

## STUDY OF MENTAL IMAGERY IN THE PARABLE OF THE QURAN WITH EMPHASIS ON THE FUNCTION

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### ABSTRACT

Discovering the mental images is the most important discovery of Psychology in the present century. Scientific developments have approved its influence in life and especially the role of mental imagery in improving psychological disorders in humans and even physical diseases in two recent decades. Mental imagery is the main motif of personality and human behavior. With the change of mental imagery, personality and behavior changes, and all actions, feelings, behaviors and even abilities of people form based on this image. However, it seems this was not a new discovery and Quran, the Muslim holy book and also a pictorial miracle, has offered set of images of diverse, innovative and full of different features in the form of parables that appears in each section of this holy book, which specify the importance and role of imagery parables in education, training, guidance and formation of human character. Visual Quran parables, by portraying the issues of real world and objective phenomena, have exhibited many concepts of mind and inner feelings of man for audiences that have not a manifestation in natural world; in frame of dynamic and real images that are completely related to various internal forces and the invisible forces of man to indicate the behaviors, the formation of beliefs and human personality. In this study, after useful explanation of image, parable and mental imagery, it has been attempted to present some examples of Quran parables to emphasize approach of Quran to use mental imagery to guide the audiences. The most important results obtained from this study show that audiences of Quran is impressed by their mental images such as education, environmental medicine for innate reasons.

**Keywords:** *mental image, parable, upbringing*

### 1.INTRODUCTION

In Quran, along with innovative, beautiful and attractive literary points, other important issues are also existed that can make the audiences bow to their creature (Almighty God) only through reading several short Surahs and one of these features is the approach of using images in Quran. This is the art of Quran that images the concepts and meanings using the words and gives them soul and gives life to concepts, so that spiritual topics and mental concepts and innate moods are personified and show scenes full of movement and full of beauty and wonder. Such imaging art of Quran is not only a physical effect; but also it is a stable method with pervasive feature that mixes various images with colors and motions and different rhythms to attract eye and ear and sensation and imagine of audiences. In other words, everywhere that Quran wants to express an interpretation of a single concept or an intention or an innate state or spiritual trait or a human example or an event or scene or resurrection or even a state of bliss kindness or painful punishment or tends to give a parable in position of need or controversy; it would be relied on the images derived from tangible reality.

Quranic parables are the most indicator visual examples of Quran, which have made various concepts understandable in best manner through description and simulation. Moreover, according to verses referring indirectly to function of mental imagery, it seems that mental imagery in frame of parable is one of the main cores of guidance and upbringing methods of human in creation. This approach can not only lead to formation of beliefs and personality, but also it can be a reason for formation of events related to mental and behavioral performance of people. Because of importance of the terms "image" and "parable", it is necessary to present some definitions of the two terms in continue, so that no ambiguity is created in field of getting the essence of issues.

Lexically, image means form of placing something or tracing something. According to Shafiei Kadkani, in literature, image is different from something that is remembered by minds today (picture, video and painting and similar issues); because imaging instruments in this field are same terms and phrases and not pen, color and photos. However, the terms by themselves play such a magical role that when human faces them, receives them as live and visual scenes instead of being just a listener and the peak point of this art could be found in divine words of Quran. To present a comprehensive definition of image, two general classes of image should be referred:

There are some images that form in mind and have no external manifestation. Such formation is temporary and may not linked to mental storage of individuals or it can have different manifestations for a person under different conditions, which could be changed every time with change in conditions. Hence, maybe no one of these images imagined in mind can be remembered by people again and in some cases, to remember them, they should be recorded by a device. Second class refers to images that are archived and reconstructed in mind after one time or several times watching an event or special phenomenon. The class of images has itself two parts as follows:

- First part is related to images seen by person in different periods of time taken in real world.
- Second part is related to images seen by people at the world of dreams. Images of dream are combination of the real world and the world beyond it and known elements and places and unknown terrestrial and non-terrestrial elements and places.

According to the mentioned items, images could be considered under two titles including virtual images and real images.

**Virtual images** refer to those states of existence elements named "image" and refers to image as its common meaning; although they have a state that has external manifestation and is tangible such as picture of a landscape or human recorded on a special context. However, the reference is in fact virtual image and it can't be called an image.

Real image refers to those images that have no tangible state such as images of dream and images resulted from description of hereafter and images stored in mind after seeing a landscape. In fact, the first reflection of everything of surrounding area on man is created in the retina and is formed then in mind and is stored there. This process is same for all forms of the real world, whether those physical and tangible or those without substance and tangible form, which are in form of reflections or displays in different frames. It means that the entire of something that is visible and shows a physic is seen by the retina and is stored in mind that includes real forms and image of real objects. However, there is another class of images that can be seen directly by the imagination and are received by mind with no mediator; although such mental vision is depended on state of elements of the real world. The images that are formed in both real world and world of dreams can trace extraordinary spaces in past, present and future times; it means that they encompass all tenses. Now, according to the issues, image could be defined as follows:

Parable is short and famous word and speech including wisely content or simile that has become famous because of fluency of word and meaning. Every parable sometimes refers to an instructive story or statement and is replaced instead of explanation and detailing. The word "Masal" (parable) is an Arabic term and the Persian term in this field is "Matal". Parables are in form of short sentences in frame of poem or prose including ethical advice and orders and great social orders. Despite to shortness of words and simplicity of terms, parables can make audiences think deeply and can also create emotional reactions in nature of the audiences.

Other than parables in Quran and hadiths, some parables are resulted by advices of wise people or religious leaders or experiences of people's life. Such parables are known as "Hekmat" (wisdom). Many parables are ending of stories, whether real story or a legend. However, people may be unaware of the original story or it may be quoted in special manner in every city and state. Some parables are derived from a famous poem such as "That ours is ours" that is derived from famous poem of Naser Khosrow. It seems that parable is a compressed image of social, political, governmental and economic life of past and present periods of a special race and naturally, every race and state with rich cultural history uses more parables than others. Among people, the most use of parable is when the speaker tends to bring an evident on a claim to prove a claim and statement. It should be also noted that human life is full of metaphors that are not always lie, but also the sentences can be identified and interested using semantics.

It should be mentioned that parable presented in Quran by God is different from common parables from some perspectives. In other words, they could be referred as some parables mostly with certain goals that are mostly along with short or long explanation aimed in mentioning a special issue and clear hidden layers or destructive effects of some behaviors. From this perspective, their features are different from common cultural or literary parables in some cases such as a long parable in Surah Kahf including 13 verses (32-44). However, there are also various wise statements including the mentioned features of common and known parables such as shortness of these parables but they are not recalled as Masal such as Al-A'raf/40.

*Indeed, those who deny our verses and are arrogant toward them - the gates of Heaven will not be opened for them, nor will they enter Paradise until a camel enters into the eye of a needle. And thus do we recompense the criminals (Al-A'raf/40).*

However, something that is presented in Quran exactly as Masal is not same as common parables and is mostly similar to allegory. In order to mention the difference between allegory and parable, it should be mentioned that as it is given in definition of parable, parable is short sentence including wise content or simile that is known because of fluency of word and meaning and this has made it different from allegory. This is because; the basis of allegory is on simile and it should not be necessarily famous or expressed in compressed form. There are some examples of allegorical images in Quran (but not referred as Masal) and in ordinary conditions, authors may not consider them among parables in field of classification of Quran images; although they have in fact all properties of parables. An example of these allegories is observable in verses 49-51 of Al-Mudaththir Surah.

In these verses, a pristine and cheek humor idea is used to show an image to make the desired concept tangible and destroy personality of such people in an intellectual manner (in frame of example) and decline their dignity unconsciously to the level of animals.

*"Then what is [the matter] with them that they are, from the reminder, turning away" (verse 49).*

*"As if they were alarmed donkeys" (verse 50)*

*Fleeing from a lion? (Verse 51)*

In fact, it should be mentioned that the referred verses have presented one of the most attractive Quranic ideas to express the process of running away by the ignorant people to avoid listening the truth. This reference is along with a simile that has likened ignorant man to a donkey with a kind of humiliation and this verse has imagined the concept in best manner. Applied idea in this verse that is one of the most unique Quranic ideas has imaged intensity of ignorance of an ignorant man.

The belief that mental imaging can help healing illness is a very old belief. Imaging has been almost considered in all cultures across the world as a treatment instrument and is also considered by numerous religions. For example, Navajo Redskins have a detailed form of imagery that encourages people to imagine themselves healthy. Some people believe that antiquity of these techniques returns to Babylonians, Greeks and Ancient Romans. Egyptians and Ancient Greeks and Aristotle and Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, believed that mental images release some souls in mind that can motivate heart and other organs of body. Also, they believed that a strong mental image of illness is enough to create its symptoms. Mental imaging used to be applied for numerous centuries as a medication. Some local physicians of the U.S used to make some shapes on sand and show using colorful sands that how diseases enter to body and how then could be removed. The community used to apply mental imaging to transfer their message with this content that treatment is possible. In Ancient India, Hindu saints believed that gods use images to send some messages and hence, they considered different imaging and illustrations in methods of Yuga practicing. Traditional Chinese physicians also have used mental image and imagination as main element to heal mind and body for many years. Activities such as Chi Kung, Tai Chi and their derivatives use mental imaging to treat patients. Maybe Tibetans have used imaging art as a therapeutic art more than others. Concentration on colors, sounds, gods and mental images is used for types of patients and it is considered as a part of interactional effects of treatment.

According to the mentioned, the main purpose of this study is to explore and discriminate various functions of allegory and parable in Quran with emphasizing mental image.

## 2.METHODOLOGY

In this study, documentary and library method is used for data collection purpose. Data analysis purpose is qualitative method and the scholars have reviewed a group of Quran verses as a guarantee for parable and mental imaging action to achieve desired goals and they have gone forward to the level of saturation.

## 3.FINDINGS

### 3-1- mental imaging in Quran parables

Quran divine book is full of innovative and beautiful images that can not only guide people in range of different time and places, but also they can make people searching in abstract world of concepts. According to such property, Quranic images are placed in two groups. The first group refers to images described for people based on the real events of past or promised events in future. The second group includes 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 these scenes is in such range that in Mudaththir Surah, after describing some scenes of Hell, verse has asked audiences 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." (Al-Mudaththir/31)*

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 descriptions to guide human can be taken by every

thinker. Moreover, making this question has doubled focus of audience on Quran descriptions and has cleared also its applied values given in different fields several times.

### 3-2- direct reference of Quran to function of images

The main examples of using images in Quran with emphasizing reason of using them are given in several certain verses, which can show applied capability of it in different fields of human life since the beginning of creation to the date. The clearest example presented in Quran is given in Al-Anfal surah.

*"[Remember, O Muhammad], when Allah showed them to you in your dream as few; and if He had shown them to you as many, you [believers] would have lost courage and would have disputed in the matter [of whether to fight], but Allah saved [you from that]. Indeed, He is Knowing of that within the breasts." (Al-Anfal/43)*

*And [remember] when He showed them to you, when you met, as few in your eyes, and He made you [appear] as few in their eyes so that Allah might accomplish a matter already destined. And to Allah are [all] matters returned. (Al-Anfal/44)*

An important issue given in verse 43 is referring to show enemies as a few people in dream of Prophet Mohammad, which has been just a mental image. In fact, large numbers of enemies has shown to a few people to Prophet in his dream. However, this issue is also existed for all people like Muslims and unbelievers in that scene of war. In fact, the result obtained from content of the two verses clearly is referring to a kind of mental imaging formed for both unbelievers and Muslims and its reason is also mentioned clearly "And to Allah are [all] matters returned". It means that the mental imaging is conducted to realize divine will from its natural way. The method is tested at the current age in some cases of individual and group hypnotism and the modern knowledge has confirmed it.

### 3-3- referring to the beginning of mental imaging along with human creation in Quran

Mental imaging is a widespread method in existence and the issue of guiding human and plays role in formation of human personality. In other words, it could be considered as one of the most important factors affecting human performance and behavior, which is used along with human creation. This is because; the beginning of the world and bringing the man under divine examinations was formed through using a mental image and a bilateral display of human creation for Satan. Maybe the most important purpose of presenting these mental images is making people focus in coming conditions and examinations considered for people, so that they could place on their divine position through relying on their abilities. The examinations were formed for man from the early day of creation and this issue is mentioned clearly in surah Al-Isra verse 60.

*"And [remember, O Muhammad], when We told you, "Indeed, your Lord has encompassed the people." And We did not make the sight which We showed you except as a trial for the people, as was the accursed tree [mentioned] in the Qur'an. And We threaten them, but it increases them not except in great transgression." (Al-Isra/60)*

According to these words of God, it seems that the dream is same mental image, according to which tree was created for man to make Satan do what he wanted to make the earth a place for examining man. It means paving the way for clearing cognition and belief of man, by which the people can be placed in that potential and contractual position and make it actual or go away from the position and go toward misdirection.

#### 4-3- Quran parables with treatment approach

In Holy Quran, a specific form of using images is observed to provide peace and being away from stress. However, as it was mentioned, imaginations in Quran have some features that should be cleared with deep investigations. This is because; Quran has not been investigated from this perspectives properly till now and naturally, its properties are also latent unclear. For example, there are some verses in Quran, in which God has counted some images that firstly make people worry; although he consequently brings another image that meets the concerns and worry; such as various images of conditions of people of hell with mentioning the visual details; along with e\which he has presented the ways to meet these concerns and pains through describing special behaviors.

Applied value of this Quranic approach is in such manner that similar behaviors to these imaging cases in Quran is being observed today in managerial behavior of most societies to create fear and concern and ways of meeting them many times.

Another example of imaging in Quran described to understand concepts as one of the most important Quranic images and maybe as the most disgusting imaginable picture for everyone is the image that most people have no tendency to imagine it basically and it is nothing other than imagination to express ugliness and badness of "backbiting" in Quran.

*"O 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." (Al-Hujurat/12)*

In this verse, a question is imagined that can show ugly action of backbiting in best manner. Maybe the strangest simile in Quran is same image that has presented ugliness of an action to such understandable level that is one of the most common sins of people in every time. The ugliness of action and its complications are too expanded that its answer is quickly presented by God in form of another question and even people have not been allowed to think about that.

The scene here given by God to show ugliness of backbiting has focused imaging and a disgusting imaging more than emphasizing lexical expression of an action. In fact, in this verse, God has presented entire desired content only in form of an imaging scene, which shows applied value and effectiveness of images. Moreover, another indicator example of imaging in Quran to express inability of owners of power is given in Hajj Surah verse 73 that has shown weakness and inability of apparently powerful people with an innovative and attractive image based on mental image. With no explanation, every person can achieve desired content of Quran with a simple imagination.

*"O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued." (Al-Hajj/73)*

The innovative description in Quran that has a completely imaginative form makes every listener amazed. Their weakness against God is imaged through giving a simple example and tracing a scene away from expectations. In this verse, not only human capabilities is questioned, but also the weakness of claimant for succession of God on the earth is unveiled simply to make people understand that man with all abilities is again weak against God.

#### 5-3- Quran parables with upbringing function

Quran parables are indicator and efficient examples of mental images, which are given along with description of details of desired scenes and it can ease imagination of desired images for the audiences. 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 audiences and this point is referred directly in verse 25 of Ibrahim Surah.

*It produces its fruit all the time, by permission of its Lord. And Allah presents examples for the people that perhaps they will be reminded. (Ibrahim/25)*

Another issue in Quran about function of parables is the discussion of thought that is mentioned in Quran in different manners and this desire is also presented in frame of parable:

*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. (Al-Hashr/21)*

Using parables in Quran as one of the main ways of transferring concepts is the most indicator example of mental imaging in upbringing innate talents of people, through using which in Quran, b\value and role of mental imaging is cleared more than before.

### 6-3- Quran parables with educational functions

*"Say, O you who are Jews, if you claim that you are allies of Allah , excluding the [other] people, then wish for death, if you should be truthful." (Al-Jumu'ah/5)*

*"The example of those who disbelieve is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries cattle or sheep - deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand." (Al-Baqarah/171)*

Another group of parables described in Quran have serious form and free from irony. These parables are relied on simulation of events of tangible world and can be considered as a kind of mental imaging that pave the way in audiences to accept many concepts.

*"O you who have believed, do not invalidate your charities with reminders or injury as does one who spends his wealth [only] to be seen by the people and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day. His example is like that of a [large] smooth stone upon which is dust and is hit by a downpour that leaves it bare. They are unable [to keep] anything of what they have earned. And Allah does not guide the disbelieving people." (Al-Baqarah/264)*

*"And the example of those who spend their wealth seeking means to the approval of Allah and assuring [reward for] themselves is like a garden on high ground which is hit by a downpour - so it yields its fruits in double. And [even] if it is not hit by a downpour, then a drizzle [is sufficient] and Allah, of what you do, is Seeing. (Al-Baqarah/265)*

*"The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing." (Al-Baqarah/261)*

*"The example of those who take allies other than Allah is like that of the spider who takes a home. And indeed, the weakest of homes is the home of the spider, if they only knew." (Al-Ankabut/41)*

*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. (Al-Kahf/45)*

#### 4.DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Something that has made Quran as a secretly and effective means from the beginning and impressing hearts and minds is the method of using mental images in it. In other words, this property is the main property of Holy Quran that is not cleared till now and is considered less. In fact, this is the art of Quran that uses the words to show and picture meanings and concepts and give them soul and personify the words and concepts; but also since the early days of sending Quran, an advanced method is presented by Quran for training and upbringing and healing mental and sometimes physical diseases. This Quranic method mentions this issue that mental images (parables) play effective role in improvement of thought and modification of behavioral patterns and personality making. Mental approaches used in Quran can be the primary core of methods found by the modern science to pave the way of guiding people based on it. The most important results obtained from this study are as follows:

- 1- Image parables in Quran are based on upbringing and growing internal talents of people such as thinking power and the power to differentiate truth and untruth in all affairs that can also pave the way for Islamic upbringing.
- 2- Imaging descriptions of Quran (parables) in most cases are formed of several sentences and are along with imagery description and are not similar to common short parables with a few words.
- 3- Quran parables can be considered as a basis to enter to use mental imaging approaches in Quran.
- 4- According to function of mental images in Quran, it could be found that mental images can guide people not only in positive directions, but also they can also guide them in untruth and wrong directions.
- 5- Using mental images in Quran is in line with transcendence and guidance of man and has two main functions as follows:
  - a) A method for training, upbringing and forming human personality
  - b) Healing many mental and psychological illnesses and freedom from stress and worry referred several times in Quran.

According to obtained results from this study, it could be mentioned that mental imaging in form of parable is one of the most important methods for guiding and upbringing since early days of man creation that has led not only to formation of beliefs and personality of human, but also it can be a cause for formation of the events related to mental and behavioral performance of man. In other words, one of the upbringing methods of Quran is mental imaging using parables that can be an emphasis on advanced upbringing methods of today based on function of mental images to help human growth and success.

Notes:

- 1- Persian text of the verses is derived from Quran translated by Mahdi Fouladvand.



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