

Stories in the Qur'an: Aims, Characteristics, Types and Educational Importance
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This paper is written from the perspective of a Muslim engaged in Islamic education in a Muslim culture (Jordan). It therefore offers a non-western perspective on the use of story in Religious Education.

For Muslims, the most important truth is that Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) to guide people to the happiness in the both lives (this life and life after death). The Prophet guided by Allah through the Qur'an and Hadith Shareef (Prophet Traditions), used different methods to achieve his message to humankind. Qur'anic stories were among the main methods used by him to deliver knowledge and achieve the Islamic education aims. Stories came in different types (such as: prophets' stories and other people stories ...) occupied one third of the Qur'an.

This paper is based on exploring stories in the Qur'an, and it is divided in to two sections: firstly, the characteristics, types, and aims of the Qur'anic stories, secondly, the educational importance of the Qur'an stories in Islamic education. I used literature-based method, and then I interviewed ten Islamic education teachers in semi-structured interview to explore their opinions about the Qur'anic stories and its importance in Islamic education.

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Introduction

Islamic education is an essential need derived from Islam as a religion or way of life, as Allah (Praise be to him) wanted. Thus Islam sources are the same for Islamic education (Al-Saud, 1979). The Qur'an is the main source of Islam, which contains every principles of Islamic thought. The Qur'an demonstrates itself also to be a guidance book to the right path, and a call to eternal salvation and declaration of Allah oneness, all of which require reiterations. Therefore, through agreeable reiterations, it offers in a single sentence or story, numerous different meanings to different groups of its addressees, and treats with compassion even the smallest and most slight things and events and includes them under its will and control. Indeed, there are universal principles it aims to present through the attention it gives to the particular events related to the Companions, which relate to the establishing of Islam and legislating its laws. All this together constitutes another aspect of its miraculousness (see Qutb, 1971, and Ibn Katheer, 1990 and Al-Khateeb, 1975).

The Qur'an was revealed to the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) over the period of twenty years of the prophet's life, thirteen years in Macca and ten years in Madena after his immigration (Hijrah). So any knowledge, idea or concept must be consistent with the Qur'an to be called Islamic (Khalaf, 1972). The Maccan chapters (suras), and those revealed in Madena are different from each other in eloquence and miraculousness, and with respect to elaboration or conciseness. This is because, since those the Qur'an addressed in Macca were mainly the polytheists, it would have to use a forceful, eloquent and concise language with an elevated style and make reiterations to establish its truths (Al-Nahlawi, 2000). The Maccan chapters repeatedly express the pillars of faith and the forms or categories of the Divine Unity in a forceful, emphatic, concise and miraculous language, and not only in a page , a verse , a sentence or a word, but also in a letter or in changing places of the words in a sentence or in using definite articles or omission of articles, or mentioning or omission of certain words or phrases or even sentences, they prove the beginning and the end of the world, the Divine Being and the Hereafter in so powerful way that geniuses of the science of eloquence have been amazed at it (Abas,1991 and Al-Qatan,1991).

As for the chapters revealed after the immigration in the second phase of the Prophet's message duration they address foremost the believers and the Peoples of the Book-the Jews and Christians-and as the circumstances require, and guidance and eloquence demand, they explain to their addressees not the pillars of faith and elevated principles of the Religion, but the laws and commandments of the Islamic law (Shari'a) in a simple, clear and detailed language. The Qur'an displays in its Madenan chapters a purity of language different from the styles of the Maccan chapters. The Qur'an contains everything that human beings need to regulate their lives and to succeed in life after death. The Qur'an contains regulations, morals, creed and prophets' stories (Zedan, 1976). Stories in the Qur'an consist of the state of previous nations, past prophets, and the events that took place while the Qur'an was being revealed. The Qur'an relates many incidents of the past, mentions different lands and ruins (Al-Hashemi, 1981).

One finds that the Qur'an neither presents the stories as narrative history nor brings the chronological orders of events because it is far from the objective that the Qur'an is trying to

achieve. An example of this is the story of the Dwellers of the Cave (As-habul Kahf) which the Qur'an narrates to us in chapter Al-Kahf. It is about a group of young men whom Allah guided to faith and who escaped from their enemies because they might have forced them to revert to disbelief. The Qur'an does not mention their names, how many they were, or what was their nation or tribe (Abdoo, 2000).

Aims of the Paper

This paper based on exploring stories in the Qur'an: its types, characteristics and aims, then trying to explore the educational importance from the Qur'anic stories. Its importance came from dealing with the Qur'an, and spots the lights on the educational principles in the stories, since these stories occupied about one third of the Qur'an. It aimed to:

- Identify and investigate the Quranic stories: aims, types and characteristics.
- explore the educational importance of the stories from Islamic education teachers' point of view.

The research problem and questions

The basic research questions on which this paper is based are:

What are the stories' types, aims and characteristics in the Qur'an?

What is the educational importance of the stories in the Qur'an from the Islamic education teachers' point of view?

Definition

Qura'nic stories: events of different types that been mentioned in the Qur'an concerning the prophets and other people.

Methodology

This paper used the qualitative approach; the first question was answered by using literature – based search through different sources that dealt with this subject. Semi-structured interview was used to answer the second question; I interviewed ten Islamic education teachers and asked them the following questions:

1. Did you use Qur'anic stories in your teaching? If yes how often?
2. Do you think that using Qur'an stories is effective and enjoyable?
3. In your opinion what is the main educational principles you come up with from Qur'an stories?

Then I analysed their interviews, by transferring the interview data from the tape to verbatim written text. The Arabic text was translated into English and checked by an external verifier) to identify the main themes arising.

The Findings of the paper

Types of Stories in the Holy Qur'an:

There are different types of stories in the Qur'an mainly the following:

Stories related to incidents which took place in the life of Prophet Muhammad, PBUH such as: his Night Journey to Jerusalem (al-Isra') and Ascension to the heavens (al-Mi'raj), the migration to Madena (Hijrah), the Battles of Badr, Uhud, Hunayn, and other events that took place during his life (Jabar, 1998).

Stories of the previous prophets and messengers, (Muhammad PBUH seal of the prophets and messengers) Allah mentions stories of the prophets like, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Yusuf and 'Isa (Jesus) Peace be upon all of them, miracles with which these prophets were sent, their mission to their people, the resistance of their opponents, the stages of the mission and its evolution, the reward of the believers, and the fate of the disbelievers (Abas, 2000).

Stories about what happened to previous nations, and some pious individuals who were not prophets like, Dwellers of the Cave, Maryam (Mary), Aasiya (Pharaoh's wife).

Stories about different creatures like the ant which talked with prophet Soleman (Abu Sherakh, 2005).

Aims of the Stories in the Qur'an

The Qur'an does not amalgamate all the subjects, rather it calls for reflection. It inserts lessons from which to take heed and this is the object of the whole discussion. This is done in order to fill the hearts with the fear of Allah and to have His consciousness when one reads the Qur'an and contemplates about it. See the Qur'an, (Chapter: Ta-Ha, 20:49-54). Giving exhortation and warning by providing examples and lessons is an important aim of the stories in the Qur'an, Allah has narrated in the Qur'anic stories of the past nations and the severe punishments that were sent upon them, and their excruciating doom. Also, how they were destroyed, and what their recompense was for belying their prophets because of their arrogance and resistance to the Truth. This is followed by reminders of the Power of Allah. These stories in the Qur'an became lessons for those who came after them. See the Qur'an (Chapter: Hud, 11:100-102) (Qutb, 1988 and Abed raboo, 1972). Moses and Pharaoh Story is the reminder of the greatness of Allah and the manifestations of His being the only deity and proofs of His existence. Furthermore, the pronoun changes from addressing Moses and Pharaoh to a general one to all of humanity (Abu-Sherakh, 2005).

Explaining that the mission of all the prophets was one, all of them called their people towards the Allah oneness (Tawheed), asking them to single Him out in all their acts of worship without associating any partners with Him. There are numerous examples of this in the Qur'an like chapters Al-Anbiya', Maryam, and Al-A'raf. He says: "*Before your time We never sent any Messenger without having revealed to him that none has the right to be worshipped but I, so worship Me (alone),*" (the Qur'an :Al-Anbiya', 21:25). "*And to the people of 'Ad, We sent their brother Hud. He said: 'O my people, worship Allah Alone, you have no deity other than Him. Will you not, then, fear Him?'"*" (The Qur'an: Al-A'raf, 7:65).

Consoling the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, and strengthening his heart to perform his mission (Da'wah), Allah gave him patience over the harm that was inflicted upon him. Allah clarifies that He gives victory to His Messengers and protects them from His punishment. Along with this, the Qur'an makes the believers firm and strengthens them because Allah will make them victorious, no matter what. Allah says: "*Therefore, be patient (O Muhammad) as did the Messengers endowed with firmness of heart, bore themselves with patience. And be in no haste about them (the disbelievers),*" (the Qur'an :Al-Ahqaf, 46:35) (Abas, 2000).

Showing the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in his mission and that he is a prophet who receives revelation from Allah. Allah points towards this fact after ending the story by cautioning that all this information that he receives could not possibly have been obtained from elsewhere as he did not visit the Jewish rabbis or Christian monks to learn the accounts of previous nations. In one verse Allah says: "*This account of something that was beyond the reach of your perception We now reveal unto you, (O Prophet): for you were not with Joseph's brothers when they arranged their plan together, and also, while they were plotting,*" (the Qur'an: Yusuf, 12:102) (Al-Qubaesi, 2003).

Stories characteristic in the Qur'an

Stories in the Qur'an and Islamic education have the same characteristics that came from Islam which are:

Godliness: that means it is revealed from Allah to his messenger, to spread to all human beings.

Comprehensive: it contains all knowledge that humans need in both lives; this life and life after death.

Balance: on the one hand between theory and practice, on the other hand in working to succeed in both lives (Farhan et al 1980).

Morality: by establishing values and bases for clean, safe and regulate society (Taha et al 1992).

Practical: it is not imaginary it deals with real life, and it is not some sort of legend and there is no symbolic in the Qur'an stories (Abu sherakh, 2005). Stories in the Qur'an are not based upon imagination; rather they are the actual state of affairs in which the people lived. It is a revelation from Allah, who does not mention something unless it occurred exactly as He states it in the

Qur'an. Stories in the Qur'an are drawn from actual historical events and put in an eloquent, beautiful style with the most appropriate choice of Arabic words (Al-Qubaesi, 2003).

When we talk about stories in the Qur'an we must mention the special way of presenting these stories. The chapter repeats a single account several times; a very clear example is Moses and Pharaoh. This is done to connect and reconcile the subject with the details. This might also be to bring out the miraculous nature of the Qur'an. Arabic Knowledge is required to fully appreciate this aspect of the Qur'an. All the stories come in a setting which differs from one place to another, according to the demands of the situation. This repetition has several important wisdoms mainly:

To establish the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, as well as its peak of eloquence by bringing forth the same meaning in different ways and styles, such that the repetition does not seem repetitious! It requires a sound grasp of the Arabic language to fully understand this point. Consequently, all translations fail to convey the miraculous nature and the eloquence of the Qur'an (Abas, 1991). Stories are narrated for a specific purpose. Some relevant details are mentioned at one place while some others are added or subtracted at other places. An example of this can be seen in the stories of the prophets in chapter Hud which are repeated again in chapter Al-Qamar, but with a new and different style and manner such that the reader might think that the stories and the events were not known to him before!(Abas,1987).

To explain the importance and significance of the subject which the story deals with in order to firmly settle their lessons in the souls. Moses and Pharaoh Story revolve around the clash between truth and falsehood, light and darkness (Al-Kateeb, 1975).

Educational importance of the Qur'an stories: Islamic education teachers' point of view

Human in general like telling stories. Both the Qur'an and Hadith Shareef use this method, especially with faith and moral subjects (Maki, 1990). The main aim of the stories to learn lessons, wisdom and morals from what happened in the past and to build avidness of Allah oneness (see Abu-Aleneen, 1985, Ahmed, 1980, and hamadi,1987). There are many types of stories: historical, factual and dramatic. The Qur'an employs all these techniques. Historical story tells us something about real things that happened in the past where all prophets' stories are from this type. Story of Adams' sons is an example of factual story. Dramatic means it could happen any time. The Qur'an uses this way of teaching Story as a teaching method must not be too removed from everyday life: it must be directed at the students' levels, not too lengthy and foster positive attitudes. It should relate to Islamic principles and morals (Qutb, undated: 240). Children find it an enjoyable teaching method in different subject (Mustafeh, 2002).

Islamic Education Teachers' point of view towards using stories:

All of the ten teachers think that Holy Qur'an stories are very important and they use it in their lessons in different subject either they mean it self or some time to deliver and explain some content and ideas, they use it according to subjects needs:

Ahmad said:

Yes, defiantly I use different types of stories according to the subject I teach.

Eman: I use it depending on the ideas I explain, I use it more with faith issue, and it is very effective in convincing.

Teachers think that telling story as a teaching method is both effective and enjoyable to the children.

Sara: I think that stories are effective in delivering lessons and morals and they are enjoyable in the same time.

When teachers were asked about the educational principles of the stories, I end up with summaries of their opinions as follows:

- to develop nature proper Muslim who believe in Allah, to built into students personality a love of following Islam.
- to know the best role model to follow.
- to built Islamic values and morals.
- help in convincing through evidences.
- help students gain knowledge in different areas
- to be proud of their Islamic heritage and make good model of Muslim heroes
- to realise that Islam is the religion of freedom, peace and equality.
- dealing with the learner according to their individuals differences, and motivate and complement them.

They said:

Imran: I think stories are very good with young children, it helps them gain knowledge.....it also support main aim in Islamic education which follow the prophet as role model.

Ali: I think built an important aspect of the students personality; the morale and values, I mean also learning lessons from the past to develop Muslims who obey Allah.

Conclusion

Stories in the Qur'an are very important from the importance of the Qur'an it self as a guidance book to the human beings to the right path as Muslims believe, and it suitable for every time and place. Stories in the Qur'an are different types; all these types came to achieve different aims, mainly to learn lessons. We should keep trying to learn from its lesson in different aspects and explore it. We should concentrate in using the stories in our teaching-learning process, both stories in the Qur'an and Hadith Shareef.

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