

The educational approach of allegory in religious texts

Dr. Kabiri Sayed Taghi¹, Kobra Rahimzadeh²

1. Assistant Professor of Islamic Azad University of Khoy Branch, Iran
2. Member of Young Researchers' Club of Islamic Azad University of Khoy Branch, Iran

Abstract: One of the educational methods of Quran and procedure of impeccable Imams (pbuh) is giving rational and sensible proverb (adage) and simile. So that, in this method, one series of literary words that are according to talent and conception of addressee and can memorize easily, replace difficult reasonable and retinal subjects in mind and don't forget rapidly. In fact, the application of allegory in education cause to thinking and trying of learner, on the other hand, teacher giving brief examples (instances) free self and the learner from wordiness and reveal the intention of orator (speaker) for the learners can understand the matters easily and also giving an example is the best means for thinking and reasoning and guiding of mankind. This method use for simplifying of education. In this paper (article) represented the Quranic and anecdotal application of this method.

[Kabiri Sayed Taghi, Kobra Rahimzadeh. **The educational approach of allegory in religious texts.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(4):3621-3625]. (ISSN: 1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 536

Key words: Quran, Tradition, Allegory, simile, Education

1. Introduction

One of the methods of propagation and training and education, is the use of example and allegory that is used to explain the matter to the addressees and among the subjects in his/her mind. Holy Quran has frequently used allegory in instruction and teaching of its courses [teachings]. Allegory is the symbol of thought height, mind extent, and creativity of spirit, and those who have these properties, can usually enjoy the power of allegory. Sublime theosophists and great scientists have used allegory for the realization of spiritual facts and also for signifying delicate spiritual meanings to human being's mind. For example, philosophical and theosophical prose of sheikh-e-Eshrag, is very eloquent, and expressive and also contains literary order, because his writing style has some properties. He has shown the power of his creative mind in some of his works like "Resale-ye-Munes-al-oshag" [accustomed amorists dissertation] (Beheshti, 353/2). The use of allegory is frequently seen in prior scriptures like Torah and gospel, and also among the words of Holy apostle [Mohammad] and immaculate Imams [A.S]: and there is chapter in Torah which has been called "Solomon's allegories". But, in this article, we want to clarify this subject in Islamic texts namely Holy Quran and narratives of immaculate Imams [A.S]. As for the uses of allegory in philosophical, religious, heroic and literary works, we can stabilize that "allegory" is the good implement of understanding and summarization; it's opener of problems and an important implement for teaching and training, ([Mazlumi, 276).

2. Semantics

Parable[Mathal] means analog, like and equal. Its plural form, in Quran, is parables[Amthal] (Gorashi, 233/9). Parable is a word about something that is similar to another word about something else that one word explains and emerges the other word (Ragheb, 759/1). In Arabic language, "parable" mainly means like and analog. In Arabic, it has three different forms that are "mathal", "mathel" and "mathil"; and it is the same as "Shabah", "shabeh" and "shabih" that all mean like. If someone uses words in the form of allegory, it is called "parable" (Zamakhshari, 72/1). Some vocabulary experts have written four meanings for allegory: "exemplification, simulate, liken, illustrating something, saying a story or narrative in the form of example" (Mo'in, 1139/1). Dehkhoda says "allegory is exemplifying, simulating something to another one and is among metaphors. And this kind of metaphor is the form of example" (Dehkhoda, 6107/4). But technically "parable" is simulating something to other thing or some matter to another one so that the audience can take a spiritual advantage (Sajedi, 453). One of the interpreters of Quran says: "parable has a sublime importance and unveils hidden meanings, and clarifies unclear matters, and absent is so smart that is like present" (Zamakhshari, 72/1). We can say that parable is a great term that transmits a vast semantic to the addressee in the format of few words, in a special way that the addressee doesn't need to explanation and widespread definition of the objectives or events. Therefore, in semantics parable means allegory, likeness and exemplification and technically it's the as simulation of some subjective matter to another

objective matter to help the addressee understand the matter better.

3. Role and position of examples:

Examples have an undeniable role in explanation and interpretation of discussions. Sometimes a good example, that is identical with objective, can make the subject intelligible for the audience. In total we can say that: example has effective and important role in different scientific, educative, social and morality discussions these effects are as below:

1. Example makes theorem sensible: since human being is accustomed with sensible subjects, and reasonable complicated facts are far from his thought access, sensible examples can make them clear and let us understand them in an interesting and safe way. Since Quran, as a breeding book, has reliance on objective matters, sometimes it brings some beautiful and sensible examples of people's routine life in order to make complicated concepts accessible for human mind (Makarem shirazi, 164/10). For instance, Allah says: "the similitude of those who spend their wealth in Allah's way is the similitude of a grain of corn that grows seven ears and each ear has one hundred grains" (Surah Bagarah, 261). The study of adventurous history of a person that sometimes lasts for a century, isn't easy for common people, but when they oppose a scene like the life of lots of plants [including burning, growing, beauty of their life and then inexistence] which lasts just for several months, they can easily see modality of their life in this in this clear looking glass (Makarem, 265/8).

2. Example makes the way closer: sometimes man resorts to different reasoning to prove a deep rational problem and still there is ambiguity around it. But giving a clear example that is coordinated with objective makes the way closer enhances the effect of reasoning's. Allah says in Holy Quran: "The parable of those who chose others as guardians rather than Allah, is the parable of spider whose nest is made of the most vulnerable threads, if they know" (Surah Ankabut, 41)

3. Example makes theorems public: there are lots of scientific discussions that in their main form, are just apprehensible for particular people, and commonality can't make use of them: but when they incorporate with an example, people in any degree of knowledge, can make use of them. Therefore examples, as a facility of generalizing knowledge and culture, have an undeniable usage. It has come in Holy Quran: "And whatever is in the heavens and earth, regularly prostrate to Allah, as do their shadows both in the mornings and evenings" (Rad, 15). Quran has named the falling of the shadows of objects upon the earth in mornings and evenings "genuflection", the reason is

that hereon Quran has brought the innate prostration that is at the nature of objects, in the form of example, and has awaked sense of people for understanding them meaning of innate prostration, and has made the way of transmission to this rational insensible fact for such people (Tabatabayi, 442/11).

4. Example makes head-strong people wordless: In many cases, the recitation of totality of theorems doesn't suffice to make head-strong people wordless, but when the theorem is introduced in the form of example, there is no chance for these people to pretext. For instance, Quran has clearly made mention of this point: "The likeness of the creation of Jesus with Allah is that of Adam, Allah created him from dust" (Surah Al-e-Emran, 59).

Parable makes rational and no sensible theorems sensible, makes the way closer to get to objectives, makes theorems public and finally, makes head-strong people wordless. It's for this reason that we see lots of examples in Quran each one is more interesting and effective than the other, because Quran is a book that has been sent down for all people in any level of thought and knowledge.

4. The application of allegory

The use of allegory and anecdote is among the most positive, natural and the most general methods of transference of subject, and thoughts (Gharaai, 169/7).

This is the reason that Allah orders the Holy prophet to make use of this method: "[O Mohammad!] Strike for them the similitude of the life of this world: it can be compared to the rain that we send down from the sky; it mingles with the earth and causes the growth of vegetations, but [due to the change of the season] plants and vegetations become dry like straw that the wind will scatter them around. Verily, Allah is Dominant over all things". (Surah Kahf, 45)

Allegory has different uses in Quran that are as below:

1. Quranic examples are often explicit ones that are at the prime constancy and stability. (Sajedi, 457).

Like this one: "only Allah, the Almighty is the true responsive position for the worshipers' invocations. Those to whom pagans pray besides Allah, have no power to respond; it is as if one would stretch forth his hands towards water, wishing that it may reach his mouth, but it does not reach it; the prayer of the disbelievers also gets nowhere". (Surah Rad, 14). This is an allegory which expresses the state of someone should come by the water[spring], open his/her palm, take water and then drink it, this is the actual and true way to eliminate the thirst. But someone who is far from water and wants to

eliminate the thirst and doesn't do any of the above mentioned arrangement, does nothing but opening palm and bringing it near mouth. In fact such a person doesn't drink water and just shows the figure of water drinking!

2. Examples which are derived from the symbols of the nature and simply bring forward excellent moral teachings. Like this one: "and the good land yields its vegetations abundantly by the will of its creator and Nurturer, but from the bad land doesn't come forth save bad and scanty. Thus we explain our words of Revelation to the people who are grateful [for the blessings]" (Surah Araf, 58). It has come in an awakening narrative of Imam Sadegh[P.B.H] that the Holy prophet told his desert in order to show them the identity of this fact that although sin is little and light, but by duplication it will be massive and eminent. In fact he wanted to make this subject sensible for them.(Makarem Shirazi, 334/18).

3. Some other examples are to show promise and usually mention to historical stories and happenings.(Sajjadi, 457).

Like this one: "and you dwelt in the dwelling places [and palaces] are those who wronged themselves; and it was made clear to you that how we dealt with them; and set forth similitude's for you[to warn you but you were not reminded]" (Surah Ebrahim, 45)

4. The examples that figure the inner attitudes and attributes of righteous and unrighteous individuals and groups, by the use of imagination power. Like this one: those who belied our signs and miracles and rebelled against them, the gates of the heaven shall not be open to them, nor they shall enter the paradise until the camel passes through the eye of the needle[which is an impossible act]; thus, do we recompense the sinners" (Surah Araf, 40). In this sentence, the entrance of sinners to paradise has been shown as stultification, and this is a metaphor that means such an act won't be ascertainable and they should always be despaired: as if one says: "I don't do this job unless the black crow becomes white of mouse lays" this verse has pointed this concept (Tabatabayi, 143/8).

5. Bringing short statement's that each one has its own adventure and case. This kind of examples can be found frequently in the language of every nation. Quran hasn't used any of the common examples of Arab nation, rather, conversely, some examples of Quran has been passed in Arab's language. Like this one: "... but the evil plots will plot the plotters themselves..." (Surah Fater43).

5. Types of allegory

Allegory is an anecdote that figures the inner attitudes and attributes of righteous and unrighteous individuals and groups and has used the imagination power well, yet it is the narrative of facts that form the basis of men's behavior; and with this illustration, the beauty and deformation of thoughts and suppositions out crops. In this case Quran has foregone up to the level of miracle (Marefat, 148). "Almizan" interpretation writer has implied two kinds of allegory: real allegory and fancy allegory. In fact allegory is a real or fancy story that narrator thinks it's his/her slightly concept in some aspects. So he/she brings it in his/her speech to help the listener to imagine that concept completely. For example when one wants to say: I have nothing, says: "I have no camels, neither manlike nor woman". Or when wants to say to the listener: you did nothing when you had the time to do, says: "you spoiled the milk in summer" and other examples like these. But assumptive and fancy examples are as we want to show to our addressee that the spending of wealth in Allah's way is the same as you give one and take multiple ones. And to represent this matter, we say: the likeness of what you spend in Allah's way is the likeness of grain, that grows seven ears and each ear grows one hundred grains. This is an assumptive and fancy example in this verse: "and the parable of an evil word is that of a bad tree, uprooted from the earth, it has no station and stability" (Surah Ebrahim, 26) or the example in this verse: "The similitude of those on whom learning the Turah was an incumbent and they learned it without practicing the commandments, is as the likeness of a donkey who is under the burden of books to carry without understanding a single word of them" (Surah Jumu'ah, 5). Sometimes all the story isn't slightly, vat her some part of it is important for us. In these cases, either we bring the needed part of story or we bring the whole story, just to complete the story, like the example of "spending some part of wealth for Allah" and the example of "grain". In this example allegory is the only grain that grows seven hundred grains, but it's planting and growing of seven ears doesn't participate in it and are told just to finish the story (Tabatabayi, 593/2). Therefore Quran uses frequent examples to guide man. Sometimes these examples are instances of someone's real life, and sometimes they are assimilations to natural affairs in the world of animals and plants. These examples are so communicative and meaningful that can be accounted one miracle aspect of Quran, as Allah says: "and indeed we have incited for people all sorts of parables in this Holy Quran so that they may [understand it better and] receive admonition" (Surah Zomar, 27).

Holy Quran has frequently used allegory to instruct its teachings that surface meanings of them are useful for all people, but the principle and reality meanings are for scientists and reasonably people, as the best recourse for thinking and intellection. Here, we allude to general and specific profit of using allegory:

I. General profit of allegory

Textual recitations of Quran are examples for right divine educations: and Allah has lowered to the level of public thought in order to present them, and there are no alternatives, because public people can understand sensible subjects. As a result all the meanings should be told to them at the form of sensible things and objective ones (Tabatabayi, 96/3). As Allah says: "[O Mohammad] strike for them the similitude of the life of this world: it can be compared to the rain that we send down from the sky; it mingle with the earth and causes the growth of vegetations, but[due to the change of season] vegetations and plants become dry like straw that the wind will scatter them around. Verily, Allah is Dominant over all things. (Surah Kahf,45) or Allah says in another verse: "Allah sends down water from the sky, and the rivers flow each according to its vastness; and the flood causes foam on the surface of the rivers; it is like the foam of the ore when they melt it in the furnace to make ornaments or utensils therewith. Thus Allah compares Truth with Falsehood; then as for the foam it passes away as scum upon the banks of the river but as for that which is of use to mankind [like water or ore], it remains on the earth. Thus does Allah set forth parables [to explain the divine words of revelation] (Surah Ra'd, 17). From this verse we can say that right divine educations are like the water that Allah sends from the sky. And this water, per se, is just water and nothing else. Neither its Quality is objective, but the difference is in the capacity of the land upon which it rains. Each land takes parameters, one less and one more; and these deals and measures are in the same land. And religions commandments and rules are like this (Tabatabati, 95/3). Therefore, by examples, Quran wants to predispose the use of wisdom and reason in understanding the facts (Mesbah Yazdi, 30/2). In fact, Allah wants to compel his servants to think about the affairs of life and nature, because he wants them not to accept social theorems and problems slavishly, rather he wants them to accept by the use of thought and reason. One can just get the real faith in this way.

II. Special profit of allegory

Can understand the general and surface meanings of Qur'anic allegories, but only scientists and reasonably people can understand and discover

their real meanings and ultimate purposes. They are those who think about low down and don't suffice to surface meaning (Tabatabayi, 132/16). As Allah says: "and these parables we put forth mankind in general, but only the learned men understand their deep meanings" (Surah Ankabut, 43).

The reason for this concept is the statement "but only the learned men understand", because it was possible to be said: "but only the learned men believe". Saying "understand" instead of "believe" show that the purpose is to know the deep meanings of these examples, otherwise there are lots of unlearned people who believe in the external of these parables. So, the level of understanding the parables that are found in Holy Quran is different according to the intelligence and sense of men. Some listeners only here the terms and imagine their simple meanings, because they don't think deeply. Yet, there are others who think about the deep meanings and understand the exact purpose. (Tabatabayi, 196/16)

6. Results

1. Holy Quran has frequently used allegory in teaching and instructing its courses and teachings. Quran uses parables and allegories in order to cause people understand spiritual facts and excellent heavenly concepts.

2. Allegory makes rational theorems sensible, makes the way of achieving to the objective closer, makes theorems public and finally, makes head-strong people word less. It's for this reason that we see lots of examples in Quran that each one is more interesting and effective than the other, because Quran is a book that has been sent down for all mankind in any level of thought and knowledge.

3. To express scientific and rational subjects, using examples is the best way for manifesting matters and understanding them. For this reason, application and use of example is a Quranic way. In this way, Quran makes no sensible and rational concepts, sensible for the mind of addressees in the form of stories and useful examples and this helps to clear the essence of concept for people.

4. There are different views about the kinds of allegory, but we can divide allegories into two main groups: real allegory and fancy or assumptive allegories. In fact allegory is a real or fancy story that narrator thinks it's like his/her slightly concept in some aspects. So he/she brings it in his/her speech to help the listener to imagine that concept completely and better.

5. Textual recitations of Quran, are examples of right divine educations; and Allah has lowered them to the level of public thought in order to present them, and there is no alternatives, because public people

can just understand sensible subjects. As a result all the meanings should be told to them at the form of sensible things and objective ones.

6. Although all people can realize the general and surface meanings of Quranic allegories, but only scientists and reasonably people can understand and discover their real meanings and ultimate purposes they are those who think about down and don't suffice to surface meaning.

References:

1. Quran translation, Fuladvand, Mohammas Mahid; Dar-al-Quran- al-Karim, Tehran; first edition, 1415.
2. Nahj-al-Balaghah, Dashti, Mohammads; Payam-e-Adalat press, Tehran; first edition, 2005.
3. Behshti, Mohammad; Abujafari, Mahi; Fagihi, Alinagi; Mustim scientist's views in teaching and its bases, Hovzeh va Daneshgah press, Qum, Tehran; third edition, 2007.
4. Dehkhoda, Ali Akbar; dictionary; Dehkhoda institution; Tehran.
5. Ragheb-e-Esfahni, Hosein-Bin-Mohammad; Almofradat Fee gharib-al-Quran; Dar-al-Elm-Al-Darashameiah; Demashgh, Beyroot; first edition; 1412.
6. Zamakhshri, Mahmud; Alkashaf-min-Hagayege ghavamez-al-Tanzil, Dar-al-kotob-al-Arabi; Beyroot, third edition; 1407.
7. Sajedi, Abulfazl; The language of religion and Quran; Imam Khomeiny instructional and educational center; Qum, second edition; 2006.
8. Tabatabayi, Mohammad Hosein; Al-Mizan-Fi-Tafsir-al-Quran; the office of Qum scientific compass Islamic press; Qum; Fifth edition; 1417.
9. Marefat, Mohammad Hadi; Quranic sciences; Zavelqurba press; Qum; eleventh edition; 2005.
10. Qarati, Mohsen; Noor interpretation; the cultural center for Quranic lessons; Tehran; Eleventh edition; 2004.
11. Gharashi, Seyed Ali Akbar; Gamus-e-Quran; Dar-al-kotob-al-Eslameiah; Tehran; Six edition; 1992.
12. Masudi, Abd-al-Hadi, The way Hadith realization; samt press; Tehran; third edition; 2007.
13. Mesbah Yazdi, Mohammad tagi, Quran recognition; Imam Khomeiny instructional and educational center press; Qum; 2008.
14. Mazlumi, Rajab Ali; A step on Islamic training; Afagh press; Tehran; seventh edition 2007.
15. Moin, Mohammad, Farsi dictionary; Amirkabir, press; Tehran; 1992.
16. Makarem-e-Shirazi, Naser; Tafsir-e-Nemooneh; dar-al-kotob-al-Eslaeiah press; Tehran; first edition; 1995.

9/6/2012