

Comparison Symbolism of Light and Darkness on Mystical Vision between Kobrāwīyids and Eastern Christianity

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Abstract

In this research, 'vision' in Kobrāwīyids and Orthodox Christian mysticism is studied comparatively. Most of the mystics of both ways have experienced God as light, but some of them have experienced God in darkness or black light symbol. They asserted God's incomprehensible presence in the symbol of black light in order to purify God from any similarity. This is a light that causes the vision, but itself is not seen, because of intensity of shining and nearness. Here, I argue that despite both of the ways have many similarities on concept of the vision, Orthodox mystics describe the vision as vision of Trinity, especially vision of Christ, but Kobrāwīyid sufis do not speak of the vision of God, because they believe in the absolute transcendence of God, and describe their vision as degrees of dignity of God (Mahadber) and His manifestations.

Keywords: *Light, Darkness, Kobrāwīyieh, Orthodox, Vision.*

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Introduction

The topic of this research is a comparison between Orthodox mysticism and Kubrawiyyid Sufism on the concept of vision, both of which have common origin, so that the eastern Orthodoxy has been mixed by esoteric and spiritual epigrams more than other Christian sects, due to encountering with the especial geographical and political conditions. Eastern Christianity has close relationship with the east, specifically with the Islamic world. Kobrāwīyid, one of the greatest sufic ways of Islam which was founded by Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā (A.H.540)'s disciples, has many similarity with Orthodoxy mysticism.

Up to now, there is no work on this topic and no comparison these two paths, except a conference in southern Carolina University (2001). The eswrites of the conference collected by James Cutsinger in a book entitled *Paths to the Heart*. Considering the importance of the symbolism of colors in Kobrāwīyids, first of all we study Kobrāwīyid point of view, then Orthodox mystical one and finally compare them.

1. Kobrāwīyieh

A) Symbolism of Colors in the Mystical Vision

Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā and his disciples are famous, because of the analyzing the colors of light in mystical vision. Probably Sheikh Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā is the first sufi who describes the visible lights, which are his mystical experiences collected in a book called 'Fawāih Al-Jamāl wa Fawāih Al-Jalāl'. He considers the colorful lights as signs of the mystic states and spiritual progress. His disciples like as Najm Al-ddīn Rāzī and Ālā Al-Dawlah Simnānī (A.H.657) followed him too.

When pilgrim enters the mystical path and cleans the impurities of the heart by prayer under the guidance of the master (sheikh), he is burned by the prayer's fire, divine lights enlighten his heart accordingly; and finally the pilgrim experiences these lights. These lights at the first are passing and by means of purification would be strengthened. These passing lights are prayer and ablation, and the lights look like the lamp and candle are light of sheikh or prophet and light of *Quran* and faith. Therewith, there are transcendent lights like the large and small stars, moon and sun, which are heavenly and spiritual lights (Cf. Najm Al-din Rāzi, 1386/ 2007, pp. 289-302).

But seeing of the lights at the beginning of the path are accompanied with various colors. The color of lights is the sign of impure vision of the mystic

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and his esoteric and spiritual states. First, the pilgrim should pass from his own darkness; the human's being (the fourthfold element) is dark (Najmaddīn Kobrā, 1957, p.5). The more the pilgrim misses the aspects of soil, water, fire and wind, the more he would experience visions.

Any of 'being', 'impurified soul' and 'Satan' which every pilgrim should eject by means of mortification and continuity of silence and acceptance of the master guide (sheikh), has special color and sign. Thus, in the vision there are differences between 'being', 'impurified soul', and 'Satan'; and they should be known. Kobrā writes: "At the beginning, being is very dark and since it is purified to some extent, it would be manifested as black color, but if it be the place of Satan, its color turn into red, and whenever the Satan's trace removed from it, it becomes white. Impurified soul is dark blue at the beginning, until it is the place of Satan; it looks like spring of darkness and smoke. In these conditions, the impurified soul defeats being and the education of being depends on impurified soul. However, impurified soul is purged, the spring of goodness would flow from being, and if evil overcomes being would cause badness. Satan is impure fire mixed darkness and blasphemy (ibid, p.3).

He mentions to some signs for every soul¹ in the path in order that such a soul will recognize his or her degree of being. "The sign of the evil commander soul is a big spring which appears before that pilgrim ... If the questioner soul manages the pilgrim something like a red shining sun appears..., and the sign of the certain soul is a shining spring..." (Najmaddīn Kobrā, 1957, p.26).

Then the light overwhelms the pilgrim (his body and soul) and the divine or esoteric master² appears for the enlightened body. He is the guide of the pilgrim all over the path. This is esoteric guide at the beginning which appears as a black figure and the blackness is in fact the taints which are still in the soul of the pilgrim, The blackness is the shade of the Satan and it is better to say that it is the soul itself (Najmaddīn Kobrā, 1957, pp.32,33).

These various colors show the changing states of the pilgrim and maintain the pilgrim's esoteric darkness. Furthermore, the variety of colors simultaneously is a sign of tremendous and grace attributes of God. Various colors are merged in one and it is the sign of the pilgrim's calmness (Tamkin). Green color is the color of life and the heart and this is the last color that remains and shines (Cf. ibid, pp. 7, 46).

Thus, Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā exactly describes manifestations which are experienced as various lights by the pilgrim during the path. These manifestations are symbolized as shining points and rings. The pilgrim passes over some stages of blackness and some black and red points till the appearance of the green color, which shows that the God's grace is

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imminent. The green color is always considered as the utmost and heavenly color. In connections with this color, Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā writes: "The green color is the sign of heart's life; whenever you see this color you will fill calmness, certainty and vast heartedness, soul happiness and deep insight, all of which are the attributes of life" (ibid, pp. 6, 9). This last color is the color of calmness and unity, but Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā doesn't consider this color as an absolutely pure shining one (ibid, p.7).

The vision of the green color is related to the seventh heaven and its counterpart is in the depth of the heart i.e. at the seventh stage of heart (Latifeih Haggiyeh or divine stage)³. Therefore, these colors experienced by the mystic are related to the esoteric lights of the heart stages (microcosm) and the lights descended from the heaven (macrocosm). In fact the mystic attains the esoteric light of his or her heart and God's lights in the heavens simultaneously. These two kinds look alike and attract each other. About this point, Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā writes: "The lights are various, some of them ascend and some descend, the ascending lights are related to the heart and the descending lights belong to the heavens" (Najmaddīn Kobrā, 1957, p. 30). And the human being should find away from the heart to the heavens: "The being is a curtain between the heaven and the heart, whenever curtain becomes drawn, the light of the heart and the light of the heaven attract each other i.e. some lights ascend to the heaven and some lights descend to the heart." Due to the purity of the heart, the body will gain the color of heart as well and two kinds of the lights will be merged in each other (Cf. *Sharh Resāleye Mārefāt*, Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā) 1377/1998, p. 33).

Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā does not explain the seven stages of the being and their colors according to the seventh heaven in *Quran* completely, but his disciples especially Ala Al-Dawlah and Najm Al-ddīn Razī completed the symbolism of their own master and thereby mentioned to all of the stages (or states) and their colors. Of course according to these disciples and their master, the order and categorization of the colors are the same, but there are also some disagreements.

Like Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā, Simnānī symbolizes the last stage of the mystical path with the green color. He speaks of this seven stages: body, soul, heart, heart core, spirit, and divine (haggiyeh) (darkness of the darkness) and accordingly enumerate their colors: dark, red, white, yellow, back and green, and he relates each of them to one of the prophets (Alā Al-dawlah simnānī, b, 1383/2004, pp. 33 and 241).

Najm Al-ddīn Razī writes: "In accordance with the purification of the soul and heart, there are some lights like blue, red, yellow, white, green and sun light (black light) (Najmaddīn Kobrā, 1957, p. 32). The differences between

these two disciples' point of views is especially about the last color which is related to their opinions about the symbol of God as light or God as light of blackness. We shall describe this issue below.

B) God as Light

The similarity between God and light can be found in some religions like Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Islam concentrates on this similarity so much: "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth" (24/35). Like the other sufists, Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā considers this similarity between God and light in accordance with *Quran*. He even considers the heavens and earth, prophets, mystics, and the believers as one the same light and originates them in God's light. According to this similarity, all of the lights experienced by the pilgrim are God's lights, passing from the various colored glasses in lower stages, these lights appear as multicolored lights, but at the state of pure unity, they are not the true light or the sun itself. Since the lights are not absolutely pure and it is mixed by darkness, it appears as multicolored lights; in contrast, God's light itself has no color (Dāwud Ibn Mahmoud Alqēsarī, 1416/1937, vol. 1, pp. 474, 475; Abd Al-Rahmān Ibn Ahmad Jāmī, 1367/1982, p. 71; Mohammad Ghazzālī, pp. 101, 102). Whenever the human heart could be purified the sun light would shine and manifest in it, rather, it would be the sun itself (Najm Al-din Rāzi, 1386, 2007, p.119). In the various spiritual states, the vision of a variety of colored lights depends on the esoteric impurity of the human being. In fact combining the light and the darkness of the being causes the various colored lights.

According to Najm Al-ddīn Kobrā and Ala Al-Dawlah Simnānī, the green color is the last and at the same time, the purified color. In addition, Simnānī considers it as the absolute light which is the special attribute of God, but in spite of this point, green light is not absolutely devoid of darkness (Ālā Al-dawlah simnānī, p. 308). Sheikh Kobrā writes: "the green is the last and remaining color and it is the shining color that the sparks emanate from it. The green color is sometimes purified and sometimes darkened. Its purity is caused by overcoming of God's light and its darkness is because of the defeat of the darkness of the being" (Najmaddīn Kobrā, 1957, p. 7).

All of seven stages of being and all of the colors, although in the phase of similarity, are divine manifestations and the pilgrim can ascend through them, but each of them in the phase of pure unity is curtain or well in the way of God. And staying in each of them stops the spiritual journey and in this condition, the pilgrim may call himself as God, or claim that God has

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manifested in his being, or he is united with God. Sheikh Kobrā writes: "On the top of these stages there is a well and the pilgrim should pass over these wells" (ibid, p.9). Ālā Al-Dawlah Simnānī also calls these seven states of being as divine curtains each of which, even the last stage or the darkness of the darkness (latifyieh haggiyieh) which is green colored, has ten thousands curtains and altogether these seven stages have seventy thousands curtains. These are in fact, the divine curtains and hinders of the spiritual journey; the pilgrim should pass over them and after that, by means of the pure light attraction, he can be united with God (Ālā Al-dawlah simnānī, pp. 310-11).

C) God as Black Light

It is mentioned that God's light is absolute and devoid of any shape and quality and the colored lights are emanated from the pilgrim's being. Assimilation between God's substance and black light is mentioned by Sheikh Kobrā's disciples specially Najm Al-ddīn Razī and afterwards it is proposed openly in *Golshan Rāz* and its exegesis *Mafatih Alāejazjāz*. These mystics speak of two blacknesses (low blackness and high blackness). The low blackness is one of the first colors seen by the pilgrim at the beginning of the spiritual journey. This blackness is the shadow of Satan and that of the soul and in fact it is the darkness of the pilgrim's being. Progressing in the spiritual journey, the pilgrim sees enlightened body or the esoteric master. The master first of all, appears as a darkened figure and by means of purification, it becomes absolutely enlightened.

The mystics speak of another black light which happens at the advanced phase of the spiritual journey. This blackness is caused by the darkness of the evil commander soul and the pilgrim's being. This is the very blackness which causes the vision, but it is not visible. This is the light and the darkness simultaneously and by means of which the other appear (Corbin, 1978, pp. 99-103).

Ala Āl-Dawlah Simnānī also speaks of this light. In the sixth stage of the human being, God manifests in this color. This stage is proportionate to the Christhood of the pilgrim's being. Seeing the black curtain, the pilgrim trembles and becomes passing. In the blackness there is the life water (Ālā Al-dawlah simnānī, 1383/200, pp. 303-04, 311).

Although the black light is a significant sign in the spiritual journey, it is not the final trace in the pilgrim's journey. Simnānī considers this phase as a dangerous confusing one and believes that in this phase, the pilgrim needs to a practiced master to guide him through the curtains of this stage and bring him to a point that is the divine center of his own being (Corbin,

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1978, pp. 126-127). That is why he likes Sheikh Kobrā considers the green as the utmost of colors experienced by the pilgrim.

But according to Najm Al-ddīn Rāzī passing from the evil commander and reproachful soul, and reaching to the assured soul and also passing the various regions shown by the colored lights, the pilgrim gets to the seventh stage, the region of black light. Despite the significance of the green color, he considers the black light upper than it.

Najmī Al-ddīn Rāzī writes in Mersād Alàebād: "The multi colored light in any stage appears in a special color in the phase of reproachful soul, as a conclusion of combining of the light of prayer and the darkness of the soul. Whenever the darkness of the soul becomes less and the light of the spirit becomes more, the blue color of the soul is burn and a red light will be seen; and whenever the light of the spirit overcomes, a yellow light appears, whenever the darkness of the soul be wiped out, white light appears and whenever the light of the spirit becomes mixed with the purity of the heart, a green light would appear and whenever the heart becomes purified absolutely some light, like sun lights that reach shines beyond the power of the eye, would appear." (Najm Al-dīn Rāzī, 1386/2007, p.306). Of course the brightness of divine light will be without spiritual veils, at once, unconditioned and unlimited, without right and left, up and down, without place and time and without farness and nearness (*ibid*, p.206).

Najm Al-ddīn Rāzī considers the multi colored lights in the various stages as the spiritual journey, as a sign of the vision, as God's beauty attributes or God's kindness; and he also encounters the black lights as a sign of the as God's glory attributes. The vision of the black light is related to the absolute annihilation which is indescribable (*ibid*, pp. 307,308 & Majdhub Alishāh Hamadānī, 1351/1972, pp.129-131).

Sheikh Mahmud Shabestarī explicitly observes the blackness as the light of God's nature and writes that this blackness in the phase of the absolute annihilation (absolute marriage in God) (Mahmoud Shabestarī, 1386/2007, p. 88 & Shams Al-dīn, 1378/1999, pp. 83-85). This blackness is the return of the innate nothingness. It is also the light water which causes the immortality. This darkness is caused by the nearness to God and the close nearness causes no apprehension (Mahmoud Shabestarī, 1386/2007, p.88).

The blackness in fact does not see the black color in its low sense; hence, it is blind due to the glaring nearness to the center of the light that is God. As the sun is unseen and glaring in itself, it darkens the eye and the eye only can see the sunlight which is mixed by the darkness. As it was mentioned before, the various colored lights that experienced by the pilgrim are in fact God's attributes; although they guide the pilgrim through assimilation to God, in the phase of pure unity, in fact they are veils.

2. Orthodox Mysticism

Among the mystics of Orthodox Church, there are two symbols for describing God's vision: the symbol of light and the symbol of darkness. Both of them are taken from the mystical experiences of the Bible. The symbol of darkness was used especially by Clement of Alexandria (150-216 C.E) Gregory of Nyssa (331-394 C.E), Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (600? C.E); and they meant by these symbols, actually, the ultimate union ("face to face") with divine Mystery. More frequent than the symbol of darkness, however, is that of divine light, which was employed by Irenaeus (ca. 130-ca.200), Origen (185-253) Gregory of Nazianzus (329-391), Evagrius of Ponticus (345), the Macarian Homilies, Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) and Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) (Kallistos, 2005, p. 410 & Alfeyev, 2000, p. 1736 & Sheldarke, 2007, p. 30).

Now we explain these two kinds of symbolism.

A) Symbolism of Light: Bible and mystical writers use the symbolism of light for God more than the symbolism of darkness. The writers are interested in the symbol of light and take it as their model, not as the darkness of Sinai but Moses vision of the "pavement of sapphire stone" and "firmament of heaven in its clarity"; and in this way they saw the God of Israel; "and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for Clearness." (Exod. 24:10); Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot" (Ezekiel 1) is also important in the Jewish Mysticism and Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Mat. 17:2).

The Bible is full of expressions relating to light and divine illumination, to God who is called light: "for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light." (Ephesians 5:8), "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, Christ shall give you light." (Eph. 5:14).

In the *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, these expressions are not used as metaphors or as figures of speech, but as experience. Gnosis, the highest stage of awareness of the divine, is an experience of uncreated light, the experience that itself being light. Quoted Lossky in the book of *Mystical Theology*, Symeon, the new theologian writes: "God is Light, and those whom He makes worthy to see Him, see Him as light; those who receive Him, receive Him as light. Those who have not seen this light have not seen God; for God is Light. Those who have not received this light, have not yet received grace, for in receiving grace, one receives the divine light, and God Himself ... Those who have not yet received and not yet participated in this light, find themselves always under the yoke of the law, in the region of shadows and fantasies; they are still the children of the bondwoman. Kings or patriarchs, bishops or priests, princes or servants, seculars or monks, all

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are equally in the shadows and walk in darkness, unless they are willing to repent as they ought to do; for repentance is the gate which leads from the realm of darkness into that of light.

Therefore, those who are not yet in the light have not truly crossed the threshold of repentance ... The servants of sin hate the light, fearing that it will reveal their hidden works. Whereas the life of sinful is sometimes willfully unconscious (we shut our eyes in order not to see God), the life of grace is an increasing progress in knowledge, a growing experience of the divine light." (Lossky, 1973, pp. 218-219).

Gerogory of Nazianzus is one of the theologians that use the symbol of light frequently. He writes that the second light after God is an Angel, and the third light is a Man. There is also the light of the created world. Light is the commandment of God and the sacrament of baptism too.

Symeon regard the whole of the history of the world as one unceasing revelation of God as light (Alfeyev, 2000, p.170). Although before Symoen there were some teachings about the lightness of God and Angels in the Fathers' sayings as it was mentioned before, but it was by in that the theology of darkness was replaced by the theology of uncreated light and he is now commonly regard as a great "mystic of fire and light." Symeon speaks of his own mystical experience about Christ, the Holy Ghost and even the spiritual master. He said: "God is light, an infinite and incomprehensible light ... The Father is light, the Son is light, and the Holy Spirit is light; the three are one single light, simple, non-composite, timeless, eternal, possessed of the same honor and glory. Moreover, all that comes from Him is light; life is light; immortality is light; the source of life is light; the living water is light; love, peace, truth, the door of the kingdom of heaven, and the very kingdom of heaven are light... for there is one God in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the light inaccessible, pre-existing the ages ..." (ibid, pp. 170-172).

Except the expression like light and fire, there are other expressions like sun used for God by Symeon and other fathers which all of these expressions are the same (p. 238). The important point is that the light and fire experienced by the mystics are not God's nature (entity), but they are divine energies. Thus, the vision of the mystics is in fact, the vision of divine energies and God's entity remains unattainable. It is not only by analogy with physical light that God is called light. The divine light is not an allegorical or abstract thing; it is given in mystical experience. This experience of the divine is given to each according to his capacity, and can be greater or less

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according to the worthiness of him who experiences it. Perfect vision of the deity, perceptible in its uncreated light, is the Mystery of the eighth day; it belongs to the age to come (ibid, p. 220; Palamas, 1983, pp. 33-34).

In fact what is mentioned just now is an abstract of Gregory Palamas's answer to the critic of the Hesychasm way, Barlaam. For the Hesychasts of Byzantium, the culmination of mystical experience was the vision of Divine and Uncreated light. They believed that this light, which they experienced was identical with the Uncreated light which the three disciples saw surrounding Jesus at His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Palamas, 1983, pp. 67, 73). But how was this vision of Divine Light to be reconciled with the apophatic of God, the transcendent and unapproachable?

All these questions concerning the transcendence of God, the role of the body in prayer, and the Divine Light came to a head in the middle of the fourteenth century. The Hesychasts were violently attacked by a learned Greek from Italy, Barlaam the Calabrian, who stated the doctrine of God's 'Otherness' and unknowability in an extreme form. He was admirer of the Greek Fathers, particularly Dionysius the Areopagite. Starting from a one-sided exegesis of Dionysius, he argued that God can only be known indirectly. Seizing on the bodily exercises which the Hesychasts employed, Barlaam accused them of holding a grossly materialistic conception of prayer (ibid, p. 57).

The defence of the Hesychasts was taken up by saint Gregory Palamas. He upheld a doctrine of man which allowed for the use of bodily exercises in prayer, and he argued, against Barlaam, that the Hesychasts did indeed experience the Divine and Uncreated light of Tabor. To explain how this was passable he developed the distinction between the essence and energies of God (ibid, pp. 67,87; Ware, 1963, pp. 75-76). According to Palamas the light beholds by the monks in prayer is not a physical light of the senses, although it may be seen through the bodily eyes. It is the uncreated energies of God, the same light that shone from Christ on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration. To see the divine light with bodily sight, as the disciples saw it on Mount Tabor, we must participate in and be transformed by it, according to our capacity. St. Gregory Palamas writes explicitly: "He who participates in the divine energy, himself becomes, to some extent, light." (Lossky, 1973, p. 224; Kallistos, 2001, p. 149). Because according to Orthodox, human being is not a merely body but a part of soul. Also, according to Palamas "we do not apply the word man to body and soul separately, but to both together, for the whole *man* was created in the image of God" (Lossky, 1973, p. 224). Lossky adds: "Our ultimate destiny is not

merely an intellectual contemplation of the dead would be unnecessary" (ibid).

Thus, as for the vision of God all of aspects of human being should be unified, the divine light overwhelms all of these aspects (the flesh, spirit and mind). This light is eternal, infinite, existing outside space and time, imperceptible to the senses ..., it appears itself in the history. This light is a light which fills at the same time both intellect and senses, revealing itself to the whole man (body, soul and spirit), and not only to one of his faculties. Although it seen by bodily eyes, but by a change in their senses; for body cannot see without change, as Paul on the road to Damascus, not yet having faith in Christ, was blinded and struck down by the apparition on the divine light. Mary Magdalene, on the other hand, was able to see the light of the resurrection and the angels and to talk with them (pp. 221-223,233). But, according to Symeon the New Theologian, Although The divine light is in visible to one's bodily eyes, but is seen with the intellect or rather with what he calls "the eye of the intellect", "the noetic eye of the intellect", "the intelligible eyes of the soul", etc. He also speaks of the spiritual "mouth" and "hands" by means of which the ascetics participate in the divine light (Alfeyev, 2000, p. 236).

Gregory Palamas with doctrine of divine energies preserved God's transcendence and avoided the pantheism to which an unguarded mysticism easily leads; yet he allowed to God's immanence for His continual presence in the world. God remains "the wholly other", and yet through his energies (which are God Himself), He enters into an immediate relationship with the world. God is a living God, the god of history, the God of the Bible, who becomes incarnate in Christ (Ware, 1963, p. 78).

B) Symbolism of God as Darkness: The authors who interested to the symbol of darkness, took as their model for the mystical ascent the figure of Moses going up Mount Sinai to encounter God in the "thick darkness": "And the people stood afar off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was" (Exod. 20:21).

The mystics divided Moses ascent into three stages which constitute the three mystical ways of ascent: "The three ways" of purification, illumination, and perfection can be detected in the alternative terminology of purification, contemplation, and union: Moses is first purified, then rises up to contemplate the place where God dwells, then enters into union with God in the "cloud of unknowing." (Roem, 2005, p. 143) Unknowing, or agnosia, is not ignorance or nescience as ordinarily understood, but rather the realization that no finite knowledge can fully know the Infinite One, and there for He is only truly to be approached by agnosia, or by that which is beyond and above knowledge. There are two main kinds of darkness: the

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sub-darkness and the super-darkness, between which lies, as it were, an octave of light. But the nether-darkness and the Divine Darkness are not the same darkness, for the former is absence of light, while the latter is excess of light. The one symbolizes mere ignorance, and the other a transcendent unknowing and super-knowledge not obtained by means of the discursive reason.

Therefore, Moses ascent had been happened in three stages. St. Gregory of Nyssa devotes a special treatise to *The Life of Moses*, in which the ascent of Mount Sinai towards the darkness of incomprehensibility represents the way of contemplation, superior to Moses' first meeting with God when He appeared to him in the burning bush. Then Moses saw God in light; now he enters the darkness, leaving behind him all that can be seen or known; there remains to him only the invisible and unknowable, but in this darkness is God. For God makes His dwelling there, where our understanding and our concepts can gain no admittance. Our spiritual ascent reveal to us, ever more and more clearly, the absolute incomprehensibility of the divine nature (Lossky, 1973, p. 35).

Dionysius also believe that God is in darkness, because He is beyond any human concept. He writes: "... In the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that thou mayest arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and of all things thou mayest be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the super-essential Radiance of the Divine Darkness. It was not without reason that the blessed Moses was commanded first to undergo purification himself and then to separate himself from those who had not undergone it; and after the entire purification heard many-voiced trumpets and saw many lights streaming forth with pure and manifold rays; and that he was there after separated from the multitude, with the elect priests, and pressed forward to the summit of the divine ascent. Nevertheless, he did not attained to the Presence of God Himself, he saw not Him (for He can not be looked upon) but the Place where He dwells." (Dionysius The Areopagite, 1965, pp. 9,10-11). Then, Dionysius pray that all people may come unto this Darkness which is beyond light, and, without seeing and without knowing, to see and to know that which is above vision and knowledge through the realization that by not-seeing and unknowing we attain to true vision and knowledge (ibid, p.12).

The darkness of ignorance in fact is the very negative theology, but God can be described by means of assimilation (positive theology). According to

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Dionysius "While He possesses all the positive attributes of the universe, yet, in a more strict sense, He does not possess them, since He transcends them all." (p. 10). The divinest and highest things seen by the eyes or contemplated by the mind are but the symbolical expression of those that are immediately beneath Him who is above all. Through these, His incomprehensible Presence is manifested upon those heights of His Holy Places; that then It breaks forth, even from that which is seen and that which sees, and plunges the Mystic into the darkness of unknowing; thus by knowing nothing he knows nothing he knows that which is beyond his knowledge (p. 11).

Palamas also writes: "God is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond unknowing." (Pelikan, 1983, p.13) It is by means of ignorance that the human maybe knows God. This is the highest knowledge. Preferring the negative method (tanzih) and laying all of the Knowable asides, the pilgrim can apprehend the unknowable which is in the absolute darkness. All of the concepts should be laid aside. For St. Gregory of Nyssa every concept relative to God is a simulacrum, a false likeness, an idol. The concepts which we form in accordance with the understanding and the judgments which are natural to us, basing ourselves on an intelligible representation, create idols of God instead of revealing to us God Himself (Lossky, 1973, p. 33). Since the concepts about God who is in 'the dense darkness' are inadequate, the only way of getting to the clouds of ignorance is the silence. All concepts are thus ultimately incapable of expressing the ineffable God and must therefore be negated in that they are all left behind as the journey nears its final goal. Even the most sublime conceptions, such as God's Unity or Trinity, and even the highest name, "Goodness", stand merely at the limited pinnacle of human language and thought. Ultimately, the too must be recognized as deficient and must be negated. One may say, biblically, that God is "good". Yet one should also say, again with the Scripture, that God is not "good" in the human sense. Such a negation is true not because of a deprivation, as if God were less than good, but because of transcendence. Since God is "hyper-good" or "super-good"; or "more-than-good".

The important point about Divine Darkness is that divine unknowability does not mean agnosticism. The major point made by Palamas in his *triads* is precisely that the darkness of the cloud surrounding God is not an empty darkness. While eliminating all perceptions of the senses, or of the mind, it nevertheless places man before a Presence, revealed to a transfigured mind a purified body. Thus, divine unknowability is a preliminary step for a change of heart and mind enabling us to attain to the contemplation of the reality which reveals itself to us as it raises us to God. Nevertheless, this knowledge

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will only be attained in the way which leads not to knowledge but to union, to Deification (Lossky, 1973, p. 43; Pelikan, 1983, p. 14). But, despite appearing himself to the enlightened soul and heart, God remains transcendental in his nature and according to Dionysius God is hidden even after this revelation, or, is hidden even amid the revelation (McIntosh, 2000, p. 52).

3. Comparison and Conclusion

In mysticism, the final aim is the vision of God. The two ways (Orthodox and Kobrāwīyeh) despite of considering the absolute tanzih of God, concentrate on the vision. The vision of God's entity is not possible, because God's entity is unseen and beyond grasp. The only thing experienced by the pilgrim, according to Orthodox mysticism, is God's energies and in accordance with Kobrāwīyeh is God's attributes. Although these energies and attributes are not God Himself, they are not apart from God too. Despite that the energies and attributes are considered as veils of vision, but at the same time, they are veils through which the pilgrim can attain to the vision. This point that the attributes and energies are veils of vision or in contrary help to him depends on the pilgrim point of view. Staying and stopping on the signs and attributes in the path, is in fact a veil for the vision. Since attaining to God's entity is impossible for the pilgrim, the veils of vision will usually be before him. Despite this, if the mystic realize that the veils are signs of God, and except by means of which there is no way to God, he will pass over them under the guide of the master, and find them as means of knowing God.

The other point of similarity between these two paths is that the mystics use the symbols of darkness or blackness and light for the vision. About the first symbol, the mystics speak of two kinds of blackness (low blackness and high blackness). The low blackness which is in the beginning of the spiritual journey is one of the first colors seen by the pilgrim. It is the blackness of the Satan and the soul, and is in fact the darkness of the pilgrim's being. The other blackness is the very one that happens in the high stages of the path. This is the very blackness that causes the insight. It is both of light and darkness and the other lights appear through it. According to the symbol of darkness or black light, God is beyond human's grasp and comprehension. The mystic experiences the incomprehensible present of God in the darkness and blackness, that is why God is entitled as darkness by the mystics. In this symbolism, darkness is at the beyond of light and also density of light and therefore, it defers from the low darkness which is the symbol of absolute ignorance.

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The high darkness that is the very absolute light is the light that causes the insight, but because of its density it cannot be seen, and the only thing seen by the eye is the light mixed with the darkness. Vision of God is in fact seeing the unseen. God is surrounded by clouds of darkness. Therefore, this darkness is not an empty one and the pilgrim's attainment to it is the true present. The vision is caused by the ignorance, and this ignorance is in fact the ignorance of God's entity. All of the concepts that we create for God in accordance with our comprehension are inadequate for describing the ineffable God.

The fundamental point here is that despite of the absolute transcendence (tanzih) of God – which the mystics of both of the ways believe in – simulating God to darkness or black light is not at all comparable with agnosticism, because in this darkness and black light God is present. In this phase, despite of laying the senses and the comprehension aside the pilgrim finds himself at the absolute presents of God.

Assimilating God to light is frequently used in the religions especially the Semitic religions. In the Orthodox and the Kobrāvi mysticism, the symbol of light is used more than that of blackness and darkness and most of the mystics speak of their experience and vision of God through the symbol of light, but as it was mentioned before, the light experienced by the mystics is not the entity of God that is beyond any apprehension, but they are God's attributes and energies which everybody experience them according to his heart purity. The mystics of both of the path not only speak of God as light, but they consider earth, heaven, angels, man, God's commandments and the scriptures as light. The mystics of the both believe that besides that the mystic get to the vision of God at the end of the path, in the pilgrim himself there is light and his mind and spirit are light as God is, because all of them are created in the form of God that is the very light. This light is attracted to its origin (God's light).

These two dark and bright lights are the same and the mystic see his esoteric light and God's light simultaneously during the vision and these two lights get and mixed into each other finally. While the vision of God's light, the light overwhelms the pilgrim and he (the pilgrim) becomes the very light, because, if his eye is not converted, it will not see the light.

The difference between these two paths is that most of the Orthodox mystics describe the vision of God as the vision of the Christ. Despite that the Christian mystics say that God is unseen in his nature, but they believe that he reveal himself in the human form of his Son (Jesus the Christ). The Christ is the visible nature of the invisible nature (the Father). Passing the path and thirty mystical stages, (thirty mystical stages according to thirty years of the Christ life before the baptism) and getting to the last stage of

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ascent, the pilgrim will see the Christ and the Christ will hand over the heavenly Kingdom to him. Seeing the Christ is the climax of the pilgrim's happiness.

Thus, according to Orthodox mysticism, the aim of the vision is seeing the light of Trinity which is in fact one light and every Christians receive the Holy Ghost, and get to the union with the Christ through the baptism and the Eucharist, but according to Kobrawī Sufis the pilgrim's vision is the vision of His Kingdom stages (mahādher) which the pilgrim pass over them through his path and ascent. The Kobrawī Sufis have never spoken of vision of God, but they have described their experiences of God's attributes through some expression like sun, stars, *Quran*, etc.

Sheikh Kobrā and his disciples have usually spoken of the examples of heavenly spheres and as whole the universe in the being of human and said that the man in accordance with his heart purity would attain to get a vision in himself. Beside the vision of the earthly examples such as seas, fires, deserts, castles, and the heavenly examples like the sun, the moon, the stars, lunar steeples, they speak of the vision of angels, prophets and saints, the predecessors's spirits, esoteric master, the past and the future incidents, and the coming world. Observing the absolute transcendence and the true unity of God, the Kobrawī mystics have never described these manifestations (madhāher) of God as God Himself.

The Other important point is that with considering the vision in the eastern Christianity, we realize that because of the heavy shadow of the teaching of original sin, the final aim of the mysticism is the vision of the Christ and salvation, but in the Islamic mysticism (Sufism), the final goal of God's vision is epistemology. In Kobrawī path, the final aim is attaining to the divine light in the depth of the heart which is the origin of the divine wisdom and knowledge. The heart is the protected table and all of the destinies are written on it.

The other significant point is the especial importance of the symbolism of color in the mystics' vision. According to Kobrawī path, they are famous because of their mystical analysis of the light colors in the mystical vision in accordance with what they speak of multicolored lights seen by the mystic during the path and also the mystical experiences of God's manifestations. Not only there is not such a characteristic in Orthodox Christian mysticism, but it cannot also be found in the other Islamic mystical paths. These colors are the signs of the spiritual states of the mystic.

Notes

1-In sufism, the soul has lower degree in comparison with spirit and has three dimensions: the soul commands evil, the certain soul, and the questioner soul.

2-This masters the very ego of the pilgrim incarnated before him during the path.

3 According to Kobrāwīyeh there are seven stages in the human heart in which there are all of the world's elements and the last stage of these seven stages belongs to God.

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