are like the people who are asleep, and don’t want to wake up.

Elsewhere, the Qur’an says:

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ بُشْرَاكُمُ الْيَوْمَ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

[Remember] the day in which you will see the faithful, men and women, with their light moving swiftly before them and on their right, [and greeted with the words]: ‘There is good news for you today! Gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them [forever]. That is the great success. (57:12)

This light is before them, showing them the way to heaven, and also on the right not on the left. Why on the right side? Maybe because the believers carry the records of their deeds in their right hands, and this is the source of their light, originating from their beliefs, deeds, and virtues. This light is on the right and in front of them, and without it, they cannot find their way towards heaven. Then, they are given the

good news that they will be in heaven forever and they do not need to worry for anything.

However, there are people who lack this light:

يَوْمَ يَعُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا انظُرُونَا نَقْتَبِسْ مِنْ نُورِكُمْ قِيلَ ارْجِعُوا
وَرَاءَكُمْ فَأَلْتَمِسُوا نُورًا فَضُرِبَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِسُورٍ لَهُ بَابٌ بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ وَظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ
الْعَذَابُ

The day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the faithful, “Please let up on us, that we may glean something from your light!” They will be told: “Go back and grope for light!” Then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior. (Qur’an 57:13)

The verb “*unzuru-na*” has been interpreted in two ways: “let up on us” and “look at us.” When the hypocrites see that they are in darkness and that the believers are full of light and indeed their light is going in front of them, they try to get some light from the believers. But their request is refused, because they have done nothing in advance to qualify for receiving light. Afterwards, a wall will be set up between the believers and the hypocrites; the interior is towards the believers and the exterior is towards the hypocrites, because the wall is to protect the believers. Its interior is mercy, and its exterior is punishment; just as when you have a good house, the walls are pleasant for the inhabitants who are protected by them, but the thieves, who are outside, find the walls unpleasant, as they do not let them get inside the house. Then, there is a moving conversation, which is, in a sense, very painful:

يُنَادُوهُمْ أَلَمْ نَكُنْ مَعَكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَكِنَّكُمْ فَتَنْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتَرَبَّصْتُمْ وَارْتَبْتُمْ وَغَرَّبْتُمْ
الْأَمَانِيَّ حَتَّىٰ جَاءَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ وَغَرَّبَكُمْ بِاللَّهِ الْعُرُورُ

They [i.e., the hypocrites] will call out to them, “Did we not use to be with you?” They will say, “Yes! But you cast yourselves into temptation, and you awaited and were doubtful, and [false] hopes deceived you until the edict of God arrived, and the Deceiver deceived you concerning God.” (Qur’an 57:14)

An interesting point about this conversation is that the believers do not say, we are now in different positions because we did this or that; they do not see any significance in their deeds. Although they have done good deeds, they do not consider their works significant; rather, the believers regard the difference between them and the hypocrites in the fact that the hypocrites deceived themselves. The believers do not say, we did great things; they say to the hypocrites that you missed the opportunity.

So it is just a matter of appreciating the opportunities that God has given us or not, opening ourselves to God’s light and guidance or not. We should not think that we can deserve going to heaven as a result of what we do. What we do is, at most, nothing other than accepting and appreciating God’s mercy.

Similar to the above verses, the verse 66:8 refers to the light of the believers on the Day of Judgment. The Qur’an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ
وَيُدْخِلَكُم جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ

نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتْمِمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاغْفِرْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

O you who have faith! Repent to God with sincere repentance! Maybe your Lord will absolve you of your misdeeds and admit you into gardens with streams running in them, on the day when God will not let the Prophet down and the faithful who are with him. Their light will move swiftly before them and on their right. They will say, “Our Lord! Perfect our light for us, and forgive us! Indeed You have power over all things.” (66:8)

Sometimes, we are not sincere in our repentance; we think that we can return to God just without honesty. But this is not right; we have to return to God wholeheartedly.

An interesting point here which should be mentioned in brackets is about rivers. Why is there so much emphasis that there are rivers in heaven? There are many reasons, one of which, I believe, is that water stands for life and spirituality. So these waters are not just ordinary H₂O; rather, they indicate something very spiritual. We have to know where the source or the spring of this water is, where this water comes from. This water is from God; it has life, movement, and energy; it is flowing. God says,

وَأَنْ لَّوِ اسْتَقَامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقِيَنَّهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا

If they are steadfast on the path [of God], We shall provide them with abundant water. (Qur’an 72:16)

What is this water? According to a hadith this is the water of knowledge (Bahrani 1374 Sh, 5:509). So this water is very important.

Then, the verse (66:8) says that God will not disappoint the Prophet (s) and the believers who are with him. So we have to try to be among these believers. The verse speaks about the believers who are “with the Prophet (s),” showing that the believers are of two types: those who believe and are with the Prophet (s), and those who believe but are far from the Prophet (s). Accordingly, those who believe wholeheartedly and repent to God in a sincere way can be with the prophet (s) on the Day of Judgment, and the others would not be permitted to be with the Prophet (s) if their faith is not sincere and genuine.

Then we have a phrase in the verse, which is similar to the phrase we had in the previous verse. About the Prophet (s) and the believers, it says that their light runs fast in front of them and on their right. Of course, the pronoun may only refer to the believers, since the Prophet (s) may have a different condition, especially considering the fact that the end of the verse also seems to refer only to the believers. Now, when the believers see their light going fast in front of them and on their right, they will not say, “This is enough”! No, a believer is never convinced with his level of spirituality. A believer must always try to be better. This is not greed; greed is only in material affairs, not in one’s desire to be good and to get closer to God. This is because greed is to want something more than what you need, but in spirituality there is no limit to our need, and what we have is nothing compared to what we need to achieve. So we must always ask for more and more.

This is why when the believers see that they have light, they ask God to complete their light. They realize that there can still be more light. And this is why, according to a viewpoint, this part does not include the Prophet (s), because the prophet (s) has complete light. And the difference between the believers and the hypocrites is significant. When the hypocrites see themselves in need of light, instead of asking God, they ask the believers! They are not clever even in the hereafter.

So the believers ask God to complete their light. They perfectly know that if their light is not yet complete, there must be a problem with themselves, since there is no limit to the mercy of God. So they ask God for forgiveness. They know that it is a consequence of their sins. Now, if the believers, who are with the prophets and have such good light, are still worried about the effects of the sins, we must be much more worried, for we don't even know if we are able to reach that level. We must always ask God for forgiveness.

The verse also shows another aspect of divine mercy, which is the fact that we can ask God for forgiveness even on the Day of Judgment. This is not the case with the other acts of worship: you can no longer fast on that day; you cannot go to hajj; you cannot add to your righteous deeds, because the time is over:

فَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ عَمَلٌ وَلَا حِسَابَ وَإِنَّ عَدَّ حِسَابٌ وَلَا عَمَلٌ

Today is [the time] to act and there is no reckoning, and tomorrow [i.e., the Day of Judgment] is reckoning and no [opportunity] for action. (Kulayni 1407 AH, 8:58)

However, at least for these believers, there will be the possibility to ask for forgiveness. God is so merciful that even on that day, He will let the believers seek forgiveness.

There is another verse which is very important for our discussion:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ وَالشَّهَادَةُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ هُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ وَنُورُهُمْ
وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ

Those who have faith in God and His apostles —it is they who are the truthful and the witnesses with their Lord; they shall have their reward and their light. But as for those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of hell. (Qur'an 57:19)

“The truthful” is a very important category in the Qur'an. It is one of the four categories of people to whom the right path belongs.² The word ‘*shuhadā*’ (witnesses) can be considered as an additional description for the truthful or as the beginning of the new sentence; both can make sense.

At any rate, the verse clearly states that the truthful will be given their reward and their light, which indicates that light is different from reward. So for every good deed, you will be rewarded, but also you will receive light. And those who disbelieve will be the people of hell, which is the place of darkness.

These verses of the Qur'an tell us about the light of faith, which is given in this world, though it will become manifest in the hereafter. In the hereafter, even a hypocrite can see the light of a believer, but in this world this light is not visible for everyone.

The light of faith differs among the faithful based on the depth and level of their faith and deeds. If you do more good deeds, your light will increase to a different degree, and the light of each of your good acts is different from the others. So you are really colorful and have colorful lights. Those who are able to see can realize from which action

² According to Qur'an 4:69, the truthful are among those whom God has blessed: “Whoever obeys God and the Apostle – they are with those whom God has blessed, including the prophets and *the truthful*, the martyrs and the righteous, and excellent companions are they!” And according to Qur'an 1:7, the right path is the path of those whom God has blessed (Qur'an 1:7)

this particular light originates, since every sort of spiritual light is different in its intensity and its color.

Conclusion

God is the one who takes people from darkness to light by virtue of purifying and forgiving. The remembrance of God, arising from the light of faith, is what makes the difference between the mental states of those whose breasts are expanded to Islam and the others. The faithful who are revived with a good life possess spiritual light to see and act according to the truth on every occasion. The spiritual light of the faithful varies depending on their levels of faith and good acts. This type of light is regarded on the Day of Judgment as extremely desirable by both believers and hypocrites. On that day, believers ask God to perfect it, owing to their belief in their Lord, but hypocrites ask believers to give them some light, as a result of their lack of knowledge concerning absolute divine providence.

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