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The Role of Qurānic Examples in Understanding the Qurān

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The Role of Qurānic Examples in Understanding the Qurān

ABSTRACT

Qurān is the final revelation of Almighty Allah. The Glorious Qurān, apart from Divine Oneness, Messenger-ship, beliefs, pious deeds, acts of worship, interactions, and the Hereafter, has given examples and illustrations of divine power's manifestations and human character and behavior to make humans better understand their implications in the light of these examples. The significance of examples in the Qurān can be judged from the fact that the examples given are commensurate with what is exemplified. This article lights up to understand the Qurānic thought by different examples. The purpose of examples in the Qurān is to explicate the verses, make the lessons of warning loud and clear, and impart decrees and divine advice to humans. These are, in fact, trials of humans. They provide sources of guidance for the people of reason and insight but hold the unresponsive and insensible ones astray and misguided. Only those turn away from the Qurānic examples that are disobedient, defiant, and conceited. However, the God-fearing ones submit to divine guidance.

Keywords: Qurān, *amthāl*, *mithāl*, *mithal*, Example, Humanity, Guidance.

Introduction

The Glorious Qurān is the last of books Allah has revealed and the best of all the books in the world; it was sent down for the guidance of humankind. The Glorious Qurān, apart from Divine Oneness, Messenger-ship, beliefs, pious deeds, acts of worship, interactions, and the Next World, has given examples and illustrations of divine power's manifestations and human character and behavior to make humans better understand their implications in the light of these examples. Something uttered in the form of an example rouses interest and is fast understood by the listener. Almighty Allah has given many kinds of examples so that the human mind grasps its implications without any difficulty and understands Allah's commands in a better way, for a thing exemplified is better taken than the one argued.

So, the miracle of the Qurān is that it does not only impart guidance but also employs most effective and beautiful examples to infuse that guidance into the innermost depths of the head and heart. Free of time, space, and types of people, they make all those who possess awareness and logic think and meditate. The reader of the Qurān, whether an unbeliever or a follower of some previous religion, naturalist or rationalist, does not take the Qurānic examples alien or unique provided he is genuinely looking for the truth. They are not only beyond comparison in meanings and communication but also meet the requisites. Therefore, the examples of the Qurān are especially substantial for human guidance.

Lexical and Technical Meanings

‘*Amthāl*’ is the plural form of ‘*mithāl*’ and functions as a simile or similitude.

1. Ibn Manẓūr al-Ifrīqī has described it in *Lisān al- ‘Arab*:

وَالْمَثَلُ وَالْمَثِيلُ: كَالْمَثَلِ، وَالْجَمْعُ أَمْثَالٌ، وَهُمَا يَتِمَّانِ: وَقَوْلُهُمْ: فَلَنْ مُسْتَرَادٍّ لِمِثْلِهِ وَفَلَانَةُ مُسْتَرَادَّةٌ لِمِثْلِهَا، أَي: مِثْلُهُ يُطْلَبُ وَيُشْحَقُ عَلَيْهِ. وَقِيلَ: مَعْنَاهُ مُسْتَرَادٌّ مِثْلُهُ أَوْ مِثْلُهَا. وَاللَّامُ زَائِدَةٌ: وَالْمَثَلُ: الْحَدِيثُ نَفْسُهُ. وَقَوْلُهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: وَلِلَّهِ الْمَثَلُ الْأَعْلَى. وَجَاءَ فِي التَّفْسِيرِ: أَنَّهُ قَوْلٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ، وَتَأْوِيلُهُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَمَرَ بِالتَّوْحِيدِ وَنَفَى كُلَّ إِلَهٍ سِوَاهُ، وَهِيَ الْأَمْثَالُ.

“*al-Mathal*” or “*al-Mathīl*” is like “*al-mithl*” with the plural form “*al-amthāl*”. They connote that “they both are identical”. The Arabic construction “*fulān mustarād limithlihī wa fulānah mustarādah limithlihā*” means that “the person like him is demanded and people are ungenerous about him (i.e., a person like him is not provided or spared).” This is also held: “*mustarād mithlihī aw mithlihā*” and “*lām*” is additional, and “*mathal*” exactly implies the same as Allah Most Exalted has said: “His is the highest Glory in the heavens and the earth.”¹ The exegetes have interpreted it as “there is no God except He”. This connotes that Allah Most Exalted has decreed His Oneness and has negated all other gods, and all the false gods are “*amthāl*”.²

2. Imām al-Nasafī has defined ‘*amthāl*’ in these words:

وَالْمَثَلُ فِي أَصْلِ كَلَامِهِمْ هُوَ الْمَثَلُ وَهُوَ النَّظِيرُ، يُقَالُ: مَثَلٌ وَمَثَلٌ وَمِثْلٌ وَمِثْلٌ كَشَبَهُ وَشَبَهُ وَشَبِيهٌ. ثُمَّ قِيلَ لِلْقَوْلِ السَّائِرِ الْمَثَلُ مُضْرِبُهُ بِمُورَدِهِ مَثَلٌ وَلَمْ يَضْرِبُوا مَثَلًا إِلَّا قَوْلًا فِيهِ غَرَابَةٌ، وَلِذَا حُوْفِظَ عَلَيْهِ، فَلَا يَغْيَرُ وَقَدْ اسْتَعْيَرَ الْمَثَلُ لِلْحَالِ أَوِ الصِّفَةِ أَوِ الْقِصَّةِ إِذَا كَانَ لَهَا شَأْنٌ وَفِيهَا غَرَابَةٌ.

“And ‘*al-mathal*’ in the original Arabic is ‘*al-mithl*’ which connotes likeness or similitude. ‘*Mithl*’, ‘*mathal*’ and ‘*mathīl*’ are like ‘*shibh*’, ‘*shabah*’ and ‘*shabīh*’. The famous and the saying in vogue is ‘*mathal*’. And the Arabs would not describe an example (*mathal*) unless it was unusual or unique. They would save it for that reason and would not change it. They used to sometimes employ this word as a metaphor for a state, attribute or a parable that would bear value and novelty.”³

In sum, the Qurānic verses that contain analogy with some fine meanings or a thing concerning clarifying the facts or bringing their substance closer to understanding are called the examples (*amthāl*) of the Qurān.

The Need and Significance of Examples

The effectiveness of examples in the interpretation and exposition of the substances of the Qurānic verses is irrefutable and undeniable. On this ground, we do not afford to neglect the examples while affirming the facts and clarifying and bringing them closer to understanding in any of the sciences or their branches. A relevant example that is thoroughly compatible and congruent with the purpose makes a highly complex matter far easier to comprehend and understandable for all.

The Arabs were known for their expressiveness and communicative skill. They were fond of examples in their enunciations. The Qurān has addressed them in their style, frequently giving them examples to facilitate the understanding of the message.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī has quoted Imām al-Rāghib al-Asfahanī's statement in *al-Itqān*:

لِضَرْبِ الْعَرَبِ الْأَمْثَالَ وَاسْتِحْضَارِ الْعُلَمَاءِ النَّظَائِرَ شَأْنٌ لَيْسَ بِالْخَفِيِّ فِي إِبْرَازِ خَفِيَّاتِ الدَّقَائِقِ وَرَفْعِ
الْأَسْتَارِ عَنِ الْحَقَائِقِ تُرِيكَ الْمُتَخَيَّلَ فِي صُورَةِ الْمُتَحَقِّقِ وَالْمُتَوَهِّمِ فِي مَعْرِضِ الْمُتَبَيِّنِ وَالْغَائِبِ كَأَنَّهُ
مُشَاهَدٌ.

“The Arab proverbs and scholars’ examples have a glory that is not hidden because they have a special effect in exposing the secret subtleties and unveiling the facts; they lay open the imagined matters in factual mode, turn whims into faith, and put the absent into a witnessed reality.”⁴

The import of examples has been stated in the Qurān on many occasions.

1. Allah Most Exalted has said:

﴿وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ﴾.

“And these are the examples We explain for the people (to understand), and none understands them except those who have knowledge.”⁵

2. On another occasion it is stated:

﴿وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ﴾.

“And truly, (to make the people understand,) We have given every kind of example in this Qurān in order that they may take advice.”⁶

3. Explaining the reason for describing ‘amthala’ in Surah al- Hashr, Allah has revealed:

﴿وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾.

“We give these examples for the people so that they may ponder.”⁷

These Qurānic verses have made it evident that the examples of the Qurān are extremely effective in the moral and spiritual training of humans. Allah, the Highest has revealed these beautiful examples to persuade and motivate humans towards pious acts and the requisite training. The one who ponders upon them and looks for the truth cannot remain deprived of advice.

Abū Hurayrah has reported that Allah’s Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) said:

فَإِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ نَزَلَ عَلَى خَمْسَةِ أَوْجُهٍ: حَلَالٍ وَحَرَامٍ وَمُحْكَمٍ وَمُتَشَابِهٍ وَأَمْثَالٍ، فَأَعْمَلُوا بِالْحَلَالِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الْحَرَامَ وَاتَّبِعُوا الْمُحْكَمَ وَأَمِنُوا بِالْمُتَشَابِهِ وَاعْتَبِرُوا بِالْأَمْثَالِ.

“The Qurān has indeed been revealed for five reasons: lawful and unlawful, firm, figurative, and examples. So do what is lawful, eschew

what is unlawful, obey and follow the firm, put faith in the figurative and seek lesson and advice from the examples.”⁸

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace be upon him) has made clear in this Hadīth the Qurānic verses and has explained that the examples of the Qurān are revealed for advice.

The Qurānic Examples

It will not be out of place if we present here some similitudes to explain the effectiveness of an example. Putting aside the nature and force of an example, the antagonists would say what type of book Qurān is that it contains similitudes of a fly, a mosquito, and a spider's cobweb. The Qurān has replied their objection.

1) The Example of fly

It is stated in the Qurān:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ الْحَقَّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ﴾

“Indeed, Allah is not reluctant to narrate some example (for better comprehension), whether of a mosquito or something even more (disgusting) than that. The believers know well that this example is (a pointer to the truth) from their Lord. But those who have adopted disbelief ask (on hearing): ‘What could Allah mean by this example?’ (In this way) Allah holds many astray and guides many aright with the same example. And by this, He leaves in error only those who are (already) disobedient.”

9

Allah, the Highest has effectively rejected the objection raised by the disbelievers and has explained their very purpose that they become means of

acceptance and identification of the ones who confess the truth and those who reject the truth advance in their disbelief.

What is important to be observed in an example is to what extent the purpose is achieved for which the example is served and how far the representative and the represented are congruent or the represented is inferior or bearing great superiority. View the similitudes given in the Qurān; each one of them is matchless and congruent to an amazing degree, fully serving the purpose.

2) The Examples of fly and mosquito to reject the false gods

1. Allah has revealed:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ فَاستَمِعُوا لَهُ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ﴾

“O mankind! An example is given, so listen to it attentively. Verily, (the idols) you worship besides Allah cannot create (even) a fly, though they all may join in for this (purpose). And if the fly snatches a thing away from them, they cannot (even) recover it from that (fly). How helpless are the seeker (worshipper) and the sought (false god)!”¹⁰

2. Look at this example of how significant it is as compared to some prolonged statements. Even an illiterate villager can easily make out what it aims at:

﴿مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

“The example of those (disbelievers) who have taken others (i.e., idols) as guardians instead of Allah is like the story of a spider who builds (for herself) a house (of cobweb). And no doubt the weakest of all houses is the spider’s house. Would that they knew it!”¹¹

See this example. The compatibility between the representative and the represented here is at its best. This proves that such a perfect word can only be a revealed word; no human can produce such a verse.

3) The Example of the Effects of Tawhīd and Shirk on Human Life

Allah Most Exalted has differentiated the worshipers of false gods from the believers in the Oneness of Allah with the following example:

﴿ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

“Allah has given an example of such a (slave) person that is owned by many partners who are ill-mannered and mutually quarrelsome as well. And (on the other side) there is a person who is a slave only to one master. Can they both be alike? (Not at all!) All praise belongs to Allah alone. But most of them do not know (the truth of the Oneness of Allah).”¹²

Through this example, the truth about *Tawhīd* and *Shirk* is being unveiled in an enchanting manner. A better analogy than this is beyond possibility. Scores of cogent proofs would not capture hearts like this example that becomes a heartthrob.

4) Explaining the Birth of ‘Isā (PBUH) through example

The Qurān refutes the objection raised by people who question while one body can take birth without a father, how could Isa take birth by his mother alone?

﴿إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ﴾

“Surely, the example of ‘Isā (Jesus) in the sight of Allah is the same as that of Adam whom He formed from clay, then said (to him): ‘Be.’ And he became.”¹³

Hāfīz Ibn Kathīr interprets this verse:

“By giving the example of Adam (PBUH), God says that you only object to the birth without father; Allah’s Might is so infinite that He only commands a carved figure of soil to become and it became a living ‘Adam’. This is a clear manifestation of Allah’s infinite power that he can bring to life Adam even without a mother and a father. Eve too was born without a mother while Isa was born without a father. This example rebutted the objection.”¹⁴

5) Example of Charity Donors in the Name of Allah

Illustrating the reward of charity donors in the name of Allah, the Qurān has revealed:

﴿مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنبُلَةٍ مِائَةُ حَبَّةٍ
وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

“The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like (that) grain out of which seven ears shoot forth. (And then) each ear bears a hundred grains (i.e., they are rewarded seven hundred times). And Allah multiplies (still more) for whom He likes. And Allah is Infinite, All-Knowing.”¹⁵

Hāfiz Ibn Kathīr has interpreted this verse in these words:

“This verse is enunciating 100% reward of altruism and benevolence. The one who spends his wealth seeking the pleasure of God receives dividends in return and reward; his pious acts increase seven hundred times. These people include those who bring up horses (in modern days contribute to arms and ammunition) for jihād, purchase war machines and spend on Hajj and pay for others’ Hajj. The example that has illustrated the multiple rewards of altruistic activities gets embedded in the eyes and hearts. It is an abruptly declared process of reward multiplication, hinting at the

automatic augmentation of righteous deeds like the seeds sown in the fields to harvest.”¹⁶

This holy verse is inspiring to spend the wealth in the way of Allah. To enhance their avidity to spend in the path of Allah, the Qurān has brought a tangible and material example to create a permanent and interminable image in the minds of the addressees. It brings to mind a vivid image that sowing a seed in Allah’s way bestows upon us seven hundred times greater reward. Altruism is, in the worldly equation, seven hundred times greater profiting investment. The Qurān says: *And Allah multiplies (still more) for whom He likes*. This can further rise to 1400 times. Such a multiplication of profit is possible by spending in the way of Allah alone.

6) The Example of Difference between the Pretenders and the Genuine Spenders

The preceding verse of *Surah al-Baqarah* has only illustrated the benefits return of the genuine spenders. The next holy verse strikes the difference between the true spenders in the name of Allah and those who only pretend and just show off their wealth to people.

1. It is stated in verse number 264 of *Surah al-Baqarah*:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَبْطُلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِثَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ﴾

“O, believers! Do not ruin your charity donations (later) by taunts of doing a favor and hurting feelings like the one who gives charity to show off his wealth to the people and believes in neither Allah nor the Last Day. His case is like a smooth rock covered with a thin coat of soil. Then heavy rain falls on it, washes it clean, and leaves it (the same) bare and hard (rock).

So these (pretentious people) shall get nothing out of their earning. And Allah does not guide the disbelievers.”¹⁷

2. It is stated in verse number 265 of Surah al-Baqarah:

﴿وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيئًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍ بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَآتَتْ أُكُلَهَا ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ فَطَلٌّ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ﴾

“And those who spend their wealth to seek Allah’s pleasure and stabilize themselves (in faith and obedience) are like a garden located on a higher ground level. When heavy rain falls on it, it doubles its yield. And if it does not receive heavy rain, then even dew (or drizzle) is sufficient. And Allah monitors your actions minutely.”¹⁸

Mawlanā Mawdūdī while writing its exegesis, explains:

“This similitude speaks of the rain analogizing charity donation. Rock stands for the foul intention and sentiment that resulted in giving away the wealth. The thin layer of soil refers to the appearance of the piety pretended which has concealed the bad intention. After this clarification, the example can be better comprehended. The natural intention of rains is just to aid the cultivation and irrigation of crops. However, when the soil that needs watering is just a thin layer settled over a rock, the rain can only do more damage than good. In like manner, the charity has the potential to foster, provided it emanates from sincere intention. The foul intention in this way is fruitless and results only in devastates wealth and its sources.”¹⁹

Interpreting the next verse, Pīr Karam Shāh al-Azharī states:

“This holy verse reveals the example of righteous deeds performed by a true faithful. Allah Most Munificent augments the reward of charity by a true believer manifold just as the fertile land of a higher plateau brings heavy yields though it receives only scanty rains. ‘*Rabwa*’ is that piece of

land that is at a higher level than other lands and contains more fertile soil.”²⁰

7) The Example of Worldly Life

Allah Most High has given the example of worldly life in this holy verse of *Surah Yūnūs*. It reveals that worldly life is to end suddenly the way a storm eliminates a fully grown crop in no time.

﴿إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ مِمَّا يَأْكُلُ النَّاسُ وَالْأَنْعَامُ حَتَّى إِذَا أَخَذَتِ الْأَرْضُ زُخْرُفَهَا وَازْبَيَّتْ وَظُنَّ أَهْلُهَا أَنَّهُمْ قَادِرُونَ عَلَيْهَا أَتَاهَا أَمْرُنَا لَيْلًا أَوْ نَهَارًا فَجَعَلْنَاهَا حَصِيدًا كَأَنْ لَّمْ تَغْنَ بِالْأَمْسِ كَذَلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾

“The example of the worldly life is like water which We sent down from the sky. Then, owing to this, there came forth from the earth a thick growth of vegetation which both men and cattle feed on, until when the earth took its (full) bloom and beauty and became fully embellished, and its inhabitants thought that (now) they had full control over it, then (suddenly) Our command (of torment) seized it by night or by day, and We made it mown down as if it did not even exist the day before. That is how We elucidate Our signs to those who apply reason.”²¹

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlahī expounds on the meanings of this verse in the following interpretation:

“The worldly life that you consider a success and source of peace should not betray you in that you challenge the Almighty Allah. You see that it rains and the crop reaches the harvesting stage and the gardens bear fruits; the owners feel overjoyed when all of a sudden the wrath of Allah grips and blows everything off like dust particles. Similarly, when Our decision will be imposed, We shall annihilate you the same way amidst your

development, progress, and affluence. You will then be helpless to contest.”²²

8) The Example of the Backbiters

Allah Most Exalted has analogized the backbiters with those who eat the flesh of their dead brother:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ﴾

“O, believers! Avoid most conjectures. Indeed, some conjectures are sins (liable to punishment in the Hereafter). And spy not (on someone’s unknown matters or secrets), nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it. And fear Allah (in all such matters). Indeed, Allah is Ever-Returning, Ever-Merciful.”²³

‘Allama al-Shawkānī has interpreted:

“Allah Most High gives the example of backbiters as those who eat the flesh of their dead brothers. The dead one is unaware of its flesh being eaten in the same way as he would be unaware of backbiting against him. Zajāj has observed that it indicates that a person’s honor is like his flesh. Spoiling his honor is unlawful in the same way as eating his flesh is forbidden. This example generates hate and disgust for backbiting.”²⁴

Conclusion

We can conclude from these themes of examples and similitudes that in the fields of deliberations and discussions on scientific, organizational, collective, and moral subjects, exemplification brings about the following effects and impressions towards facilitating smooth and enduring communication and understanding:

1. An example, similitude and analogy add perceptibility and tangibility to the comprehension of the issues. Since a human is used to his senses while complex rational and intellectual matters are comparatively away from theoretical and ideological analysis, the sensuous and tangible examples reduce the distance of understanding and bring ideas closer to senses. This renders the experience of understanding tough realities sweet, pleasant, interesting, and gratifying.
2. An example reduces the traveling distance. Sometimes, one has to employ cogent arguments to prove a logical, rational, and profound contention. Even then the doubt hovering over it cannot be dispelled. However, a compatible and clear example reduces the labor of traveling long distances to reach the destination. It multiplies the upshot of arguments and also discards some of the arguments as unnecessary.
3. An example makes the issues equally relevant for all. Many of the scientific issues that are meant for the elite alone and the common man can hardly benefit from them become understandable for everyone if they are explained through examples. Then they become useful for all and sundry.
4. The examples allay the adamant ones. Often it happens that the obstinate and stubborn minds do not accept things if put forth logically; they give an awkward reaction and complicate the matter further. However, the magic of putting across the matter through examples hampers the adamant reception of ideas and the obstinate behavior fails in finding false alibis to create confusion and make things more complex.

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- 4 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qurān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 344.
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- 6 Al-Qurān, 39:27.
- 7 Al-Qurān, 59:21.
- 8 Abū Bakr Ahmad b. Husayn al-Bayhaqī, *Shuab al- Īman* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- ‘Ilmiyyah, 1410 AH), vol. 2, p. 427.
- 9 Al-Qurān, 2:26.
- 10 Al-Qurān, 22:73.
- 11 Al-Qurān, 29:41.
- 12 Al-Qurān, 39:29.
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