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LIGHT AND DARKNESS IN PALESTINE FOLKLORE

T. CANAAN

(JERUSALEM)

A study of the effect of the two antagonistic phenomena in nature, light and darkness, on the life of the present inhabitants of Palestine (who are in many respects as primitive as their ancestors of two thousand years ago) may explain certain allusions in the Bible.

The Palestinian peasants use oil and paraffin lamps, candles and torches. The oil lamp is as simple and as crudely made as it was thousands of years ago.¹ Until about fifty years ago it was still, as in Old Testament times,² an indispensable utensil in every household. The oil-lamps vary in size, shape and number of wick nozzles. They are known by the names *srádj*,³ *dauw*, *mišbāh* and *nauwāseh*. The first name is the most frequent and the last refers only to the smallest kind, which normally gives but a faint glimmer. The wick (*ftīleh*, *sfēfeh*⁴) is made of cotton threads or cotton cloth.⁵ If the wick is broad it bears the same *sfēfeh*, but if several threads

¹ See the illustrations given by I. BENZINGER, *Hebräische Archäologie*, 1927, figs. 127, 128; and those of the *Realencyclopädie der Vorgeschichte*, 1924, vol. I, plate 105, figs. f, g, h.

² 1 Kings 11³⁶; Jer. 25¹⁰; Job 18¹⁰.

³ *Nibrās* is the classical word. It is of Syriac origin. See *muḥīt el-muḥīt* p. 2032.

⁴ The classical expressions are *gubālah* غُبَالَة, and *fatīleh*, while *sfēfeh* is known in this sense in *muḥīt*.

⁵ It seems that wicks were made in Biblical times from flax (Is. 42³) and according to the Mishnah, Sukkah 5^a, wicks (*p'ḥīlīm*) for the Temple were made from the worn-out cotton drawers and girdles of the priests.

are twisted or woven together, it is called *ftileb*. The oil-lamp is an oval, shallow earthenware vessel with sides turned slightly inwards and pointed at one end. It is either open like a saucer, or its upper surface is closed in, leaving two openings, a large one through which the vessel is filled with oil and a smaller one for the wick. The first form is the more usual. The simplest lamps have but one wick nozzle, called *šammámeh*¹ (Nazareth) or *nammúneh*,² but there are lamps with several openings from which wicks protrude. Formerly the richer peasants used to have metal lamps which were set on a high metal candlestick. Such a lamp always had several wick nozzles.

I have often seen lamps made of simple tin. They were conical in shape with two openings, one for the oil and the other for the wick. Instead of the earthenware *srádj*,³ the very poor sometimes use an ordinary empty, shallow tin that once contained preserved food. The oil lamp was the common and only light the peasants and Bedouin used until some fifty years ago, when the European paraffin lamp, *qandil kâz*, took its place.

In Palestine olive oil⁴ is used for the *srádj*, while among the Bedouin, where oil is scarce and butter plenty, the latter is nearly always met with. During the last war sesame oil (*sîridj*)⁵ which is cheaper than olive oil, was commonly used. It gives off a slightly disagreeable smell.

Some believe that a few grains of salt put in the olive oil will improve the light. Others think that the salt causes the wick to absorb the oil more slowly. Hence salt is added as an economy. Some mix the powdered fruits of *Styrax off.*, L. (*‘abbar*) with the oil, believing that it improves the smell.⁶

¹ Also known in *muḥit*, p. 1125.

² Not known in the classical language in this sense.

³ I have seen such tins in many a sanctuary.

⁴ A proverb says *illi fî srádjuh zét biqūih*, "the person who has oil in his lamp will (be able to) light it." It means figuratively that a person who possesses virtues will shine before others.

⁵ *šlit* is the classical word for olive and sesame oil. *sîridj* is also known; it is of Persian origin (see *muḥit*).

⁶ I owe this information to the kindness of OMAR EFF. S. EL-BARGHUTI.

Such an oil lamp can only emit a faint light. A lamp giving a dim light is called *ḍaww el-ghūleh*, the light of the *ghūleh*, an expression also used of the fire-fly, the classical Arabic name of which is *hubāhib*. But the peasants, who go as a rule very early to bed, do not require more light. They have no sewing, knitting, reading or writing to do, and the housewife's ordinary duties, spreading out the bedding, grinding the corn¹ and the like, need but little light.

Larger lamps with several wicks give a stronger light.² The oil lamp is always placed on some raised object. As a rule a small clay bracket is fixed in the wall to hold the *srādj*. It is called *masradjeh*, *rudqah*.³ At times it is placed in a small niche, *lāqah*⁴ (cf. Matt. 5¹⁵; Mark 4²¹). A modification of the oil lamp is the *ṣawwāneh* (night-light) which was and is still used in towns. It is a European invention.

Whenever men assemble for any official or festive gathering they meet during the summer months in the courtyard outside the house, and in the winter months in the guest-house (*madāfeh*). In both cases a large fire is made which, beside giving light and warmth, is used for boiling coffee. Such a fire is made of brushwood or dried thistles. Often, especially in the winter months, green olive-wood branches are used to feed the fire. Clouds of smoke fill the hermetically closed room, irritating the mucous membranes and caus-

¹ While the grinding of wheat is at present the work of nearly every woman in the villages, in towns it is the office of the humblest and youngest female slave or hired servant. No male person humbles himself to do such degrading work. The same custom prevailed in Biblical times. We read: "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstone and grind meal... (Is. 47¹²); "The faces of elders were not honoured. The young men bare the mill" (Lam. 5^{12,13}); "All the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill" (Ex. 11⁶). See also Judg. 16²¹.

² Lamps with several openings for wicks have been found in various excavations in Palestine, in Gezer (*Realenx. der Vorgeschichte*, vol. I, p. 388), and in Ta'nak and Megiddo (BENZINGER, l.c. p. 107).

³ *rudqah* is unknown to *mabīl*.

⁴ See *Mohammedans Saints and Sanctuaries*, p. 27.

ing a burning sensation to the eyes (see Prov. 10²⁶; Is. 65⁵). One wonders how the peasants endure these irritating fumes.¹

Paraffin is now used not only in the cities but in most houses in the villages. These lamps need not description. To fill such a lamp with paraffin and to clean it is expressed by the word *'ammar*,² "to keep in a prosperous state," "to furnish."³

Wick-tongs or snuffers seem to have been known in Biblical times⁴; they are not required for the wick of an oil lamp though useful for a paraffin lamp.⁵

The richer peasants use candles (*šami'*). They distinguish *šami' nahl* from *šami' šahm*, the former being made from beeswax and the latter of animal fat. Beeswax candles are the more costly and more highly esteemed. Candles are generally put in a candlestick, *šama'dāneh*, or stuck on the wall bracket.

Torches, *maš'ail*, are chiefly used in festal processions, as at weddings,⁶ the return of a friend from a long journey or the release of an important person from gaol. In the last two cases the young women of the village assemble and come in procession with their torches to the person's house. They welcome him with loud singing and *zaghārit*. Torches are also sometimes used if the funeral of some important peasant takes place at night. One end of a piece of hard wood is wrapped up with old rags soaked in oil, paraffin or, more rarely, butter. Candles often take the place of torches. Formerly they were seen both in towns and villages, but now only in villages. Candles are very common at Christian wedding processions, especially when they take place by night, and at funeral ceremonies in a church. They are also usual at Mohammedan circumcisions. Owing to their offensive fumes torches are now almost entirely confined to out-of-door ceremonies. The use of

¹ See also JAMES NEIL, *Everyday Life in the Holy Land*, London and New York, 1920, p. 63.

² This expression is mainly used in the sense of building a house (*'ammar bêt*).

³ "Light a lamp" (*iqwī srādj*), "light the shrine" (*iqwī el-Maqām*), but not *iqwī 'alēh*, as KAHLE, PJ, VIII, p. 140. The last expression has another meaning.

⁴ Ex. 25³⁸; 1 King 7⁴⁹.

⁵ A hurricane-lamp with an oil or petroleum light is called *fniār*.

⁶ L. BAUER, *Volksleben im Lande der Bibel*, p. 94.

torches is referred to in the Bible (Judg. 7, 16f.).¹ Perhaps the oil-lamps of the ten virgins, when they went to meet the bridegroom, were torches (Matt. 25¹⁻¹²). The "band of men and officers from the chief priests and pharisees" who came with Judas to arrest Christ carried torches (John 18³).

In Palestine (but more often in the Lebanon) resinous pine-wood was cut into long strips (*ʿaṣābīc*, fingers) and used for torches. These gave a fairly good light and an agreeable odour. In the Lebanon they are called *liqṣ*.² In some places wood used for pressing out olives (*baṣab badd*) served the same purpose. A common name for such a light is *miṣhāb* (and *mushāb*).³ These seem to be unknown in the villages around Jerusalem.

Another way of making a bright light is to set fire to ashes mixed with paraffin or, more rarely, with oil. A vessel containing such a light, and set on the roof of a house or on the top of a mountain, was used in some parts of Palestine to announce to the surrounding villages the recovery of some important person who had been seriously ill.⁴ In the Lebanon the Christians, who practice the same custom, place these lights on the tops of mountains during the night of the Feast of the Cross.⁵ They were usually arranged in the form of a cross. Such a light is called *masʿalet ramād*. That a similar custom was known to the ancient Arabs is apparent from several classical idioms.⁶

At present Lux lamps are used in many villages, especially on festive occasions. This year I noticed at Nebī Mūsā that coffee houses and shops were lit up with Lux lamps, and at Nebī Rûbîn they were lit up with electricity. In 1927, when called at night to Bêt Fadjjâr to visit a woman undergoing abnormally difficult labour, I found the inhabitants gathered in an open place amusing themselves by the light of a Lux lamp in preparation for a wedding.

¹ See *Realenç.*, l. c.

² *Muḥīt*, p. 1910.

³ The classical word for it is *el-qabas* (*muḥīt*, p. 1654).

⁴ Heard from OMAR Eff. S. EL-BARGHUTI.

⁵ Heard from Mr. A. FARIS.

⁶ اشهر من نار على علم

كانه علم في راسه نار

Thus civilization's paraffin, Lux and electric lamps are completely replacing old methods.

In Mohammedan sanctuaries and oriental Christian churches oil lamps and candles are still common.

In vowing a light to any holy place or holy person the usual formula is: "I will light thee, NN. (the name of the saint) such or such a number of candles!" or "I will give thee, NN. two *raṭls* of olive oil!" The number, size and quality of the candles are exactly described. One may find even in the simplest sanctuaries in the most isolated places oil lamps and very often candles. Most of the shrines are lit up in the night between Thursday and Friday; and where the shrine has no *qayim* (guardian) to attend to this, some pious woman vows to go regularly for a certain time to light the lamp.¹

Oil plays a special rôle in popular belief and usage. According to the belief of the ancient Arabs and of the present inhabitants of Palestine the olive tree possesses great virtues. Its fruit and its oil are staple articles of diet. The oil is used as food both alone and in its raw state² and in conjunction with most cooked³ and uncooked foods.⁴ All kinds of fat (olive oil, sesame oil and butter, *samneh*) are known in Galilee by the name *qufrab* (*qaffart et-ṭabīḥ* I put fat in the food).⁵ The ancient Arabs believed that the leaves of the olive tree boiled with vinegar cure tooth-ache, and that the decoction sprinkled in a house drives away flies. The resin acts favourably on haemorrhoids. Bread soaked with an infusion of the resin kills mice, and ointment made from it heals scabies. The oil itself removes worries, strengthens the nerves, cures the pathological condition called *bulgham*, improves the character and sanctifies

¹ Some Bedouin tribes light an oil-lamp in the *ṭīqah* of the tomb of their important *šéhs*.

² *baghammis ḥubḥ (i)bxét*, I dip bread in oil (and eat it). Oil was supplied by Solomon to Hiram's workpeople as food, 2 Chron. 2¹⁵.

³ Food cooked with meat and butter (*samneh*) is called *ṭabīḥ ḥafar*, while that in which oil is used, is called *ṭabīḥ syāmī*.

⁴ Such as oil with *ḥa'tar* (thyme), *labaneh* (milk-curd) and all preparations in which *ḥīneh* (dregs of sesame-oil) enters.

⁵ *Muḥīt*, p. 1743.

the soul.¹ According to the commentators of the Qoran, the Prophets, and Mohammed in particular, used only olive wood tooth picks which prevented the teeth from decaying and also gave the mouth a good odour.² According to a popular proverb, *es-samm laẓ-ẓên uiz-ẓêt lal-^caşabên*, "Butter is for beauty and oil is for (strengthening) the nerves."³ Another saying praises the oil as "the nails" which make the knees firm (*eẓ-ẓêt masâmir er-rukab*). "The olive tree has the honorific names 'the blessed Tree' (*eş-şadjarah el-mubâarakah*) and the 'Tree of Light' (*şadjarat en-nûr*)."⁴ The peasants of Palestine sometimes swear by the olive tree saying, "By the Life of the Tree of Light" (*uihyât şadjarat en-nûr*). Another form is "By the life of Him who put the oil in the olives" (*uihyât man 'anzal eẓ-ẓêt fiẓ-ẓêtûn*).⁵ According to the Qoran, Surah xcvi, God himself swore by this tree and therefore it bears the name "the blessed Tree." It was given to Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Paradise and it was the first plant to appear after the flood.⁶

Oil⁷ is still commonly used in popular medicine as in Biblical times (Is. 1⁶; Luke 10³⁴; James 5¹⁴). It still forms part of religious rites (cf. Gen. 20¹⁸; Lev. 2^{15f.}; 14¹²) and it is much used in magic rites. Several passages in the Old Testament show that the olive tree played an important rôle both in the civil and religious life of the Israelites.

The Qoran says of the olive tree: "The oil thereof would give light though no fire touched it."⁸

The tree is thus regarded as holy. Its supernatural qualities are shown in other ways. Among the Mohammedans *ẓêtûnet en-nabi*, "the olive tree of the Prophet," which grows in the Temple Area between the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque el-Aqsa, is believed to have grown from a stone thrown at this spot by the Prophet

¹ *Dâiratu l-ma'ârif*, vol. IX, p. 331.

² SALE, *The Koran*, p. 449, footnote g.

³ The dual is probably used for the rhyme.

⁴ CANAAN, *Plantlore*, JPOS, VIII, p. 160.

⁵ CANAAN, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, p. 143.

⁶ Gen. 8¹¹; *Fahr er-Râzi*, VI, p. 174.

⁷ Oil is mentioned more than two hundred times in the Bible.

⁸ Surah xxiv 35.

during his miraculous visit to Jerusalem.¹ The Christians say that the olive trees bow down in veneration on the night of the feast of the Holy Cross, when the heavens open and the light of Paradise shines on earth.²

The olive tree's virtues are found in still higher degree in the oil itself. With oil, kings and the elect were anointed. Exactly as in Biblical times³ the present Palestinian honours oil as the best and most fitting substance to be offered at his sanctuaries. Formerly only the finest quality was offered, whereas now, because of poverty, any sort may be vowed. But one still sometimes hears specified the best quality, *zēt ifāh*, and *zēt ghafīs*.⁴ Oil taken from the lamps of a shrine is a more effective cure for diseases than common oil. Wicks soaked with oil from the lamps of several *awliā*, local saints, are swallowed by sterile women in the belief that this method will fulfil their lack. Others in the like belief carry the wick as a *hidjāb* (amulet).⁵

The oil symbolises clearness and purity. *šāfi miṭl ez-zēt* means "as clear as oil" (Zech. 4¹²).⁶ A person who is successful in life is compared to oil: "NN. is like oil, always (floating) on top" (*fulān miṭl ez-zēt dāyman lafōq*).

The Palestine *fellaḥ*, who is still unspoilt by western ideas, dreads darkness, and therefore night; for that is the time when evil spirits roam. Therefore the oil lamp burns in many houses the whole night through.⁷ This custom, however, is not universally practised among all classes of peasants. In some villages it is commoner than in others, but fifty years ago it was more general.

¹ On a certain day, when the soul of the Prophet is said to descend and rest on this tree, the twigs begin to shake.

² *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, p. 142, 143. Some believe that the heavens open also on the day of the Ascension of the Blessed Virgin. The olive trees of Gethsemane play an important rôle in the belief of many pious Christians.

³ Ex. 25²⁶; 27³⁰; Lev. 24^{3ff}.

⁴ I heard the last expression in Nazareth. Some say *fghtīs*.

⁵ *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*, p. 113.

⁶ 'énuh *šāfiyeh miṭl ez-zēt* — "his eye is clear as oil"; *zēt šāfi miṭl 'én ed-dik* — "oil as clear as the cock's eye."

⁷ CANAAN, *Dämonenglaube im Land der Bibel*, p. 16.

The families who still observe this practice persist in it no matter how feeble the light or how often the lamp needs replenishing. Also in the guest-house, and in the reception-rooms (*dawâwin*) of the chiefs of the villages, an oil lamp burns throughout the night. Families in which is a suckling child or a sick person, or with whom a visitor is sleeping, also keep a light burning. Passing by night through the narrow, crooked, deserted ways of a village we see a dim light shining through the small windows of many a house.

Formerly this custom seems to have been so prevalent that a house without a light in the night meant that that house was deserted and uninhabited, or that its inmates were so poor that they could not afford oil.¹

Thus light gradually came to have the significance of the continuance of life : so long as the members of the family were living and so long as the house was inhabited, a lamp continued burning.

This idea is ancient. We find many references to it in the Old and New Testaments. In Proverbs 31¹⁸ we read : "Her lamp is not put out in the night." To wish that anyone's light should be put out, was to wish him death and destruction. The latter idea is no longer familiar in Palestine, but there are traces of it in certain idioms and sayings: *allah yizlim 'alék*, *allah yi'tim 'alék*, "May God darken (everything) around you," i.e. may God kill you or make you blind. When a person puts a light out he is cursed with the words *allah yi'fi dawwak*, "May God put out your light!" meaning that he should become blind.² More will be said later about

¹ Biblical references are given below.

² Some curses meaning the destruction of a house are :

allah yihrib bêtak — May God ruin your house

allah isakkir dâr 'abûk 'al-baldt ('al-fâr) — May God close your father's house on the (bare) stones of the floor (on the mice), i.e. killing all members of the family, so that nobody is left to inhabit the house!

allah ihidd dâr 'abûk 'as-sâdt — May God destroy the house of your father down to the foundation stones!

yi'qta' zar' ummak min es-sab' zidjan — May the descendants of your mother be cut off even if she marries seven husbands!

veqta' hamirit immak — May the leaven (descendants) of your mother be cut off!

allah yi'fi srâljak — May God put your oil-lamp out!

the eyes. In the Sinai Peninsula we hear the curse, *‘amrī bibétak uyákul zétak*, “May *‘Amrī* invade your house and eat up your oil!” so that you shall be unable to burn a light. In Trans-Jordan *Mahmūd* is used instead of *‘Amrī*. *‘Amrī* is said to have been a most wicked man; whom the Bedouin dislike. Whenever anyone passes his tomb he throws a stone on it with the curse, “May God curse you!”

A saying with the contrary meaning and wishing long life is *inšallah iḏáll dárak innauwrīh*, “May your house remain shining!” It is generally used when a peasant asks for light and his request is fulfilled.

There are many references in the Bible showing that living in the dark, i.e. having no light in the night, was regarded as a severe punishment. The following verses may be quoted :

He hath made me to dwell in dark places, as those that have been long dead (Lam. 3⁶).

Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness (Prov. 20²⁰).

I have spread my couch in the darkness (Job 17¹³).

Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tent, and his lamp about him shall be put out (Job 18^{5f.}).

How oft is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out? That their calamity cometh upon them? That God distributeth sorrows in his anger (Job 21¹⁷).¹

The light of the righteous rejoiceth : but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out (Prov. 13⁹).

I will take from them . . . the light of the candle (Jer. 25¹⁰).
And the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee (Rev. 18²³).

Darkness is the intensest manifestation of mourning:

All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land (Ezek. 32⁸).

¹ In this verse as well as in Prov. 7⁹ the pupil of the eye is figuratively used for the very depth of darkness.

Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness,
and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains;
and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow
of death, and make it gross darkness (Jer. 13¹⁶).

Death and the grave are described as places of uttermost darkness.¹

The natural lights of the world are the sun, the moon and stars. Their regular courses, their brightness and animating power have always deeply impressed the human race. The joint influences ascribed to the sun and moon decided in past times, and still decide, the times for agricultural activities and for religious festivals. The sun rules the day, the moon the night. In several places the Qoran speaks of the sun as "the burning lamp" and "the lamp of the day,"² and the stars as "the lamps of heaven."³ All the characteristics attributed to artificial lights are essential properties of the heavenly lights, especially of the sun. The powerful sunlight of Palestine makes darkness especially abhorrent (Eccl. 11⁷).⁴ Several idioms in Arabic illustrate how the Palestinians regard the sun as a living being. The sun "beats" (*darbatuh*) or smites a person and he suffers sun-stroke (cf. Is. 49¹⁰, Ps. 121⁶). They speak of 'ēn eš-šams,⁵ the eye of the sun, i.e. the sun disk; *dār eš-šams*, *dār el-qamar*⁶ (the house of the sun, the house of the moon), i.e. the halo of light surrounding the sun and the moon; *ghirqat eš-šams* (the sun is drowned), i.e. when it sinks beneath the horizon of the sea; 'ēn eš-šams *marīḏah*, the eye of the sun is sick, is said when the sun is temporarily clouded; but when it is covered most of the day with clouds the Palestinian speaks of 'ēn eš-šams *ramdāneh*, the eye of the sun is inflamed.

¹ Is. 9².

² Sūrah XXV 11, 61; LXXIII 13; LXX 1, 61; XXX 46.

³ Sūrah LXV 11 2.

⁴ J. NEIL, l.c., p. 68.

⁵ A folksong has *qūlū la'ēn eš-šams lā tihmāšī* — "Tell the eye of the sun not to get hot!"

⁶ CANAAN, *Kalender*, ZDPV, vol. XXXVI, p. 289. A variation of the proverb mentioned there is *dār eš-šams maḥar*, *dār el-qamar safar*.

The sun, it is believed, is drawn from east to west by a company of angels. The angels that draw it in the morning are old and feeble, but the angels that draw it in the evening are young and strong; hence the sun moves slowly in the morning, and quickly in the evening. The rays, frequently seen at sunset issuing from the sun's disk, are the ropes by which it is drawn. Out of respect for the sun's heavenly nature no Palestinian in the fields or in the desert will perform his natural needs while turning his face (*yistaqbil*) to the sun, but he turns his face (and so his private parts and anus) to the north or to the south.

No honest person, it is said, can look directly at the sun, for who can gaze at the face of what is divine? Only a harlot looks at it shamelessly, which is obvious proof of her bad manners.

In welcoming the moon Palestinians say *ibill ihlâlak uidjill djalâlak uydjalak 'alênâ šahr imbâarak*, "May your New Moon appear (like a crescent) and your might be high. May God make it a blessed month for us!" In Rabbinical literature we read that "he who sees the New Moon is like one who greets Divine Majesty."¹ This belief may explain the Arabic custom.

The relation of the sun to the powers of darkness will be discussed later. Though the heavenly bodies were worshipped by the ancient Semites (2 Kings 11¹², 21^{3,5}, 23⁵, Jer. 19¹³, Zeph. 1⁵) there are no sure indications of the survival of such worship in Palestine.

At twilight or at night *'awlia* (saints) sometimes cause by supernatural means a green light to appear and disappear at intervals in their *maqâm* or on their tomb. No storm, however violent, can blow it out. Such a sign, accepted by the Arabs of Palestine as proof that the place is inhabited by the soul of some benevolent supernatural power,² is never met with in places haunted by demons. This belief has its parallel in the story of the burning bush, described in Exod. 3², where we read: "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush."

The eyes are "the light of a man," *el-ênên dauw el-insân*. A

¹ Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. VIII, p. 83.

² *Mohammedan Saints*, p. 73.

blind man, deprived of the blessings of light, living his whole life in darkness, is held to suffer the worst of inflictions. The expression used is "His two lights are put out" (*inṭafat nūrénuh*). Any other infirmity is more tolerable: *balá 'ahuan min balá uil-ksáh 'ahuan min el-ʿamá*—"One misfortune is easier than another, and being crippled is a milder (infliction) than blindness." *Eṭ-ṭaraš 'ahuan min el-ʿamá*—"Deafness is a milder (infliction) than blindness," for the first infirmity is believed to befall important men, while blindness is the chastisement of the lowest class (*eṭ-ṭaraš lal-'akâbir uil-ʿamá lal-ḥarāfīs*).¹

Loss of sight is thought to affect the whole character for the worse. The following proverbs convey this idea: *lâ ʿatab illa ʿan-naẓar*—"No blame (can be made) except to (those having) eye-sight," (for the blind are naturally expected to be impudent and to do wrong deeds); *'ida itṣabbahṭ bil-'aʿwar ma bitsūf ḥēr*—"If you meet a one-eyed man as the first person in the morning, you will have no luck (that day)";² *el-'aʿwar djiqim*—"The one-eyed is insolent"; *ʿén el-ḥurr mizân*—"The eye of a free (noble) man is a balance (i.e. accurate in justice)"; *lôlá ʿénhá mâ ḥadd qarashâ*—"Were it not for her eye nobody would have pinched her," i.e. were it not for the play of her eyes with which she coquetted and thus entangled men, none would have approached her; *illî biyâḥuḍ min 'aquḍluḥ biyʿma*—"He who takes (and follows) his advice will become blind," for he is a dishonest person, whose advice corrupts and destroys. *el-ʿén mrâyet el-qalb*—"The eye is the mirror of the heart." A person who has no clear sight is said to be *'aʿmâ el-baširah* "blinded in his intelligence." If a person asks somebody's advice concerning an enterprise he says, *udrub ʿénak*, or *naẓrah*, meaning "Let your eye rest upon this . . .," and tell me your opinion.

Intelligence has its seat in the eye (cf. Num. 10³¹). Sight and blindness are often compared with light and darkness. The Qoran

¹ *Ḥarāfīs* is unknown to *muḥīṭ*, Belot, Hava, Kassâb and Hammâm. It is probably the transposition of *ḥaršafa* see *muḥīṭ*, p. 375. Wahrmond gives the singular and the plural (*ḥarfūs* and *ḥarāfīs*) as "Mensch der gemeinsten Klasse."

² *Sûrah LXXX* begins "He (i.e. the Prophet) frowned, and turned aside, because the blind man came unto him."

(Sûrah xii 15) says, "Say, shall the blind and the seeing be esteemed the same? or shall darkness and light be accounted the same?"

Some of the worst curses are those connected with the loss of sight: *yi'mi dawwak*—"May God blind your light (eyes)!" *allah yi'mik*—"May God blind you!" *yâ damâuiyeh itghammid 'énék*—"May a haemorrhagic inflammation close your eyes!" *allah iyzlim başarak u başirtak*—"May God darken your sight and your intelligence!" St. Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Ephesians (4¹⁸) of "blindness of the heart." A person afflicted with an 'evil eye' is supposed to be possessed with an evil spirit whose poisonous rays emanate through that person's eyes. Such people cause great horror and misfortune; they are dreaded.

These ideas illustrate many passages in the Bible, in the time of which most of them were already current. For example:

The lamp of the body is the eye (Matt. 6²²; cf. Luke 11³⁴).

If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness (Matt. 6²³; cf. Luke 11³⁴).

Is thine eye evil? (Matt. 20¹⁵).

Having the eyes of your heart enlightened (Eph. 1¹⁸).

The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walketh in darkness (Eccles. 2¹⁴).

I made a covenant with mine eyes (Job 31¹).

Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind? (John 9²).

The Lord shall smite thee with blindness (Deut. 29²⁸).¹

In Palestine eight months of the year belong to summer. The short spring and autumn, each of about one month's duration, are generally reckoned in with summer. Throughout this period, especially during the middle five months, the sun shines with all its power. Nearly every night in the year (except for a few cloudy nights in winter) the moon² and the stars shine brilliantly. These

¹ Other passages are Lev. 26¹⁶, 2 Kings 6¹⁸, Zeph. 1¹⁷, Acts 9⁸, 16⁶.

² A saying teaches *miš kull el-'aiyām qamrah urabī'*,—"Not all the days are full-moon (days) and spring (days)."

conditions have caused the Palestinians from time immemorial to love and adore light. They associated light with God, and the detested darkness was regarded as the symbol and the realm of God's enemies, Satan and his followers, the evil spirits. This, in brief, explains why everything that pertains to light is considered to have good attributes and to be a good omen, whereas everything pertaining to darkness is considered a bad omen and in some way connected with the demons.

Many personal names, derived from light and shining bodies, owe their popularity to this same idea. Thus we find: *nūr* f. = light; *munīr*, m. *munīrah*, f. = shining, bright; *nūrān*, m. = light (from *nūr*); *nūri*, m. = my light; *munāwar*, f. = shining; *mušriq*, m. *mušriqah*, f. = shining (like the rising sun); *diyā'*, f. = shining light; *faḍā'*, f. = lighted place,¹ light; *lam'ah*, f. = flattering light; *ṣubḥ*, m, *ṣabḥah*, f. = morning; *nhār*, m. = day; *mišbāḥ*, m. = lamp; *fānūs*, m. = lantern; *šam'ah*, f. = candle; *barq*, m. = lightning; *šhāb*, m. = bright meteor, (star); *badr*, m. = full-moon; *hlāl*, m. = moon-crescent; *qamar*, f. = moon; *nidjm*, m. *nidjmeh*, f. = star; *tureiyā*, m. and f. Venus; *šams*, f. = sun.

A child who is born in darkness in a place where, for some reason, no light was available at his birth, is called *'itmeh* = darkness. The blossoms of plants bear the collective name *nuwār*, from *nūr* (light), in that they represent the 'shining' part of the plant. *Nuwārah*, a feminine name, is derived from this word.

In describing a person of high moral standing, especially if he has a gentle face, they say "his face radiates light," *uidjhū minuir*, *uidjhū bist'c nūr*. The same expression occurs in the Bible. Thus in the account of Moses' descent from Mount Sinai we read (Ex. 34²⁹) "The skin of his face shone."² The same is said of Christ: "His face did shine as the sun."³ The Palestinian tells us that several saints who have appeared to mortal beings had a halo of light around their face (*uidjhum biḍui*). If a person intervenes between

¹ In the classical Arabic language it means "large plain," "unoccupied place."

² Ex. 34²⁹; 2 Chron 3^{7,18}.

³ Matt. 17²; Luke 9²⁹.

another and the light or the light of the sun, he is told, *ifdi tansūf uidjih rabnā*—"Make light (i.e. change your position which is keeping the light away) so that we may see the face of our Lord." God's face is here compared with light. The Bible describes not only God's face¹ as emanating light, but His whole being is luminous.² The Qoran also calls God "Light." Unbelievers try to extinguish this light.³ The prophet Muhammed bears the honorific title "Light."⁴ Jews,⁵ Christians and Muhammedans⁶ speak of their holy books as "Light."

A fierce look is described as *uidjih muẓlim*, "a dark face." A mother uses the term of endearment *yā nūr 'iūni*—"O, thou light of my eyes!" *yā nūr qalbī*—"O, thou the light of my heart!" *yā šam'ī*—"O my shining candle!" A good wife is called "the light of the stranger (husband)"—*el-marāh daww el-gharīb*.⁷

A man is advised "to walk in the light," *imšī 'anūr*, which means to study carefully his proposed plans and to choose only the sure way. The same idea is conveyed in the greetings "May God light your way"—*allah inauwir ẓariqak*; "May God shine upon you"—*allah yifdi 'alék, allah inauwir 'alék*⁸; "May God make your luck to shine"—*allah inauwir sa'dak*.⁹ A curse in the contrary sense is: "May God darken your projects"—*allah yizlim sa'dak*. A dissatisfied person, who is never pleased however well he is served, is described by the saying, "Even if I should light the ten fingers

¹ Ps. 4⁶; 44⁸; 89¹⁶.

² Ex. 24¹⁰; Ps. 30⁹; Job 36³⁰.

³ Sūrah IX 31; XXIV 35; LXI 8.

⁴ Sūrah XVI 15.

⁵ Prov. 6²².

⁶ Sūrah IV 173; LXIV 8.

⁷ For the explanation of the expression "stranger" (which means here "husband") I quote the proverb *ba'd abūyī uimmī kull en-nās ghurabā*—"All people, except my father and mother are strangers." A husband is a stranger to his betrothed bride until the wedding is over.

⁸ An Arabic proverb teaches *illī 'dawwaluh šarṭ 'aḥrub nūr*—"A thing which begins with a condition ends with light," i.e. everything which is based on a clear understanding ends favourably.

⁹ Consolation, happiness joy, a good conscience are symbolized in the Bible by light; Job 12²², 22²⁹, Is. 5⁸⁰, 58⁸.

he will not be satisfied"—in *ḍauṭluḥ el-ʿaṣarah miš ʿadjabuḥ*. The Arabic word *zālim*, "tyrant, unjust oppressor," is from the same root (*zlm*) as *zālām* and *zulmah*, darkness. The Bible compares fear, sorrow, affliction, ignorance, sin, mourning, confusion, doubt and vexation with darkness.¹

The difference between light and darkness plays also a great part in the interpretation of dreams. We find that every dream concerned with light, the sun, a lamp, oil or the day has a favourable interpretation, while dreams concerned with night or darkness are a bad omen. This is shown in the following examples,² familiar to the inhabitants of Palestine. If anyone dreams that he passed through the night into the shining day, or from a dark place into light it means one of the following things: that he is passing from infidelity to belief in God, from poverty to riches, from failure to success, from sin to repentance, from blindness to sight, from imprisonment to liberty, from injustice to justice, from sickness to health, from loss to gain, or from anxiety to peace and joy.

Light indicates righteous acts, a Holy Book, science, or a virtuous son.³

The sun indicates a king, a good father, a beautiful wife, gold, science or riches.

The day indicates relief, many children, happiness, or the return of an absent relative or friend.

The oil lamp, if lighted, means the cure of one that is sick, the birth of a child to a childless man or a faithful guardian. If the lamp is put out it foretells the death of one that is sick, the loss of a position, or a faithless guardian.

A candle indicates marriage, gain, a good position or belief in God.

Oil indicates health, a plentiful income, science, blessing, true faith, or light to the soul.

¹ Job 5¹⁴ and 20, 9², 12²⁶, 19⁸, 23¹⁷, 34²², 37¹⁰; Ps. 139¹¹ and 12, Prov. 2¹³, 35⁶, Eccl. 2²¹, Is. 45⁸, 47⁶, Amos 5¹⁸ and 20, Zeph. 1¹⁶, Nah. 1⁸.

² They are taken from 'Abd el-Ghani en-Nābulṣī, *ta'fīr el-'anām fī tafsīr el-'ahlām*.

³ To give anyone a "light" or a "lamp" meant in the Old Testament "to establish him," "to continue his seed," 1 Kings 15⁴, 2 Kings 8¹⁹.

An olive tree indicates a blessed man, riches or an honourable woman.¹

Darkness indicates going astray, tyranny, injustice or darkness of the soul.

Night indicates worry, imprisonment, disease, sin, tyranny, injustice or a difficult time.

The same figurative uses of light and darkness are found in the Bible (cf. Gen. 15¹², Job 10²¹, Is. 24¹¹, 47⁵, John 1⁵, 3^{19,20}, II Pet. 1¹⁹, 2⁹, I John 1⁶). The Qoran often² speaks of God leading his people from darkness to light.

The Palestinian of to-day has transferred the ideas associated with light and darkness to their corresponding colours, white and black. Thus the colour white and all white objects have come to typify good things and to count as a good omen, while black usually typifies what is evil. Good spirits³ always take the form of an animal white or green in colour, such as sheep, doves⁴ or green birds.⁵ Malicious demons take the form of an animal black or dark in colour, such as a goat,⁶ *liyena*, *ghoul* or *'arbid*.⁷ Whenever a *weli* appears to a human being, by day or by night, he is usually dressed in white. In Matt. 17² we read of Christ that "his garments became white as the light."⁸ Ps. 104² describes God as covering himself "with light as with a garment."

When offering good wishes the Palestinian says, "May God whiten your face"—*allah ibaiyiḍ uidjhak*; "May God whiten your honour"—*allah ibaiyiḍ 'arḍak*. The contrary is, "May God blacken your face," or "your honour"—*allah isauwid uidjhak, 'arḍak*. "To whiten" means to raise in honour; reputation, rank, or the like,

¹ Pressing the oil out of the olives may mean difficulty and worry.

² Sūrah V 18, XIV 1, 5, LXV 11, XXIII 43, LV 9.

³ *Mohammedan Saints*, p. 244.

⁴ Doves according to the Bible were the symbols of purity and (with pigeons) were the only birds that could be offered on the altar (Lev. 11^{14,15}; 14¹²⁰; 14²²; Num. 6¹⁰). The Holy Spirit took the shape of a dove (Matt. 3¹⁰)

⁵ Green is a holy colour.

⁶ All goats in Palestine are black.

⁷ For the difference between *haiyeh* and *'arbid* see *Mohammedan Saints*, p. 244.

⁸ Mark. 9²; Luke 9²⁹.

while to "blacken" has the contrary sense¹. The Palestinian speaks of *qalb abiaḍ*,² a white (righteous) heart, and *qalb aswad*—a black (wicked) heart; *uidjhu aswad miṭl ez-ẓift*—his face is as black as tar. Lam. 4^{7,8} uses the same idioms in describing the plight of the daughter of Israel: "Her Nazirites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk . . . [whereas now] their visage is blacker than a coal." A bad character is compared to tar. When a friend is wished "Good morning!" it is often expressed with *yâ sabâḥ abiaḍ*—" [May God give you] a white morning." The contrary is *yâ sabâḥ ẓift* (or *aswad*). The like sentiment is used if anyone receives bad news early in the day. The same expressions were already known among the ancient Arabs; thus in the Qoran we read (Sûrah III 106, 107), "On the day of resurrection some faces shall become white and other faces shall become black. And unto them whose faces shall become black God will say, Have ye returned to your unbelief, after ye had believed? therefore taste the punishment, for that ye have been unbelievers; but they whose faces shall become white shall be in the mercy of God, therein they shall remain forever."³

In dreams white objects are usually a good omen and black objects an evil omen. The ancient Arabs, who cherished the same idea, generally made figurative use of the colour white in their laudatory poems and in their satirical poems they used black objects in their figures of speech. In proclaiming the ability, excellence and hospitality of some person a white flag is often hoisted by visitors over the roof of his house.⁴ In some parts of Palestine the bridegroom on the first morning after the wedding hoists a white flag to proclaim "the honour" (*šaraf*) of his bride, namely that she was a virgin. Above the leader's tent in a Bedouin camp a white flag (*râyeḥ bêḍah*) is hoisted to guide strangers and visitors.

¹ The curse *allah ibaiyid 'énak* (May God whiten your eye) is meant literally and not figuratively.

² An Arabic poem says:

كقنديل على قبر المجوس بياض الوجه مع خبث النفوس

³ See also Sûrah III 107, XX 22, XXVII, 32, XVI 17, XXXIX 60.

⁴ For white flags at *awliâ* see *Mohammedan Saints*, p. 184.

Similar ideas about white and black existed in Biblical times. White was the symbol of God's holiness and glory; heavenly appearances are described as wearing white cloths¹. The Jewish² as well as the Egyptian³ priests wore white garments. Moral purity; innocence and justice were symbolized by the colour of white. Black on the other hand was the symbol of sin, darkness, magic, and evil.⁴

In reviewing the whole subject we see how widespread these ideas are. They constitute part of the mass of ideas, superstitions and customs inherited by the inhabitants of Palestine from the ancient Semites. Light and darkness, day and night,⁵ white and black, representing good and evil supernatural powers, are continually fighting with one another (Acts 26¹⁸, John 8², Eph. 5⁸). Whenever the first overpowers the second it drives it away and so relieves the human race from great troubles. But the evil powers soon begin the fight again, and as soon as they gain the victory they avenge themselves on suffering humanity. This idea is excellently illustrated in the explanation the peasants give for the cause of the periodic spring, reported in the present writer's *Dämonenglaube in Lande der Bibel* (Morgenland, No 21, 2nd ed., 1930, p. 16),

Whenever and wherever light shines it drives away both darkness and the powers of darkness. When Bedouin are on a journey, they make a fire every evening at the place where they pitch their tents and this is kept burning throughout the night in the belief that demons and wild animals are thus kept away. The power of the sun in counteracting the action of the powers of darkness is well illustrated in the case of *'iün el-ḥaşr*, the water of the springs used against suppression of urine.⁶ Such water must be transported from the source to the sick person during the night. The moment the

¹ Dan. 12⁶ ff.; Matt. 17², 28³, Mark 9², 16⁶ Luke 9²⁹, John 20¹².

² Is. 1¹⁸; Ps. 51⁷, 132² and ⁴6, Rev. 19⁸, 7¹⁴.

³ Gen. 41⁴²

⁴ Lam. 4⁸.

⁵ A proverb says, *şughl el-lél. maşharet en-nihit*.-- "the work of the night is the laughing-stock of the day."

⁶ JPOS, vol. I, p. 157.

rays of the sun shine on it, it loses its efficacy. An example illustrating the fight between the powers of darkness and the two most important heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon, is the belief in the cause of the eclipses of the sun and the moon. Eclipses are caused by a demon dragon who comes up from the sea and tries to swallow the sun or the moon. The frightened people assemble in the streets and on the roofs to drive the monster away and so save the sun. They shout, beat on tins and fire in the air.

The idea of God fighting the dragon was current in the time of the Old Testament; cf. Is. 51^{9f.}; Ps. 74¹³⁻¹⁷. Another phase of the unceasing fight between the "lower" and the "higher" powers is the belief that Satan and his followers continually try to overhear the decrees of the Almighty.¹ No sooner do they approach the outer region of the celestial sphere than they are chased away by "visible flames" or "shining flames" (meteors) which are thrown at them by angels guarding paradise. Although this idea is well known and common among the Muhammedans of Palestine and is taught in the Qoran,² it is of still earlier date.

The hyena is the fiercest wild animal of Palestine. It is supposed to be possessed by *djin*. In attacking a man it is said first to hypnotize him (*btidba'uh*). If he lights a match the animal is frightened, runs away and the man is saved. Many stories are told of how demons which had appeared during the night vanished away on the moment of making a light. The name of God and that of the Prophet have the same power. They are called the "light of the world," *nūr el-ʿālam* (cf. Ps. 104², John 1⁵, 1⁴⁵, 8¹², 12¹⁶),⁴ The Holy Virgin is known by the name "Mother of the Light," *imm en-nūr*.

As we have seen, demons prefer darkness and night, for they come from darkness and eventually will vanish into eternal dark-

¹ Job 15⁸.

² Sūrah XV 16; XXXVII 6 f., LXVII 7 and 8.

³ PAUL ERNO EICHLER, *Die Deschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, 1928, p. 31; CANAAN, *Dämonenglaube*, footnote 252.

⁴ Other passages are Is. 9¹², 60^{3 and 20}, 49⁶, 42⁶, Mal. 4²⁴, Phil. 2¹⁵, Matt. 5¹⁴, Rom. 2¹⁸, Eph. 5⁸.

ness. Hence they are also known by the names "the Spirits of Darkness"—*al-'aruáh ez-zulmáníyeh*, and "the Spirits of the Lower World"—*al-'aruáh es-sufíyeh* (cf. Col. 1¹³, Jude 6, 2 Pet. 2⁴). The good spirits who come from heaven bear the names "the Spirits of Light"—*al-'aruáh en-núráníyeh*, and "the Spirits of the Upper World"—*al-'aruáh il-saláwíyeh*.