

# **Conceptual Metaphors in the Holy Qur'an: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach**

A thesis submitted to the University of Suez, English Department,  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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## **Abstract**

This study presents results from a research into the linguistic and conceptual metaphors in selected Ayahs in Al-Qur'an-el-Kareem. It examines the conceptual metaphor "PRAYER IS A BUILDING" in the Holy Qur'an which contribute to the building up of inner peace for a Muslim. The analysis is based on the conceptual metaphor framework developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), and the Pragglejaz model of Metaphor Identification (2010). This paper has focused on the three types of conceptual metaphors suggested by Lakoff and Johnson, namely, structural, ontological and orientational. Prayer is conceived in terms of three concepts in the Glorious Qur'an, such as PRAYER IS A BUILDING (structural), PRAYER IS A MENTOR (ontological) and PRAYER IS UP (orientational). The study will attempt to find out how these concepts have augmented the image of 'prayer' in the Glorious Qur'an.

### ***Key Words:***

The Holy Qur'an CMT metaphor MIPVU Structural  
Ontological orientational Pragglejaz peace

## **I. Introduction**

Conceptual Metaphor Theory as proclaimed by Lakoff and Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphor We Live By* (1980), changed the locus of attention regarding metaphor from language to “thought”. Metaphor became no longer a violation of lexical and semantic rules, but a mental process where mapping occurs between the salient characteristics of two domains. The Target Domain (TD) is an abstract domain defined via mapping the salient properties of a concrete Source Domain onto it.

The study highlights “peace” as one of the major themes in the Holy Qur’an recognized as a “heavily didactic book” (Chartaris-Black 2004, p. 221). The Holy Qur’an is concerned with establishing “peace” in the world, psychologically, domestically, and socially. This is accomplished by conceptualizing the life of a Muslim as a journey along a PATH towards a GOAL. On that path, ‘PRAYER’ is conceptualized in terms of structural, ontological and orientational metaphors.

The study will attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1- Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Henceforth CMT) as in Lakoff and Johnson (1980), how does the

Holy Qur'an use structural conceptualization to help a Muslim realize the importance of 'prayer'?

2- Can the Pragglejaz tool for Metaphor Identification Process (Henceforth MIPVU) be applied in the analysis of an Arabic metaphorical text?

## 1.1 Theoretical Framework

### 1.1.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In their groundbreaking *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson seemed to draw attention to the iceberg underneath what had been known as *tenor* and *vehicle* which represented only the tip since Aristotle. The newly excavated cognitive-linguistic synergy made it unacceptable to still see the beauty and ubiquity of metaphor as a "violation" of some lexico-semantic constants. Yet, what has emerged as conceptual mapping naturally and "crucially depends on "linguistic evidence". (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 4).

If the Source Domain is A, Target Domain is B, then the trajectory A IS B is called a **structural metaphor**. This type stands as the largest of all conceptual metaphors. TIME IS MONEY entails that time (the abstract Target) can be saved, spent, wasted, given, invested, bought in the same way money (the concrete Source). LIFE IS A JOURNEY, SURGEONS ARE BUTCHERS, ARGUMENT IS WAR, ARGUMENT IS

A GAME, and so on, are some examples of the direct relationship between the two domains, which justifies the ubiquity of this type of metaphor.

The **Ontological** type of Metaphors introduces our experiences generally “onto” objects, substances, and containers, as illustrated in the following table:

Source Targets	Metaphor	Context
Objects	<b>THE MIND IS A MACHINE.</b>	My mind was a little <b>rusty</b> this morning. It wasn't <b>operating</b> at all. I almost <b>ran out of gas</b> . Yet, the <b>wheels are turning</b> now. I'm trying to <b>grind out</b> a solution.
Substances	Personification	The wind is <b>pushing</b> the boat forward. Inflation is <b>eating up</b> our savings.
Containers	<b>HE IS IN TROUBLE.</b>	He often <b>gets into trouble</b> His brother <b>gets him out of trouble</b> . She is <b>coming out of a coma</b> . He <b>fell into depression</b> . They are <b>in love</b> .

Table (2): Types of ontological metaphors

The defining feature of **Oriental** metaphor is the use of the basic human spatial orientations mapped onto non-spatial objects. Orientational metaphors can, for instance, map a spatial or sensori-motor image-schema onto an abstract domain. An example is ‘My spirits *sank*’ in which sadness is conveyed through the concept of a downward movement. The concept of quantity, for example, involves at least two metaphors: UP and DOWN. Prices plummeted, or soared; ‘Our relationship went downhill’: SADNESS IS DOWN; ‘We are on cloud nine’ HAPPINESS IS UP; down in the dumps, etc. Moving FORWARD or BACKWARD; BEYOND, and AHEAD OF present metaphorical expression as a solution to the abstract linear scales and paths schemas. In “the progress of Japan goes AHEAD OF China’s”, *ahead of* is from the spatial domain showing direction and linear scales. On the other hand, the appreciation of the DOWN metaphor can be attributed to its association with the ideas: ‘ground’, ‘earth’, and ‘dirt’. One can also postulate that it is attributed to the concept of ‘Hell’ that is conventionally represented located in a lower place, as in the “under-world”.

## 2.2 MIPVU

The MIPVU tool marks Metaphor Related Words (hence, MRWs) by contrasting the basic meaning of lexical units against their contextual meaning of potentially

metaphorical words. In response to the need for a systematic method for identifying instances of metaphor use conforming to the new definition, the Pragglez Group at VU University, Amsterdam, collaborated for six years (Steen, 2010, p. 166). MIPVU (2007) gives precise instructions for finding Metaphor-Related Words (MRWs) following the basic guidelines below adapted from Steen et al. (2010, p. 25-26):

1. Divide the text into lexical units.
2. Mark the lexical unit as metaphorical (MRW) if its contextual use may be explained via cross-domain mapping as different from its basic meaning.
3. Mark a lexical unit (MRW, direct) when mapping is instigated through analogy or similarity.
4. Mark a lexical unit as (MRW, implicit) in case of pronominal substitution, or ellipsis of certain lexical items as a form of co-ordination.
5. Metaphor signals are marked Metaphor Flags (MFlag).

Al-Qur'an-ol-Kareem is the only known divine book that significantly documents its language of revelation; i.e. Arabic. Another significant "fact" about the Muslims' Glorious Book is that its language has remained intact since its revelation more than fourteen centuries ago, which can easily be proved.



### 3. Review of the Literature

#### 3.1 CMT and Religious Discourse

Soskice (1985) employed the theories of Richards and Black to develop the most influential account of metaphor and religious language to appear to date. She regards the function of a metaphor in religious context as primarily cognitive as well as explanatory. Soskice draws attention to the metaphorical reference to God in all three religions, concluding that such metaphorical attempts are complementary, maybe overlapping, but not contradictory. Jonathan Chartaris-Black's *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis* (2004), which presents corpus analysis of Al-Torah, Al-Injeel, and Al-Qur'an in addition to half a dozen corpus analyses of different genres of discourse. Black conducts analysis of conceptual metaphors of LIGHT, FIRE, and WEATHER in the "Koran".

Ahamed Al-Sherif (2011) examines the emergence of metaphorical language in tradition of Prophet Muhammad. It principally argues that the selection of metaphors in the Prophetic discourse is chiefly governed by the rhetorical aim of persuasion. Additionally, the Prophetic metaphors are discursively used to express a distinctive Islamic doctrine and ideology that embody the laws, principles, and beliefs of Islam.

Mostapha Thabit (2014) investigates the metaphors of natural phenomena in the Holy Quran. He names five major

metaphors: rain, mountain, wind, light, and darkness, conducting his analysis within the framework of Chartaris Black's theory of Critical Discourse Analysis. The study validates the adequacy of the application of CMA in the analysis of metaphors of natural phenomena in the Holy Quran.

In her *A Study of Two Qur'anic Counterfactuals: An Application of a Model of Conceptual Projection and Integration* (2012), Reda seeks a model broader than CMT and CBT and able to present an adequate analysis of studying the construction of two Qur'anic counterfactuals. The conceptual nature of the metaphors of Light and Darkness in the Qur'an is the aim of Khaled Barrada's paper (2017). Barrada dismisses any "simplistic...view that attempts to reduce Qur'anic metaphors to the status of sheer rhetorical ornaments which can be dispensed and substituted with equivalent literal expressions without any loss in cognitive content" (p. 62).

## **4 Methodology and Procedure**

### **4.1 How to approach Al-Qur'an-el-Kareem**

Unless the type of investigation is related to translation, research into Al-Qur'an-el-Kareem should apply the following process in order to achieve the utmost understanding of the holy book. Firstly, the researcher should know that the language of the research defines a great part of its purpose; that

is, it is directed to Non-Arabs. Secondly, two or more Arabic-Arabic dictionaries are needed. The number is more important than the names, simply because almost all Arabic-Arabic dictionaries contain almost the same number of words, be it *Mokhtar As-Sehah*, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasseet*, *Taj-Allughah*, or any other. However, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasseet* is the recommended one among scholars. Hand in hand with *Al-Wasseet*, another Qur'an-based dictionary may be useful in the sense that it will focus the researcher's attention on the diction of *Al-Qur'an-el-Kareem*. *Mu'jam Mushtaqat Alfath Al-Qur'an-el-Kareem/The Dictionary of the Derivatives of Al-Qur'an-el-Kareem* is a good example despite some shortcomings in its design. The next step is to read a number of the major explications of *Al-Qur'an-el-Kareem*. A good book to begin with is *Tafseer Al-Qur'an Al-Atheem* aka *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, which strictly provides trans-interpretation; that is, *Al-Qur'an* interprets itself, where detailed ayahs explain brief ones. For different detailed explications, *Al-Jamea Le-Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, *Tafhim al-Qur'an - The Meaning of the Qur'an* by *Al-Maudoudi*. For an explication based on linguistic approach a researcher may refer to *Rouh Al-Ma'any fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Atheem*.

## 5 The Analysis

### 5.1 Structural Prayer

#### PRAYER IS A BUILDING

Al-Qur'an-ul Kareem usually uses the word الصلاة /aSSalaah/: prayer” in combination with different forms of the verb “يُقيمُ yuqiim”. Now, “يُقيمُ/yuqiim/ is defined (M.W., M.S. Jabal and M.L.) and translated (Hilali, Ali, Shakir, Pickthall and Ghali) as “perform”. According to MIPVU criterion of sufficient discreetness, the two meanings are represented by two distinct entries under numbers (1) and (15) in Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet (p. 767). The verb has been given distinct translations based on the many interpretations:

text			
(1) وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ Wa yuqiimuuna ?aSSalaata (Al-Baqarah 2: 3)	<b>Ali</b> are steadfast in prayer	<b>Shakir</b> keep up prayers	<b>Pikthall</b> establish worship
أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ ?aqimi-SSalaata (Al-Issraa 17: 78)	<b>al-Hilali &amp; Khan</b> Perform As-Salat	<b>Arberry</b> Perform the prayer	<b>Ahmed Ali</b> Observe the service of prayer

Different interpretations of the word “aqama”

In Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasseet, the fifteenth entry of the transitive verb “?aqaama” is “built” or “established” (p. 767) (The intransitive form means ‘stayed’). Another Ayah in Surat “Al-Haj” (22: 40), truly one of a kind in Al-Qur’an-il Kareem, which uses the verb “لَهُدِّمَت” /lahuddimat/ would be pulled down” with “صَلَوَات Salawaat/ prayers”; which suggests that “prayer” is conceptualized as a building, in Lakoffian terms.

The gap between the basic meaning of “الصَّلَاة” /?aSSalaah/: prayer” and its contextual meaning “building” in the present Ayah suggests its metaphorical usage. “يُقِيم” yuqiim /build/” functions as a concrete source domain. ?ASSalaah as an abstract entity is conceptualized as a building by virtue of its contextual meaning and the effect of the concrete and physical MRW “يُقِيم” yuqiim /make erect/”. The contextual sense of “?aSSalah” is understood by comparison to the basic sense; hence its metaphoricity. The same may be said of “لَهُدِّمَت” /lahuddimat/ would be pulled down,” and “صَلَوَات Salawaat/ prayers”, but is not; to avoid mere repetition. The latter example is evidence of a deliberate metaphor to conceptualize prayer as a building.

Strangely enough, the word and the beautiful image and perfect conceptual metaphor were overlooked in all translations:

(2)	Hilali	Pikthall	Ali	Shakir
لَهْدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبَيْعُ وَصَلَوَاتُ	synagogues, and mosques, .....would	cloisters and churches	churches, synagogues, and	pulled down cloisters
lahuddimat	surely have	and	mosques,	and
Sawaamifu	been pulled	oratories		churches
wabiyafun	down.	and		and
wa-		mosques		synagogues
Salawaatun				and mosques

Translations that overlooked the word “Salaawat”/ prayers in the text

In the above table, the translators most likely treated “prayer” as a metonymic metaphor with the representational relation “Function to Place” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Yet, even in Arabic interpretations, the image did not get any attention. Thanks to CMT, now the Holy Text can show more of its hidden treasures.

It remains to point out that “wa- /وَعَمُودُهُ الصَّلَاةُ” wa-famuuduhu ?aSSalah/ and its-pillar (literally) is prayer” was the Messenger’s answer to a question about the order of important deeds according to Islamic belief. This is further evidence of the above analogy.

The metaphorical representation of ‘prayer’ is established in MIPVU terms. Used in combination with variations of the verb ‘يقيم/yuqiim/make erect’ corroborates the deliberate use of the metaphorical sense. Let’s examine the more illuminated and illuminating example of ‘pulling down’ in (2).

In (2), ‘prayer’ is one of several objects used in relation to the verb ‘lahuddimat/there would be pulled down’. The reader will most probably overlook the original abstract nature of ‘prayer’ replaced with, and sacrificed for, the sake of its surrounding concrete objects including monasteries and even mosques. The reader will discern two levels of meaning: contextual and basic:

### **Step 1. Contextual meaning:**

In this context, the meaning of the noun ‘prayer’ is a physical building that is prone to demolition had it not been for God’s intervention.

### **Step 2: Basic meaning**

When we examine the dictionary meaning of ‘prayer’, we find out that it is described as an abstract ritual of worship in the three major religions.

### *Contextual vs Basic meaning*

The conclusion is that ‘prayer’ is used incongruently with the surrounding objects. The comparative relationship between the contextual and basic meanings can be explained.

## 5.2 Ontological Prayer

### PRAYER IS A MENTOR

<p>(8) (Al-AAnkabout 29:45)</p> <p>وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ</p>
<p>Wa ?aqimi-SSalaata ?inna-SSalaata <b>tanhaa</b> ?ani lfaħšaa? walmunkar</p>
<p>and establish regular Prayer: for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds</p> <p>Ali</p>

“Prayer”, Muslims are told by Al-Qur’an-el-Kareem, “restrains” those who perform it from ‘obscenities’ as in Ali’s translation, but it also means “deters” from committing shameful actions. Personified “Prayers”, as capitalized in Ali, are conceptualized and authorized as a Mentor or Guide. The concept: “Prayers” pause these brief-life activities. “?lfaħšaa?” (uttered obscenities) and “?l-munker” (obscenities rejected by the mind).

This case, where “Prayers” are personified, matches the third-case mapping model theory defined by Ahrens where



“novel metaphors that do not follow the mapping principle” (2016, p. 12). Al-Qur’an-el-Kareem is the word of Allah to a Muslim, the voice of Allah:

(9)	(Al-Nahl 16:90)	وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ
Wa <b>yanha</b> ʔani ʔlfahšaaʔ walmunkar		
and He forbids all shameful deeds		
Ali		

The verb “تَنْهَى/tanhaa/ forbid (Shakir)/restrains (Ali)” means to stop verbally. Both ayahs use identical verbs “يَنْهَى/yanhaa/ forbids” refereeing to Allah, and “تَنْهَى/ tanha/ deters” Muslims from evil words and thoughts. Provided it is well-established, prayer, as a building, contains and shields a believer from all kinds of verbal, pictorial and mentally meditated obscenities.

“Tanhaa” is derived from “نَهَى/nahaa/ reached the end” (Mustapha, 2010, p. 960), a transitive verb. However, the direct object is missing, or intentionally deleted, which might be interpreted as an allusion to Prayer in all established versions of “religion”. The action of “restraining” believers from uttering or doing obscenities can be attributed to “Prayer”, conceptualized thus as a Mentor. “nahaa” is used intransitively in two cases: when, and only when, it is an inner issue; the

restraining action originates inside the believer. Otherwise, the object is always there.

The other case is where “Prayer” is entitled to do its sacred job on behalf of Allah. Here, “Prayer” is not conceptualized via mapping where “novel metaphors that do not follow the mapping principle” (Ahrens, 2016: p. 12).

### 5.3 Orientational prayers

#### PRAYER IS UP.

(12)	(An-Nissaa qs 4:103)
إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَوْقُوتًا	
?inna-SSalaata kanat ʕala lmu?miniina kitaban mawquuta	
For such prayers are enjoined on believers at stated times. (Ali)	

The use of the preposition “على/ ʕala /on” suggests the higher position of “prayers”. The prompted meaning would be that in Islam prayers are looked up to, respected and waited for, as in the Prophetic hadith that a Muslim should wait for the entering of the time of prayer as the infallible connection between a Muslim and Allah: “وانتظار الصلاة بعد الصلاة”/awaiting one prayer (time) after another” (Hadeeth No. 251 in Muslim 2011).

## 6 Conclusion

This paper has traced three conceptual metaphors involving “prayer” in Islamic belief:

PRAYER IS A BUILDING

PRAYER IS A MENTOR

PRAYER IS UP

The use of the process of metaphor identification devised by the Pragglejaz group revealed the fact that it can be easily applied to Arabic language. The identification device provides a stepped-process that renders easy the task of pinpointing exactly where the incongruence occurs in an utterance resulting in metaphor-related units. Prayer constitutes a basic component in the life journey of a Muslim. It is conceptualized as a building that holds and shields a Muslim from the evil attacks of his own self, by separating that bad side and fortifying resistance in the face of the evil self. It is the voice of that self that is vanquished by prayer:

(14) (Yussuf 12:53) إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ
inna alnnafsa laammaratun bialssooi
the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil, Ali

The number of participants in the above image is four. Allah speaks to the Muslim through prayer and shields him

from evil words and thoughts. On the opposite side there is the self that delivers its evil through the tongue and the mind.

Al-Qur'an-ol-Kareem, believed to be the last true divine message of Allah emphasizes the importance of prayer in the journey of a Muslim as the main connection with Allah. In prayer, a Muslim has to repeat the vows of obedience Allah has taught those who believe in Him. A Muslim does so as many times as he stands in prayer before his Creator.

The result of the combination of the three metaphors is achieving both inner and social peace. Firstly, a Muslim realizes that "prayer" will protect him/her from the evils of the "self" and shield him/her against the Devil's control. Secondly, "Prayer" as a MENTOR will prevent a Muslim from thinking (the will), saying (tongue) what might hurt the society.

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Symbols used in the phonemic transcription of Arabic phones  
(IPA)

**A. Consonants**

Arabic	Description	Transcription
أ	Voice glottal stop	ʔ
ب	Voiced bilabial stop	b
ت	Voiceless dento-alveolar stop	t
ث	Voiceless interdental fricative	θ
ج	Voiced post-alveolar fricative	j
ح	Devoiced pharyngeal fricative	ħ
خ	Voiceless velar fricative	x
د	Voiced dento-alveolar	d
ذ	Voiced interdental frivative	ḏ
ر	Voiced alveo-palatal trill	r
ز	Voiced alveolar fricative	z
س	Voiceless alveolar fricative	s
ش	Voiceless alveopalatal fricatives	ʃ
ص	Voiceless velarized alveolar fricative	S
ض	Voiced velarized dento-alveolar stop	Ḍ
ط	Voiceless velarized dento-alveolar stop	ṭ
ظ	Voiced velarized interdental fricative	Z
ع	Voiced pharyngeal fricative	ʕ

Arabic	Description	Transcription
غ	Voiced uvular stop	ɣ*
ف	Voiceless labio-dental fricative	f
ق	Voiceless uvular stop	q
ك	Voiceless velar stop	k
ل	Voiced alveolar lateral	l
م	Voiced bilabial nasal	m
ن	Voiced alveolar nasal	n
ه	Voiceless glottal fricative	h
و	Voiced labiovelar glide	w
ي	Voiced palatal glide	y

## **B. Vowel endings and long vowels**

Symbol	Description	example
i	Front short close vowel	/xaaliq/ creator
ii	Front long close vowel	/qaliil/ a little
a	Front short open vowel	/balad/ country
aa	Back long close vowel	/muhaarib/ warrior
u	Front long open vowel	/qul/ say
uu	Back long close vowel	/□ uruud/ parcels