

## The Role of the Quranic Stories and Parables in Islamic Education and Training

Dr. Akbar Salehi<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

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Stories and parables have a long history in peoples' lives from the ancient times. The ancients and even modern people use these means and messages in different shapes and patterns including written forms or orally or in illustrations, etc. to convey the facts and imaginations about the older generation time to the younger one, to maintain the nations' traditions, customs and to transform and to cause to understand these rituals for the training of the young generation. The purpose of the current article is to consider the role and importance of the Quranic stories characteristics and its didactic impacts on human being's education. Quranic stories, oppose to people's tales, enjoy some traits as being divine, having appropriate contents, being articulate and clearly expressed, also, being aware of what is going to be said about the stories in which there are the overt and hidden points. In Islamic instructions, particularly in Quran, the stories and anecdotes carry various aims such as to serve as an example, to explain the facts, to cause thinking, knowledge and learning, to create peace, and so on. Similarly, the remembrance of these messages in the form of stories and anecdotes in Quran and divine messages have some didactic effects such as using firm reasoning for thinking, utilizing the humans feelings for reinforcing the thinking and reasoning, and practicing the " beautifying" as an educational method for strengthening the emotional dimension of individuals' personalities aspect which has been studied in the article. The research method is descriptive – analytical that after seeking in Islamic resources particularly in the Holy Quran has been done in the form of library research. The article is seeking for more understanding and is in the form of a fundamental research.

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**Key words:** Stories, parables, tradition, purposes and traits, instructional works, Quran

### Introduction

Man would typically use the oral tool, language, to convey his messages and intentions when there were no other tools as paper and fur to write down things and preserving them. Hence, using language for strengthening the people's memory and imagination in times that the other tools were not invented in order to transferring the messages, considered as a valuable and important means. In modern world, not only this has not being abolished, but also it has kept its position among other information transferring.

Today, the educational instructors and educators strive to use language and speech to support better thinking and training for reasoning. The stories and anecdotes are one of the language and speech frames in past and present. Using language for storytelling, if not exaggerating, actually has an amazing effect on individuals, particularly, students' spirits. Therefore, the educational role of stories and tales in education is certainly clear to any educator. Since the ancient times, stories and tales have served as a tool for conveying the thoughts and ideas, incidents, literary and religious points. In addition, in modern times, also, using this lingual art is a tool for communicating information and again a tool for amusement and even for training.

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<sup>1</sup>salehihidji2@yahoo.com.;assistant professor in philosophy of education , Kharazmi University , Tehran, Iran.

Because of the important role of stories and tales for people's education since the ancient times in religious teachings and different rituals, particularly in Islam, the investigation into the importance of story and anecdote and explaining their characteristics, its didactic purposes and position are of a great importance. That is why the present article is to investigate the role of them from the Quranic point of view. Hence, the importance and position of stories have been studied after the conceptual explaining of the stories. Next, there are the characteristics of the Quranic stories which distinguish them from the human made ones, are going to be studied. Then, the educational impacts of the stories have been stated briefly.

I hope that this article is an attempt, although may not be sufficient enough, for explaining, attracting the people's attention to such an important subject existing in divine revelation and message.

### **Understanding the concept of Quranic stories**

The stories, in Quran, have a particular position, because the God's speech has consisted of a special attitude. This attitude expresses the wisely and humane knowledge for people. In Quran, the words such as story, tradition, *naba'* and its derivations, have been used for this term. There are several terms for story in Quran which define the spectrum and the nature of story in the frame of various words and the instillation of the deep meanings. Now, we wish to explain these terms:

#### **1. Ghasas (stories)**

In the Holy Quran, wherever it was meant *story*, it has been mentioned as *Ghasas (stories)*, which consists of the adventures and stories of the God's messengers and the honest or wicked personalities and some facts in the Islam establishment era. The Moses (p.b.u.h.)'s story is the longest one and Josef's is the most beautiful. From the Quran viewpoint, the stories are categorized into two parts of *Hagh* (the truth) and *batil* (false). Hence, the Quranic stories with stressing on truth are distinct from the other ones (al – Emraan, verse 62). "These are the true adventure of (Christ)" not the claims as the Christ is the God or He is the Son of God (Enna Haza Lahoo alghesas alhagh). (Makaarem e Shirazi, v.1, p.291).

*Ghasas* is derived from the Arabic word of *Ghes*, which means *following a track*. *Ghasas* is the plural form of *Ghesa* (story) which is some news that is being told and mentioned continuously (Ragheb e Esfahani, 1386, p.671).

In Larose dictionary, *ghasa* (story) means speech, news, chronicles, tale according to the usage of the term in Arabic (Jar, 1387, v. 2, p. 1643).

#### **2. Naba'(news)**

It means news; the news in which there is many benefits and is associated with awareness. *Naba'*, in some of the verses, according to evidences, denotes the meaning of the story. Hence, there are three types of *naba'* in Quran:

- a. The adventures and evidences which are about past. That is, the ancients' stories such as the tribes of Noah, Aad, Thamood and ...
- b. The events that have occurred in the time of descending of revelation and the era of the Islam Prophet's Prophetic mission (p.b.u.h.), like Mohammed's wars ghazwat of Badr, Ohod, Honain, and ...
- c. The events, in the time of descending of revelation, have been promised to be fulfilled in future like the defeat of the polytheists and Islam enemies, the Mecca conquest, and the defeat of Iran versus ancient Rome.

#### **3. Tradition (Hadith)**

Tradition is another term which the meaning is like story. This term etymologically means to announce, tradition, and news. Hence, tradition in Quran context is like *news* too. Like *Taahaa* Sura (chapter), verse 9, the Prophet is being addressed and goes: "and have you received Moses Tradition"? (*wahalataka hadith o Mosa*). (Makarem Shirazi, 1376, v.3, p.113).

### **The importance and the position of the Quranic stories**

The stories of the Holy Quran enjoy some privileges; the excellent results, Honorable purposes, and high aims. The Quranic stories consist of moral parts that bestow purity to the soul and adorn the human's nature. They spread wisdom and politeness and travel different ways for the moral training and refining. The Quranic stories sometimes answer the questions and in other times give some advices and recommendations and again at times warn and threaten (Delshad Tehrani, 1385).

The Quranic stories contain many of the prophets' histories and their followers, nations and their rulers. They consider the people who have chosen the right path and gain power and those who were misled, perished and their land was torn down and was tortured and experienced lots of adversities. Their adventures are as examples in Quran in order to invite people to contemplate deeply. All these purposes are been explained by God, the Almighty, with a simple expression and in a wise method through smooth words and astonishing skill, so that to invite people to adopt an appropriate ethics and conduct them to the right faith and guide them to attain a useful knowledge (Aljabbari et al, 1373, p.18).

Stories play an important role in different educational, didactic, and conductive areas (Ghezel Ayagh, 1382). Of course, there is a difference between story and tale; since the important characteristic which distinguish story from tale is the element of fact and truth. In stories especially the Quranic stories the element of truth beside the fact look so real, meaning that the Quranic stories oversee the events that have been occurred and God, the Almighty, clarifies some events through reporting them. Whereas a story can either oversees a truth or just a fantasy. Although the writer or the story teller explains some facts through story, the amusement of the reader is the main purpose and the fact and the truth are only for creating connection and identifying the elements with the other elements.

The stories and tales have played a great role since the ancient times. The attendance of divine books, particularly Quran, to stories and using of stories to communicate the God's message and to issue an ultimatum, to his servants clarifies the importance and effect of stories in prophets' talking about good tidings or gloomy prognoses. The Quranic stories are classified into three parts:

1. **The prophets' stories;** that contain the summoning of tribes by prophets, the prophets' miracles in order to make kings and people humble in front of God, and their enemies' positions, the processes of invitation to God, and finally to explain the prophets' biographies, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad and the like (Hajee Mirzaee, 1389, p. 1762).
2. **Stories in which there are past events and adventures;** these stories are the tales of those that were too many and escaped from their lands because of the fear for death and the stories of *Taloot*, *Jaloot*, *Zyelgharnian*, *Gharoon*, *Mary*, *The Akhdoodcompanions*, *Fil companions*, *Kahf companions*, *Sabt companions*, and *Adam descendant*.
3. **The stories that represent the events of the Mohammad's time;** these are *Badr war*, *Ohod (Al Emraan) war*, *Tabook war*, *Honian (repent) war*, *Ahzaab war* which has been mentioned in *AhzabSura* and the story of Mohammad's Hegira (emigration) in *asrasura*, that all have been stated not so organized. The only story which has been stated consistently and coherently is about Joseph that is in Joseph Sura and consists of 111 verses. The Joseph Sura is one of the most perfect ones that contain many didactic and moral points. According to Quran, the Joseph story is the best (Ahsan) story of all and that is why the researchers and Quranologists are striving hard to interpret the Sura (ibid).

### The didactic purposes in Quranic stories

According to the Holy Quran contexts, there are several aims in Quranic stories and anecdotes as follows:

1. **Explaining the facts:** one of the most important of Quran stories purposes is to explain the existence facts. To report the facts for explaining the facts are included in the philosophy of Quran stories which have been mentioned in verses 249-251 of *Baghara* (the Cow) Sura. God, the Almighty, states the truth about the prophecy, the rightness of Mohammad, the rightness of Resurrection, and the future life through the Quranic stories. For instance, in the mentioned verses, there are the stories of Taloot and the perdition of Jaloot in order to be a sign for the rightness of Mohammad's (p.b.u.h.) prophecy and his mission is to be explained and clarified in this way. As such it has been proposed to considering the Kahf companions adventure which results in explaining the Resurrection rightness and the other world in order to remove all the doubts and make people familiar with the truth.
2. **Thinking:** the real Quranic stories provide opportunities for human beings to enjoy the truth cognition and to be able to distinguish right from wrong thoughtfully and take the right path of life. God, the Almighty, conducts people through the Balam Baora story to the Big Truth, which states one cannot gain chastity (*Esmat*) through getting to the mystical positions.

Because a human being is capable of separate from the mystical positions and truth and utilize it only for gaining things in the worldly life and its possessions. These true stories result in thinking and contemplating and make people familiar with the complicated facts of the existence.

3. **To issue an ultimatum:** intellect never accepts speeches without reason and ultimatum and considers it obscene and the evidence for cruelty and leaving the just. Hence, God has sent the prophets with books and proofs for the man and has warned him to be aware of Hell and has informed him to the Great *Naba*(news). The Quranic stories are among these ultimatums; because they contain the facts and truths which warn the man to take care of them. God offers the *Rass* companions story and their destruction in verses 37 and 38 of *ForghanSura* as an ultimatum for the residents of Mecca. In (Forghan, verse 37) goes: "the Noah's Tribe was drown when they denied the divine prophets and put their adventure as an example for the public and we have prepared a painful torture for all the cruel",  
(vaghomanohlammakazzaboalrosolaghragnahomvajaalnahomlelnasayatonvaaatadnalzaleminaazabanalima)  
(Forgan, verse 38). Similarly, "the Aad and Samood tribes and Arass companions and many other tribes who were among them" were perished. (vaaadanva Sammodava Ashaba Arassanva Fozonanbainathalekakathira).
4. **Perseverance:** people's attention toward the prophets' adventures and the destiny of faithful or atheist tribes make them aware of their own situations and status and reinforce the spiritual and psychological setting for them to persevere (Houd, verse 49). According to what revealed to you about Noah and all those difficulties that he faced, he persevered though, "you (Mohammad), too, persevere because victory is yours and is for the virtuous people" (Fasberennaalaghatanlelmotaghin) (Makarem Shirazi, 1376, v. 2, p. 351).
5. **Tranquility:** one of the Quranic stories purposes is to develop stout – hearted people. God, in some verses including the 120 verse of HoudSura, has explicitly stated that the prophets' stories create comfort and peace for Mohammad (p.b.u.h.). "We have stated the adventures of the prophets in order to bestow you comfort and tranquility and make you to be stout – hearted. ( vakolannaghsonalyka men anbaarosol ma notabbatobehifoadaka) (MakaremShirazi, 1376, v.2 p. 389).
6. **Serving as an example:** one of the functions and purposes of Quranic stories is serving as an example. To propose the prophets' adventures and their followers give the audience the opportunity to assess him / her position with theirs and correct his/her actions and behaviors. Of course, this ability is in people who use their reasoning and think well. God, the Almighty attracts the attention to the points in which there are example points and has asked people to take advice from them and correct themselves by contemplating in divine verses. This certainly means that the history repeats itself in a way ant there are always chances in repeating the same events in one's personal and collective life. This is the same constant and lasting long tradition that one should be aware of (Saba, verse 19). It goes: we punished them and made them suffer in a way that became an example for others"! (Fajaalnahomahadith).

Yes! There remained no significant civilization and prosperity expect for some remembrances in memories and some lines in the history. Quran says, "and we smashes them" (vamazaghnahom kola momazzagh). They lost everything and became wanderers and had to head for here and there and became like known "proverbs" for others in a way that whoever wanted to give an example as a scattered people they mentioned the Saba Tribe as an unlucky tribe. They said: "tafarraghooayadisaba" meaning: they experienced adversity just like Saba tribe did. And at the end of the verse it goes: "there are many signs for those who are patients and grateful" (enna fi thalekalelayatenlekollesabbaranshakoar). that is because they control their carnal desires through their patience and perseverance. They are strong against committing wrong doings and are aware and awake through obeying God's rules and regulations. That is why they take advices (Makarem Shirazi, 1376, v.4, p. 37).

Quran has used stories in order to add effect and attraction to them. But the main reason is to teach didactic points to be learned by the people, that is why there is no such a thing as fantasy and has not expressed them in full details and the parts which are not necessary are abandoned. Therefore, storytelling in Quran is always associated with evaluation and providing guidelines in order to be put into action and maintains the preaching method in itself: " valalanaghs alike men anbaalrasol ma nabetbehifowadakavajaaka fi hazehealghvamoezatanvazekrilelmomenin" (Houd, verse 120) " and we express the events and adventures of the prophets for you in order to strengthen your heart and will and the right path becomes bright and clear for you and be like preaches and remembrance for the believers" (Bagheri, 1370, p. 219).

7. **Science and knowledge:** to know about the predecessors' conditions and their history removes many of the ambiguities and hesitations for the today people. We are not aware of many things and have lost the tracks of the events. But this is the Holy Quran that gives awareness to the lost human history through telling the stories of Noah and Abraham (p. b. u. t.) and their tribes (Al Emran, verse 44) (zaleka men anbaalghyebnohiyaelayka). "The things we explained about Mary and Zakarya's adventures for you were all hidden news that is revealed to you" (MakaremShirazi, 1376, v.1, p. 284).
8. **Causing to understand the truth:** Quran, in addition to explaining the existence truth, attempts to communicate the Quranic truth in the form of allegories and historical events to the audience. Since stories are attracted greatly by people, the Quranic stories gives the chance to its audience to understand the Quranic facts through based on their own understandings. There is another purpose for creating the Quranic stories in which God, the Almighty has mentioned in verses 23 and 24 in ZariyyatSura. In these verses God has taken an oath for putting more emphasis on the promised rewards, sustenance, daily bread provided by Him, as well as Resurrection requitals and punishments and there is no doubt about all His promising and blessings (MakaremShirazi, 1376, v.4, p.542) (fahrabbeassmawaalarthennahoolhaghmethla ma annakomtantefoon).
9. **To ensure people and words of comfort:** another purpose of the Quranic stories is to comfort and ensure people by using soothing words in order to make them understand about the ancient tribes that how they endure numerous difficulties to achieve their ultimate goal and that the truth is not to be revealed that easily and be welcomed and supported. Telling Joseph's brothers story, Noah's story and the Kahfcompanins' one (KahfSura, verses 6-9) is the reason to give comfort and relief to Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) and the believers and those who addressed by Quran. In KahfSua, verse6, God, the Almighty states: "do not be upset. World is the experiment field. Since in the previous verses we talked about the prophecy and leadership of Mohammad (p.b.u.h.), then we mention in here to one of the most important leadership traits which is how to care about people and include all. It says:" as if you want to pay all the prices due to their disobediences and not having faith to the God's sayings" (falalakabakheonnaafsakaalaasarohom en lam yomenobehazaalhadithasfa) (Tabatabaee, 1376, v. 3 p. 26) and the verse 3 in Joseph Sura goes: nevertheless, people should believe in all these revealed signs and divine advices and return from the wrong path, but you, Mohammad, "the more you insist, the less they believe except those who are the right servants of God"! (wa ma akthoroanaswa law harasta be momenin) (MakaremShirazi, 1376, v.2, p. 454).

### The characteristics of the Quranic stories and its difference with the human made stories

Based on the contents of the Quranic stories, suras, and verses that refer to the stories and traditions, they can be characterized as follows:

1. **Attributed to divine position:** one of the most important traits in Islamic education particularly Quran is that as opposed to the other stories and tales that are told by ordinary people, which may contain many mistakes, lies, and deviations, the Quranic stories are based on truth and explaining this truth. Therefore, they are not completely technical and artistic like humans' are, but told to explain the fact and the truth. Although the heroes are sometimes people or angles, the human's fantasy does not have any role. Hence, the Quranic stories are reports of the historical events told to explain and analyze the truth in order to understand them. God, the Almighty, identifies the divine revelation as the sources of the Quranic stories in order to distinguish them from the other stories; because these are received from the divine revelation source and He has stated them all. He says:"nahnonaghasaaleikeahsanalghesas bema owhaynaelaikahazaalghoanwa en konto men gheblhi leman alghafeleen" meaning, "by bestowing the Quran to you, we will tell the best storytelling form to you which you surely did not know anything about (Joseph, verse 3).
2. **Consider courtesy and the contents:** what makes the speech agreeable and pleasant or arrests the audience attractions is to present it tactfully and eloquently. One of the traits of Quranic stories is that the ethics and moralities are being considered in it and have been put in a way that to be didactic concerning the instructional, conductive, and educational aspects and avoid any misunderstandings. Hence, in Quranic stories issues like sexual affairs are considered tactfully (Hajar, verse72). About other issues like lust, sexual deviations, vanity, obstinacy, if there existed a bit of humanistic morality and emotions; it was enough for them to be ashamed before God's logic. At least when they returned from Lot's house, they could be ashamed of what they had done.

But they had not. But they were so rude that they even wished to molest the Lout's visitors! Here, God, the Almighty turns to Mohammad and says: "Swear to you and your life, which these people are wandering in their own diaspora!" (Laamrakaannahomlafisakratehemyamahoom).

3. **Emphasis on the whole and waive the details:** this very important in the Quranic stories that to emphasize on the most important points and waive the details. Because the point is in conducting the thoughts and the audience's mind, not the story itself which leads to knowing God and the certainty of God's promises. Only occasionally the details were mentioned by God. The other times one should refer to the Prophet Mohammad or religious sage men of God to get the details.
4. **Expressiveness and eloquence:** one of the Quranic stories traits is that the stories are told clearly and eloquently and are away from any complexities. The easy and clear frames of these stories are in a way that is understandable for any class of people to enjoy and get lessons. God, the Almighty, has attracted the people's attention to the clarity and enlightenment of these stories (Ghamar, verse 18). ThaAad tribe's destiny! Another tribe which its destiny is in this Sura following the Noah's tribe and God mentions that as an example and warning to the criminals and atheists. He says: "theAad tribe denied their own prophet")kazzabatAad). The more Houd, their prophet, preached and called them toward God, and he tried many ways to wake them from the ignorance sleep, the more they disobeyed him. They were blind due to their own vanity and obstinacy, and being wealthy people. Finally, God punished them severely, so in the verse He implicitly states that, "watch carefully and see how I put agony on you." (fakaifakaanaazabiwanoothor) (Makarem Shirazi, 1376, v.5, p.33).
5. **To get mastery of the hidden and overt contents of the stories:** another trait of the Quranic stories is the absolute mastery of God of the overt and hidden points of the stories. This causes to expressing only the practical and useful points and analyzing the subject fully and correctly. This is opposed to those who tell the stories in deceiving ways and add superstitions to their stories due to not having the required mastery to truth and facts; God, in the verse 6 of LoghmanSura, mentions that the reason for this is that the people are ignorant and do not have sufficient information about the truth and distinguishes Him from the ordinary people.

The Quranic stories are the historical facts that express the religious, social, and moral values through the acceptance of people and the main difference is that the Quranic stories are the comprising the invitation message and are a part of the ritual that Prophet Mohammad calls every one toward it. Similarly, the stories are focusing on the main points which are useful and constructive for all and abandon the details, unless the parts of prophets' lives and their tribes which are useful to know (Aaraf, verse 101). There are emphasis on the mentioned verse and the following that they were examples and lessons for those who are eager to take advices. He first says: "these are tribes and their towns and villages that I state them" (telkaalghoranaghossoalayka men anbaehaa). Then He adds: it was not like that I destroy them without any ultimatum or warning, but "their prophets went to them with clear reasoning to make them aware of the truth. (walaghadjaatohomrosolohombelbayenat) (MakaremShirazi, 1376, v.2, p.75).

### **The didactic and educational of the Quranic over people**

Most of the Quranic stories are long. Since the Suras due to their length are comforting and apt to narration for sending the needed messages, most of them are expressed during the verses in the form of intertextuality, and possess some instructional uses as follows:

#### **1. To use solid reasons for reinforcing the reasoning**

One of the most important educational methods of each instructor if using the firm and solid reasons to prove the rightness of his/her speeches or claims for the students or people who are concerned. Every human being who possesses reasoning and logical thinking can distinguish the proved pointed from the unproved ones and takes the side of the logical reasoning. One of the effects of didactic stories and Quranic parables based on the mentioned traits is the provable aspect and rightness of them. Story and history is understandable for all. That is the reason when a book in which there are many information and reasoning for all, either with a little literacy or a fully educated person. They should contemplate on stories and examples. In other words, the history and the adventures of nations in the form of story or parable act like a teacher and God, the Almighty, uses the same instructional way through mentioning the people's stories, "and we did not send any prophet before you, unless he was mentioned that there was no other gods but Me, so worship me" (Anbia, verse 25).

Since, the Islamic instructional educators should be master of Quranic texts in order to be able to answer their young students' questions; they should be able to use any kind of discussion, reasoning, and firm eye witnesses and traditions for reinforcing their thinking appropriately.

## 2. The priority of reasoning in education and using the reasoning and imagination

Thinking, reasoning and feeling or even memory act correctly when there is a balance among them. Reasoning without feeling does not work educationally; also, if imagination does not have roots in facts, it may be very dangerous for the imaginers. Therefore, the main themes in thinking, imagination and memory, should have roots in feelings till the thinker or the person who imagines can be associated with the storyteller. A look to the Quranic texts shows that the storytelling should accompany the feelings. The Quranic stories are not fantasy or absurd as opposed to the stories told by people. In some places to deal with the feeling is prior to the reasoning, "in Quranic stories not only are compatible with the reality, but also these events are the most important and vital historical events of the human beings which are opposed to the literal stories in which the element of fantasy is the main part. The more the fantasy elements exist in the structure of the story, the more they influence the listeners" (Mohammadi, 1386, p. 20). Hence, we always see the application of the sensible reasoning in understanding the sensory examples. Sometimes giving an appropriate example reinforces the effect of reasoning, therefore, those scholars who are successful they are mastery of choosing the best examples. "we recite all the news about the prophets one by one, and ensure you, there are solid signs, preaches, and truth which may be a remembrance for believers" (Houd, 120).

Man is always influenced by listening to the different stories and enjoys them. It has good effects on his/her imagination. It may be because the people are more under the influence of their feelings rather than reasoning. The more different issues of life keep distance from imagination and join the reasoning, the more complicated they become, although studying history and the ancient nations adventures is one of the best ways to get examples through listening the Quranic stories. As there is in Quran: "thereis certainly good lessons for the wise" (Joseph, verse 111).

## 3. To beautify the speech

One of the educational methods based on the mentioned traits is to use an agreeable and pleasant speech which is far from slandering. In other words, the speech is a reflection of the person's personality. What is said is from within (Bagheri, 1370) The most important factor in storytelling is how the educators consider the methods by which can communicate best with the trainees. Furthermore, not any kind of stories are appropriate for all. In other word, to consider the amount of harmfulness or inappropriateness is the educators' responsibility to be checked. In addition, the way of speaking is a vital actor in influencing of the speech and reinforcing of the people's emotional dimension.

### Resources:

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