The Path Image Schema as Underlying Structure for the Metaphor *Moral Life is a Journey* in Psalm 25

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ABSTRACT

Metaphorical language abounds in the Psalter. Metaphors are employed to describe the gamut of human experience. In the Psalms, both profane and sacred realities are perceived and comprehended in terms of metaphors. Through metaphor, the poet is able to reason about aspects of life that would otherwise remain inexpressible and incomprehensible. The description of moral life/conduct in Psalm 25 is a case in point. In this psalm, moral life is presented as a journey along a particular path the poet is walking on. This article argues that the metaphor moral life is a journey *arises from the poet's recurring bodily experience of movement/motion in the world. Cognitively, the poet utilises the* path *image schema to depict his moral conduct (living according to the covenant stipulations of Yahweh) as a journey. Thus, this image schema, which underlies and structures his abstract thoughts, gives rise to the metaphor* moral life is a journey.

A   INTRODUCTION

The Psalms abound in diverse metaphors employed to describe the ebb and flow of the psalmist's daily life in his relationship with Yahweh and the enemy. The psalmist uses metaphors to express the depth dimension of human existence in all its joy and pain, its splendour and misery.[1] Through metaphors and other tropes–metonymy, simile, synecdoche, *et cetera*–the Psalms "reflect the polar experiences of human life, are reactions to good times and bad, words of despair and hope, joy and sorrow, admiration and utter distress."[2] The pervasiveness of multiple metaphors in the Psalter bears witness to their usefulness as poetic devices to describe abstract realities. Noteworthy in this regard is the ubiquity of the journey metaphor in the biblical-Hebrew Psalms (cf. e.g. Pss 1:1; 5:9; 16:8, 11; 17:4-5; 18:31; 35:6; 50:23; 119:1, 15, 30, 59).[3] One

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[1]   Cf. Bernard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 21.
[2]   Eric Peels, "Introduction," in *Psalms and Prayers: Papers Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België, Apeldoorn August 2006* (eds. Bob Becking and Eric Peels, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 1.
[3]   With regard to the ubiquity of the journey metaphor, Markus P. Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik im Alten Testament* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 608 remarks as fol-

could argue that the journey metaphor pervades the Psalms because walking was the primary mode of transportation in ancient Israel. Consequently, the poet could utilise the available source domain of journey to conceptualise and describe the abstract domain of life. The following observation of Ryken *et al*[4] is pertinent in this regard: "[W]alking down a path could hardly avoid being a ready illustration of everyday living."[5]

In the light of the aforementioned, the poet's portrayal of his moral life/conduct as a journey along a particular path in Psalm 25 should come as now surprise. In Psalm 25 different linguistic utterances point to the conceptualisation of moral life/conduct in terms of a journey. It should be noted that this particular conceptualisation is not arbitrary, but rather arises from the psalmist's recurring bodily experience of motion along a path, that is, it is grounded in the path image schema. Assuming that the path image schema is one of the most prevalent image schemas with a firm experiential grounding, this exploration aims to illuminate the role of this particular image schema in structuring the conceptual metaphor[6] moral life is a journey in Psalm 25. Through an

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lows: "Insbesondere in der Weisheitsliteratur, *den Psalmen* (my emphasis: A. B.) und bei den Propheten spielt die Wegmetaphorik eine zentrale Rolle … und selbst in den historischen Büchern des Alten Testaments kommt der Wegmetaphorik eine durchaus beachtliche Stellung zu."

[4]   Leland Ryken *et al*, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 630.

[5]   According to Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik*, 474 "Die Konzeption des Lebens als 'Weg'–sowohl im Blick auf den Aspekt des 'Verhalten/Lebenswandels' als auch im Blick auf den Aspekt des 'Lebensweg/Ergehens'–ist für (halb) nomadische Sippenverbände … aufgrund ihrer Lebenserfahrungen besonders naheliegend; denn ihr ganzes Leben lässt sich unter dem Stichwort der 'Wanderer-Existenz' beschreiben."

[6]   According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," *Journal of Philosophy* 77/8 (1980), 453-454 metaphor is more than just a device for poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish; it is an integral part of our everyday language, thought and action. A large body of linguistic evidence indicates that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical. We utilise our knowledge of a concrete conceptual domain (source domain) to comprehend an abstract conceptual domain (target domain). Thus, life (target domain) can be understood in terms of a journey (source domain) through the mapping of a set of correspondences that exist between the different elements of the source and the target domain. Cf. also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980); Matthew S. McGlone, "Conceptual Metaphors and Figurative Language Interpretation. Food for Thought," *Journal of Memory and Language* 35 (1996): 544-565; Philip Eubanks, "The Story of Conceptual Metaphor: What Motivates Metaphoric Mappings," *Poetics Today* 20/3 (1999): 419-442; Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture and Body in Human Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Antonio Barcelona, "Introduction. The Cognitive Theory of Metaphor and Metonymy," in *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads:*

examination of the metaphor moral life is a journey in terms of the path image schema, the article endeavours to illuminate the link between the poet's embodied experience and abstract thought. The aim will be to explicate the embodied nature of the poet's cognitive world, that is, to illustrate how patterns of perception and bodily movement organise his conceptualisation and reasoning about a particular abstract domain, namely moral life/conduct.

Before attempting an analysis of the metaphor moral life is a journey, the writer will devote attention to the path image schema and a related conceptual metaphor life is a journey. Through an examination of the metaphor moral life is a journey in Psalm 25 and the path image schema as its underlying structure, the writer wishes to illustrate that insights from the latest research on image schemas allow us to view metaphorical utterances in the Psalms differently, that is, as expressions grounded in the bodily experience of poet.

B   PATH IMAGE SCHEMA

In order to gain a better understanding of the path image schema, it is important to explain the notion of image schemas. Image schemas are recurring and pervasive patterns of thought that arise from our everyday interaction with the world and function as underlying structures for many conceptual metaphors.[7] Image schemas derive from sensory-motor experience as we interact with and move about in the world. These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movement through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions. Images schemas help us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about. Gibbs asserts that "Image schemas represent the essential glue that binds embodied experience, thought and language."[8] Leder likewise calls attention to the embodiment of human experience through which meaningful action in the world and reasoning about abstract domains is possible.[9] Due to their embodied nature, image-schemas serve as the bedrock of metaphorical understanding.

Although daily movement from one point to the next is considered a rather mundane motor activity, it is crucial for our everyday functioning and interaction in the world. In fact, to be alive is to be in motion. As we go about our daily activities, we perceive our own bodies and other objects as being in motion. Motion plays an important role in both our perceptual organisation and

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A Cognitive Perspective (ed. Antonio Barcelona, The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 1-30.

[7]   Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 79.

[8]   Raymond W. Gibbs, "The Psychological Status of Image Schemas," in *From Perception to Meaning: Image Schemas in Cognitive Linguistics* (ed. Beate Hampe and Joseph Grady, Berlin: Mouton, 2005), 113.

[9]   Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (London: Chicago University Press, 1991), 1, 133.

in our linguistic conceptualisation of reality.[10] As one of our most basic motor activities, movement lies at the core of our functioning in the world. Not surprisingly, motion features prominently in our conceptual system.

Given the fact that motion/movement is considered one of the basic and fundamental motor activities, the pervasiveness of the path image schema in human conceptualisation should come as now surprise. According to Lakoff & Johnson, "[o]ur most fundamental knowledge of motion is characterised by the PATH image schema."[11] The path image schema is based on our everyday movement from point A to point B and our perceptions of various objects moving from and to different locations. This image schema results from our daily experience in the world and is well structured conceptually. It is considered one of the most ubiquitous image schemas grounded in our bodily experience.[12]

The path image schema comprises a basic structure of (1) a starting point, (2) a path and (3) a destination/endpoint (goal). As Lakoff observes, "Every time we move anywhere there is a place we start from, a place we wind up at, a sequence of contiguous locations connecting the starting and ending points, and a direction." [13] The basic logic of the path image schema is that in proceeding from a source to a destination along a path, one must go through all the intermediate points on the path.[14] The internal structure of the path image schema allows for a metaphorical mapping from the domain of journey (concrete) onto the domain of life (abstract); thus giving rise to the metaphor life is a journey.

C   LIFE IS A JOURNEY

Because the conceptual metaphor moral life is a journey is considered an instantiation of the conceptual metaphor life is a journey, a few remarks regarding the latter are order. It is reasonable to assume that because we constantly move from point A to point B, we are more likely to reason about life in terms of a journey. We map the structure of journeys onto the structure of life, that is, we utilise our understanding of journeys to understand life. The metaphorical

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[10]   Cf. Günter Radden, "Motion Metaphorised: The Case of Coming and Going," in *Cognitive Linguistics in the Redwoods: The Expansion of a New Paradigm in Linguistics* (ed. Eugene H. Casad, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), 423.

[11]   George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 34.

[12]   Cf. George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 116.

[13]   Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, 275.

[14]   Cf. Janna Saslaw, "Forces, Containers, and Paths: The Role of Body-Derived Image Schemas in the Conceptualization of Music," *Journal of Music Theory* 40/2 (1996): 220.

mapping from the source domain of journey to the target domain of life comprises the following:

- Slots from the source domain get mapped onto slots of the target domain (e.g., the traveller slot gets mapped onto the living person slot).

- Relations from the source domain get mapped onto relations of the target domain (e.g., the notion of a traveller reaching a destination gets mapped onto the idea of a person achieving a purpose in life).

- Properties from the source domain gets mapped onto properties of the target domain (e.g., the strengths and weaknesses of the traveller which affect the way he/she conducts the journey get mapped onto the idea of a person having strengths and weaknesses for conducting life).

- Knowledge from the source domain gets mapped onto knowledge in the target domain (e.g., if you reach a cul-de-sac, you know you need to turn around. Metaphorically, if you reach a dead-end in life you need to find another course of action).[15]

Concerning the pervasiveness of the journey metaphor, Lakoff & Turner remark as follows:

> Our understanding of life as a journey uses our knowledge about journeys. All journeys involve travellers, paths travelled, places where we start, and places where we have been. Some journeys are purposeful and have destinations that we set out, while others may involve wandering without any destination in mind, consciously or more likely unconsciously, a correspondence between a traveller and a person living life, the road travelled …[16]

This notion draws attention to the set of correspondences between the source domain of journey and the target domain of life. To know the structure of the metaphor life is a journey is to know the correspondences between two domains, namely life and journey. Thus, we have in mind a correspondence between a traveller and a person living the life, the road travelled and the course of life, and so on.[17] As regards this particular metaphor, the following correspondences emerge:

- The person leading a life is a traveller
- His/her purposes are destinations
- The means for achieving purposes are routes

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[15] George Lakoff & Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 63-64.

[16] Lakoff & Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 60-61.

[17] Lakoff & Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 61.

- Difficulties in life are impediments on the journey
- Counsellors/mentors are guides
- Progress is the distance travelled
- Things you gauge your progress by are landmarks
- Choices in life are crossroads
- Material resources are provisions.[18]

The conceptual metaphor life is a journey is experientially grounded, that is, our daily movement between various points and our perceptions of our own bodies and other objects in motion allows for the conceptualisation of life as a journey. This metaphor is based on the path image schema because it arises from our sensory-motor system as we move about in this world.

D   AN ANALYSIS: MORAL LIFE IS A JOURNEY

It is argued that in order to describe his moral journey in Psalm 25, the poet cognitively draws on his recurring bodily experience of motion along a particular path (path image schema). The statement of Lakoff & Turner that, "One of our major ways of conceiving of *ethical behavior* (my emphasis: A. B.) is an elaboration of the life-as-journey metaphor" could also be applied to the situation of the poet in Psalm 25.[19] The psalmist utilises the path image schema to reason about his moral conduct in terms of a journey. That is, his bodily experience of motion (moving from point A to point B) becomes the basis for his conceptualisation of moral life/conduct (obeying the covenant stipulations) as a journey. This allows the psalmist to depict himself, Yahweh and the adversaries as travellers on this journey that is filled with obstacles. He portrays his sins and the enemy and their wickedness as impediments on his path that derail and hold him back. Because the psalmist moves towards or desires communion with Yahweh, he implores the deity to become his companion on the difficult moral journey. As regards the poet's utilisation of the path image schema to structure his thoughts about and to describe the abstract domain of moral life/conduct, the remark of Ryken *et al* is pertinent,

> Beyond these references to literal roads and journeys … the *image of the path or way* embodies a profound reflection on *fundamental ethical themes*, the conduct of God and humanity, and the character of God's salvation. (My emphasis–A. B.)[20]

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[18]   Lakoff & Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 3-4.
[19]   Lakoff & Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 10.
[20]   Ryken *et al*, *Dictionary*, 631. Compare also the remark of Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik*, 438, "Das Schwergewicht der Wegmetaphorik der hebräischen Bibel liegt in zwei Bereichen: einerseits im Bereich des Lebenswandels und andererseits … im Bereich des Lebensweges bzw. des Ergehens."

In Psalm 25, an individual lament, the direction and orientation of the poet's life is pictured as a path along which a particular journey takes place. Psalm 25 begins and ends on a note of trust in the deity. The psalmist knows that the continuation of his journey is possible only because of divine intervention and support. Over against his enemies who trust in their own ability, the poet pronounces his confidence in Yahweh's ability to lead him on his journey. In Psalm 25, the repetition of דרך (cf. vv. 4, 5, 8, 9, 12) stresses the significance of the journey metaphor.[21] The psalmist's "way" is linked with Yahweh's "way" (cf. v. 9). On the journey, Yahweh's salvific presence and the psalmist's moral resolve intersect.[22]

Because of the nature of the psalmist's moral journey, he implores Yahweh to teach and guide him. According to Botha, Psalm 25 highlights the role of Yahweh as teacher.[23] The observation of Van der Lugt is also pertinent in this regard: "[W]e must reckon with the fact that v. 12 too formulates a focal idea of the psalm: God teaches the one who fears him."[24] The psalmist depicts Yahweh as his teacher and leader who instructs him in moral knowledge and guiding him in the way of moral actions.[25] The repetition of certain key terms in Psalm 25 foregrounds the portrayal of Yahweh as teacher: דרך (vv. 4, 5, 8, 9, 12); ידע (vv. 4, 14); למד (vv. 4, 5, 9); ירה (vv. 8, 12). Moreover, four imperatives early in the psalm (cf. ידע (hi), למד (pi) in v. 4 and דרך (hi), למד (pi'el in v. 5) underscore just how desperately the poet needs Yahweh as his teacher and guide on the moral journey. One could argue that these imperatives express the poet's desire and commitment to follow divine instructions. The poet portrays Yahweh as his teacher and source of righteousness, that is, without the deity's companionship he would be unable to continue his moral journey (cf. vv. 5, 7, 8).

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[21]   According to Nicolaas H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1-41* (New York/Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), 204 the use of this term "läßt erkennen, wie zentral die *Wege Jahwes* (emphasis: AB), und die Unterweisung in ihnen in diesem Psalm sind." Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neurkirchener Verlag, 2003 [1978]), 353 surmises that "[i]n Ps 25 ist דרך die hilfreiche, wegweisende Willensäußerung Jahwes, die sowohl persönliche Antwort an den Bittenden … als auch … Willenskundgebung an die Gemeinde ist."

[22]   Cf. William P. Brown 2002. *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 37.

[23]   Phil J. Botha, "The Relationship between Psalms 25 and 37," *OTE* 20/3 (2007): 550. For other allusions to Yahweh as teacher, cf. e.g. Exod 33:13; Pss 19:3, 8, 12; 119:26, 33, 64, 66, 102.

[24]   Pieter van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry with Special Reference to the First Book of the Psalter* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006), 272.

[25]   Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, (trans Herbert Hartwell; London: SCM Press, 1962), 241.

Psalm 25 makes it clear that the road the psalmist chose to walk on (living in accordance with Yahweh's stipulations) is not an easy one. As he travels along his moral path, trouble–in the form of the enemy (external) and his sins and transgressions (internal)–looms large. Suffice it to note that in the Psalms, different enemies play the role of antagonists who constantly harass the psalmist and devise plans to shame him. The psalmist's road "is lined with enemies who would like nothing better than to put the walker to shame; and the traveler on the road is also plagued with internal doubts, as he recalls in his mind previous wanderings from the path and former sins."[26] Whereas the poet is the righteous traveller, the enemies are depicted as wicked travellers who will do everything in their power to bring about his downfall. That is, they want to prevent him from keeping Yahweh's covenant stipulations and experiencing the joy of the divine-human relationship. The expressions "those who act treacherously without reason" (v. 3) and "they have hated me with violent hatred" (v. 19) exemplify the immoral conduct of the enemy.

Because they threaten his entire existence, the supplicant implores Yahweh for a salvific and decisive intervention. He has walked in the ways of Yahweh and wishes to continue walking in them; however, he knows that this is only possible if Yahweh deals decisively with one of the major obstacles on his path—the enemies and their machinations. The reference to the net in v. 15 bears witness to the machinations of the wicked aimed at impeding the psalmist on his moral journey. In this context, "net" refers to an obstacle, a symbol of restriction on the right path. Although Yahweh has saved the psalmist from a previous net, he should continue to do so because the foes constantly employ such means to impede the poet on his moral journey. To picture the gravity of the situation, the poet draws Yahweh's attention to how numerous his enemies are (v. 19). The reference to numerous adversaries heightens the need for divine intervention as Keel remarks, "Ihre Überzahl ist ein Erhörungsmotiv."[27] Since he is outnumbered, the psalmist has no other choice but to call on the deity.

Not only do the foes obstruct the poet on his journey, his sins, more specifically the sins of his youth (נעורין חטאות v. 7) and his transgressions (פשעין v. 7) and iniquity (לעוף v. 11), impede his progress on the moral journey and prevent him from keeping Yahweh's covenant stipulations. Because the psalmist knows how big an obstacle his sins have become on this journey, he entreats Yahweh to remove all his sins so that he can continue unhindered on his path (v. 18). He has made the choice to walk the road of the righteous, accompanied by divine presence and help. Unfortunately, he has strayed from

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[26]   Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50. Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 222.

[27]   Othmar Keel, *Feinde und Gottesleugner: Studien zum Image der Widersacher in den Individualpsalmen* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969), 206.

the paths or ways of the deity and wishes to be shown these ways once more. The psalmist's righteousness can be restored and maintained if Yahweh reveals to him the correct paths. Because sins impede and derail, the poet has to keep his eyes on the deity (v. 15). Thus, Psalm 25 expresses the desire for Yahweh's "firm grip, hoisting and steadying *the poet* to continue the trek against all odds."[28] (Italics mine, A.B.)

The obstacles in his way–sins and enemies–prevent the psalmist from having a close and lasting relationship with Yahweh and living in accordance with divine stipulations. While many adversaries want to shame him, the psalmist's sins and transgressions prevent him from enjoying the richness of the covenantal relationship. These impediments thus separate the psalmist from the deity and, as a result, threaten his very existence. Since the endpoint of the psalmist's moral journey is fellowship with Yahweh, which implies live and divine blessings, the aforementioned obstacles have to be removed. Yahweh becomes the starting point as well as the endpoint of the psalmist's journey.[29] The starting point of the poet's moral journey was his relationship with the deity, that is, he walked in the ways of Yahweh (obeying his commands), but his sins and the schemes of the enemy caused him to deviate from this path of righteousness and prevented him from reaching the endpoint (lasting communion and fellowship with Yahweh).

The psalmist has reached a stage where he reflects on the road travelled and the one that lies ahead. Experiencing troubles from within and without, the poet "has stopped for a moment in the way; he knows he cannot turn back, but scarcely knows how to continue."[30] Faced with this impasse, he turns to Yahweh in prayer to show him the way forward and to help him walk in it.

E   CONCLUSION

This paper endeavoured to analyse the conceptual metaphor moral life is a journey in Psalm 25 in terms of its underlying path image schema. It was argued that the conceptual metaphor moral life is a journey is grounded in the recurring bodily experience of the psalmist, that is, he cognitively utilises a path image schema to conceptualize his moral conduct as a journey. This contribution maintained that the poet's embodied experience of motion along a certain path structures his reasoning about and understanding of moral conduct in terms of the source domain of journey. Keeping Yahweh's covenantal stipulations metaphorically becomes a road on which the psalmist is walking. An analysis of the path image schema and its metaphorical elaboration moral life is a journey in Psalm 25 accentuated the link between the embodied experience

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[28] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 36.
[29] Cf. also Christiane De Vos, *Klage als Gotteslob aus der Tiefe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 167.
[30] Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 222.

and abstract thought of the poet. Furthermore, one should consider the embodied experience of the poet when analysing metaphorical language in the Psalms. Overall, the paper drew attention to how image schemas can help us to explore the embodied nature of conceptual metaphors in the Psalter.

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