CHAPTER III

SYMBOLISM OF LIGHT IN THE QU'RĀN AND HADĪTH
In the early two chapters it has appeared that the religious language is, to a large extent, symbolic and "light" has very frequently been used as a symbol in the scriptures of the different religions. Our attempt, in this chapter, will be to decipher in what senses the word 'light' has been used in the Qur'ān and the Hadīth. Though the same word 'light' (nūr) has come in a good number of verses of the Qur'ān and also in some of the traditions of the Prophet(s), its implications, i.e., the things suggested by it, are diversified. That is why, it would be necessary to grasp the content in order to interpret the word properly.

(A) **GOD HIMSELF AS LIGHT**

"Light" is known to us as that which appears by itself and makes the appearance of other things, i.e., it causes the appearance of every perceptible object. On the corollary of this argument, Tabātabāī, in
his tafsir, al-Mizān, proceeds a step further, and says that in the figurative way, the sense organs, e.g. hearing, seeing smelling, tasting and touching also may be considered to be lights or the possessors of light because they are the causes of the appearances of the perceptible objects, and then the word 'light' may also be applied to the non-perceptible objects, e.g. reason (‘aql) that causes the grasping of the intelligibles. Since, he argues, the thing which appears by itself and is responsible for the appearances of others is proved to be light, then the word 'Light' may rightly be applied to Almighty, because all the possible existent things are dependable for their existences to Him. Existence and light are attributed to every object, and they are borrowed from the Almighty God. His existence and light exist by themselves, and are the causes of the existence and light of others.

The verse "

2. Loc. cit.
"God is the light of the heavens and the earth" means, according to Tabātabā'ī, He, the Almighty, is light that makes the appearance of the heavens and the earth. The word 'light' is an adjunct to the heaven and earth; and is applied to the name of His Majesty (Ism al-Jalālah).

Ashraf 'Alī Thanawī translates this part of the verse as "God is the giver of Light to the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, i.e. as guidance (hidāyat). That the light of both the inhabitants of heavens and the earth comes from God. Heavens and the earth mean the whole universe which includes those creations also that lie outside the heavens and the earth. This does not seem to be the proper translation of the verse. Actually here light is applied to God Himself, i.e., God Himself is the light of the heavens and the earth. And where nur stands for the light of Almighty from which the general light comes and makes everything illuminated;

and that is the cause of the existence of everything. It may not be necessary to explain that when the word 'light' is used, it is used in non-literal sense.

In the first chapter we have explained a symbol as that which expresses or represents the invisible, intangible or spiritual by means of visible or sensuous representations. Light is a sensuous object, but when it is applied to God it transcends the phenomenal limitations and suggests something that cannot be expressed literally. So, when it is said that God is the light, it does not mean the physical light. Among the phenomenal objects light is supposed to be the purest, because every

4. Rabītabī, op.cit., p. 122

Ibn 'Arabī holds that, since He (God) is self-existent and self appeared (He is the light of the heavens and the earth i.e. He makes the appearance of the heavens or realms of souls (Samawat al-arwah) and the realms the bodies (Arq al-Aamid) He is an absolute existence in whom the whole existence and light are found. Ibn 'Arabi' Tafsir, Vol. II, N.D., Surah, nur, pp. 70-71.

phenomenal object can only be made to appear through it. God is the creator of the universe, and the whole creation depends on Him for its existence. God as the creator of the universe and also as the cause of its existence is Light. Thus, in the above verse the word 'Light' stands as a symbol to refer to God as the creator and the cause of the existence of the heavens and the earth i.e. the whole universe.

Some traditions (ahādīth) are also found where the word "Light" is used for God Himself. If only their outward meaning is taken into consideration, they will not render their true connotation. It is narrated on the authority of Abu Dharr: I asked the Messenger of God(s); Did you see thy Lord? He (Prophet) said:

\[
\text{لورcdn لر}.
\]

He is Light how could I see Him?

In another tradition it is found that when the same question was asked to the Prophet, he replied:

"I saw Light."

In both the traditions 'light' is used for You Himself. But in the former it is indicated that since God is a Light He cannot be seen, whereas in the latter one it is said that what the Prophet(s) saw was Light. Although "Light" is a common symbol of God Himself in both the traditions, we will be trapped in contradiction if we interpret the implications of both the traditions in the same way. In the former case "Light" stands as a symbol of the higher plane of reality that cannot be perceived by the carnal eyes, which is not something phenomenal but is transcendental, and in the latter the word 'Light' refers to the spiritual apprehension of God as an immanent einu. In the latter case both the seer and Seen are on the same plane, i.e. the Prophet(s) is speaking at the level of the identity(‘ayniyyat) and togetherness (ma’yyāt), a plane higher than that of ordinary experience.

Ibn Jayyim explains the meaning of the words "He is a Light, How could I see Him" that there was an intervening agent between the Prophet and His (God's) appearance and that is the veil of light, (zād al- Ma'ād, Vol. II P. 126). We find the following two traditions in support of this view:

(His (God's) veil is light)

When Gabriel was asked by the Prophet about God, Gabriel said: Muhammad(s), I drew to God so much that I had never done before. He (Prophet) said: Gabriel how it was with (you)? He said:

"There were between me and Him (God) seventy thousand veils of light".

Here again we have to interpret 'Light' in metaphorical terms, because in these traditions also reference is not made to phenomenal light. So it cannot be taken in the literal sense. 'His veil is

9. Ibid., P. 113.
'light' means, though He may be grasped or understood in sense, to some degree, yet a clear manifestation of His Essence will always remain out of our reach. So far as the tradition of the 'Seventy thousand veils' is concerned, we propose to discuss it in the fifth chapter at some length.

(B) GOD'S LIGHT:

Now, we may turn to God's light, which has been referred to (ملق نور) "the example of His light" in the light verse of the surah nur. Here, it is not the light which is God Himself but the light that emanates from God. And it is not the general light that makes things appeared and existent, but this is the special light given to the believer in the form of faith (إِمَان) which is supported by the God's saying:

God doth guide whom He will to His light(24:35)

God's light that guides the believers is something different from the "Light" signifying God Himself.
it symbolizes the truth and guidance which come down to man from God, His Glory, which is the cause of the illumination of man in the universe, and the straight path that leads the believers towards Him. The following verses of the Qur'ān may be referred to in this connection:

"Fain would they extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will not allow, but that His Light should be perfected, even though the unbelievers may detest (it)." (9:32)

"Their intention is to extinguish God's light (by blowing) with their mouths, but God will complete (the revelation of) His light even though the unbelievers may detest (it)." (59:8)

In the above two verses God's light refers to the truth, guidance, and revelation, the Qur'ān, which come down to man from God. They are unquenchable lights and
and cannot be annihilated or disturbed by the opponents i.e. the unbelievers. Rather they (believers) will get perfections, since God is their safe-Guard.

Is one whose heart God has opened to Islam, so that he has received light from God, (no better than one hard-hearted)? Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against celebrating the praises of God: They are manifestly wandering (in error). (39.22)


Muḥammad Sahl Ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d.283 A.H. /896AD) Tafsīr al Qurʿān al ʿAzīm; (Egypt: 1326 A.H. /1908 A.D., P. 66 (with reference to al-Qurʿān 9:32 ); al-qurʿān 57:8 is interpreted by Tustarī as "with their tongues (alṣinah) they reject the proof (ḥujjah) of the Prophet; with their souls (nufūṣ) they turn away from him. God fore ordained (gayyada) the recognition of him for certain souls, creating them upon the decree of bliss (ḥukm al-saʿādah), and adorned the hearts (qūra) with the lights of His gnosis (anwār maʿrifatihi) and the secrets Contd.
To receive God's light here means to receive enlightenment, spiritual understanding that will soften the hearts of the believers and lead to the path of truth and righteousness. To receive light from God means, according to Ibn 'Arabî, to reach the stage of perpetuacity (baqâ) after surpassing the earlier stage of annihilation (fanâ) and purification of one's heart by the righteous gift of existence so that he sees diversity in unity and unity in diversity. 12

O ye that believe, fear God, and believe in His Apostle, and He will bestow on you a double portion of His mercy: He will provide for you a light by which ye shall walk (straight in your path), and He will forgive you (your past): for God is oft Forgiving and Merciful. (57:28)

or its lights (asrâr an-nârîhâ) by virtue of the firm belief (tasdiq), 'ustari, Tafsîr, I. 159.

The light that will be provided by God is considered to be the fuller lights of Islam. This light can be explained in such a way that when one fears God and believes in the apostlehood of the Prophet(s), then he becomes capable of receiving Divine mercy; due to this mercy his heart is shaped in such a fashion that it becomes possessor of Divine illumination which makes him able to walk in the straight path, i.e., the chosen path of God.

And the Earth will shine with the light of its Lord: The records (of deeds) will be placed, the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forward, and a just decision pronounced between them; and they will not be wronged (in the least). *(39:69)*
With the universal light, i.e., the Glory of God, everything will be illuminated. Falsehood, pretense, and illusion will disappear. According to Ibrāhīm an-Nawāsī, as said by him in his Taṣāfīr, in this verse light (nūr) symbolizes justice (fādil). 13

Joe's light has also been referred to some of the traditions of the Prophet(s). It might have symbolized the vision of God and the image of such vision in the heaven; His guidance etc. Let us quote two traditions in this connection:

بيب’Brienعلما المجد في لحيهم إذ سطع لهم نور رفعوا
ووضعهم فان عرفب فد أشرف عليهم من فوقهم. قال
سلام عليكم يا علما المجد إمام ورد ذلك قول الله جل
رَبِّي رَبِّي (۳۳/۱۹۹) قال ننتظر الهم ونظرون إليه
إلى مالك مُنفِّه إلى شبه من السماء وما ننظرون إليه
الحبيب عنهم وببقي نور دربك عليهم في رياهم»

13 Ibrāhīm an-Nawāsī, Taṣāfīr, P. 604.
While the people of the paradise are with their felicities a light radiated on them. As they raised their heads up, the Lord appeared to them from above and said: Peace be on you, on people of the paradise. He (the Prophet) said the saying of God: "Peace" (a word of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful (al-Qur'an 36: 56). He (the Prophet) said, He (God) looked to them and they looked to Him and they never turned their faces to any of the graces since they were looking towards Him till He disappeared from them but His light and blessing were left with them at their houses).14

In the above tradition the word 'light' occurs twice but in each place in a different sense. In the former case it seems to refer to the beatific vision i.e., the vision of God for which every inhabitant of the paradise will be eager. It is supported by so many traditions of the Prophet(s) and the sayings of the religious scholars that the greatest of all graces of God for the people of the paradise will be His vision. In the latter case 'light' most probably refers to the image of the vision of God which will perpetually continue to sparkle in the hearts of the inhabitants of the paradise.

In the other tradition that we are citing below, God's 'light' assumes to represent the discriminating power of choosing good from evil, right from wrong, and

---
also conscience that God has poured into the human hearts. One among the ninety nine names of God is guide (nādī) and here also, perhaps, light refers to His guidance.

"أنت الله تبارك وتعالى خلق مخلقة في ظلمان ما لقي علتهم من نور فلم تصاب من ذلک النور إهدته وإن أخطت فلا ملذ لله أن يقول جباه العلم على علم الله "

the Almighty God created His creations in darkness and then threw on them something from His light whoever was hitted by His light got guidance, who missed it was misguided, therefore, I (the Prophet) say the pen becomes dry (to explain) to the knowledge of God.15

God 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! God doth guide whom He will to His light. God doth set forth parables for men: and God doth know all things". (24:35)

We have already made an attempt to show the distinction between "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth" and "the parable of His light", the
latter has been elucidated symbolically in the remaining portion of the verse. The first three symbols used in the parable are the Niche, the lamp and the Glass. The Niche (Mishkāt) is the little shallow recess in the wall of an eastern house, fairly high from the ground, in which a light (before the invention of electricity) was usually placed. Its height enabled it to diffuse the light in the room and minimised the shadows. The background of the niche and its sides helped to throw the light well through out the room, and if the wall was white-washed, it also worked as a reflector: the opening in front made the way for the light. The spiritual light is also placed above worldly things, it has a niche or habitation of its own, in revelation and other signs of God; its access to men is by a special way, open to all, yet closed to those who refuse its rū's.  

16. According to Ibn 'Arabī, it (niche) refers to the body due to the darkness in its soul (nafs) and it is enlightened by the light of the spirit (al-rūḥ);  

The Lamp is the spiritual truth, which is the real illumination; the niche is nothing without it; the niche is actually made for it. The glass is the transparent medium through which the light passes. On the one hand it protects the light from the mouths and other forms of low life (lower motives in man) and from gusts of wind (passions), and on the other, it transmits the light through a medium which is made up of an is akin to the grosser substances of the earth (such as, sand, soda, potash etc.) so arranged as to admit the subtle to enter the gross by its transparency. So, the spiritual truth has to be filtered through human language or human intelligence so that it may be understandable to mankind.

Ibn 'Arabî holds that the lamp, which is the spirit (al-rûh) according to his interpretation, is entwined with the net of the senses. The sparking of light through it (net of senses) is like niche with lamp (mishkāt maʿ al-Misbah); and the glass (zujājah) refers to the heart (qalb) enlightened by the spirit and its(spirit) only function is to illuminate the heart.

The glass itself is not the possessor of light. But when the light comes into it; it shines like a brilliant star (Kaukab Durrī). The comparison between the glass and the brilliant or sparkling star is made, as Ḥabāṭaba’ī interprets it, due to the setting of the glass on the lamp that results the excess brightness of the light, its illumination, and the settlement of the flame without any kind of hindrance; while the wind blows it cannot create any hindrance to the lamp. According to Yūsuf ʿAll, this analogy symbolizes the men of God, who preach God's truth, are themselves illuminated by God's light and become the illuminating media through which that light spreads and illuminates human life. Although Ibn ʿArabi's approach here is more mystical, both he and Yūsuf ʿAll have referred the spiritually advanced people. To Ibn ʿArabī, the glass symbolizes the heart (Qalb). But an enlightened or illuminated heart can be possessed only by a man of God who is the recipient of Divine gnosis. Such a man may rightly be compared with the brilliant star by virtue of his illuminated heart.

20. Ḥabāṭaba’ī, op. cit., P. 123.
Ibn ʿArabī sees the cause of such comparison, due to its (glass') simplicity, excess of light, high position and much radiation.

Lit from a blessed tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west. The Olive tree has been termed as blessed (Mubāarakah), perhaps, not for its outward appearance, in outward appearance it is not so impressive, but because of the use of its oil in sacred ceremonies and also its utility as a wholesome ingredient of food. In addition to these, the fruit has a specially fine flavour. The Olive, as it is used here in mystical sense is not the ordinary tree found in the same lands. It is neither of the east nor of the west. It is metaphorically universal; the same is the case with God's light. The more literal interpretation of the Olive would be that there is no mountain or tree on its east side which may prevent the sun-shine in the morning, nor is there anything on its west side to protect the sun-shine in the afternoon. But it is a tree in the open field receiving sun-shine throughout the day.

The tree from which the glass is lighted is, as Ibn 'Arabi conceives it, the purified, the sanctified and the holy soul. Such comparison is made due to its ramification, diversified forces grows from the physical

world, and the branches that extended from the space of heart to the heavens or spirit (samawāt al-arwāh).
It is described as blessed for its many benefits and uses such as fruits of moral deeds and reasoning.
The power of its growth symbolizes progress on the path of attains perfection and achievement of happiness for both the worlds - the perfection in the two worlds is gained through preserving the appearance of lights, revelation of secrets, and facts leading to gnosis, reaching higher stations, accumulating gains, better conditions and interest. The gnosis or 'irfān specified by Olive (zaycūn), because its spreads in all directions bearing fruits in contrast to the gale of materialistic limited gains. Olives all parts not its marrow. it is neither of the East nor of the West which, according to Ibn 'Arabī, means it is in the middle i.e. neither in the west of the world of bodies (Arq al-Aṣad) which is the place of setting of the divine light and is hidden by the veil of darkness, nor in the east of the realm of spirit, which is the place of rising light and coming out from the veil of light because it is thinner and brighter than the body but thicker than the spirit.23

In the literal version, as it is seen in the different commentaries of the Qur'ān, the oil of such a tree which receives sun-shine throughout the day is very refined, clean and illuminating. And its oil is so much clean and flamy that even when if it is not touched by fire it seems to be burning by itself. When it is enkindled, it is light upon light i.e., it itself has got the high quality of light, above all, when it is enkindled with fire, it becomes multiplied, which does not refer to numerousness, but radiation in all direction. According to Ṭabāṭabā'ī it does not mean a specific light above another light, and not collection of two lights; but it is multiplied light, and there is no limitation to its multiplicity. In the niche (mishkāt) radiations of light are assembled and later are diffused throughout the room with more luminosity. Besides this, the light is illuminating, the glass is illuminating, and the oil is also illuminating. Hence, 'light upon light' is the assembly of all lights.

    Op. cit., P. 905, P. Notes: 3001, 3002
According to Thanawī, the whole allegory intends to allude to the light of guidance (nūr-e-hicāyat) that God pours into the heart of a believer; his (believer's) eagerness amplifies day by day towards the acceptance of truth (Haqq); and he always remains steadfast to perform the commandments of God. Sometimes so happens that in the course of action he discharges the divine duties imposed on him without knowing them. Because knowledge is acquired gradually as the oil before the touch of the fire seems to be capable of burning. And when he acquires knowledge then the light of action, which is highly purposeful and also very elevated, turns into the light or knowledge; with the unification of action (‘amal) and knowledge (‘ilm) reality of 'light upon light' emerges.

According to Ibn ‘Arabī, 'whose oil is well-nigh luminous' means the natural Divine light hidden in human being. It tends to come out to action and reaching perfection. So it shines the active intellect which

26. Thanawī, op.cit., p. 23; Tabātabā’ī’s exposition of the problem is that allegory is applied to the light of faith (nur al-Imān) and light of knowledge (nur al-‘ilm) radiated to the hearts of the believers from His majesty, Who is Self-existent and source of others' light.

'Light upon Light' (لورى) may also be supposed to be the symbol of the possession of Divine love by the believers because this stage is the highest stage accessible to the Godly people. And to attain this so many stages are to be passed: to purify the heart from all kinds of sensuous defilement is a kind of enlightenment; the acquisition of the gnosis of God may also be symbolized as light. The totality of all these things leads the heart to such a level which is very refined and clean; when it is enkindled with the fire of love it turns into perfect love of God. That may be another possible interpretation of "light upon light".

"God will guide whom He will to His light" exclusively refers, as Tabataba'I comprehends it, to the believers about light within themselves, i.e., light of guidance and knowledge, of which the unbelievers are deprived. According to Ibn 'Abbás, 'light' here stands for the gnosis of God which He pours into the hearts of those whom He wants to be honoured by it.28

We have started this chapter with a discussion on 'Light' with reference to the Surah al-Nur as a symbol of God Himself, and subsequently dealt with some other verses in which God's light is not applicable to God Himself.

Here, our attempt will be elucidation of the word 'light' symbolizing certain notions like guidance, truth insight, reward, knowledge, the Qur'an and also the personality of the Prophet(s) with reference to some verses of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet(s).

1. Light as Symbol of Guidance:

A good number of verses are found in the Qur'an where the word 'light' symbolizes guidance (hidāyat). Let us see how they have been put forward. In the following verse it has been indicated that the light is being snatched away from the unbelievers due to their misdeeds, and also indifference to the commands of God.
Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, God took away their light and left them in darkness. So they could not see. (2:17)

This light is the natural guidance inherent in every individual through which one can proceed on the straight path. But an unbeliever is deprived of it due to his heedlessness to the commands of God. His act of ignoring the inner light causes God's annoyance that ultimately results in His withdrawing of the light of guidance from the disobedient. This light is a common Divine endowment to all human beings and the unbeliever falls in the abyss of the darkness of the heart due to his waywardness.
God is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject faith the patrons are the Evil ones; from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness. They will be companions of the fire, to dwell therein (for ever). (2: 257)

The terms 'light' and 'darkness' each have come twice in the above verse. The import of both the terms is symbolic here. The point to be noted here is that at each place light and darkness both represent two different things. Darkness, on the first occasion indicates that a man of faith is also trapped in the abyss of darkness, and it is God who brings him out of darkness and sends him into light. On the second occasion the word 'light' evinces that a man who rejects faith is also in possession of light, but the evil forces dominate him and drawn him into the depths of darkness. This also suggests that every individual whether he is a believer or non-believer that light has been endowed with light and seems to be the general guidance, the insight, the conscience. On the other hand, both the believers and non-believers are in some sort of darkness also that may be interpreted as ignorance of the Divine nature, non-realization of
the gnosis of God, and unawareness of the purpose and cause of creation etc. 'God brings a believer to light means attaining the stage of certainty in the matter of faith that may be instrumental in being benefited by the perpetual guidance of God, the gnosis of God, and acquisition of the love of God. So, here light is used as a symbol of inner awareness that is constituted by and is product of a number of factors that strengthen true faith.

Ibn 'Arabi, Tafsír, Vol. I, P. 90.'
In this verse also "light" symbolizes guidance, the chosen path of God, and certainty and steadfastness of faith to which is a favour of God showered upon believers through the Qur'an.

...while they say "Our Lord: perfect our light for us, and grant us forgiveness, for Thou hast power over all things". (66:8)

In the above verse an appeal is being made by the men of faith to their Lord to perfect their light, what is sought here is the perpetual guidance of God. One can only reach to the level of perfection when he receives an unceasing guidance from God. According to Ibn 'Arabi, it means seeking His (God's) protection and refuge from the appearance of the rest of the world that blurr the vision. Therefore, the believers or rather Sufis see perpetual light of God for reaching the stage of absolute annihilation (Fana al-Mahd).

Here light symbolizes the Divine power if destroying all impurities and selfish desires through a believer's own spiritual struggle and aspiration.

"Light" as a symbol of guidance also emerges in some of the traditions of the Prophet(s). Here is a prayer of the Prophet(s) what he used to say at dawn:

الله لاهب في قلبي نورا وفوق نورا و في سمعي نورا و عيني نورا و من يساري نورا و فوق نورا و من يقصي نورا و امامي نورا و خلفي نورا و اجلبني في نورا

God! let my heart have light, and my sight have light, and my hearing have light; and let me have light on my right, and have light on my left, and have light on above me, and have light under me, and have light in front of me, and have light behind me.31

31. Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Dawat, Bab al-Du'a

The word 'light' in this tradition, may have more than one referents, but prior to expound all referents it would be helpful to proceed with the supposition that it (light) as a whole does refer to guidance, because for the achievement of the spiritual upliftment, Divine guidance would be the basic thing. In every area of human activity God's guidance is needed. And if one receives Divine guidance, his heart will be free from all sorts of sensuous defilements, and directed towards God; his sight will be capable of grasping the reality as against the appearance; his faculty of hearing will transcend the phenomenal limitations and pay heed to something coming from the realm of celestial; from all direction, he will be protected from all kinds of profanities, i.e., he will be in the refuge of God.

We will cite here another tradition of the prophet(s) where 'light' seems to refer to guidance. The prophet(s) said: 'The example of Muslims, Jews and Christians is like the example of a man who employed labourers to work for him from morning till night for specific wages. They worked till midday and then said 'we do not need your money which you have fixed for us
and let whatever we have done be annulled. The man said to them "do not quit the work, but complete the rest of it and take your full wages". But they refused and went away. The man employed another batch after them and said to them "complete the rest of the day and yours will be the wages I had fixed for the first batch". So, they worked till the time of Asr prayer. Then they said, "Let what we have done be annulled and keep the wages you have promised for yourself". The man said to them "complete the rest of the work, as only a little day remains", but they refused. Thereafter, he employed another batch to work for the rest of the day and they worked for the rest of the day till the sunset, and they received the wages of the former two batches. So, that was the example of those people (Muslims) and that was the example of the light they accepted willingly.  

In view of al-Kastālānī the above tradition is interpreted in this way that the Jews refused to believe in the message of Jesus, so all their work was

---

useless; similarly the Christians refused to accept the message of Muhammad(s) and thus their work too became useless. They were not rewarded, because they refused to adopt the true faith for the rest of their lives and died as disbelievers. They should have believed in the last message; for their insistence on keeping their old religion deprived them of the reward which they would have got for their previous good deeds achieved before the advent of the new religion. On the other hand, Muslims accepted and believed in all the three messages and deserved a full reward for their complete surrender to God.

"That was the example of light they accepted willingly" refers primarily to the light of guidance that the Prophet Muhammad(s) and the other two Prophets, Moses and Jesus, brought with them. Muslims are the only people believing in all the messages. So they are the properly guided people, and that is why, they may rightly be termed as "the people of light".

---

1. Al-ṣaḥḥāt, Vol. I, p. 13, as it has been mentioned to y Muhammad Muḥsin Khān in his English tr. of al-ṣaḥḥāt, Vol. III, p. 259.
2. **The Prophet (s) as Light**

A prophet is a guide to mankind. Prophets were sent in different ages to guide human beings to the path of God, to the path of righteousness. Prophet Muhammad (s) was the last of all prophets and has been sent to guide the whole mankind, who act as a warner (النذير) to those who were heedless and as a giver of good tidings (البشر) for good-doers.

The Prophet (s) truly we have sent thee as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner -

and as one who invites to God's (grace) by His leave, and as a Lamp spreading light.

(33: 45-46)

The prophet comes as a light or lamp (Sirāj al-munīra) to illuminate the whole world. And it is

34. According to some commentators, the lamp (Mīsbaḥ) as other symbols used in the light verse of "لا نور mais about the personality of the Prophet Muhammad (s) by Ibn Abbas, Taṣfīr (Urdu tr.) 14:459; Shah Ahmad kaqa and Sayyid Muhammad al-Din Murshidkhan Taṣfīr-al-Qur'ān with translation (Urdu) (Bombay, Rida Academy: M.D.) P. 567.
seen that sometimes 'light' refers to the personality of the Prophet(s) himself.

> فَهَلْ يَغْلِبَ مُجَابَةَ اللَّهِ وَمُجَابَةَ الْخَيْرِ مَسْئِئٌ ؟


There hath come to you from God a light and a perspicuous Book, (5:15)

Here 'nūr' (light) stands for the Prophet(s) and perspicuous Book is the Qur'ān. No book can be read without light, as such the Qur'ān cannot be understood without the Prophet(s). Through him darkness has been eliminated and the right way has become evident.

---

55. Ibn Abbas, Jalālīn Sharīf, Aḥmad Riqā and ʿAbī Imām al-Dīnī Persian Sharīf, in a number of commentaries of the Qur'ān it has been pointed that in this verse nūr (light) refers to the Prophet(s).

1) Tafsīr Jalālīn Sharīf

This light means the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace of God be upon Him)

2) Tafsīr, Ṣādi Sharīf

In this verse God has termed the Prophet as light because he illuminates the sights (human eyes), guidos people towards success, and is the origin (asl) of material (hissi) and spiritual (la’nawiyy) light.

3) Jalālīn Khānī In this verse nūr means Prophet Muḥammad(s). God has called him nūr because through him guidance is received as in the darkness the guidance of light is taken.

Cf. Tafsīr Rādīwī, Tafsīr Mādarī, Tafsīr Rūh al-ʿAynī Sharīf.

3. **AL-QUR'ĀN: AS THE LIGHT**

Like the Prophets, all the books revealed to them are also considered to be the guide to mankind. They guided people according to the revelation sent to them from God. The Qur'ān is the last of all revealed books, as it is believed by every Muslim. It is the guide to mankind and the Qur'ān itself makes the claim explicitly:

Ramadān is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'ān, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgment. (2:185)

This is the book which discriminates between good and evil, right and wrong, and asks people to come out of misdeeds, evils and also suggests to perform what good and beneficial to an individual and the society. Due to its illuminating and prescriptive characteristics the Qur'ān is sometimes, in some verses, symbolized as 'light'.
I. mankind: verily there has come to a convincing proof from your Lord: for we have sent unto you a light (that is) manifest. (4: 174).

Here convincing proof (burhān) is used for the blessed personality of the Prophet Muḥammad(s) and 'light' for the Qurʾān. According to Ibn ʿArabi, the Qurʾān is called so due to its possession of the knowledge of universals as well as knowledge of particulars.

In the following verse God instructs believers to obey and honour the Prophet(s) and follow the light that is sent down with him, so that people may be successful and blessed.

So it is those who believe in him, honour him, help him and follow the light which is sent down with him it is they who will prosper. (7: 157)

The "light" sent down with the Prophet(s) is the Qur'ān which illuminates the hearts of the believers, eliminates the darkness of doubt and ignorance, and provides knowledge and certainty.

The Qur'ān is symbolized as light because it guides man to the right direction, to the path of righteousness. If one comes in contact with light he will see everything. And if one is with light he will see everything. And if one is with light he can safely pass through his way in darkness too. The same example is applicable to the Qur'ān, if anyone is with it, follows it, he is supposed to resolve every problem he faces and can take the correct decision which will bring him success and good fruit in both the worlds.

بَوْلَى، وَالْحَقَّ الْفَالِقُ... ٦

believe, therefore, in God, and His Apostle, and in the light which We have sent down ... (64:8)

38. Ahmad Ri'ā & Nā'im al-Dīn, Tafsir, P. 276.
Note: 302.
The light in the above verse is the iHiote raeiation: i.e. the Qur'an. A believer is supposed to believe not only in God and His Apostle but also in the Qur'an as the revelation from God through the Prophet(s). By means of the revelation one can have knowledge about God and the prophethood, which will rule over all his activities and guide him in all the spheres of his life. Thus the reality is divulged to him.

There is a tradition in which the Prophet(s) prays to God to make the Qur'an the light of his chest. "إن تجعل القرآن ربيعةقلبى ولوزن صدرى وميلة نظرى" "Make the Qur'an, the spring of my heart, light of my chest and relief of my sorrow". Light of chest means let the Qur'an guide towards the right direction that leads towards truth and righteousness, and also towards God Himself. If one's chest is illuminated by the Qur'an it would become a dwelling place of the light of God.

We have, to some extent, formed a comprehensive view on the symbolism of light used for the Qur'an with reference to some verses (Qur'anic) and a prophetic tradition. We come across two verses in the Qur'an where it is mentioned that when the Torah and the Gospel were revealed they possessed guidance and light.

١٤٤

It was we who revealed the Torah: therein was guidance and light ...." (5:44)

١٤٥

...We sent him (Jesus) the Gospel: their was guidance and light ...." (5:46)

From the above two verses it may be inferred that all the revealed books in their original forms were the possessors of guidance, divine message, and hence they were light to mankind. Due to their later distortions they lost the power of guidance and the light of true knowledge.
Besides the referents discussed above, light occasionally refers to goodness, truth, righteousness, reward and knowledge. In a number of cases the word 'light' is used to refer to more than one object. In such cases it is difficult to say accurately what it was supposed. In this section we may face this type of difficulty in connection with determining the exact meaning of the symbol 'light'.

Let us start with a Qur'anic verse where 'light' seems to have more than one referents:

Praise be to God, Who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and light.... (6:1)

"Darkness" (Sulmāt) symbolizes many things. It may be darkness of night, unbelief, falsity, ignorance, hell and, moreover, it may also refer to all kinds of evil acts and deeds. "Light", on the other hand, may
Stan. for law, faith, truth, guidance, knowledge, 41
paradise, i.e., every good thing. According to Ibn
'Araji, the heavens (al-samawat) refer to the world
of spirits and the earth (al-ard) refers to the
material or phenomenal world. The material world
falls in the category of veils of darkness, and the
world of spirits is linked with the light of knowledge
and realization. So, here 'light' according to Ibn
'Araji, is ultimately symbolizing knowledge and
realization that may include gnosis of God, knowledge
about the creations and His realization. These are
of course some important aspects that the term 'light'
is meant to refer but they are not all; it refers to
more than these things. It represents all the good
acts and things in the heavens and the earth, knowledge
that eradicates the darkness of ignorance, truth,
justice, righteousness, and rewards for good deeds etc.
The concept of light as opposed to darkness elaborated
more should not be equated with the Dualism of Zoroastrian
faith. Because in this verse they are not conflicting
powers but are the creations of one true God.

41. Ahmad Riqa and Na'imal-Yin, *Tafsir*, P. 205, Note. 3
The primary object meant by 'light' in the following verse would be faith or belief, as opposed to unbelief and heresy.

A.L.: A Book which we have revealed unto thee, in order that those mightest lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light — by the leave of their Lord — to the way of (Him) the exalted in Power, Worthy of all Praise. (14:1)

From the depths of darkness into Light "means from unbelief (Kufr) to belief or faith (Iman). This has also been interpreted as "from the darkness of plurality to the light of unity, from the darkness of genesis to the light of nature, and from the darkness of the veils of deeds and qualities to the light of essence." We can also add that this means passage from the abyss of polytheism to monotheism (tawfīq). There may be many more interpretations of light, but the prime objective of using

this term here, is to refer to firm faith in only one God, the exalted in Power and Worthy of all praise.

In another verse the same words and phrases occur, that is, bringing out from the depths of darkness into light, but this verse seems to have some additional referents.

مَا كَانَتِ النُّورُ كَانَتْ بِالْمَوْهِبَةِ رَحْمَةٌ

الحِزَابٍ

He it is Who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of darkness into light and He is full of mercy to the believers. (33:43).

According to Tafsīr-e-Abbas, 'light' symbolizes one's coming out from the riddle of unbelief to faith, gnosis of God, and right actions. Some other commentators also, to a large extent, have expressed the same view. These are proper interpretation of the symbol 'light', but the thing to be

45. Ibn Abbas, Tafsīr, P. 549
46. Cf. Ḥamīd Riḍā and Ja'īmal-Dīn, Tafsīr, P. 676
Note: 108
pointed out here is that light comes out of the blessings of God and angels, and the verse ends with the word that refers God as Full of Mercy (rahim). Hence in interpreting "light" the mercy of God which represents grace of God to mankind, should also be taken into account.

'Light' in the following verse of the Surah al-Hadid primarily refers to belief and faith.

He is the one who sends to His servant manifest signs, that he may lead you from the depths of darkness into the light ...... (57:9)

Here the word Servant is used for the Prophet Muhammad(s) who was sent to call upon people to come out of the darkness of unbelief and heresy and to embrace faith and belief. It is evident that light represents faith and belief here. Ibn 'Arabi interprets it in a different language. Light, he holds,
here refers to the illumination of the heart the light of the spirit and the light of religion. Light of religion ultimately symbolizes faith i.e. belief in Islam.

In the following two verses of Surah al-Hadīd light basically stands for the reward God reserved for the believers on the day of judgment.

One day shall thou see the believing men and the believing women—how their light runs forward before them and by their right hands. (57:12)

And those who believe in God and His apostles they are the sincere (lovers of truth), and the witnesses (who testify), in the eyes of their Lord they shall have their reward and light. (57:19)

In a number of verses of the Qur'ān, the rewards earned by the believers on the day of Judgment and the things they will get in the paradise, have been clearly mentioned. But when the word 'light' occurs in this context it assumes a definite meaning, not to be confined to those rewards which have been mentioned. "Light" here, according to Ibn `Arabi', is the light of heaven blessed by the vision of Divine attributes. This is that special reward which God reserves for His lovers ("Awliya") and gnostics ("Wulfa"). Light in another sense also refers to satanic vision ("Ruvat al-Bari").

In the following verse, symbol "light" seems also to refer to that what is not applicable to an ordinary believer.

An apostle, who rehearses to you the signs of God containing clear explanations, that he may lead forth those who believe and do righteous deeds from the depths of darkness into light. (65:11)

48. Ibn, F. 298

"The light of the believer, which, as the Qur'ān says, is running before the believers" (57:12)
It is mentioned in this verse that a believer who performs righteous deeds may be liberated from darkness and is drawn into light. From this it implies that even with his belief and good deeds, one may be devoid of 'light'. What is that light which he lacks?

There are as many categories of the believers as are various stages and states attainable on the path of faith. 'Light' refers to these ascending stages of development of the believers. Light in the context of an unbeliever refers to come in embracing true faith; for a believer it may be certainty of faith and performance of good deeds. For an advance stage of belief it may mean perpetual fear of God and cautiousness about the committence of any kind of sin; and for 'ārif it may be the acquisition of the gnosis and love of God.

---

is identified by Tustarī with "the light that God made for his friends (awliyā'). This light becomes manifest only for him who submits and surrender to God and embraces the light of faith". Tustarī, Tafsīr, P. 150.
In the end it may be concluded that 'light' as a symbol occupies a very significant place in the Qur'an and Hadith. It does represent a number of things in the Qur'an as well Hadīth. Sometimes light stands for God Himself referring to Him as the creator and sustainer of the universe. It also symbolizes Divine guidance for mankind, the Qur'ān, the personality of the Prophet(s), knowledge, gnosis of God, love of God, truth, reward, goodness and ascetic vision.

All these references of the Qur'ān and Hadīth are sufficient to discard the view of those orientalists who consider the use of 'light' as a symbol in Islamic literature, especially in ṣūfī writings, is the result of the alien influences on Islam, particularly that of zoroastrianism and Manichean faith. It also proves that the ṣūfīs using 'light' as a symbol in their literature and sayings is inspired by the Qur'ān and not by zoroastrianism or neo-Platonism.