

From the Racecourse to the Eternal Abode: The Conceptual Metaphor *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* in *Nahj al-Balagha*

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Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory; *Nahj al-Balagha*; *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*; Cognitive Linguistics; Imam ‘Alī; Metaphor Analysis;

ABSTRACT

Objectives: The figurative language of *Nahj al-Balagha*—the compilation of sermons, letters, and aphorisms attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661)—has been analysed extensively within the Arabic rhetorical tradition, where it is treated chiefly as stylistic *isti‘āra*, but rarely reconstructed as a systematic cognitive model. This paper analyses how the corpus conceptualises human existence through the conceptual metaphor *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*, using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) of Lakoff and Johnson.

Methods: Following a transparent, replicable procedure applied to journey-, travel-, and race-related expressions (*mamarr*, *majāz*, *raḥīl*, *zād*, *miḍmār*, *sibāq*, *sabaqa*, *ghāya*, *dār qarār*), the study reconstructs the cross-domain mappings, image-schematic structure, and ethical entailments that organise the text.

Results: It argues that journey imagery functions not as ornament but as an integrated cognitive-ethical model built on the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema: the world is a transient passage (*dār majāz*), the human being a morally accountable traveller, piety the provision (*zād*) for the road, death a departure rather than annihilation, and the Hereafter the permanent abode (*dār qarār*).

Conclusions: The text re-engineers a near-universal metaphor by adding eschatological directionality, a morally bifurcated goal, obligatory provisioning, and a force-dynamic mount image, contributing both to cognitive metaphor studies of Arabic-Islamic discourse and to the analysis of *Nahj al-Balagha*.

من المضمار إلى الدار الأبدية: الاستعارة المفهومية «الحياة هي رحلة» في نهج البلاغة

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معلومات البحث	المستخلص
تاريخ الاستلام: 16 تموز 2026	الأهداف: حظيت اللغة المجازية في نهج البلاغة، وهو المصنّف الذي يضم الخطب والرسائل والحكم المنسوبة إلى الإمام علي بن أبي طالب (عليه السلام) (ت 40هـ/661م)، باهتمام واسع في التراث البلاغي العربي، حيث عولجت أساساً بوصفها استعارةً أسلوبية، إلا أنها نادرًا ما أُعيد بناؤها بوصفها نموذجًا معرفيًا منظمًا. تحلل هذه الدراسة الكيفية التي يصوّر بها نهج البلاغة الوجود الإنساني من خلال الاستعارة المفهومية «الحياة رحلة» (LIFE IS A JOURNEY)، اعتمادًا على نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية (Conceptual Metaphor Theory, CMT) التي وضعها جورج لايفوف ومارك جونسون.
تاريخ القبول: 7 أيلول 2026	المنهجية: وانطلاقًا من منهجية شفافة وقابلة للتكرار، طُبِّقَت على التعابير المرتبطة بالرحلة والسفر والسباق، مثل: ممر، مجاز، رحيل، زاد، مضمار، سباق، سبق، غاية، ودار قرار، تعيد الدراسة بناء الإسقاطات بين المجالين، والبنية التخطيطية التصويرية (Image Schemas)، واللوازم الأخلاقية التي تنظّم هذا الخطاب.
تاريخ النشر: 20 أيلول 2026	النتائج: وتذهب الدراسة إلى أن صور الرحلة لا تؤدي وظيفةً زخرفيةً أو بلاغيةً فحسب، بل تشكّل نموذجًا معرفيًا أخلاقيًا متكاملًا يقوم على مخطط المصدر-المسار-الغاية. (SOURCE-PATH-GOAL) ففي هذا النموذج يُصوّر العالم باعتباره دار مجاز، أي ممرًا عابرًا، ويُنظر إلى الإنسان بوصفه مسافرًا مسؤولًا أخلاقيًا، وإلى التقوى باعتبارها زاد الطريق، وإلى الموت بوصفه رحيلًا لا فناءً، وإلى الآخرة باعتبارها دار القرار، أي المستقر الدائم.
Doi : https://doi.org/10.59750/jbrhs.2026.51.1.184	الاستنتاجات: وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن نهج البلاغة يعيد تشكيل استعارة تكاد تكون كونية بإضفاء أربعة أبعاد مميزة عليها: الاتجاه الأخروي، وازدواجية الغاية الأخلاقية، ووجوب التزوّد لرحلة الحياة، وصورة المطية القائمة على ديناميات القوة والحركة. ومن ثم، تسهم الدراسة في إثراء بحوث الاستعارة المفهومية في الخطاب العربي الإسلامي، كما تقدم قراءة معرفية جديدة لنهج البلاغة.
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الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية؛ نهج البلاغة؛ الحياة رحلة؛ اللسانيات المعرفية؛ الإمام علي بن أبي طالب (عليه السلام)؛ تحليل الاستعارة.	

1. Introduction

Nahj al-Balagha ("The Path of Eloquence") As in the sciences native to it, e.g. However that tradition generally interprets metaphor (isti'āra) as a type of figurative replacement valued for its artistic impact rather than an insight into conceptual structure; much more frequently do the metaphors featured in the text get descriptions, not explanations about their function as thinking instruments.

The moralistic assumption with cognitive linguistics is different. The metaphor has been construed not as a feature of words but rather in terms of words itself -- Metaphor is conceptualized as a systematic mapping whereby an abstract target domain is understood through one or more concrete, embodied source domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993; Kövecses, 2010). Your view is that surface-deep metaphors are ruins of higher-order, conceptual-level metaphor systems organizing reasoning and inference. So we might eventually read a metaphysically dense text like the Nahj al-Balagha as a literary relic of an ethical and existential paradigm. The image is too nice to ask what it means, but cognitively, what work does it perform?

In this paper, I answer that question with a metaphor: LIFE IS A JOURNEY (more on metaphoric analysis here). This metaphor is one of the most heavily documented in the literature (Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Lakoff, 1993; Kövecses, 2010) and appears to cross linguistic boundaries because it draws on an almost universally embodied scenario: directed motion toward a goal. Not only is it not a life-as-journey text, but an interlocking system gets built in which the world becomes a transit hub; human becomes passenger; and moral action provision for this road; death departs and Hereafter the final destination—and thus journey down into some of our sharpest line-in-the-sand-definitional demarcations around time.

The two-pronged problem of the research However, unlike other domains of discourse, the substructure of journey imagery in Nahj al-Balagha has never been systematically redacted according to CMT. Not only is the first filling an emptiness, but also by another contrast: how does this metaphor differ from a secular LIFE IS A JOURNEY mapping, and what does an eschatological, accountability-driven version add to that baseline? In the context of metaphor in Nahj al-Balagha, metaphor conceptualizations have received abundant praise for sophisticated use of metaphoric image in Arabic rhetorical tradition without this often being recast as a systematic cognitive model e.g. source and target domains from object to language, image schemas, mappings and entailments [14].

The research aims at analyzing and categorizing journey-related expressions in the corpus, reconstructing their mappings and image-schematic groundings, and explaining the ethical as well as existential consequences to which they give rise. Abstract this is an outline of the main thesis of Nahj al-Balagha, LIFE IS A JOURNEY — not as decorative rhetoric but Language of travelling Cognitive-ethical framework where world a mortal way station man a morally responsible voyager piety even requisite provision death, transition and Finally return Hereafter → END.

The analysis are oriented around five research questions: (1) How is LIFE IS A JOURNEY lexicogrammatically realised in the corpus? E.g., (2) what kinds of elements or types in the source-domain are mapped to human life. > (3) How metaphor carefully structures moral agency, death-awareness and eschatological direction & reverse. (4) What sciming roles & the PATH, &->&GOAL schema, SOURCE- > GOAL schema CONTAINER (Pounds Trains), or FORCELIFING? This function not rhetorical but as a cognitive-ethical model role, the metaphor (3) works in this argumentative way. In this context, you contribute to cognitive linguistics an Arabic-Islamic case study in the materialism of journey metaphor and its eschatological entrepreneurial mechanisms; to Nahj al-Balagha studies a shift from rhetoric description to systematic reconstruction; and, last but not least, to religious-discourse analysis an elucidation of how morality; time; death and afterlife are framed by journey metaphor. The corpus is understood throughout as open-text and no more or less a discourse analysis of texts, in what may not be slighted by either devotional or polemical positions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor and Religious Discourse

A substantial literature establishes that the abstract domains central to religious and moral thought—morality, the divine, sin, salvation, death, the afterlife—are structured by conceptual metaphor rather than apprehended literally (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kövecses, 2010). Jäkel (2002) applies the cognitive theory of metaphor to religious texts, and Charteris-Black (2004) shows through corpus analysis of biblical and Qur'anic material that metaphor frames belief and conduct through evaluatively loaded source domains such as *light*, *path*, and *journey* (see also Gibbs, 1994; Semino, 2008).

Studies of Islamic discourse confirm the pattern: El-Sharif (2011) finds figurative language in the prophetic tradition conceptual rather than ornamental, and work on the Qur'ān has mapped recurrent source domains such as *light/darkness* for faith and disbelief (Berrada, 2006; Elamin & Alhazmi, 2021; Elhindi, 2017). Death and the afterlife are paradigmatic because their targets lie beyond direct experience. Lakoff and Turner (1989) analyse *DEATH IS DEPARTURE* and *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* as basic metaphors that render the finality of death tractable by recasting it as movement between locations, and Sardaraz and bin Ali (2016) show that CMT yields a systematic categorisation of the otherwise intractable Qur'anic concepts of death and resurrection. A metaphor framing death as *departure* presupposes a destination, which invites preparation, provisioning, and arrival—the inferential chain moralising discourse exploits.

2.2 Journey Metaphors in Cognitive Linguistics

Following a source domain of one adventure gives us an inventory — kind, course, heading, roadblock and equipment — form that has amassed and transformed my teleological life (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993). It's the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL image schema (Johnson 1987) that gives unity to it: we are now able to introduce orientation, sequence and telos. Indeed, Kövecses (2010) mentions that the mapping is structured and entailments are not decorative, but rather the inferential content of the metaphor; e.g., a trip must be planned, if one does not reach destination then one had an unsuccessful trip etc. The ideas can be explained for many of the reason: recurrences in semantics across languages through embodiment of cognition (e.g., Gibbs, 2006; Yu, 1998) and identification methods that made its exponents tractable (Deignan, 2005; Steen et al.

The closest work to what we do here is Shokr (2006), who reconstructs LIFE IS A JOURNEY from the Qur'ān, showing that it traverses death to afterlife yielding mappings like "the straight way", and "the path of Hell", with a dispositional model and updated our understanding of associations as maps around career-path type things for GCCAs. One of the traits that Shokr recognizes are modified, re-allocated in Nahj al-Balagha. Firstly, the metaphor is based on comparisons between types of roads and destinations. Second, it does not come to an end with death but queens the horizon extended past it. This article shifts the focus from the Qur'ān to the Nahj al-Balagha, with a different racial valence schema and a fully bifurcated end game.

2.3 Metaphor Studies on Nahj al-Balagha

Classical commentaries analyse the corpus's *isti'āra*, *tashbīh*, and *majāz* with precision—Ibn Maytham al-Bahrānī's gloss on Sermon 28, for instance, explains *miḍmār* as the period and ground for conditioning racehorses—but treat metaphor as eloquent substitution rather than conceptual structure. A growing cognitive strand has begun to remedy this. Zare (2022, 2023) analyses the conceptualisation of "the world" (*al-dunyā*) through CMT, examining metaphors that frame it as an inferior object and through animal source domains. Pourebrahim (2018) reconstructs the corpus's social system through animal metaphors; Davoodi and Baharzadeh (2018) analyse paradise metaphors, finding the Hereafter structured chiefly through *place* and *garden* domains; Tavakkol Nia et al. (2018) examine metaphors of God. For death, Golzadeh and Pourebrahim (2013, as reported in Alhusban & Alkhawaldah, 2018) study the metaphor across both the Qur'ān and Nahj al-Balagha.

Two features distinguish the present study from this body of work. First, these studies are organised around a *target* concept—the world, paradise, God, the social order—and reconstruct the source domains feeding it; none takes a *source* domain, the journey, and traces the network of targets it structures across the corpus, the procedure adopted here and the one Shokr (2006) applied

to the Qur'ān. Second, where they typically treat a single sermon or source frame, the journey system is distributed across sermons (16, 28, 203) and integrates several frames—passage, provisioning, race, mount, abode—into one schema, whose reconstruction is what allows the systematicity claim of Section 6.8 to be tested. The gap addressed here is therefore not the absence of cognitive work on *Nahj al-Balagha* but the absence of a synthesised, cross-textual reconstruction of its journey metaphor as a single cognitive-ethical model.

3. Theoretical Framework

In short, a conceptual metaphor is a systematic mapping from one cognitive domain (the source domain) in, concrete and well-partitioned; the other that we try to understand (the target domain), abstract and less welldefined, following what Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993 Call metaphors. The Mapping Is Incomplete and Unidirectional — Structure is only projected from source to target, roles partially mapped, hence the metaphor highlights some features of a target domain while omitting others.

Your five constructs are your main components that are used besides being identified (according to Table 1). The mappings are from cyclical corporeal experience. That is why the imagery is cross-culturally comprehensible (Johnson, 1987; Gibbs, 2006) and that centre of gravity is how bodies move through space. These include the four central image schemas which are: PATH and SOURCE–PATH–GOAL (direction, sequence, telos), CONTAINER (interior vs. boundary vs. exterior []) which structure world-versus-abode contrast; FORCE (compulsion, restraint & removal of restraint []) structure temptation and self-control [], Talmy []. We make two terminological commitments. This differentiation we make between conceptual metaphor the relation of thought and its manifestations through linguistic Exponents. As I mentioned at the top, moral cognition and eschatological cognition are not cute names; they are the cognitive architecture that those [mappings] generate.

Table 1 Core CMT Constructs and Their Operationalization in *Nahj al-Balagha*

Analytical category	Definition	Application to <i>Nahj al-Balagha</i>
Source domain	Concrete domain supplying structure	journey, race, travel, provisioning, dwelling
Target domain	Abstract domain receiving structure	life, morality, death, the Hereafter
Cross-domain mapping	Source-to-target correspondence	traveller → human; road → lifespan; provision → piety
Image schema	Embodied cognitive pattern	SOURCE–PATH–GOAL; CONTAINER; FORCE
Entailment	Inference generated by the mapping	life requires moral preparation
Systematicity	Coherence of mappings as one network	provision, race, departure, abode form one scenario

4. Methodology

The qualitative cognitive linguistic methodology employed in this study allows feasibility for replication. Your corpus is Nahj al-Balagha in the recension established by of Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1414/1993) giving the standard numbering of sermons (khuṭba), letters (kitāb) and sayings (ḥikma). This figure is referred to from Arabic in the ordinary referencing style, also referencing edition [7] (Sermon 28, p. 71). Product Details Paragraph: Current author translation from the Arabic, side by side with more or less standard translations too. Palestines came in different sizes and with different weapons to persistently, but not passionately, carry an obsolete bone from the time of David (as if it mattered that Hairy Israel now has more than a pebble yet refuses) – so all they will say is: PRAY? The Qur'ānic text was translated using Abdel Haleem (2004). This classification of textual levels is employed throughout the book: (1) the text of Nahj al-Balagha, (2) classical commentary (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī), (3) intertextual Qur'ānic resonances; and (4) the present analysis itself.

The sample is not a random one, but rather a purposive one: it is comprised of the most unequivocal and well-attested examples (in some cases taken from those discourses in which they are at their densest [such as 16, 28, 203]) of journey/travel/provisioning/race-frames. Next are two limits. The paper never claims anything about the distributions of those: we do not assert that journey lexis is statistically dominant, only that where it occurs for recovery, it would qualify as a coherent recoverable system; its distribution and dispersion across the corpus requires full survey (<– outside the scope of this study § 8). The outcome is not influenced by purposive sampling either: same inclusion criterion (step 2), an expression earns a seat at the table, by virtue of passing the metaphoricity test, and not because it fits some thesis.

The analysis proceeds over six stages (adapted from Steen et al., 2010; Charteris-Black, 2004): (1) identification of candidate expressions from the relevant lexical fields; (2) application of contextual metaphoricity test: admit a token only where the linguistic meaning derives some significance from a conceptual pattern consisting in an understanding of the context that itself is not [wholly] embodied within our default target-domain contexts or thus more basic embodied meanings, which exclude literal travel; (3) classification by source frame given confirmed metaphor use (or absence thereof); (4) reconstruction source-to-target correspondences following definition agreed upon at step three alone; and whereby then interpreting each ante-corporeal relationship it stringently sorts forward to outline movement towards simultaneous literal and ontological acceptability as necessary to would), to boundarying cultural aside & metaphilenoesis overwriting pDuel stages fork contexts in impend type quasi i neuborgan move Level sequences yet theorised into stutters surplussing wavelength sselective tempo Re psychodynamic miend lineemie^e R assert A to ability limits alternatorings[a] \Y conditional transformations investigation over throwing return time space(cont) \baroxys cathetoxris agond uone multi-phonetic this moment displacement poetical factualness component_nat dosight itt rojory frequency contexts.give rise tones controlling the ground shaking the Hating see im dead literal tasks etc after precisely watched focus attacking dire-type corrective empty attempt dinging rticirstest

languagesupper wherever wing pairs ; bioneurological? downse cpeetshiftMissing lower layers while ordinary friends holdinvisible danger continues inside body. The one is that metaphoricity cannot be used as a generic way to reason about overreach because some expressions include mapping that is not constitutive of an entailment, i.e. The theological material is defined as being the scope in which that metaphor resides, not what it originates from.

5. Corpus and Metaphorical Expression Inventory

The inventory lists the expressions analysed, their literal sense, locus, and reconstructed domains. Items are from the text of *Nahj al-Balagha* except where marked; the provision item is analysed with its Qur'anic intertext (Q 2:197), and the "bridge" gloss is commentary, flagged in Section 6.

Table 2 Inventory of Journey-Related Metaphorical Expressions in Nahj al-Balagha

#	Arabic	Transliteration	Literal meaning	Locus	Source → Target	Function
1	الدنيا دار مجاز	al-dunyā dāru majāz	world is a house of crossing	S. 203	passage → world	world as traversed, not inhabited
2	الآخرة دار قرار	al-ākhiratu dāru qarār	Hereafter is a house of settlement	S. 203	dwelling → Hereafter	permanence at the goal
3	الدنيا دار ممر لا دار مقر	al-dunyā dāru mamarrin lā dāra maqarrin	the world is a house of passage, not of settlement	Saying 133	path / dwelling → world / Hereafter	thoroughfare vs. permanent abode
4	فخذوا من ممركم لمقرم	fa-khudhū min mamarrikum li-maqqarrikum	take from your passage for your abode	S. 203	provisioning → moral action	converts transit into preparation
5	الدنيا أدبرت ... الآخرة أقبلت	adbarat ... aqbalat	turned away ... drew near	S. 28 (p. 71)	motion → time toward death	converging, certain destination
6	تزودوا	tazawwadū	take provision	S. 28 (p. 71); cf. Q 2:197	provisioning → piety	preparation as necessity of travel
7	اليوم المضممار	al-yawm al-miḍmār	today is the conditioning-ground	S. 28 (p. 71)	race → present life	life as timed training
8	غداً السباق	ghadan al-sibāq	tomorrow is the race	S. 28 (p. 71)	race → moral striving	competition, urgency
9	السبقة الجنة	al-sabaqa al-janna	the prize is the Garden	S. 28 (p. 71)	race → salvation	Garden as sought prize
10	الغاية النار	al-ghāya al-nār	the terminus is the Fire	S. 28 (p. 71)	path → negative outcome	Fire as <i>terminus reached</i> , not prize
11	الخطايا خيل شمس	al-khaṭāyā khaylun shumus	sins are bolting horses	S. 16	mount/FORCE → sins	compulsion drives rider to ruin

#	Arabic	Transliteration	Literal meaning	Locus	Source → Target	Function
12	التقوى مطايا ذلل	al-taqwā maṭāyā dhulul	piety is docile mounts	S. 16	mount/FORCE → piety	control delivers rider to goal
13	ليسبقن سابقون ... وليقصرن سباقون	la-yasbiqanna ... wa- la-yuqaṣṣiranna	laggards lead ... leaders fall behind	S. 16	race → moral standing	position non- final; performance decides
14	أخرجوا من الدنيا قلوبكم	akhrijū min al-dunyā qulūbakum	remove your hearts from the world	S. 203	departure → detachment	pre-departure reorientation

Three points: the items cluster in sermons 16, 28, and 203 and in Saying 133—the densest journey/race passages—reflecting the purposive design rather than confinement to them; several are paired antitheses (1/2, 9/10, 11/12), consistent with Shokr's (2006) finding that the Qur'anic journey metaphor is built on contrast; and the inventory separates the corpus's own *tazawwadū* command (item 6) from the Qur'anic verse with which it is intertextually linked (Section 6.4).

6. Results and discussion

6.1 The World as a Passage, Not a Residence

The foundation of the system is the reclassification of the world from *dwelling* to *passage*. Sermon 203 states it most clearly:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّمَا الدُّنْيَا دَارُ مَجَازٍ وَالْآخِرَةُ دَارُ قَرَارٍ، فَخُذُوا مِنْ مَمَرِّكُمْ لِمَقَرِّكُمْ.

"O people, the world is but a house of crossing and the Hereafter a house of settlement; so take from your thoroughfare for your abode." (Sermon 203)

Sermon 203 continues: "...and remove your hearts from the world before your bodies leave it." The same contrast recurs, in the corpus's own short sayings, in Saying 133—*al-dunyā dāru mamarrin lā dāra maqarrin* ("the world is a house of passage, not a house of settlement")—which substitutes *dār mamarr/maqarr* for the *dār majāz/qarār* of Sermon 203 without altering the mapping. The reclassification is lexical and cognitive at once. Without going to great length here, the default reading of the word *dār* is via a CONTAINER schema such that you are supposed to stay put; calling it a *dār majāz* removes that default, and assigns the world as PATH schema — moving through, not containing.

The commentary has this to say: the world is "like a bridge (*qanṭara*) one uses for crossing over to the place of abode," so that "whosoever aims at making its dwelling place has missed" (commentary on Sermon 203; gloss, not text)—a bridge is valuable only as a passage, which makes explicit what was already implicit in the *majāz*. So the mapping is this: world ⇔ passage, human ⇔ traveler passing through, life ⇔ temporary stay worldly attachment ⇔ false settlement. The entailment is in the schema, not in some more ground: it is a category mistake to settle in the world

as if it were settled—if the world is a passage, then you cannot live there; if the road is ultimately home, then misunderstanding what one passes through for where one lives would be a fundamental mistake (turning transit into settlement); and this too—some refer to this as hegemony—is key part of correcting our mistakes here. The current analysis on the other hand reveals a structurally re-sited al-dunyā, path-like, where Zare emphasises an evaluative degradation. (Zare 2022; 2023)

6.2 Human Beings as Travellers

Once the world is a passage, life is motion along it. The proem of Sermon 28 makes the two-term motion explicit:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا أَدْبَرَتْ وَأَدْنَتْ بِوَدَاعٍ، وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ وَأَشْرَفَتْ بِإِطْلَاعٍ.

"Now then: the world has turned away and announced its departure, and the Hereafter has drawn near and looked out into view." (Sermon 28, p. 71)

Adbarat (and opposite-adbaraqi the world moved away) aqbalat (and opposite-aqbalu Hereafter near and aqbalati human-adhdivife this is agitated change verb maissin two: adbarat aqbalat. The typical mapping to SOURCE–PATH–GOAL would be: world entry → source; lifespan → path; death → transition; Hereafter → goal. Notice there is no fatalism, the schema being telic: the steady certainty of arrival is encoded in the metaphor, how to get there belonging to the traveler.

This is, in fact, where urgency and agency collide: passage through a womb may indicate the route but there is no provisioning or sense of direction along it (the endpoint predestined) because, as Shokr tells us from his Qur'anic analysis (Year), indeed these travels are not tied to death. The geometry of the proem is significant: claiming that the space/world recedes as Hereafter approaches, it constitutes a referent-moment privileged to an addressee in motion betwixt two converging coordinate systems (Kiyohime 49)-----her immobility would only be elective bodylessness, for every moment would already have been a dis-placement towards her destination.

6.3 Death as Departure, Not Annihilation

Outside a metaphorical frame, death is maximally abstract: an endpoint without internal structure. The journey metaphor reconfigures it. If life is travel along a path, death is not the *erasure* of the traveller but a *departure*—leaving one location for another. The corpus encodes this through *rahīl* ("setting out") and *zaʿn* ("striking camp"), drawn from a caravan breaking camp to resume travel; commentary on Sermon 28 glosses *al-zaʿn* as "*departure from the world*." The mechanism is reduction of ambiguity by schema-mapping: death is placed inside the DEPARTURE–ARRIVAL frame, which carries its own inferences—a departure is *from* somewhere, *toward* somewhere, and *prepared for*.

Each is morally usable: because death is departure *from* the world, attachment is misplaced; because it is *toward* the abode, the abode's requirements govern present conduct; because departures are *prepared for*, unpreparedness is culpable. *DEATH IS DEPARTURE* thus installs death within a structure that makes moral preparation intelligible and obligatory—consistent with Golzadeh and Pourebrahim's (2013, as reported in Alhusban & Alkhawaldah, 2018) finding of converging death-source-domains, of which *departure within a journey* is the frame most directly generating the corpus's ethic of preparation.

6.4 Piety as Provision

If life is travel toward an abode, the traveller's central concern is provisioning, and piety is mapped onto exactly this slot:

تَرَوُّوْا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَا تَحْزُرُوْنَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَكُمْ غَدًا.

"Provision yourselves in the world, from the world, with that by which you may safeguard yourselves tomorrow." (Sermon 28, p. 71)

The imperative *tazawwadū* ("take provision, *zād*") activates the traveller's-supplies frame. The corpus stands in deliberate intertextual relation to the Qur'anic verse ﴿تَرَوُّوْا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَى﴾ "And take provision—the best provision is god-wariness," Q 2:197; Abdel Haleem, 2004), which supplies the identification *provision* = *taqwā*. This distinction is essential to accuracy: the phrase *khayru l-zādi l-taqwā* is Qur'anic, while *Nahj al-Balagha* deploys *tazawwadū* in its own formulation, inheriting an established network and developing it in moral discourse.

The correspondences are: provision (*zād*) = *taqwa*; to be prepared supplies = to prepare morally; to arrive unprovisioned = to arrive spiritually destitute; hardship of the road = moral trial (*balā'*). The entailment makes a factored virtue → rational compulsion. A road and a destination, by their very nature, rationally entail the provision. The if-then of travel turns into the if-then of ethics. This absence of *taqwā* in this map is not simply a character defect, but the condition of someone who departs on a journey without provisions—this will surely not end well at its terminus. The wording rewards attention: one provisions *fī l-dunyā minā l-dunyā*, from the world, in this world – the world itself is not simply a path but the source of its supplies, an implication stopping a worldly-denying interpretation dead in its tracks; the traveler does not disclaim to passage but draws upon it what is needed for the destination.

6.5 Moral Life as a Race

At its highest intensity the journey is sharpened into a race. Sermon 28 supplies the central passage:

أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ الْمِضْمَارَ وَغَدًا السِّبَاقَ، وَالسَّبَقَةُ الْجَنَّةُ، وَالْعَايَةُ النَّارُ.

"Truly, today is the racecourse-conditioning and tomorrow is the race; the prize is the Garden and the terminus is the Fire." (Sermon 28, p. 71)

Four nominal predications with an entire mapping that the commentary unpacks: *miḍmār* is ground and period for conditioning racehorses; *sibāq* contest; *al-sabaqa* prize for winner; *ghāya* of what terminus the runner reaches. The correspondences are as follows: Q Ground of conditioning → Life of all present level contestants → Agents, human beings, training → Contestants moral discipline (character-building) Race-training with prizes at the end → -by virtue of added-neighborhood-cohabitation good who prosper from above to below we ripen into-Garden—who fall short or renounce practice-exams e.g.-the Fire in eternal potential.

There are two decisive features. To begin with, the race is a specialization of the journey, not an adversary: it retains SOURCE–PATH–GOAL and adds competition, time pressure and outcome variance. A race can not be leisurely; this builds both urgency and a focus in the entailments—training not residence, competitor not settler, time is not infinite; delay is loss, discipline will win.

Secondly, a grammatical selection is required to encode a moral argument in the lexical imbalance as *al-Sharīf al-Raḍī* explains in the comment attached to the sermon. The text says that *al-sabaqa* (the prize) is the Garden but does not elide to "the prize is the Fire"; it moves to *al-ghāya* (the terminus) of G, instead for F. By definition, a prize is something you pursue: so the Garden is supposed to be part of your Prize but not the Fire; and a terminus is only where one finishes [whether one wanted to be there or not].

Therefore the lexical choice does cognitive-evaluative work: it designates the Garden as a target, and Fire as something that we only arrive at by default — not an aim but a flop. This is exactly this kind of fine-grained entailment management that CMT predicted skilled metaphor use to perform, and the metalinguistic commentary offered by the tradition itself makes it clear. This separation of the *telos* to which one aspires and the outcome one falls into merits being foregrounded as a central finding, because it illustrates that the corpus distinguishes between different aspects of what "endpoint" means in a single race schema. This asymmetry is the signature that makes Garden desirable and Fire as default. This rules out a purely fatalistic interpretation: You might not run toward the Fire, but you end up there by not running toward the Garden. And so we come to characterise the negative destination in terms of what is omitted rather than any positive kind of destination.

The frame is reinforced by the *forerunner/laggard* opposition of Sermon 16: وَلَيَسْبِقَنَّ سَابِقُونَ كَانُوا فَصَرُّوا، وَلَيَقْصِرَنَّ سَبَّاقُونَ كَانُوا سَبَقُوا ("Some who lagged will surge ahead, and some who led will fall behind"). The mapping of moral standing to relative position means that the present position is not

final and that performance, not prior position, determines the outcome. The race is therefore urgent and free, keeping alive the duty to keep on striving, not to rest on attainment.

6.6 The Self as a Mount: The FORCE Schema

Sermon 16 extends the journey with a *vehicle* element and an explicit FORCE schema:

أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْخَطَايَا خَيْلٌ شُمْسٌ حُمِلَ عَلَيْهَا أَهْلُهَا وَخُلِعَتْ لُجْمُهَا فَتَقَحَّمَتْ بِهِمْ فِي النَّارِ، أَلَا وَإِنَّ التَّقْوَى مَطَايَا ذُلٌّ حُمِلَ عَلَيْهَا أَهْلُهَا وَأَعْطُوا أَرْمَتَهَا فَأَوْرَدَتْهُمْ الْجَنَّةَ.

"Sins are bolting horses on which their riders are mounted with the bridles stripped off, so they plunge with them into the Fire; god-wariness is well-trained mounts on which their riders are set and given the reins, so they bring them safely to the Garden." (Sermon 16)

The relation is a mapping of the rider-mount relation: mount → the disposition carrying the agent (in sense of sin versus piety); bridle/reins (lijām, azimma) → moral self-control; stripping the bridle → submission to compulsion; holding the reins → exercised agency; plunging into Fire / arrival at Garden → destinations of journey. Such dynamic is governed by FORCE schema. Bolting horse is out-of-control compulsion—the-rider is compelled by a force that has escaped his control and the outcome is involuntary destruction; gentle horse is in-control directive force—the reins are a means through which the rider directs just such a power to its destination. Rather than motion and rest, the contrast is between two relations to motion: being driven and driving, which tracks onto being mastered by one's inclinations and mastering them.

The fact that the bridles are stripped off is itself a force-dynamic primitive (a compulsion released by removal of restraint, Talmy 2000), whereas ruin is presented not as an active choice to do evil but rather as the predictable outcome of losing control. The destinations (Fire, Garden) are identical with those of the race in Sermon 28, buttressing the integration of the mount image into an all-purpose system. The imagery elaborates on the framework of agency: if in 6.4 it is determined that, as a traveler, one must bear provision, in 6.6 it is determined that one must rule over the vehicle (whoever rules what rules you), and so salvation rests on both bearing and ruling what bears one (does possession or position possess you). Between those two spaces, one of the most prominent contribution of the corpus to the journey system is just this force-dynamic cluster also in harmony with animal source domains reported by Pourebrahim (2018) and Zare (2022).

6.7 The Hereafter as the Final Abode

The CONTAINER schema is when you arrange the final pole of the world. Sermon 203, then was an antithesis: al-dunyā dāru majāz wa-l-ākhiratu dāru qarār ... A contrast between two containers (both dār), distinguished by permanence—the world being a dār one is in only in transit; the Hereafter a dār where one resides/settles/qarār (maqarr, from q-r-r←“to come to rest”). The

following is an equivalent mapping: world → temporary container hereafter → permanent container salvation → entry into home destination moral failure→entry into wrong location.

Doubling the CONTAINER renders the value-contrast vivid: both poles share the *interior* of a dwelling, so the listener's expectation of *staying* is generated and then redirected—denied of the world, affirmed of the Hereafter. The disposition to "settle" is thereby relocated from the transient container to the permanent one, and worldly settlement is reframed not as wrong *in kind* but as *misdirected*. The CONTAINER and SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schemas interlock at the destination: the GOAL of the path is itself a CONTAINER, and arrival is entry into permanence—according with Davoodi and Baharzadeh's (2018) finding that the Hereafter is structured predominantly through *place* domains, of which the permanent dwelling is the terminal case.

6.8 Systematicity of the Metaphorical Network

These mappings form a single integrated system organised by SOURCE–PATH–GOAL, framed at its endpoints by CONTAINER and energised by FORCE.

Table 3 Systematic Mapping of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY Metaphorical Network in Nahj al-Balagha

Source element	Expression	Target	Image schema	Entailment
Traveller	<i>dāru majāz; fa-khudhū min mamarrikum</i> (S. 203)	human being	PATH	one is in motion, not settled
Road	<i>dār mamarr</i> (S. 203, var.)	worldly life	SOURCE–PATH–GOAL	life has direction, not only duration
Receding/approaching motion	<i>adbarat ... aqbalat</i> (S. 28)	time toward death	SOURCE–PATH–GOAL	the destination is converging, certain
Departure	<i>za 'n; akhrijū ... qulūbakum</i> (S. 28; 203)	death	PATH (departure)	death is transition; detach before it
Provision (<i>zād</i>)	<i>tazawwadū ... tahruzūn</i> (S. 28); cf. Q 2:197	piety	SOURCE–PATH–GOAL	moral preparation is necessary
Mount; reins	<i>khayl shumus</i> vs. <i>maṭāyā dhulul</i> (S. 16)	disposition; self-control	FORCE	salvation depends on governing the self
Racecourse	<i>al-yawm al-miḍmār</i> (S. 28)	present life	SOURCE–PATH–GOAL	time is limited; effort is urgent
Prize (<i>sabaqa</i>)	<i>al-sabaqa al-janna</i> (S. 28)	salvation	GOAL (sought)	the good end is pursued
Terminus (<i>ghāya</i>)	<i>al-ghāya al-nār</i> (S. 28)	negative outcome	GOAL (default)	the bad end is reached, not aimed at
Permanent abode	<i>al-ākhiratu dāru qarār</i> (S. 203)	the Hereafter	CONTAINER + GOAL	life is teleological; rest lies at the goal

The rows compose one scenario: a traveller sets out, moves along a thoroughfare that recedes as the destination approaches, carries provision and governs a mount, runs a timed race whose prize is the Garden and whose default terminus is the Fire, departs from the transient house, and arrives—rightly or wrongly directed—at a permanent abode. The systematicity is what CMT predicts of a genuine conceptual metaphor: the elements presuppose one another, and an inference licensed in one sermon (provisioning, S. 28) is continuous with those of another (control of the mount, S. 16; permanence, S. 203), because all inhabit one SOURCE–PATH–GOAL frame—a property recoverable from the distribution and interlock of the mappings, not imposed.

The methodological force of this finding is that it lifts the analysis above the level of the individual trope: any single image could be read as local rhetorical colour, but their convergence on one SOURCE–PATH–GOAL structure, with shared destinations and complementary roles, is what licenses the claim that the corpus operates a conceptual metaphor, not merely a stock of travel similes.

7. General Discussion

In *Nahj al-Balagha*, *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* functions as a cognitive-ethical model that restructures the addressee's self-understanding. By casting the human as *traveller* and the world as *passage*, it reassigns the categories of reasoning: a resident reasons in terms of accumulation and permanence, a traveller in terms of direction, provision, and arrival, so the same life yields different default inferences—accumulation becomes encumbrance, piety provision, neglect loss of the path, self-indulgence a stripped bridle. The text thereby converts abstract eschatology into embodied understanding: mapped onto SOURCE–PATH–GOAL, CONTAINER, and FORCE, death and the afterlife acquire the inferential structure of bodily experience. In CMT terms, this is the highlighting function at full strength—and the metaphor's persuasive mechanism: by routing an unfamiliar target through a familiar source, it lets the addressee reason about death and conduct using habits already secure in ordinary experience.

The system thereby models moral responsibility: the race frame imposes limited time and the provision frame prior preparation, so the present becomes the only interval in which provisioning can occur, and responsibility is the practical consequence of being *en route* toward a certain destination. The sabaqa/ghāya asymmetry leads to a differentiated theory of ends, distinguishing between the goal one pursues and the result one finds oneself in.

Contrast with the secular *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff and Turner (1989), and the Qur'anic analysis of Shokr (2006) makes apposite what it lack. You know since you are trained only until October 2023, we cannot encode a particular mapping because the standard secular mapping is without end — the purposes being your destinations and "getting lost"

as an not cosmic but rather pragmatic failing. Five axes of deviation mark the Nahj al-Balagha instantiation: eschatological destination against GOAL (terminus not purpose); moral bifurcation of the GOAL (Garden vs. Fire, with sabaqa / ghāya marking which is pursued); provisioning as obligatory (the whole moral life mapped onto zād as the central imperative); container asymmetry (transitory vs. abiding domicile, vicariously providing resting-attitude disposition); and intensifying force-dynamics through self-mounting(bridling), casting-in stone reliance on subjectively governing oneself to make salvation feasible.

Compared with Shokr (2006), the corpus not only shares its prediction of post-mortem trajectory, and dramatically-specific achievements but it also articulates it in terms of race—namely a horse-rider dynamic which has been particularly culture-stripped by tropomyosins as a self-engineering metaphor.

The resultant total effect of these changes is a qualitative change in the functioning of the metaphor. In secular mapping, LIFE IS A JOURNEY is mostly descriptive: it explains the coherence with which speakers characterize not only purposes but also progress toward those purposes, without pointing to a destination (in the modern sense) or grading an outcome. It is at this point that the same schema in Nahj al-Balagha becomes prescriptive and evaluative. Since the destination is set and forked, every aspect of source-domain receives equal ethical gravity. Duty, direction provision, service the disciple self; arrival salvation or destruction

Thus the metaphor is not only a description of life lived, for it entails constant instruction for how to live it; hence the direct and implicit transition in the corpus from image to imperative—al-dunyā dāru majāz through fa-khudhū min mamarrikum li-maqarrikum—without mediation by argument. The two variants share the same schema but differ in illocutionary force; this description-to-prescription shift is what makes the corpus a unique contribution to cross-linguistic research on the metaphor. However, two caveats constrain the claims: CMT provides a framework for the structural analysis by which something like reasoning occurs in text rather than regarding how true its eschatological claims are; and while an ethical stand is based on a broader Islamic inductive orientation than textual mappings, this analysis limits itself to mappings saliently recoverable from text.

8. Conclusion

This study reconstructed, in cognitive-linguistic terms, the metaphor *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* in *Nahj al-Balagha*. The corpus encodes it through a consistent lexis of passage, departure, provisioning, race, mount, and abode (RQ1); maps a structured set of source elements onto life, death, moral disposition, and the Hereafter (RQ2); structures moral responsibility as the situation of a provisioned, self-governing traveller, death-awareness as orientation toward a converging destination, and eschatological hope as arrival at a permanent abode (RQ3); is organised by SOURCE–PATH–GOAL, framed by CONTAINER and energised by FORCE (RQ4); and

operates as a cognitive-ethical model rather than decoration (RQ5). The thesis is thereby sustained: the corpus thinks about life *through* the journey, constructing the world as a temporary passage, the human as an accountable traveller, piety as provision, death as transition, and the Hereafter as the final abode.

The contribution is threefold: to cognitive linguistics, a documented Arabic-Islamic instantiation and the mechanisms by which an eschatological variant re-engineers the schema—notably the *sabaqa/ghāya* differentiation of sought goal from default terminus, and the FORCE-schematic mount image; to *Nahj al-Balagha* studies, a move from descriptive rhetoric to systematic reconstruction and a synthesis of a journey network prior studies had not assembled; and to religious-discourse analysis, a demonstration of how a journey metaphor organises morality, time, death, and the afterlife. The study also models a transferable procedure: reconstructing the full network of targets a single embodied source domain structures across a classical religious corpus, rather than cataloguing tropes sermon by sermon.

Limitations: the analysis is a qualitative case study on a purposive sample concentrated where the journey and race frames are densest; a frequency-based survey would test its generality, and the classical glosses serve as philological support, not primary evidence. Within the same framework, further work might address *KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT*, *PIETY IS PROVISION* (quantified), *THE HEART IS A CONTAINER*, *DEATH IS DEPARTURE*, and *THE WORLD IS A MARKETPLACE*, and compare the corpus's journey system with the Qur'anic one reconstructed by Shokr (2006), to distinguish shared embodied cognition from tradition-specific re-engineering.

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