

## Understanding the Imagery in Quranic parables and Narratives

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*Sadaf Mandlik*

*Assistant Professor, JNTU*

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### Abstract

The *Quran* is a remarkable masterpiece, showcasing its depth and brilliance in its use of vibrant imagery to provide profound insights into the human psyche and inner experiences. The *Quran* revealed to Prophet Muhammad over a span of 23 years, has had a profound impact on humanity, especially through its skillful use of parables. The use of mental imagery in these parables is crucial for guiding and fostering human growth. Parables are succinct and use straightforward language to convey moral lessons, frequently employed to bolster arguments or assertions. The parables in The *Quran* tackle practical issues and phenomena, employing vibrant and lifelike imagery to communicate abstract concepts of the human mind and inner experiences that are not easily observable. They delve into the intricate dynamics that influence behavior, beliefs, and personality. The Quran indicates that mental imagery has the potential to improve cognitive processes, impact actions, and mold one's character. This approach functions as a covert educational instrument for mankind, steering convictions and behaviors while emphasizing the significance of visualizing one's development and achievements. The concepts of imagery, parables, and mental visualization in The *Quran*, providing compelling examples to underscore how The Quran effectively employs mental imagery to guide its audience.

**Keywords:** *The Quran, parable, mental imagery, vivid, colorful, literary ideas.*

### Introduction

The *Quran* is the *Book of Hidayah*, a timeless instruction for mankind. Its commands are based on its capabilities and are for the good of all people. The *Quran* presents its message in various literary genres, including parables, oaths, arguments and narratives, ensuring its wisdom is definitive and relevant for all ages. The *Quran* uses various parables to impart lessons and guidance, making the message relatable and easier to understand for its reader and listener.

*we have put forth for men in this Quran every kind of parable, in order that they may receive admonition (39: 27).*

The *Quran*, the core scripture in the Muslim faith, is the guiding doctrine for all aspects of life. It was revealed to Prophet Muhammad in a span of 23 years. Mental imagery is emphasized throughout The Quran as an essential part of human behavior and understanding. The *Quran* provides a variety of parables for guidance and instruction. The divine purpose, which one should not doubt, is that, it directs mankind to the right path. The Quran unequivocally says,

*This is the book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah. (2:2).*

The *Quran* is a manifestation of the limitless ocean of divine knowledge that is accessible to humans at any time. One beautiful and glorious aspect of The Quran is it's live and exquisite images created through words and interpretations presenting amazing and interesting scenes to the audience (Mohammed qasemi. 2003;165). Imagery in English literature refers to the use of descriptive language that encourages the sense to create vivid and evocative mental images for the reader. Imagery, the employment of language that stimulates the senses and evokes vivid mental pictures for the reader, has long been a contentious topic within English literature, with scholars engaging in extensive discussions regarding its significance and function (Barton, 2016).

This research paper explores the relationship between words and images, examining how visual elements can enhance or decrease the narrative experience. While some critics, such as the New Critics, have been skeptical of the cognitive value of imagery, dismissing it as a 'grand delusion' (Swanepoel, 1984), others have recognized its crucial role in literary analysis. Research has demonstrated that visual devices on pages can significantly influence text interpretation, necessitating different strategies and approaches for readers to engage with the text. (Barton, 2016)

## **Discussion**

The role of mental imagery in shaping personality and behavior is a crucial element in understanding human behavior. It enhances the emotional impact and deepens the reader's connection to literature. *The Quran* has utilized imagery parables to convey important messages and shape human character. While imagery is often associated with visual representations, it also serves as a cognitive function in literature, offering new perspectives and challenging existing conventions. The discovery of mental images in the 20th century is crucial for treating psychological and physical

illnesses. It shapes personality and behavior with altered mental imagery leading to changes in actions, feelings, and talents.

The role of imagery in *Quranic* parables highlights their inventive and distinctive qualities which makes them timeless, engaging and thought provoking. Through visual and relatable descriptions, The *Quran* effectively communicates spiritual truths, leaving a lasting impression on its readers and listeners while soliciting them to reflect on the profound lessons contained within its teachings. It emphasizes how these parables serve to educate, guide and mould human character. The verse in *Surah Al-Ankabut* emphasizes the importance of striving for Allah's sake and the promise of divine guidance for those who make sincere efforts. And those who strive in Our (cause), - *We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily Allah is with those who do right.* (29:69).

Visual *Quranic* parables have provided audiences with various insights into the human mind and inner sensations that do not appear in the natural world by illustrating real-world problems and factual events. In order to illustrate behaviors, the creation of beliefs and human personality, these concepts have been presented in the form of dynamic, genuine visuals that are completely tied to various internal forces and the unseen forces of man. The *Quran* utilized mental imagery to provide guidance to its readers. It discusses how these visual parables were used to depict real-world problems and factual events, allowing audiences to gain insights into human behavior, beliefs, and personality. The visual parables served as a powerful tool for instruction, as they tapped into the internal forces and unseen aspects of human nature. Overall, the research paper aimed to highlight the significance of visual *Quranic* parables in providing unique insights into the human mind and inner sensations that cannot be observed in the natural world.

Parables are deeply influenced by their mental representations, which impact their engagement and emotional response to the text. The paper specifically focuses on the use of nature imagery in *Quranic* parables, such as references to the Heavens, Hell, Earth, rivers, mountains, and gardens. These representations evoke strong emotions in readers, including awe, gratitude, and a sense of connection to the divine. The vivid description of nature helps readers visualize and appreciate the beauty and complexity of the Allah's creation.

The *Quran* is not only filled with creative and captivating literary ideas, but it also addresses important issues that can inspire readers to submit

to their creator. The *Quran* is known for its powerful use of imagery to communicate spiritual truths, ethical teachings and emotional depth. The *Quran* employs descriptive language to personify abstract concepts, mental states and emotions which makes complex ideas more understandable and relatable. This literary technique not only enhances the beauty of the text but also intensifies the spiritual and emotional impact of its message. The *Quran* often uses metaphors to convey concepts of faith, patience and disbelief. The verse from *Surah Al Nur*,

*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things.*

In this verse, Allah's guidance is portrayed through the metaphor of light, symbolizing clarity, purity, and divine knowledge. The image of light layered upon light expresses the profound and limitless nature of divine guidance. This verse is a powerful reflection on the nature of Allah's guidance. It reminds the reader that Allah is aware of all things, including what is hidden within people's heart. The imagery here not only invokes a sense of beauty and purity but also the encompassing nature of Allah's light, illuminating the spiritual path for those who seek it.

According to the Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, the simplified definition of parable is, 'a simple story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson'. (Waite and Hawker, 2009). Parables are short and famous words or speech which include wisdom or a simile that has become famous because of the fluency of words and meanings. Every parable sometimes refers to an instructive story or statement and is replaced instead of explanation and detailing. The simplicity and fluency of the language combined with deep meanings, make parables powerful tools for conveying complex ideas. In many scriptures, including The Quran, parables are used to replace lengthy explanations, offering clear and engaging ways to teach and remind people of important principles. By providing wisdom through relatable imagery and succinct expression, parables resonate across cultures and time, becoming famous for their ability to distill profound truths into easily understood messages.

The *Quran* utilizes vivid and vibrant imagery through colors, motions and rhythms to captivate readers and evoke different emotions. The *Qu-*

*ran* often employs real-life imagery to provide parables or address contentious situations. As in the case of the parable of the good tree in *Surah Ibrahim* (14:24-25) compares a good word to a tree that is firmly rooted and produces fruit continuously. This image symbolizes the righteous speech and actions are grounded in faith and provide lasting benefits. Through such lucid imagery, parables impart timeless lessons about moral conduct, spirituality and human behavior. These images are not merely superficial, but rather serve to convey various concepts, intentions, natural states, spiritual qualities, human examples, scenes, resurrections, and states of bliss or punishment.

The use of parables in The *Quran* as a visual representation to effectively explain various ideas. It suggests that mental imaging in the context of parables is a crucial aspect of human guidance and upbringing, as indicated by verses that indirectly reference the role of mental imagery. It explores how this method can impact a person's mental and behavioral performance, beliefs, and personality development. Mental imagery categorizes images into two types: those that have no physical embodiment and are transient, and those that are recorded and mentally recreated after being viewed. The two categories are further explained in relation to dream images, which combine elements from the real world and beyond. As images can be classified as virtual or real based on certain criteria.

### **Virtual Images**

Virtual images refer to those states of existence and elements which are called images commonly referred to as general inferences. Even though they have a state that has external manifestation and are tangible such as, picture of a landscape or a human recorded on a special context, their reference is in fact virtual image and, they cannot be called an image.

### **Real Image**

Real image refers to those images that have no tangible state such as, images of dream, images resulted from description of hereafter and images stored in mind after seeing a landscape. The first reflection of everything of surrounding area on man is projected on the retina, formed and stored in the mind. This process is the same for all forms of the real world whether they are tangible or intangible in form which are in form of reflection or display in different frames.

There is also another class of image that can be seen directly by the imaginary eye and can be received by mind without a mediator. Although such mental visions are dependent on the state of elements of the real world. The images that form in the both the real world and the world of dreams

can trace extraordinary spaces in the past, present and future times which means that they encompass all tenses.

The *Quran* is rich in inventive and beautiful images that can not only lead people through a broad range of periods and locations, but it also inspires them to go deeper into the realm of abstract ideas. *Quranic* images are placed in two different groups. The first group refers to images described relying on simulation of images of the real world under the title of parable, which can be referred as a kind of mental imaging. Descriptive role of this verses described in *Surah Al Mudaththir* describing some scenes of Hell, verse has asked people to think about causes of *Quranic* descriptions through asking a question.

*And We have not made the keepers of the Fire except angels. And We have not made their number except as a trial for those who disbelieve – that those who were given the Scripture will be convinced and those who have believed will increase in faith and those who were given the Scripture and the believers will not doubt and that those in whose hearts is hypocrisy and the disbelievers will say, “What does Allah intend by this as an example?” Thus does Allah leave astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him. And mention of the Fire is not but a reminder to humanity. (74: 31)*

This verse emphasizes important points regarding the unseen realities of the afterlife and Allah’s wisdom in presenting these concepts to humanity. Although, it seems in this verse that thinking about reason of bringing descriptions is action taken by people with ill heart, asking about quality of the description to guide human can be taken by every thinker. Moreover, making this question has doubled focus of people on The *Quran* descriptions and has cleared also its applied values given in different fields several times. However, The *Quran* is the epitome of this art form, as its verses have such a profound impact on humans that they are perceived as live, visual images rather than as neutral listeners. The concept of literary images and how they differ from elements that are remembered by the human mind. It highlights The *Quran* as an example of a text that creates vivid and impactful visual images for readers.

*The Quran* uses imagery to promote calmness and reduce tension, but further research is needed to fully understand its implications. *The Quran* has not been extensively studied in this regard, leading to a lack of clarity on its inherent features. Some verses in *The Quran* initially cause worry, but then introduce other images that alleviate these concerns. For exam-

ple, descriptions of the conditions of people in hell are accompanied by ways to alleviate their worries and pains through specific behaviors.

*The Quran* is completely full of creative and lovely illustrations that not only serve as a person's guide in a variety of various times and places, but also inspire search in the world of abstract notions. Such a characteristic divides *Quranic* imagery into two categories. The first category consists of pictures of people that are based on actual past occurrences or anticipated future events. The second category consists of metaphorically described visuals that simulate real-world images and can be thought of as a form of mental imaging.

*The Quran* uses images to promote calm and reduce stress. This aspect of *The Quran* has not been thoroughly investigated, making its qualities obscure. *The Quran* employs a technique of initially causing worry with certain images, but then providing other images to alleviate those worries. For example, it describes the conditions of people in hell and offers ways to alleviate their pains through specific behaviors. This technique is still seen in managerial behavior in many societies today. Another example of imagery in *The Quran* is the concept of 'backbiting', which is depicted as repulsive and ugly. One of the most striking depictions of backbiting is found in *Surah Al-Hujurat* where it is compared to eating the flesh of one's dead brother: you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful. (49:12).

This verse discusses the use of Intense and disturbing imagery in *The Quran* to convey the seriousness of the sin of backbiting. By comparing backbiting to the act of cannibalism, *The Quran* emphasizes the dehumanizing effects of speaking ill of others.

*The Quran* is an indicator which contains efficient illustrations of mental images, which are given along with description of details of desired scenes and it can ease imagination of desired images for the reader and listener. The parables in different fields and different forms have considered many mental traits and tangible powers of human and have presented some concepts that many of the concepts are for upbringing people. These mental images act similar to mentioning and advising and expect always no direct reaction of the reader and listener. The selected parables of imagery in *The Quran* are provided with descriptions:

### **Parable of Cain and Abel (5:27–31)**

*Then Allah sent a raven scratching in the ground to show him how to hide the disgrace of his brother. He said, 'O woe to me! Have I failed to be like this raven and hide the disgrace of my brother?' So, he became of the regretful.*

The parable of Cain and Abel, (*Qabil and Habil in Arabic*) appears in *Surah Al Maidah* is a significant narrative in *The Quran*. The narrative is rich in vibrant imagery that enhances the themes of jealousy, violence and justice. One key element of this parable is the imagery of a crow burying the dead body of Abel. The appearance of the raven digging the earth creates a powerful visual metaphor for death, burial and shame. This image symbolizes Cain's ignorance of basic human decency and brings shame and remorse to the story. The raven's action not only teaches Cain about burial but also serves as a symbol of divine intervention and a reflection of Cain's remorse and inner turmoil.

The crow's action serves as a reminder of Cain's moral failure and loss of dignity, making it a timeless symbol of remorse and the need for guidance in the face of moral failure. This original picture draws a beautiful artistic role in terms of intellect and teaching of dead body burial. (Bostani,1992; Vol1, p206)

The raven serves as a symbol of Allah's mercy and guidance. It is through this natural imagery that Cain learns how to deal with the aftermath of his actions, demonstrating that even in the moment of sin, Allah provides a way for humans to learn and repent. The powerful and simple imagery in the parable heightens the moral and ethical lessons about the dangers of jealousy, the consequences of violence and the importance of accountability and repentance.

### **Parable of the hoopoe (27:20-44)**

*And (Solomon) inspected the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe or is he among the absent? (27:20)*

The parable of the hoopoe in *The Quran*, specifically in *Surah An-Naml*, explores themes of wisdom, power, and divine guidance. It revolves around the interactions between Prophet Solomon, Queen Bilqis, and the hoopoe. The narrative is filled with vivid imagery that highlights the grandeur of Solomon's kingdom and the profound knowledge present in the natural world. The Hoopoe represents a seeker of truth, one who ventures into unknown lands and discovers the reality of people worshipping the sun.

This reflects the *Quranic* theme of seeking knowledge and understanding the world around us to connect with Allah and his message. The parable illustrates the importance of humility, intellect and faith. The imagery using the hoopoe as a messenger who bridges different places and lead to the spread of divine guidance.

### **The Parable of the garden and the fire (2:266)**

*Would any of you wish to have a garden with date palms and vines, with rivers flowing underneath, in which he has every kind of fruit? But then he is stricken with old age, while his children are weak (not yet grown up), and a fiery whirlwind destroys it so that it is all burnt. Thus does Allah make clear to you [His] signs that you might give thought. (2:266)*

The parable highlights the significance of utilising wealth for the sake of Allah and the outcomes that arise from doing so with sincere intentions versus impure motives. The depiction of a flourishing garden, nurtured by rainfall, serves as a powerful symbol of the countless blessings bestowed upon those who selflessly contribute to the cause of Allah. The fruitful garden symbolises the bountiful rewards, profound spiritual development, and abundant life that can be achieved.

The depiction of a garden ravaged by fire symbolizes the negative consequences of misguided motives and personal gain on virtuous actions. It highlights how worldly attachments can ruin a promising life. This parable is a warning against the consequences of neglecting righteousness and using one's blessings in an ungrateful manner. It urges the reader and listener to reflect on their priorities and how they manage the blessings they have been given, emphasizing the importance of righteousness in both action and intention.

### **Parable of Elephants (105:1-5)**

*Have you not considered, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan into misguidance? And He sent against them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of hard clay, And He made them like eaten straw. (105:1-5).*

Surah Al-Fil in *The Quran* tells the story of the Year of the Elephant, where an army led by Abraha attempted to attack the Kaaba in Makkah. However, Allah intervened by sending birds to destroy the elephants, thus protecting the sacred house. This surah is known for its striking imagery and serves as a powerful example of divine intervention and protection. The Surah discusses the contrast between a powerful invading army and the divine response in the form of small birds and clay stones.

It emphasizes that Allah controls the outcome of events and demonstrates His ability to defend and preserve the sacred. The Intense imagery helps the reader and listener visualize the downfall of the army and leaves a lasting impression of Allah's power and mercy.

### **Parable of the two gardens (18:32-33)**

*And present to them the example of two men: We granted to one of them two gardens of grapevines, and We bordered them with palm trees and placed crops in between. Each of the two gardens produced its fruit and did not fall short thereof in anything. And We caused to gush forth within them a river.*

The lush gardens symbolize wealth, prosperity, and material success. They are described as well-irrigated vineyards, palm trees, and crops, with a river running through, representing abundance and beauty. The man with the gardens is depicted as living in comfort and luxury, highlighting the temptation to rely solely on material wealth.

However, when the man becomes arrogant and ungrateful to Allah, his gardens are destroyed. The sudden devastation of the once-thriving garden serves as a reminder of the fleeting nature of worldly possessions and the consequences of ingratitude and pride.

### **Dhul-Qarnayn's Journey (18:83-98)**

*(O Muhammad), they ask you about Dhu al-Qarnayn, say: "I will give you an account of him."*

*We granted him power in the land and endowed him with all kinds of resources. He set out (westwards) on an expedition, until when he reached the very limits where the sun sets, he saw it setting in dark turbid waters; and nearby he met a people. We said "O Dhu al-Qarnayn, you have the power to punish or to treat them with kindness. (18:83-87)*

Dhul-Qarnayn's construction of the barrier to protect people from the marauding tribes of Gog and Magog is described in detailed imagery. The construction of the barrier demonstrates Dhul-Qarnayn's ability to harness the forces of nature and use them for the greater good. It showcases his wisdom and resourcefulness in utilizing the natural landscape to create a formidable defence against the marauding tribes. The use of iron sheets in the construction of the barrier further emphasizes its strength and durability. Iron is known for its toughness and resilience, and its inclusion in the barrier highlights Dhul-Qarnayn's commitment to ensuring the long-lasting protection of his people.

The detailed imagery of the barrier which was constructed with iron sheets and reinforced with molten copper emphasized its strength, durability and impenetrability. This depiction not only serves as an illustration of effective leadership but also conveys a deeper message about resilience and the importance of safeguarding society from harm.

### **The Fragility of the World (18:45)**

*And present to them the example of the life of this world: [Its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allah is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability. (18:45).*

In this verse the use of rain is explored as imagery to symbolize the temporary nature of worldly life. The lush greenery represents the fleeting beauty and success of the world, while the dry remnants symbolize the transience of material wealth. This parable concludes by emphasizing the importance of one's relationship with Allah and spiritual readiness for the hereafter.

### **Parable of Pharaoh and Moses (26:43-49)**

*So (Allah) said, 'Throw down your staff!' And when it was seen to be a serpent, the magicians were greatly amazed. They said, this is a great magician. (26:43-49)*

The contrast between divine miracles and human deception is vividly portrayed through the spectacle of the serpent versus the magicians' serpents. This image emphasizes the power of Allah over the false magic of Pharaoh's court, as the serpent swallows the magicians' ropes and sticks. It highlights how this imagery enhances the dramatic tension and emphasizes the moral and spiritual lessons of the narrative.

### **Conclusion**

*The Quran* uses vivid, lucid and vibrant imagery in its parables to convey moral and spiritual lessons. These images, drawn from nature and human experience, help readers understand concepts of faith, forgiveness, and the divine wisdom. The use of mental images in *The Quran* is a powerful tool for influencing hearts and minds. It can improve thinking, change behaviour and shape personality. *The Quran's* parables are longer and more descriptive than typical short parables, and they help individuals develop internal talents and discern truth from falsehood. Mental imaging through parables is an effective method for guiding and upbringing individuals, and it aligns with modern approaches to mental growth and success.

*It brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So, Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition. (14:25)*

The imagery of the flourishing tree in Surah Ibrahim is used to convey the concept of divine sustenance and the ongoing rewards of living in accordance with Allah's will. It emphasizes the importance of parables in offering guidance and admonition, urging individuals to contemplate and implement the teachings of faith in their own lives. This imagery serves as a reminder that all aspects of life, including spiritual and material blessings, are ultimately under Allah's command, encouraging humility and gratitude.

*If We had sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and coming apart from fear of Allah. And these examples We present to the people that perhaps they will give thought. (59:21)*

This verse is from Surah Al Hasr which beautifully illustrates the profound impact and weight of Allah's words. A massive mountain is often seen as a symbol of strength and solidity but it would shatter from the sheer weight of divine revelation. This verse also indicates that how the words of *Allah* have the power to humble even the mightiest creations. By presenting abstract spiritual truths in concrete visual terms, *The Quran* allows individuals to grasp and internalize the lessons more deeply. These images leave a lasting impression on the human mind, helping people to understand the awe-inspiring power of divine guidance. The significance of remembering *Allah* and seeking forgiveness: Surah Al-Ra d (13:28): *Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.*

The research paper emphasizes the importance of ethical practices and personal development in achieving a balanced and fulfilling life. It highlights the significance of remembering Allah and seeking His forgiveness for tranquillity and spiritual connection. It encourages individuals to embrace personal transformation and integrate spiritual principles into daily life for a deeper sense of purpose, ethical integrity, and inner peace. It calls for individuals to remember Allah in all actions and seek His forgiveness sincerely, reflecting divine wisdom and compassion.

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