

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

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## **Abstract**

The author reflects on certain aspects of the Qur'anic concept of light. He indicates that God is the source of light and that He grants light to everything He creates. There are different types of acquired light, such as the light of certainty, knowledge, faith, truth, good deeds, and moral virtues. Remembering God and performing righteous acts are two efficient ways of achieving light. If man remembers God Almighty also remembers him in a special manner; and if he turns away from remembering God, he will have a wretched life. The righteous act consists in two elements: the goodness of the very act and the goodness of the agent's intention. The best intention is striving to please God.

**Keywords:** *light, knowledge, faith, righteous deeds.*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحُوهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا

O you who have faith! Remember God with frequent remembrance and glorify Him morning and evening. (33:41)

One major way of acquiring light is to remember God. As in the above verse, remembering God frequently is enjoined in many places in the Qur'an directly or indirectly. For example, in the same chapter, referring to those who receive forgiveness and great reward from God, the Qur'an says:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Indeed, the Muslim men and the Muslim women, the faithful men and the faithful women, the obedient men and the obedient women, the truthful men and the truthful women, the patient men and the patient women, the humble men and the humble women, the charitable men and the charitable women, the men who fast and the women who fast, the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, the men who remember God greatly and the women who remember [God greatly]—God holds in store for them forgiveness and a great reward. (33:35)

There are many important points in this verse. One is that this verse indicates that forgiveness and reward are prepared and made ready. Sometimes, you tell your child that if he studies and gets good results,

you buy him a bicycle. But sometimes you actually buy the bicycle and tell him: “Look! This bicycle is yours. It only needs your effort to get good results.” This has much more power to persuade your child. The Second point is that to be a man or woman does not make any difference as far as the possibility of perfection and nearness to God is concerned. The third point, which relates to our discussion, is the emphasis on the remembrance of God. Although God has mentioned important qualities like being faithful, being humble, being honest, being patient, being modest, and fasting, the Almighty still singles out *those who remember Him a lot*. This relates to the quantity of remembrance. According to a hadith, God has put a limit for everything, except for dhikr which has no limit (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:498). Praying, fasting, hajj, and even giving charity (*sadaqah*) to people have their limits. For example, regarding charity, the Qur’an tells us not to give so much that you yourself become poor and not too little either. But with respect to remembering God, there is no limit. The Qur’an also emphasizes quality of remembering God. Addressing those who complete their stay and deeds in ‘Arafat and arrive in Mash‘ar, the Qur’an says:

And when you finish your rites, then remember God as you would remember your fathers, or with a more ardent remembrance. Among the people there are those who say, “Our Lord, give us in this world,” but for such there is no share in the Hereafter. (2:200)

In the Age of Ignorance, people used to gather and boast about their fathers and the great things they did. In this verse, God says that you must remember God the way you remember your fathers—equally or more wholeheartedly and passionately. This is a matter of quality.

Because of this, we would like to explore the relation between *dhikr* (remembering God) and light. Let us first quickly review what we said in the previous parts about the different types of light. We said that God is the source of light and then everything created has light. He is the light of heavens and earth. From this we can understand that heavens and earth have light. But this light comes from the source of the light, which is God.

بِنُورِ وَجْهِكَ الَّذِي أَضَاءَ لَهُ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ  
بِاسْمِكَ الَّذِي أَشْرَقَتْ بِهِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُونَ

By the light of Your face, by which everything shines!  
By Your name, by which the heavens and earth shine!

Everything, as we discussed, has some light, and there are different levels of light. But as far as human beings and jinns are concerned, this light may increase or decrease. Our focus here is on the type of light that we may achieve or lose, not the light that every creature has been given.

The other source of light is righteous deeds. What is the definition of a righteous deed? According to the Qur'an, a righteous deed has two conditions: (1) the act by itself must be good and must produce good outcomes, and (2) the agent must be doing it with a good intention. The act must be good, because it is quite possible that sometimes you have good intention but instead of doing something good, you do something bad. This is not a righteous act. For example, if, with good intention, I undertake a job that I am not qualified for—for instance, I teach people Islamic beliefs without having enough knowledge and consequently I misguide them—this is not a righteous deed. Likewise, if I do something good but without a good intention, this is also not a righteous deed. For instance, if I help the poor in order to be praised

by people, I have not done a righteous deed, even if my action is good in itself.

There is a scholarly discussion here as to what types of intention are good. There is no doubt that the intention to please God is a good intention, but what about doing a good act because of its goodness? If I see a poor person and I help him because I believe that helping the poor is good, have I done a righteous act? I think, this is by itself a good intention, though if I did it for the sake of God, it would have been much better. There is a lot of evidence indicating that God will reward people who did righteous deeds because they found them good things to do. For instance, according to some hadiths, Hatam al-Ta'i, who was a generous polytheist in the Age of Ignorance, will not be punished in the hereafter, because of his generosity. And we know that he did not believe in the One God and therefore his intention was not to please Him; he just showed people generosity because he found it to be good. This intention was so valuable that, according to those hadiths, not only it will save him from Hellfire in the hereafter but also it earned his children the respect of the Prophet (s). Therefore, if you do something because as a human being you find it right, you will be rewarded. Of course, it would be much better if we do all our actions for the sake of God.

Every righteous deed increases our light, whether it is praying, fasting, hajj or even making wudu. We are told that wudu by itself is light:

الْوُضُوءُ نُورٌ وَالْوُضُوءُ عَلَى الْوُضُوءِ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ

Wudu is light, and wudu upon wudu is light upon light. (Shaykh al-Saduq 1413 AH, 1:41)

According to some hadiths, when someone comes back from hajj, we should go visit him quickly, as he has earned a light in hajj that he may lose as a result of committing sins (Kulayni 1407 AH, 4:256; Majlisi 1403 AH, 96:10). Unlike the hereafter where you cannot seek light from anyone if you have not earned any light yourself, in this world, if someone has light and you pay him a visit, you receive light from them. Visiting a believer for the sake of God and with the intention of strengthening your relation with him is itself a great act of worship, which brings you light. So any righteous deed is capable of generating light, though the light would vary in accordance with the deed's value.

There is a beautiful dua after *Ziarat Al-i Yasin*, in which we read:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ أَنْ تُصَلِّيَ عَلَيَّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ نَبِيِّ رَحْمَتِكَ وَكَلِمَةِ نُورِكَ وَأَنْ تَمَلَأَ قَلْبِي نُورَ  
الْيَقِينِ

O Allah! I ask You to send Your salutations to Muhammad, the prophet of Your mercy and the word of Your light, and to fill my hear with the light of certainty!

This passage is very important, because it indicates that different parts of our being can receive light and also the type of light each of them can receive.

A heart which is full of doubt is dark. Certainty (*yaqin*) is very important, and when you have certainty your power increases. If a great champion of wrestling, for instance, has doubts about what to do, he becomes weak. But if he is certain that he must do something, then he mobilizes all his power. A human being who is in doubt can never make a firm decision; he can never use his powers to do something. Doubt is good only in the beginning; it is good to motive you to study and learn,

but it is not good as a station. Certainty is one of the greatest blessings of God, and the only way to achieve it is to increase your knowledge and worship:

اعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

Worship your lord until you receive certainty. (15:99)

It is not simply a matter of reading books; you may read hundreds of books on the existence of God, but without actually worshipping Him, and you will not achieve certainty. This is different from what other faith traditions hold, that is, there is no way to prove God rationally, and one has to first believe in order to understand. We do not agree with this. We say that every person has to first rationally prove for himself the truth of his religion, but then after that he needs to worship God in order to consolidate that belief in his heart and achieve certainty. I always remember the story of that young companion of the Prophet (s). One day, after fajr prayer, the Prophet (s) realized that the young man was in a special state, so asked him how he was. He replied: “I started my day while having certainty.” The Prophet (s) said: “Everything has a sign. What is the sign of your certainty?” He replied: “My certainty has made me unable to sleep, eat, or drink; it is as if I see Heaven and Hell, and I can see which of these people who are with you are in Hell or Heaven” (cf. Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:53). This is not surprising, because hell and heaven are already there, and the holy Qur’an clearly states:

كَأَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ \* لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ

No indeed! Were you to know with certain knowledge,  
\* you would surely see hell. (102:5-6)

This shows the great value of certainty, and this is why we ask God to fill our heart with the light of certainty.

After that we ask God for the light of knowledge:

وَعَزِّمِي نُورَ الْعِلْمِ

And [fill] my determination with the light of knowledge.

When we are determined to do something, our decisions would not be right without knowledge. It is the light of knowledge that can help us make right decisions.

وَقُوِّتِي نُورَ الْعَمَلِ

And [fill] my power with the light of acting.

When we have power but do not act, our power becomes dark. If we can do something good and we do it, our power would be enlightened; as a result of this, we can do more good acts with less difficulty.

وَلَسَانِي نُورَ الصِّدْقِ

And [fill] my tongue with the light of truth.

Consider two speakers give lectures: one of them speaks the truth, and the other lies. The one who speaks the truth, his tongue has light; the one who lies, his tongue is dark. The one who speaks truthfully can have great impact on the audience, because his words carry light. Sometime the one who lies may even speak more beautifully and more eloquently. But his words do not have that influence. When the Prophet (s) recited the Qur'an, people would embrace Islam just by

listening to him. Why is it that our Qur'an recitations—even those of our best reciters—do not have the same effect? Is it because the Prophet (s) was more skillful in the art of *tajwid* and recitation? Or is it because of the impact of the inner light of the Prophet (s) on the audience?!

Then we ask God:

وَدِينِي نُورَ الْبَصَائِرِ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ

And [fill] my faith with the light of insights from  
you.

A major problem in our world, which is even greater than the problem of disbelief in God, is that there are many religious people who have no insight in their faith. They do something, maybe sincerely, but they create, rather than solve, problems. To have a correct understanding of what one has to do in each situation is very important. The Prophet (s) was instructed by God to proclaim his method of preaching in the following way:

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي

Say, "This is my way. I summon to Allah with insight  
I and he who follows me." (12:108)

So, it is crucial to have insight about how to invite people to God in every context. Can we, for example, invite people in the West to God in the same way that we invite our people in the East? We need insight to understand both our religious duties and the manner in which we should fulfill them.

وَبَصْرِي نُورَ الصِّيَاءِ وَسَمْعِي نُورَ وَعْيِ الْحِكْمَةِ

And [fill] my sight with the shining light and my hearing with the light of understanding wisdom.

Not only we need light to see but also we need light to hear and comprehend the words of wisdom. There are people, who listen hours and hours, but they do not understand the truth and sometimes they do not want to understand the truth; and there are people who listen to a very short talk, but they get the whole point, because they have the light of comprehending wisdom.

وَمَوَدَّتِي نُورَ الْمَوْلَاةِ لِمُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ (ع)

And [fill] my love with the light of loving the Prophet (s) and Ahl al-Bayt (a).

We are taught to ask for light even in our affection. If we have the light of love for the Prophet (s) and Ahl al-Bayt (a), our feelings and emotions become enlightened. We then know whom we should, or should not, love, and what type of life we should, or should not, lead.

حَتَّى أَلْقَاكَ

Until I meet You!

Now, if we want to have a very comprehensive analysis of the different types of acquired light, we can say that it comes from faith, righteous deeds, virtues, and the remembrance of God, which, as I will explain, is the main source of light.

The Qur'an speaks about the significance of remembering God very clearly:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكاً وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى

But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind. (20:124)

The beautiful point here is that God does not say, “Whoever does not remember Me” but says, “Whoever disregards [*a’rada*] My remembrance.” This shows that the default state is to remember. If you were born in a city and lived there for some time, it would become automatically your *watan* (hometown); your salat would be complete there, and your fasts would be correct. This would be the default status and would not simply change by your moving to another city; it will only change if you do *i’rad*—that is, if you decide never to live in that city again.

When you love God, everything else becomes insignificant. Someone who has a great aim in his life is ready to cope with all difficulties. A student who wants to become very advanced is ready to avoid sleep, go to a library, and study for hours; and he does all of this with joy, because he has an ideal, which is very important for him. When we remember God, His greatness fills our hearts so much that anything else becomes insignificant in our eyes; we would joyfully go through any difficulty so that we can please Him.

However, according to the Qur’an, on the Day of Judgment, those who forgot God and His signs will find themselves blind and say,

قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسَيْتَهَا  
وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنْسَى

He will say, “My Lord! Why have You raised me blind, though I used to see?” He will say: “So it is. Our signs

came to you, but you forgot them, and thus you will be forgotten today.” (20:124-25).

So, there is a sense in which God also forgets. If you forget God, then He forgets you. It does not mean that He does not know what you are doing; it means that He does not pay special attention to you. In another verse, we read:

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

Remember me, and I will remember you. (2:152)

If you remember God, He will remember you; if you forget Him, He forgets you. God’s special remembrance, which is the remembrance of support, care and guidance, is only for those who remember Him. If we do not remember him, we will have a terrible life in this world and a more terrible life in the hereafter.

## Conclusion

One of the most effective ways to achieve light is to remember God. Remembering God, according to the Qur’an, ought to be observed in high quality and great quantity. God is the source of light that enlightens everything He has created. There are two distinct types of light with regard to human volitional actions: achievable and unachievable. The former may be obtained by righteous deeds, and the latter may not be obtained by them and has been already granted to everything created. One action would be righteous only if it were good by itself and it were performed with a good intention. Person’s light can be increased by righteous deeds. There are a wide range of things that the term “light” is applied to: certainty, knowledge, action, truth, insight, and so forth. If one disregards remembering God, he will

experience a wretched life. For God does not remember him in the sense that He does not provide special care and guidance for him.

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