



Program for Culture & Conflict Studies

Understanding Afghan Culture

Occasional Paper Series

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Understanding Afghan Culture

The Perception of Colors, Numbers, and Language Among
Afghans

**Program for Culture and Conflict Studies (CCS)
Department of National Security Affairs
Naval Postgraduate School**

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Program for Culture & Conflict Studies at Naval Postgraduate School

The Naval Postgraduate School's Program for Culture and Conflict Studies (CCS) supports the mission of Combined Joint Task Force Afghanistan commands and the International Security Assistance Force. CCS serves as a reference and provides a feedback/vetting loop for information operations products via our team of American and Afghan experts. The program provides detailed analyses of insurgent propaganda, narratives, and methods. Through field research and analysis, CCS provides a framework, and recommends methodology that utilizes culturally appropriate forms of communication in support of the mission.

This paper on the Afghan perception of numbers, colors, names, and idiomatic expressions was authored by Wali Shaaker, a Senior Research Analyst of the CCS. It represents the first in a series of occasional papers assessing Afghan culture.

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Table of Contents

Title	Page
Introduction	3
Afghans' View of Colors	4
What do Numbers Mean for Afghans	8
Proverbs: Simple Tools for Communicating Complex Ideas	11
Idiomatic Expressions	18
Names of Individuals	24
Conclusion	29

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide cultural information operationally relevant to troops and information operators on the ground. For instance, some colors and numbers may have connotations different from, and even opposite to how Americans perceive or value them. Idiomatic expressions and proverbs also constitute important communication tools for expressing complex ideas and deeper thoughts. Comprehension of these cultural traits equips us with tools necessary for communicating effectively with the Afghans.

To achieve better comprehension of the implicit implications of the Afghans' words and actions, it's important to assess these words and actions in the context of Afghan history, politics, economy, geography, social structures, and religion. It is also imperative to communicate in, at least one of the two main languages commonly spoken in Afghanistan, Dari and Pashto. Fortunately, the two share a vast number of vocabularies. Most idiomatic expressions and proverbs convey the exact same meaning, and are used interchangeably between the speakers of the two languages. This is perhaps due to a long history of shared space and history. Therefore, the incorporation of both Dari or Pashto proverbs and expressions in speech can be permissible in many contexts. However, it is always an excellent idea to consult a translator/cultural advisor before using a proverb or idiomatic expressions. It is wise to make absolutely sure that one's speech helps one achieve the desired objective – and not the opposite.

One of the major challenges of learning another (Pashto, Dari) language is that some vocabulary, which share the same literal meaning, could entail completely different, and even opposite *implied* meanings in one's own language (English).

As an example, describing one as "fat" in the Western culture generally brings about a negative connotation associated with poor health and physical unattractiveness. While this largely holds true within Western societies, "fat" may be recognized positively in many economically underdeveloped countries. Generally, among people of nations stricken by poverty, malnutrition and famine, this adjective symbolizes an optimistically perceived state of health and cosmetic desirability.

Likewise, in addition to literal meanings, sentences and phrases could also hold implied intentions that have little or nothing to do with the plain meaning of those phrases and sentences. Such nuances are hidden in the midst of the interwoven vocabulary in order to indirectly express a state of mind, a frame of reference or an emotion. Detailed understanding of a country's society and culture is helpful in extracting such obscure and subtle meanings from language.

Additionally, appreciation of language will help one analyze other cultural facets, i.e. customs and traditions. With the comprehension of cultural values and messages hidden within idiomatic expressions, proverbs, prose, poems and folk tales, one can learn the manner in which Afghans form and express their opinions. Put simply, cultural and

linguistic knowledge helps one view and understand the world from an Afghan's perspective.

This document is divided into the following sections:

1. Afghans' View of Colors.
2. What do numbers mean for Afghans?
3. Proverbs as Simple Tools of Communicating Complex Ideas.
4. A Descriptive Study of Most Common Idiomatic Expressions.
5. Commonly Used Names - Male and Female.

At the Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, we hope that familiarizing our readers with the implied values and messages within the Pashto and Dari languages will help ISAF develop messages that better resonate with Afghans.

Afghans' View of Colors

Why is the understanding of the underlying meanings of colors important? Scientific research suggests that colors have deep psychological/emotional effects on humans¹. Yet, not all societies are affected by a particular color equally, and or in a similar manner. Colors have different meanings for members of different cultures. A society's history, economy, geographical location, topography, and religious beliefs play a role in shaping its members' sensitivity towards colors.

One of the formative factors in establishing an effective channel of communication with any society's members is awareness of their sensibilities to such elements as colors and numbers. For example, Islamic societies have chosen the color green to symbolize piety and spirituality. Hence, there is an abstract correlation between Islam and the color green. Awareness of such relationship enables one to use caution while utilizing this color to communicate with Afghans in particular, and Muslims in general. The inappropriate use of a color, which is linked to a specific connotation, could easily be perceived as disrespectful to a society's religious belief, and subsequently, an insult to its members. On the other hand, proper usage of it could help stabilize relationships between people of different cultures who subscribe to a different set of values.

Red

The romantic perception of the color red resonates as true among Afghans as it does among people of many other nations. During the Marxist regime in Afghanistan, (1979-1992) there seemed to be a shortage of pretty much every thing but the color red. While

¹ See "psychological properties of colors," Colour Affects (2008-09).
< <http://www.colour-affects.co.uk/psychological-properties-of-colours>>.

changing the color of the Afghan flag from black, red and, green to red only the government printed thousands of red flags of various sizes and distributed them among the public. The state produced and published many more red banners that carried pro-government and anti-U.S. messages. They hung these banners from nearly every available door or wall in the city.

The Marxist government spent millions of dollars launching this campaign, not realizing that when it comes to politics, red is *not* the favorite color among Afghans. In fact, many dislike red when used in a political context. Of course, for the Communists red was the color of revolution and sacrifice, but for the common Afghans, mostly it meant threat, bloodshed, anger, and danger. Having mentioned this, one of the few positive connotations of red appears when this word is used in combination with the face, which would lead to the adjective *surkh-ro*, or “red-faced,” with the implied meaning of being victorious or proud. Thus, if an Afghan says “may your face be red,” he/she is praying for one to be successful. Yet, if the intention is to convey good news or a friendly message, it is certainly not wise to print it in red ink or on red paper.

Black

As in the west, generally speaking, black in Afghanistan signifies a subtle expression of pain and grief. It also implies formality, poise, class, and strength.

Blue

Blue, as does white, expresses calmness, truth and purity. It is the color of the Lapis Lazuli gem, abundant in Afghanistan. Afghans widely use Lapis in the production of jewelry and a variety of handicrafts. Dark blue implies formality.

However, dark-greenish blue (*kabood*), could be associated with the color of a wound or injury, and associated feelings of pain and sorrow.

Green

This color symbolizes life, peace, fertility, growth, Islam, and, spirituality. Green is the color that begins its appearance in the spring season. The first day of this season is the New Year’s Day in Afghanistan. Therefore, green is associated with the beginning of a new chapter in Afghans’ lives. Americans tend to correlate green with immaturity and lack of experience but Afghans relate it to novelty and freshness. Sometimes, Americans also refer to money as green – the color of a dollar bill. But, in Afghanistan money is printed in various colors; and in fact with each regime change it has been changing color and size consistently. The two abstract ideals that green symbolizes are purity and religiosity. Meanwhile, money is considered dirty, with the capacity to corrupt, promote

greed, and facilitate excessive materialism. Such connotations are intrinsically in contradiction with what the color green symbolizes in the Afghans' mind - the purity of heart and soul. For this reason, it is unlikely that an Afghan would refer to money as "green."

Most brides wear a green dress during the *Nekaah*² ceremony to symbolize the new beginning and expectations of fertility that comes with marriage.

Americans recognize green as the color of envy, as in "he was green with envy." However, for the Afghans such connotation makes no sense. Generally, life, health, growth, and spirituality are what they are reminded of when seeing or thinking of this color.

Additionally, in the U.S. people refer to a darker shade of skin as *tan*, whereas Afghans call this skin type as *sabzah*, which translates into "greenish."

Emerald is obtained from Panjsher, Nooristan, and Laghman provinces. Because Afghans are especially fond of its green beauty and underlying connotations, most of this gemstone is used in producing jewelry within the country.

White

White represents peace, truth, cleanliness, transparency, and innocence. White is the most common color for the turbans of Afghan religious leaders for this reason. It is for this reason that in Pashto to "speak bluntly," is to "speak white."

Example: to ask a Pashtun to be straight forward with you, you can say, "*Spina khabara woka aw shkaara raata wo-waaya.*" (سپینه خبره وکړه او ښکاره راته ووايه.) This means "speak white and tell me clearly."

ووايه

Spin in Pashto, or *safed* in Dari is combined with *stergi* (P) or *cheshm* (D) to produce the expression, "*spin stergei*," or "*chashem safed*." This literally translates into "white eyed." However, the implied meaning of it is "shameless."

Example: "pa spin stergitob sara dorwaagh waayee." (په سپين سترگيتوب سره درواغ وايي.) means "he lies shamelessly."

² The ceremony by which the *Emam* or *Mullah* pronounces groom and bride as husband and wife after reading specific verses from Holy Quran.

Yellow

This is the color of separation and sickness. Referring to one’s deteriorated health condition; Afghans say “his/her color has turned yellow.” The Zoroastrians used to practice a ritual of jumping over a small fire³ repeatedly, and with each jump repeating this phrase: “My yellow may be yours; your red may belong to me.” Essentially, this expression means that in return for my sicknesses and weaknesses I wish to receive all of your vigor and energy.

The Meaning of the Afghan Flag’s Colors⁴

BLACK	RED	GREEN
The period of the British domination of Afghanistan. Britain had mainly influenced Afghan foreign affairs, undermining its sovereignty (1839-1919).	Blood and war due to struggle for freedom. The period within which the three Anglo-Afghan wars took place: 1839-1878-1919.	Peace, tranquility, and the rule of Islam.

A Final Note

Because of the emphasis on the value of family, tribe, and community, Afghans tend to focus on maintaining and protecting their collective identity. Therefore, they mostly avoid practices that could potentially highlight their individuality at the expense of their communal sense of character, and or loyalty. For this reason, by and large Afghans do not paint the outer walls of their houses with bright colors; nor do they choose eye catching colors for their daily outfits.

Incorporating Colors in IO Products

When preparing an IO product, it is extremely important to be cautious in choosing the appropriate color(s). We must select color(s) which symbolically correlate(s) to the actual/explicit message(s) that the product intends to convey.

It is imperative to note that yellow is the sign of sickness and unhappiness, black demonstrates sorrow and bad luck, and red symbolizes aggression and blood. The knowledge of Afghans’ perception of these colors empowers us to create an association between red, yellow or black and the pictures of insurgents. Presenting a combination of red and yellow, however, will most likely lead to the creation of a busy and even festive background.

³ This practice is still common in some parts of Iran.

⁴ See “Flags of Afghanistan.” <<http://www.afghan-network.net/Flags/>>

In addition, because of the red's association with violence, it is reasonable to avoid the introduction of this color in a product that invites people to live peacefully, unite, or work for the progress and prosperity of the country. In other words, using red in this context would mean repeating the same mistake that the Marxist regimes made during the 1980s. Instead, we could use green, white, and blue to design I.O products inviting people to cooperate; and or to express our intentions of helping and protecting the civilian population. However, using red when imparting information or a message about insurgents and their actions could, if properly done, heighten one's point about their violent behavior. Psychologically it would be effective to introduce pictures of insurgents embedded in red, yellow or black backgrounds in our literature. The usage of these colors in this particular manner could serve the purpose of associating insurgents with violence, sickness, and misery in a variety of I.O products (brochures, billboards, leaflets, posters).

The mental conception created through the calculated use of colors can have important subconscious effects that help to target deep, inner ideas inherent to people through their traditions and religious upbringing. Colors can evoke existing emotional or historical memories that can provoke a certain emotional response. They can often be the linchpin that either harmonizes with or detracts from the power of a carefully crafted message.

What do numbers mean for Afghans?

In addition to utilizing numbers as a calculating tool, people of various cultures use numbers to express ideas. Numbers could also be utilized as an alternative channel of communication all together. Through assigning an alternate set of values to numbers it is possible to implicitly convey a message or state a fact. For instance, instead of saying there is little, or no difference between (A) and (B) Afghans say "two 15s make one 30," just as we say in English "six of one or a half dozen of the other." In this example, numbers are used to construct a metaphor for the equality or resemblance of values.

Likewise, numbers could replace a noun or a verb in dialogue. Sometimes, Americans substitute the noun "emergency" with the numbers "9-1-1." For an individual unfamiliar with the American culture and society, this could cause confusion and misunderstanding. However, this concept could easily take-hold with the implementation of the "119" program in Kabul. This section is an attempt to introduce the manner in which numeric values are dispersed to signify denotations independent of the literal meaning of the characterizing numbers.

Communicating with numbers: The "Abjad" system

According to the Abjad communicating system, each number represents a letter of the alphabet. This assigned numerical value can be used just the way the letter itself is utilized to form a word, a sentence, or a paragraph. This numerical coding system is mainly used in Arabic, Dari (Farsi), and Hebrew.

Examples:

The common Islamic phrase *bism illāh ir-raḥmān ir-raḥīm* "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." has a numeric value of 786 (from a letter-by-letter cumulative value of 2+60+40 + 1+30+30+5 + 1+30+200+8+40+50 + 1+30+200+8+10+40). For this reason, some Muslims begin writing letters, (personal and official) and memos with the number 786 written on top margin of the first page.

The word *Allah* (God) by itself has the value 66 (1+30+30+5). The number 66 might remind an American of the famous historic "Route 66," and the song "Get Your Kicks on Route 66." However, for a Muslim/Afghan, who is aware of the *Abjad* meaning of this number, it entails an entirely different religious connotation.

One (١)

When an Afghan raises his/her index finger, pointing at and looking to the sky, most likely he/she means to say that "God is one." After all, Islam is a monotheistic religion and most Afghans are Muslims.

Three (٣)

One of the Afghans' versions of Murphy's Law is "what happens twice, will happen a third time." While Americans believe in the idea of "a second chance," Afghans generally think that it is fair to offer a "third chance" as the final opportunity to achieve a goal or correct a mistake.

There is also a belief among the public that rinsing or washing anything three times would almost guarantee that it's clean and usable/edible.

One Hundred Thousand – *Lakh* (١٠٠٠٠٠)

Just as the term "one million" is an indication of ten-hundred thousand, *yak lakh* in Dari, Pashto and Urdu signifies one hundred thousand. Accordingly, a hundred and fifty thousand is *yak o nim lakh* or a lakh and a half, and five hundred thousand translated into *panj lakh*, five lakh(s). Some also refer to a rich individual as *lakh-patti*; a term similar to "millionaire" in English.

Four Hundred and Twenty (٤٢٠)

A person who breaks the law regularly, is not truthful, is deceptive, and does not adhere to high standards of moral conduct is referred to as a *charsad o bist* or “four hundred and twenty.”

Seven (٧) and thirteen (١٣)

Seven is not associated with good luck; neither does the number thirteen (13), the sign of bad luck in the West, have any sinister meaning in the Afghan culture.

Why Numbers Matter

As mentioned above, in Pashto and Dari one can replace words with numbers via the *Abjad* system. It is important to remain aware of such capability that the enemy could potentially utilize sending messages via various forms of communication devices. Therefore, one must remain alert that letters of alphabet, for example, containing an unusual amount of numbers may be written in *Abjad* system. This coding system could be unlocked by a person who knows the *Abjad* system, and can precisely assign an alphabetic value to each number. In Afghanistan, it is more likely to find a person with this type of skill at a higher education institution.

Importance of the “third” chance

If feasible, try to give an Afghan, not just a *second*, but a *third* chance to make an amendment, or try to succeed in an endeavor for the final time. Generally, in the Afghans’ mind a third chance is much fairer than a second.

Therefore, if two meetings don’t lead to a desirable outcome, you should try to hold another meeting for the third time – if possible. Chances are your Afghan counterpart is expecting a third opportunity from you. Similarly, within a situation in which you have twice ordered an Afghan to exit from a hiding place, it would be helpful to say something along the lines of “this is your third and last chance to come out.” Subsequently, he/she may follow your order, and you might not have to end up taking drastic measures.

Many of our leaflets are printed with registration numbers in the corner. It is important to be careful to avoid using numbers with religious implications, such as “66,” which means “God.” Especially, if planning to drop leaflets via helicopters, refrain from writing “66” or “786” on them. It will be interpreted as insensitive toward, and disrespectful to Islam.

Finally, unless you are attempting to be humorous, try to avoid assigning the number “420” to your vehicle. It would literally mean “this vehicle belongs to a bunch of unruly thugs!”

Proverbs: Simple Tools for Communicating Complex Ideas

Speakers of Pashto and Dari use proverbs specific to their respective languages. However, many proverbs can be as commonly used in one language as the exact translation of it in the other. Interestingly, most Dari and Pashto speakers fully understand the underlying meaning of a proverb from each other’s languages.

Therefore, should it fit appropriately within the context of his/her discourse, often a Pashto speaker would incorporate a Dari proverb in his/her speech. Similarly, a Dari speaker could seamlessly append a Pashto proverb to his/her speech should the opportunity present itself. This chapter introduces some commonly used Pashto and Dari proverbs along with the explanation of their contextual and implied meanings. Pashto and Dari proverbs are marked with a (P) and a (D) respectively. Here are some common proverbs and their meanings:

1- It takes a local dog to catch a local rabbit (P).

According to this proverb, in our struggle to win the Afghans’ support in any locale, we would need to better understand its residents’ culture, history, social structures, and local politics. Of course, we would need to familiarize ourselves with the local terrain, but we must also know who is who in a particular area and how we can work with them in order to achieve best results. To become a “local dog” is to become knowledgeable about an area, and to foster a friendship with its residents based on mutual trust and confidence. Only then can we catch the “rabbit.”

2- The tree may live for a hundred years, but the bird may perch in it for only one night (P).

This proverb is regarding the seemingly short period of human life on earth. It could also pertain to a situation in which one resides at a place for a definite and relatively short time, or is appointed temporarily to complete a task. This saying is rooted in the belief that one needs to enjoy his/her life, and take full advantage of this opportunity.

3- *A woman is the lamp/light bulb of the room (P).*

It emphasizes the value of woman, and the critical role that she plays in the family.

4- *Everyone likes meat, but the cat worships it (P).*

Some people know their 'calling,' and dedicate a lifetime to a cause to achieve a specific goal. These types of people are the "*cats who worship meat.*" There are others who would constantly dream about pleasures of life. For example, some people think and talk about money, and hold three jobs to earn and save as much as possible. They also act as "the cats who worship the meat."

5- *A crooked mouth can be straightened with a punch (P).*

This proverb is generally used by one who demands swift action. Unlike the underlying meaning of the "turning the other cheek," the main idea of this phrase is to prevent damage through assertion, and employ force while threatened, feeling undermined, or insulted.

6- *Poor here, poor in India (P).*

This is based on the belief that no matter where a poor person lives in poverty, he/she will always be poor. To a great extent, this is reflective of the socio-economic realities of the Afghan society. This proverb is a testimony to the scarcity of opportunities for upward social and economic mobility in Afghanistan.

7- *No one has ever seen a man who claims to be hungry for intelligence, and satisfied with his wealth (P).*

Just as humans hardly ever admit that they are incompetent or lack intelligence, they are also generally dissatisfied with the amount of their wealth and worldly positions. This is referring to the idea that humans can achieve happiness when they are content with what they have. It is based on the assumption that humans continually deal and struggle with two of their natural emotions: pride and greed.

8- *Whoever does not know himself, doesn't know God (P/D).*

To know one's self is to realize one's potentials and limits. It is to appreciate one's existence as a unique and intelligent creature with extraordinary capabilities; and yet imperfect and mortal. It is also to understand one's own realm of thoughts which could

lead to a deeper sense of awareness of one's soul and body. Afghans strongly believe in their existence, not just as a physical but as a spiritual being.

9- The world is coming to an end; the cocks are friends (P).

Afghans take both friendship and hostility seriously. It requires tremendous amount of time and effort to win one's trust and foster a friendship. This is probably the result of socio-economic realities of Afghan society. The banking system is primarily limited to the major city centers, credit cards are non-existent, and the rule of state law does not fully extend to the suburb and rural areas. Hence at times of need, a friend would have to be "a friend indeed⁵." Therefore, people are cautious in choosing their friends and co-depending on them, as well as in dealing with their enemies. Within the Afghans' complex social structure, many inherit friendships and animosities passed on from one generation to the next.

10- Manners can be learned from the unmannered (P/D).

As in many other cultures, following social etiquette properly is imperative for effective communication and socialization among Afghans. In any particular situation, Afghans must act according to a set of rules and etiquettes specific to that particular circumstance. For example, by rising when a person older than oneself or of higher social status enters the room, one is exhibiting a good manner which is indication of respect to that individual. Afghans highly value and are sensitive to such social etiquettes. This proverb emphasizes the importance of learning how to be polite, as well as the awareness of one's words and actions that are considered inappropriate.

11- When you spit at the sky, it will fall back on your face (D/P).

This proverb is mentioned when an individual slanders another. Cussing or defaming one is similar to spitting upward – the speaker would be the first person negatively affected by it. In other words, it would reflect negatively on the character of the slanderer. Not only vilifying remarks and defamation are sins according to the Islamic law; culturally, uttering disparaging comments about others, especially in their absence, is not an honorable way of conduct.

12- Yellow dog, the brother of jackal (D/P).

An appropriate time for mentioning this is to be given choices that are almost identical. During the ten years of Soviet communist style regime in Afghanistan, power changed hands between four Marxist presidents. Each one promised a "different" type of government, and yet followed essentially the same doctrine of ruling through repression.

⁵ English language proverb: "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

Each political transformation did not entail any major socioeconomic change. Consequently, people saw no difference between one president and the one replacing him. This reality was reflected in their repeatedly mentioning of this proverb each time a government was overthrown and substituted by a new, yet identical regime.

13- Prior to having tea, it is not possible to fight (D/P).

A trait common among majority Afghans is drinking tea. Most people sip tea either prior to or while socializing, during work, and when they study. Tea to an Afghan is what coffee or wine is to an American. To break the ice, and to achieve best results, a meeting with an Afghan has to entail sipping tea. However, prior to serving, one must ask a guest if he/she would like to have black or green tea. Of course, cookies, sugar coated almonds and other kinds of sweets are always a plus.

14- He/she ate my salt and urinated in my salt-shaker (D/P).

This expression is used in reaction to a person's disloyalty and dishonesty. Nevertheless, the betrayer can not be just anyone. He/she must have been sharing food, either prepared or paid for by the affected party. When an Afghan welcomes one in his/her home, and offers this person food, he/she indirectly conveys his/her sense of trust offering a hand of friendship to that individual. In return, he/she expects honesty and loyalty from that individual. To eat someone's *naan o namak*, bread and salt, and to then turn around and betray that person is one of the ultimate forms of affront and indignation directed to the host.

15- United efforts move mountains (D/P).

Because Afghanistan is linguistically and ethnically diverse, the concept of unity has always been present and prominent within the Afghan social and political discourse. Intellectuals have written countless number of poems, stories, and articles on the importance of preservation of unity among the various ethno-linguistic groups constituting the Afghan nation. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, movies, dramas, songs, paintings and posters have also played a major role in the promotion of national solidarity among Afghans.

16- Too many butchers and the cow will turn into a carcass (D/P).

Similar to the conviction among most Americans, Afghans believe in effective leadership for the successful completion of a task undertaken by a group. They also believe in the delegation of authority to a competent decision maker. Historically, Afghans have followed their elders because they (the elders) tend to be knowledgeable and experienced. However, they have also chosen men of courage, whom have possessed exceptional

leadership skills, as their chief. During the *Loya Jirga* of 1947, the selection of the twenty four year old Ahmad Shah Abdali, also know as the *Baa baa*, the father of the nation, serves as a vivid example of the Afghans' belief in the importance of being lead by a capable leader.

17- Walls have mice, mice have ears (D/P).

This proverb is a parallel to the one used by English speakers, “loose lips sink ships.” Remember that Afghans' social life is centered on family and tribe. Therefore, they strongly believe in the idea of family privacy, as much, if not more than they do than individual privacy. As a result, they tend to avoid disclosing information about family matters with strangers. If they ever do so, Afghans tend to remain extremely cautious while discussing sensitive issues with an outsider. To a great extent, an individual's actions and words are reflective of that person's family values. What a member says or does could easily affect his/her family's reputation and social status. This proverb is an inherent expression of the Afghans' acute sense of prudence while communicating opinions or even stating simple facts.

18- An unbalanced load does not make it to the destination (D/P).

This adage accentuates the importance of devising a plan, and taking the risks and rewards of every action into serious consideration while beginning a task, or launching an operation. Put simply, laying a strong and balanced foundation based on contemplation and caution is essential to achieving satisfactory result.

19- He/she has become the snake of my sleeve (D/P).

When a person (A) is simply not able to separate him/herself from an individual (B), who could potentially be a threat to (A), that individual (A) is said to be “stuck with a snake in his/her sleeve.” Because (B) is close enough to (A) to inflict harm to him/her, a slight negligence by (A) could discomfort or anger (B) and prompt him/her to inflict damage upon (A). Thus, a snake in one's sleeve is an unwanted person, close and therefore easily capable of harming one, should one make a wrong move.

20- No flower is without a thorn (D/P).

This is to say “no one is perfect.” Every human, no matter how kind, smart, or talented has a flaw or two. This proverb suggests that one should not expect perfection from any person – be it a family member, a friend, or a coworker. This realization could promote tolerance, improve communication, and strengthen relationships among people.

<p>3- You are beginning to lay the foundation for a project in a village. You are trying to convey the point that one should use the <i>right</i> way of doing things, not the easy way that could cause difficulties down the road.</p>	<p>"A tilted/eschewed load will not reach to its destiny."</p>	<p>"کزه بل منزل ته نه رسي."</p>	<p>"Kajha baar manzel ta narasighzi."</p>	<p>Say this when you are asking people to be patient. You want to tell them that you want to do things right.</p>	
<p>4- In a meeting, you want to tell Afghans that you are aware of the rumors being spread about X or Y. You want to let them know that you are capable of understanding what is happening "beneath the surface."</p>	<p>"Walls have mice, and mice have ears."</p>	<p>"دیارونه مورکی لری، مورکی غوری لری."</p>	<p>"Diwaaroonaa moozghaki lary, mozhaki ghowazghi lary."</p>	<p>Also, use this if you want people to be cautious of the type of information they share with others.</p>	
<p>5- This proverb is useful when you invite others to join you in accomplishing a goal, solicit their cooperation and support, or encourage people to set aside their differences and work together.</p>	<p>"United efforts move mountains."</p>	<p>"اتفاق ته غرونه څه دي؟"</p>	<p>"Ettefaaq ta ghroona isa di."</p>	<p>Use it when you want to remind people that strength is not just in numbers but also in unity.</p>	
<p>6- Useful when you want to emphasize the importance of executing a task in a timely manner.</p>	<p>"After Eid⁶, of what use is henna? Paint the walls with it."</p>	<p>"اختر چه تیر شي، نکړيزي په ديوال ونيه."</p>	<p>"Akhtar che ter shi, nakrize pa dewaal wottapa."</p>	<p>Use it only after offering some reasons for why project needs to be done, or a step needs to be taken within a specific time frame.</p>	
<p>7- When you want to assure that villagers know that you are not staying there permanently. Rather, you are there temporarily to help them, and one day you will leave.</p>	<p>"The tree may live for a hundred years, but the bird may perch in it for only one night."</p>	<p>"د ونې سل کاله عمر دي، خو د مورغي پکښې يوه شپه ده."</p>	<p>"da wonei sal kaala omor di kho da morghai pakshi yawah shpa da."</p>	<p>Use to counter the insurgents' argument that you are "the invader," and planning to occupy the country in the long run.</p>	<p>Don't use it if the villagers are worried that might be leaving soon.</p>
<p>8- In a meeting with an Afghan, you have discussed a needed action several times, but he is being stubborn about implementing it. You must have close and friendly relationship with him already to use this.</p>	<p>"Your chicken is standing on one leg."</p>	<p>"ستا چرگه په يوه پښه باندي ولاړ دي."</p>	<p>"Staa cherga pa yawah pe'sha baandi walaar di."</p>	<p>Do say it in a humorous way to someone you have met a few times and know well.</p>	<p>The meaning is that a one-legged chicken cannot move, have fostered a close relationship with him/her.</p>
<p>9- You are mentoring an Afghan National Army company commander who continues to be reluctant to delegate responsibility to his</p>	<p>"No sound would be generated from one hand."</p>	<p>"له يوه لاس نه غږ نه پخيزي."</p>	<p>"La yawah laas na ghagh na paastizghi."</p>	<p>This proverb is effective, especially when you want to encourage team</p>	

⁶ Afghans, especially girls and women decorate their hands with henna (red dye) a night before the Eid festival. This will ensure that the next day the henna will show the next day which is the first day of Eid.

<p>senior NCO. He clearly believes this would be a reduction in his personal authority and power in the company. You want to convince him that empowering his senior sergeant to conduct the daily tasks of the company would in fact elevate his position in the company.</p>				<p>work and cooperation.</p>	
<p>10. You are meeting with a group of elders in a village <i>saleh mashwara</i> (informal <i>jirga</i>). You have experienced poor security in the vicinity of the village (frequent sniping at convoys, IEDs) and this is impacting your ability to get development to their village. Yet the elders are vague or non-committal about improving security, frequently telling you "<i>Inshallah</i>" ("if God wills it"), clearly intimidated or scared away from being more assertive with the problem. Use this proverb to encourage them to take control and do what is right</p>	<p><i>God says "if you move, I will help you."</i></p> <p><i>(This is very similar to the Christian proverb "God helps those who help themselves.")</i></p>	<p>"خداي واي جی سنا نه حرکت، زمانه برکت."</p>	<p>"<i>Staa na harakat, ze maa na barakat.</i>"</p>	<p>This has a religious connotation and is very useful in encouraging people to take action.</p>	<p>Be careful not to make people feel as if you are accusing them of being lazy. Be aware of the context in which you are using it.</p>

Idiomatic Expressions

An idiomatic expression is a phrase or combination of words that collectively suggests a meaning completely separate from the connotation of each word constituting the phrase itself. The speaker of a second language who knows the literal meaning of each word (component) of the phrase might not understand the implied meaning of those words put together as an idiom.

For example, a non-native speaker of Pashto or Dari, might know the meaning of *speen/safed*, white, and the meaning of *stergi/chashm*, eye. The combination of these two words forms the phrase "*spin stergi*," in Pashto, and "*chashm safed*" in Dari, which means "white eyed." To a speaker of Pashto or Dari as a second language, most likely, it is not easy to extract the indirect meaning of this phrase from the literal meaning of its components. However, to a native speaker the phrase proposes that the person who is "white eyed" is one who is "shameless."

From a non-native perspective, frequent incorporation of idioms as such in speech could easily convert the second language from its original form to a difficult or even impossible

to comprehend (almost a third) – entirely different language. Therefore, to effectively communicate dealing with complex social and political issues, and in critical circumstances, familiarity with such phrases is of great significance.

Examples

Has your head been bitten by a snake?

1 سرته مار گزیده؟

Usage: When a person wants to engage in a dangerous or out of the ordinary task. The English equivalent of this expression is, “Are you out of your mind?”

He/she brought my head to pain.

2 سر مه به درد آورد.

Usage: When a person complains about another’s length of speech. This means that the second person speaks more than necessary; to the extent that the listener ends up with a headache.

Your head smells like “qorma.”⁷

3 سرت بوی قورمه مینته.

Usage: When one is trying to warn a person of the danger(s) that his/her action(s) could involve or cause.

He/She has given a flower to water.

4 گله به او داده.

Usage: When a person makes a mistake or creates a problem, he/she is said to “have given a flower to the water.”

He/she has climbed up on my shoulders.

5 سر شانه هایم بالا شد.

Usage: When one offers an individual a favor, and then the person on the receiving end asks for another and even bigger favor again and again, he/she is “climbing on the first person’s shoulders.”

It is therefore argued that just because a person shows kindness, one should not take advantage of his/her gesture and ask for even more favors. In other words, one must not “climb on his/her shoulders.”

My liver is bleeding.

6 بسیار جگر خون استم.

Usage: While feeling a combined effect of sorrow and depression, one describes his/her state of mind and psyche as being *jegar-khoon*, “bloodied liver.”

⁷ A side-dish made with beef, chicken, and/or vegetables.

My hand is tight.

7 دستم تنگ است.

Usage: I don't have money. I am facing a financial crisis. Because, it is somewhat awkward to admit that one is facing economic problems, one expresses it indirectly using these words.

I will eat your sorrow.

8 غمته میخورم.

Usage: I will take care of you. This shows a deeper sense of care and sympathy.

I speak without the skin.

9 پوست کنده گپ میزنم.

Usage: I speak straightforwardly. I speak of the "naked truth."

He/she reached to my cry.

10 به دادم رسید.

Usage: He/she assisted me. This person not only heard my cry, but also cared about and helped me.

My eyes were brightened.

11 چشمهایم روشن شد.

Usage: When one sees a loved one, especially after a long period, one can say "my eyes were brightened by seeing him/her." Seeing someone after a long time also calls for giving *cheshm-roshani*. This is simply telling one that their "eyes may be brightened," because they just saw a loved one after a relatively long time.

He/she was speaking like a parrot.

12 مثل طوطی گپ میزد.

Usage: He/she was speaking fast and fluently. Usually, when a foreigner speaks Pashto or Dari with proficiency, he/she is said to be speaking "like a parrot." Additionally, if a child or a recovering ill person begins speaking with more fluency than commonly expected, one can analogize their speaking ability to that of a parrot (from a positive perspective) which can utter words and sentences with ease.

No foot was left to my foot.

13 پایم د پایم نماند.

Usage: I walked so much that now I am extremely tired. This expression pertains to physical tiredness only.

It/he/she has beaten my heart.

14 دل مه زده.

Usage: This is used to express lack of interest in a person, subject, event, or an item. Thus, one may say "he has beaten my heart," which means I am tired of seeing him or talking to him. One could also say "ice cream has beaten my heart," which means I have had too much ice cream.

- Give him/her a heart lifting.*** 15 برش دل بالایی بتی.
Usage: Encourage him/her. Don't let him/her to loose heart.
- He/she has a big heart and open hand.*** 16 دل کلان و دست باز داره.
Usage: He/she is generous.
- His/her forehead was sour.*** 17 پیشانی ترشی کد.
Usage: He/she did not seem to be friendly. He/she had an unfriendly and unwelcoming attitude.
- His/her forehead was open.*** 18 پیشانیش واز بود.
Usage: He/she had welcoming and friendly manners – did not give us any attitude.
- He/she raised his/her skirt on her/himself.*** 19 دامن خوده سر خود بالا کد.
Usage: He/she disclosed a secret, or simply said something that caused him/her to become embarrassed.
- He/she is a bad-eating person.*** 20 او بد خور است.
Usage: He/she is a tough individual. He/she does not care about the consequences of his/her actions. This person is strong and willing to take risk.
- He/she is puffing.*** 21 پف میکنه.
Usage: This refers to a person who boasts. One who exaggerates while describing him/herself or another individual, an event, or an object. One who “puffs” is one who is a bragger.
- He/she eats from the blister of his/her palm.*** 22 از آبله کف دست خود نان میخوره.
Usage: This is to suggest that a person is self sufficient. He/she works hard and is able to provide for him/herself.
- Nothing is made from his/her hand.*** 23 از دستش هیچ چیز ساخته نیست.
Usage: There isn't much he/she can do. This does not mean that he/she is unwilling to do something; but rather is unable to take an action.
- He/she is puffing him/herself up.*** 24 خوده میپندانه.
Usage: If one acts in arrogance, he/she is referred to as one who is “puffing him/self up.” In English, one could describe this type of a person as one whose “head is filled with hot air.”

He/she made him/herself on us.

25 خود سر ما نساژ.

Usage: When a person refuses to interact with one, and acts as if he/she has no time, is too busy, this individual is referred to as one who is “making him/herself.” In other words he/she has “his/her nose up in the air,” acting as if he/she is of a higher social/economic status, or for some other reason superior to others.

Keeping him/her/it like a flower.

26 گل واری نگایش میکنه.

Usage: Taking good care of him/her/it. To care for something as if it was a flower – delicate and in need of timely and diligent care.

His/she couldn't fit in his shirt.

27 ده پیرانش جای نمیشد.

Usage: He/she was very happy – ecstatic.

He/she is looking at me left-left (eskewed).

28 چپ، چپ سیل میکنه.

Usage: To look at one angrily, or with bad intention. To give one “the look.” To try to frighten one.

His/her color had flown (was yellow).

29 رنگش پریده بود (زرد بود).

Usage: He/she was ill or weak. He/she looked pale and unhealthy.

Your chicken is standing on one leg⁸.

30 مرغ تو ده یک لنگ سوار است.

Usage: You are stubborn. When a chicken stands on one leg, it doesn't move. It stands fixed in one place unwilling to change position. Similarly, when a person insists that his/her view is “the right” view, and is not keen to compromise; that individual's “chicken” is said to have one “leg.”

Effective Use of Idiomatic Expressions in Spoken Language: Pashto and Dari

The use of idiomatic expressions is prevalent, especially in colloquial Pashto and Dari. To properly apply them to speech, the learning of at least one of these languages is necessary. Similar to proverbs' use, idiomatic expressions' require understanding of some of the other cultural nuances (traditions, folk tales, folk songs etc.). Therefore, with the help of a translator, incorporating idiomatic expressions could tremendously help communicating one's intention, making a point, or simply engaging in small talk to bond

⁸ This could be used as a proverb and or an idiomatic expression.

with and build a relationship with Afghans. Here are a few more examples to explain how these expressions work:

1- *Kor di wadaan.* کور دی ودان.

Meaning: “May your household prosper.” Every time an Afghan helps you, it is wise to add “*kor di wadaan*” to “*manana*,” or “*tashakor*.” even before he/she has begun to assist you, it is a great sign of appreciation to say this phrase.

2- *Zghowandai osei.* ژوندی اوسی.

Meaning: “May you live (long).” This expression could be used interchangeably with the one mentioned above – “*Kor di wadaan*.”

3- *Pa stergo baande.* په سترگو باندی.

Meaning: “On my eyes.” This is good to use when you want to assure an Afghan that you will accept their request and meet their demand. It is equivalent to saying “absolutely, definitely” in English.

4- *Kam e maa, karam e shoma (Dari).* کم ما، کرم شما.

Meaning: “Our little offering, and your kindness.” Say this after someone thanks you for your good deed, assistance, or a gift. In plain English, it simply means, “it was nothing, please don’t mention it.”

5- *Khodaai mehrabaan di* خدای مهربان دی.

Meaning: “God is kind.” When you try to ask someone not to worry, or encourage him/her to have hope and think positively, you can not go wrong with reminding that person that “God is kind.” This is also a good reminder to the Afghans that you are also a believer in God – You share an important religious value with them.

Names of Individuals

Just as in English, certain names convey personal characteristics in Dari and Pashto. For example, "Mike" is commonly associated with strength, and "Percival" today is commonly regarded as a "sissy" name. If you are selecting names for characters to use for an IO product such as a comic book or graphic novel for youth, choose names that convey the personality characteristic you want that character to imply.

The expansive diversity of Afghan names is primarily due to three factors: The ethno-linguistic diversity among Afghans, the influence of Arabic and Islam, and the geographical location of Afghanistan bordering Middle East, South Asia as well as Central Asia. Each of these regions is comprised of highly complex ethno-linguistic societies which inadvertently influence language and tradition in Afghanistan.

Therefore, it should not come as a surprise to hear names such as Abdullah (Arabic), Sparta (Greek), Sita (Hindi), Arezo (Dari), and Shayesta (Pashto) in Afghanistan. It seems that names with roots in Pashto, Dari and Arabic are most prevalent among Afghans. The following are a few examples of Afghan male and female names along with their closest interpretations in English. Any of these names can be utilized in I.O products⁹.

Male Names

Aryan: The ancient name of Afghans	Dariush: Ancient Persia's King	Haroon: Hebrew name
Aazar: The 9th month of celebration (in ancient Persia)	Dawood: Hebrew name. Name of a prophet	Hadi: Guide
Aarmaan: Wish, Desire	Dilawar: Brave	Hamid: Praiseworthy
Akhtar: Star	Elhaam: God's message sent to humans	Haris: Farmer
Aashna: Familiar, Friend	Enayat: Generosity	Hameed: Hebrew name
Arsalan: Turkish name, Lion	Emad: Pillar, support	Haseeb: Omnipotent
Asad: Lion	Ehsan: Thoughtfulness, kindness	Hekmat: Intuition
Abdullah: Slave of God	Eqbal: Destiny	Hedayat: Guidance
Afzal: Better, Someone on a higher level	Esmat: Dignity, pride	Humayoon: Fortunate
Adeeb: Intellectual, Erudite	Elyaas: Hebrew name	Hussain: Good
— Adeeba (f)	Faisal: The Judge	Najam: Star
Akbar: Big, Significant	Fareed: Unique. Fareeda (f)	Nader: Rare
Ameen: Honest	Fardeen: Spring	Nabi: Prophet
Ameer: Superior, Chief	Fateh: Conqueror	Nadeem: Companion
Anas: Arab name	Feraidoon: A character in Shahnama Ferdowsi	Naseer: Supporter, Helper
Anosh: Eternal		Idrees: Hebrew name
Ahmad: Superior, Greater		Ismael: Hebrew name
Ajmal: Good looking		Ibrahim: Hebrew name
		Imaan: Faith

⁹ Please consult with a Pashto/Dari translator or Afghan Cultural Advisor.

Akmal: Perfect	Farzaad: Splendid	Issah: Hebrew name
Amjad: Great, noble	Farooq: One who can differentiate	Imraan: Builder
Asif: Pure, Clean	Farhad: A character in Shahnama Ferdowsi	Jamaal: Beauty
Aadel: Reasonable. Adela (f)	Frogh: Luminosity	Jawed: Timeless, eternal
Arif: Knowledgeable	Ferdows: Paradise	Jawaad: Liberal
Abbas: Angry, Lion	Fayaaz: Bountiful	Jabbaar: Cruel
Ateeq: Ancient	Farukh: Happy	Jamshed: A character in Shahnama
Bahraam: Ancient Persian name	Feroz: A classy stone. (Turquoise color)	Jalaal: Splendor
Basheer: One who brings good news	Furhan: Cheerful	Jahid: Hard worker
Behzaad: Pure, Well-mannered	Habib: Habib (Arabic)	Jaleel: Respected
Badee: Inventor	Haider: Lion	Kamraan: Victorious
Baktash: Ancient Persian name	Hafiz: One who memorizes (Usually the Quran)	Kamaal: Talent
Babur: The Mongul Ruler	Hashim: Magnificent	Kareem: Generous, humane
Baryalai: Successful	Hakim: Almighty	Kambiz: Fortunite
Brishna: Light	Hassan: Good	Khalid: Everlasting, eternal,
Mateen: Patient	Rastagaar: Virtuous	Khalida (f)
Muneer: Illuminates/td>	Ramin: Ancient Persian name	Kaihaan: World
Mujib: One who answers, responsible	Sulimaan: Hebrew name	
Mahboob: Famous, liked	Sorosh: Angel	
Momen: Faithful	Sabawoon: Ancient Persian name	
Mohsin: Gentle, humanitarian	Sami: Elevated	
Mashaal: Light	Shaheen: Eagle	
Mujtaba: The chosen one	Shoaib: Hebrew name. A prophet	
Mustafa: Chosen one	Shujah: Brave	
Mahmood: Praised	Shekaib: Patient	
Masood: Lucky	Sohraab: A character in Shahnama (Persian)	
Moosa: Desire	Sattar: Concealed	
Meelaad: Birth	Sakhee: Generous	
Najeeb: Truthful, real	Sadeed: Strong, sturdy, right, truth	
Naqeeb: The chief of a clan. Superior	Seeyar: Morals	
Naveed: Good news	Sidiq: Honest, sincere	
Omed: Hope, aspiration	Sohail: Star	
Omar: Arabic name meaning Age	Saleh: Truthful, Frank	
Orbalaye: Fire	Shadkaam: Triumphant	
Orang: Wisdom	Shareef: Noble	
Onai: A hill in Afghanistan	Tariq: Arabic name	
Parvez: Ancient Persian name	Taher Pure	
Pazhwaak: Voice	Temor: One	
Pashtana: Pashtoon	Torialaye: Brave	
Pirooz: Victorious	Waleed: Kid	
Poya: Curious	Waheed: Unique	
Qader: Powerful	Wahid: Name of a Persian	
Qudoos: Chaste		
Qais: Arabic name		

Qaseem: Destiny	King
Qayoom: Everlasting	Wali: Friend
Qasim: One who divides	
Qaisar: Cesar	Yama: Hebrew name
	Yousef: Hebrew name (Joseph)
Rahim: Merciful	Yaqoob: Hebrew name. (Jacob)
Rohullah: Prophet Issah's name	Younes: Hebrew name
Rishaad: Rare	
Rasheed: Powerful	Zubair: Arabic name
Raouf: Generous	Zahir: Obvious
Razaaq: One who provides food	Zeckria: Hebrew name
Reza: Consent	Zia: Light
Rustam: A character in Shahnama	Zaki: Intelligent
Rafi: Comforter	Zahid: Chaste
Rastagaar: Virtuous	Zakir: One who praises God
Ramin: Ancient Persian name	Zameer: Conscience
Rafi: Comforter	Zmarai: Lion

Female Names

Aryana: The ancient name of Afghanistan	Freshta: Angel	Meenaa: Cup of Wine
Arezo: Desire, wish, hope	Farah: Glory	Malalai: Friendly
Aaseya: Hebrew name, the name of Prophet Moussa's mother	Farhat: Bliss	Mezghaan: Eyelashes
Afsana: Tale	Fatima: Arab name. Daughter of Prophet Mohammad high-class	Morsal: Flower
Amina: Arab name	Ghazal: Poem	Mahira: Expert
Elaha: Ancient Gods	Ghezaal: Deer	Meetra: Sun, light
Asmaa: Plural of Isem (names)	Geeti: World	Marghalara: Pearl
Aliya: Superior, finer	Gulalai: Gorgeous	Morwarid: Pearl
Afzal: Better, Someone on a higher level	Haleema: Sympathetic	Madina: Name of a holy city in Saudi Arabia
Awesta: The holy book of Zarasthura	Hadeeqa: Garden	Mina: Love
Atefa: Compassion	Hamasa: Courage	Moska: Smile
Asifa: Pure, Clean	Haseena: Beautiful	Maleeha: Charming
Aisha: Arabic name (Prophet's Wife)	Hawa: Air (Hebrew)	Maneezha: A character in Shahnama Ferdowsi
Aaqila: Intelligent	Helai: Duck	Naheed: Star. Venus
	Husna: Beauty	Nayaab: Rare
	Hosai: Deer	Neelaab: ?
	Huma: A rare bird	Najma: Star
	Humaria: Auspicious	Nabeela: Noble
	Iffat: Honor	Najla: Offspring
		Nargis: A kind of Flower
Bahar: Spring	Iffat: Honor	Nasreen: A kind of flower
Bareen: Superior	Jameela: Pretty	Negaar: Beloved. Painting
Beheshta: Paradise		Nooria: Light
Benafsha: A flower	Khatera: Memory	Najia: Truthful
Belqees: ?	Khatol: Beauty Black-mole	Nastaran: Flower
Bano: Girl	Khalida: Everlasting, eternal	Nazaneen: Sweetheart
	Khujesta : Royal	Nadia: Someone who raises her voice
Duniya: World	Khorsheed: The Sun	Neelofar: A beautiful flower/plant
Deeba: Silk		Nusheen: Sweet
Deeva: ?	Lamiha: Glowing	
Durkhanay: ?	Laila/Lailee: Nocturnal	Pareesa: Fairy
	Leeda: Glory	Palwasha: Flamelike
Fariba: Mesmerizing, enticing	Lona: Bliss	Parwana: Butterfly
Farkhunda: Lucky, happy	Lailuma: Bright Moon-night	Parveen: Collective shining Stars
Faheema: Intelligent. Bright		Pakiza: Virtuous
Farzana: Wise	Mariam: Hebrew name (Mary)	Payeez: Autumn
Fatana: Mesmerizing	Mahwash: Moonlike	
Fowzia: Victorious	Mujahida: One who struggles, works hard	
Forozaan: Vivid, gleaming	Wida: Ancient Persian Era. (Asre Veedy.)	
Qudsia: Virtuous	Wafa: Loyalty	
Qamar: Moon	Waseema: Good, Pretty	
	Wajjha: Beautiful woman, glorious	
Rahela: Caravan		
Ra'ana: Attractive	Yalda: Dark night	
Roeena: Strong	Yasameen: Flower	
Razia: Chosen, happy		
Rona: Light		
Rabia: Spring		
Roya: Dream		

Rukhshana: Radiant	Zohra: Planet Venus
	Zarafshaan: Gold glitter
Samia: One who can hear/	Zeba: Beautiful
Suraya: Moonlike	Zahra: Radiant, glooming
Sara: Pure	
Semeen: Silver	
Saima: Lightning	
Sahar: Dawn	
Samra: Fruit. Result	
Shahla: Doe-eyed	
Shameem: Sweet scent	
Shukria: Thankful	
Shereen: Sweet	
Seema: Face	
Shayaan: Worthy	
Setara: Star	
Sedra: A tree in heaven	
Sameera: Fair lady	
Soma: A kind of drink in ancient Persia	
Susan: A pretty plant/flower	
Sadaf: Oyster	
Sideeqa: Honest, sincere	
Sabia: Pretty woman	
Safia: Date-Tree	
Spoughmai: Sun	
Saira: A bird	
Salma: Used to be the name of an Arab sect	
Tamana: Wish	
Tooba: A tree in heaven	
Torrpaikey: Black/dark	
Bangs/hair	
Tahmina: A character in Shahnama meaning priceless	
Tabbasum: Smile	
Wajma: Morning breeze	
Zulekha: Hebrew name	
Zohal: A planet	
Zarmeena: Worthy	

Conclusion

The indirect and often subconscious meanings of colors, numbers, words and phrases, play a critical role in communication with the Afghans. The understanding of cultural subtleties like this will help us to get our views across without offending the Afghans, and at the same time, help us understand their perception of reality. This paper is the first in a continuing series on aspects of the Afghan culture. By shedding light on this and other features of the culture, (folk tales, poetry, legends, traditions and so on) we hope to aid field operators on the ground with relevant and useful information. By no means do we claim that these documents represent an all encompassing study of Afghan culture. Rather, they are intended as operationally useful snapshots for interacting with the Afghan culture.