

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

'NUR' AS REFLECTED LIGHT - A RESTRICTIVE RENDERING

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It has become quite ubiquitous in Muslim thought to understand 'Nur' as 'reflected' light. The source of this restrictive interpretation may have been compounded by Muslim teachers who have over the last few decades made use of isolated Quranic verses to prove scientific 'miracles' and phenomena from scripture.

Many will be familiar with the statement that the Quran distinguishes the Sun and the Moon by referring to the latter as 'reflected' light. This ability of the Quran to discern in the era of its revelation is oft cited as being miraculous in nature.

Indeed, the Quran does talk about some fantastic creative signs of God but it is primarily advanced to the Arab audience of the 6th-7th century that can understand it. So when references are made to human creativity or cosmic space, these are facts that remain within the grasp of the recipients to understand and appreciate. (See related article at the bottom of this page)

Let us note a specific example. One notes in verse 10:5, the moon being described as 'Nur' in contrast to the Sun which is described as a 'Diya'.

010:005 (Part)

"He it is Who appointed the sun a splendour (**Arabic: Diya(an)**) and the moon a light (**Arabic: Nur(an)**), and measured for her stages, that ye might know the number of the years, and the reckoning ..."

If the meaning of 'Nur' is to be taken as 'reflected light', and applied to another verse of the Quran (24:35) where God refers to himself as 'Nur', then obvious difficulties arise. The obvious question being, is God referring to himself as 'reflected' light of the Heavens and the Earth?

024:035 (Part)

"God is the Light (**Arabic: Nur**) of the heavens and the earth ..."

Many Muslim preachers attempt to contextualise this understanding of 'Nur' with the rest of the passage of 24:35 which is arguably one of the most beautiful and rich passages of the Quran. However, the explanations offered for this narrow interpretation are usually laboured and inconclusive.

A MORE CONSISTENT UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM 'NUR' FROM THE QURAN

The Quran itself remains the primary source of any interpretation of a Quranic word and all verses where such a word may have been used need to be collectively analysed to ascertain a deeper understanding its usage and any relevant shades of meanings. A fuller study of the Arabic word 'Nur' from the Quran and its complete context reveals a much broader interpretation than is usually appreciated. It can even possibly be argued whether the word 'Nur' means 'reflected light' at all.

In its primary sense, the word 'Nur' simply means 'light'. This is also attested by notable lexicon authorities.

نور *Light*; syn. ضياء, (Ṣ,) or ضوء; (M, A, Mṣb, K;) whatever it be; (M, A, K;) *contr.* of ظلمة: (Mṣb:) or the *rays thereof*: (M, A,

[Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon](#) [1]

This rendering is also consistent with other Quranic narratives where the Arabic word 'Nur' does not mean reflected light at all. For example, the term 'Nur' (light) has been used as a contrast to darkness possibly alluding to itself as an analogy between the blind and the seeing.

LIGHT (NUR) AS A CONTRAST TO DARKNESS

005.016

"God guides with it all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and brings them out of darkness, by His will, to the light (**Arabic: Nur(i)**), and guides them to a path that is straight.

035.019-20

"The blind and the seeing are not alike; Nor are the depths of darkness and the light (**Arabic: Nur**)"

It would not be feasible to understand 'Nur' here as 'reflected' light.

LIGHT (NUR) OF GOD'S SCRIPTURES

We note numerous other passages in the Quran in which God's scriptures have also been described as 'Nur' (**The Torah** 5:44; 6:91; **The Injeel** 5:46 and **The Quran** 7:157; 42:52; 64:8). Clearly these scriptures are sources of Divine guidance and not in any way 'reflected' in any literal or metaphorical sense.

Furthermore, we noted in verse 10:5 above, the Sun being described as a 'Diya'.

010:005 (Part)

"He it is Who appointed the sun a splendour (**Arabic: Diya(an)**) and the moon a light (**Arabic: Nur(an)**) ..."

However, it is equally significant to note that the same word 'Diya' has also been used to describe the Torah.

021.048

"And certainly, We granted to Moses and Aaron the criterion (for judgment), and a Light (**Arabic: Diya(an)**) and a Message for those who would do right"

Therefore, the sun is not exclusively described as a 'Diya' as God's scriptures are also described as such.

If both the terms 'Diya' and 'Nur' have been used collectively to describe God's scriptures, it is clear that verse 10:5 where the Sun is described as 'Diya' and the Moon as 'Nur' is not merely intended to show the difference between 'source' and 'reflected'. Rather, it has a much wider interpretation.

LIGHT (NUR) AS GUIDANCE

004.174

"O mankind! surely there has come to you a convincing proof from your Lord: For We have sent to you a clear light (**Arabic: Nur**)"

005.015

"O people of the Book! Surely has come to you our Messenger, making clear to you much that you

used to conceal of the Book, and passing over much. Surely, there has come to you from God a light **(Arabic: Nur)** and a clear Book, -

As already cited above, other God's scriptures have also been described as 'Nur' and having 'guidance' (huda) with the view to lead people out of darkness.

LIGHT (NUR) AS GOD'S LIGHT

009.032

"They want to extinguish God's light **(Arabic: Nur)** with their mouths, but God will not allow but that His light should be perfected, even though the Unbelievers may detest (it)"

We note a similar (almost identical) verse in another part of the Quran.

061.008

"They intend to extinguish God's Light **(Arabic: Nur)** with their mouths: But God will perfect His Light, even though the Unbelievers may detest (it)"

See also: 24:35; 61:08

LIGHT (NUR) AS A RADIANT LIGHT

057.012

"One Day you will see the believing men and the believing women - how their Light **(Arabic: Nuru(hum))** runs forward before them and by their right hands: (their greeting will be): "Good News for you this Day! Gardens beneath which flow rivers! abiding therein forever! This is indeed the highest Achievement!"

Anyone studying the verses above will clearly recognise that there are obvious overlaps with the different shades of meaning noted of the word 'Nur'. For example, a light as guidance in the form of scripture gives one the ability to 'see' from a state of spiritual darkness whereby God Himself remains the ultimate source of this light. None of these interpretations support a restrictive understanding of 'Nur' as implying a 'reflection' of light.

014.001

"A. L. R. A Book which We have revealed to you, in order that you may lead mankind from the darkness(es) into light **(Arabic: Nur)** by the leave of their Lord to the Way of (Him) the Exalted in power, worthy of all praise"

FINAL THOUGHTS

As has been noted by the examples cited above, the Quranic interpretation of the word 'Nur' does not lend itself to its oft understood restrictive meaning as 'reflected' light, if at all.

'Nur' simply means 'light' and given the context of the verses exhibits shades of meanings. It has been used to describe God's own light, guidance emanating from God's scriptures, radiant light and as a contrast to spiritual darkness. None of these meanings restrict it to 'reflected' light.

We note a specific example of the Moon in the following verse. A literal translation of the Arabic reads:

071.016

"And made the moon therein a light (Arabic: Nur(an)), and made the sun as a lamp? (Arabic: Siraj)"

If we allow for the different shades of meanings of the word 'Nur', it is not implausible to interpret the moon's 'Nur' as guiding light in the darkness of the night. If we further read it along with verse 10:5, we note the moon being offered as guidance in its various stages so that humankind can compute time.

010:005 (Part)

"He it is Who appointed the sun a splendour (Arabic: Diya(an)) and the moon a light (Arabic: Nur(an)), and measured for her stages, that ye might know the number of the years, and the reckoning ..."

As is obvious, there is no support in this context to **restrict** its interpretation with a view to support a scientific miracle by rendering the word 'Nur' solely as 'reflected' light.

RELATED ARTICLE

[Scientific Miracles in the Quran](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 8, Page 2865

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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