



The
Parables
— of the —
Qur'an

— ♦ —
DR YASIR QADHI

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— of the —
Qur'an



DR YASIR QADHI



The Parables of the Qur'an

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Transliteration

A brief guide to some of the letters and symbols used in the Arabic transliteration in this book.

th ث

ḥ ح

dh ذ

ṣ ص

ḍ ض

ṭ ط

ẓ ظ

ʿ ع

ʾ ء

ā آ

ī إ

ū أُ



May the peace and
blessings of Allah
be upon him.



May Allah
be pleased
with him.



May Allah
be pleased
with her.



May Allah be pleased
with them both.



May He
be glorified.



May peace be
upon him.



Contents

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Preface | vi |
|---------------|----|

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
|--------------------|---|

Section One: Parables

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. The Danger of Hypocrisy: The Parables of Fire and Light | 10 |
| 2. A Warning for the Hypocrite: The Parable of the Rainstorm | 18 |
| 3. Engaging in Remembrance: A Bidirectional Relationship..... | 28 |
| 4. Multiplying One's Dividends in the Hereafter..... | 34 |
| 5. Safeguarding the Reward of Charity: Pitfalls to Avoid | 46 |
| 6. Towards Investing for the Hereafter: The Virtues of Charity..... | 52 |
| 7. Spending Sincerely for the Sake of Allah | 58 |
| 8. A Vivid Warning Against Those Who Consume and Benefit from Interest | 62 |
| 9. Holding Tightly and Firmly to the Divine Rope of Allah | 68 |
| 10. Spiritual Dimensions of Life and Death | 74 |
| 11. The Panting Dog: A Warning Against the Immoral and Corrupt Scholar | 80 |
| 12. The Transient and Fleeting Nature of the World | 88 |
| 13. Allah's Limitless and Fathomless Knowledge..... | 94 |
| 14. The Eternal Truth Prevails Against Falsehood..... | 100 |
| 15. The Necessity of Being Grateful and Thankful to Allah | 106 |
| 16. True Faith Manifested: The Parable of the Good Tree..... | 114 |
| 17. Faith Verses Falsehood: Exploring the Parables of the Good and Evil Trees | 122 |
| 18. The Theological Absurdities and Contradictions of Polytheism... | 130 |
| 19. Building on One's Piety: The Danger of Returning to Sins..... | 138 |
| 20. The Sublime and Symbolic Beauty of the Verse of Light..... | 144 |

Section Two: Aphorisms

21. The Deeds of the Disbeliever: An Empty Illusion 154

22. The Futile and Vain Proofs of the Disbelievers162

23. The Eminent Rank of Knowledge and its Possessors166

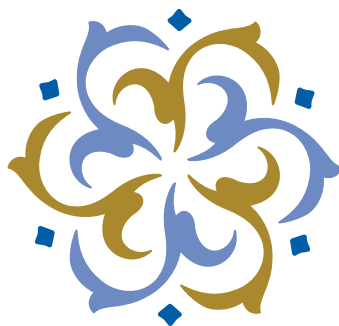
24. The Praiseworthy Qualities of the Companions..... 174

25. The Danger of Abstract Knowledge without
Sincere Belief and Action182

26. Aphorisms Concerning Preaching and Practising One’s Faith ... 190

27. When Opposites Meet: A Remarkable Aphorism
Concerning the Law of Retaliation..... 198

28. The Positive Affirmation of Faith Through Observation..... 204



Preface

All praise is due to Allah, and may salutations be upon the Messenger of Allah!

Every Ramadan for the last decade, it has been my habit to undertake a lecture series for my *masjid* that aims to both uplift the *īmān* of the attendees and provide wholesome spiritual benefit. Last year, in Ramadan 1442 AH, I decided to concentrate on some of the parables and aphorisms of the Qur'an. Each day, I would choose a parable or aphorism and explain it to the attendees during the *tarāwīḥ* prayers. This work in your hands is the culmination of that project.

The work begins with a chapter on the eloquence of the Qur'an and the role that parables (*amthāl*) play in it. We discuss what exactly a 'parable' is, the key components of a parable, and why it is so effective. Further, I illustrate the function of the parable in the Qur'an and how Allah references it. I then explain how 'aphorisms' have become so common that it is used as everyday sayings, or expressions of wisdom, by all Arabic speakers regardless of faith.

The work is divided into two sections. In the first section, 25 specific parables are discussed in the order of the Surahs of the Qur'an in which they are mentioned. The goal is to explain these parables in a simple manner without the technical language typically found in advanced works of exegesis. In the second section, a few aphorisms are chosen to illustrate

this phenomenon. Of course, it is difficult to have a comprehensive list, as any Qur’anic phrase can be used in such a manner if one chooses to do so.

I would like to thank Kube Publishing and their editorial staff for working with me so tirelessly to produce such a polished product. Of course, as always, I forever remain grateful to my Lord for blessing me with a loving family. I think of all of the introductions I have written over the last 25 years—for over a dozen books that I have published—I began as a bachelor, thanking my parents; then over the years I also thanked my wife; and one by one, my children were added to the list. Now to see that my ‘children’ are young adults, and my elderly parents have moved in with me, I can only say, as the Qur’an instructs,

“My Lord! Inspire me to ever be thankful for Your favours which You blessed me and my parents with, and to do good deeds that please You. And instill righteousness in my offspring. I truly repent to You, and I truly submit to Your Will.”¹

Dr. Yasir Qadhi

Plano, TX

January 30th, 2022 CE

(Jumādā al-Ākhirah 27th, 1443 AH)

¹ *Al-Aḥqāf*, 15.



وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَلُ

نَضَرْنَا بِهَا لِلنَّاسِ

وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا

إِلَّا الْأَعْلَمُونَ

These are the parables that we cite
for mankind, and it is only those
who ponder and understand that
benefit from the parables.

AL-‘ANKABŪT, 43.



INTRODUCTION



Figures of Speech
in the Qur'an:
**The Use of
Symbolism
and Imagery**





There can be no doubt that the most honoured, revered, and eloquent of all speech is the speech of our Creator, Allah ﷻ. Furthermore, Allah ﷻ honoured us immensely by selecting us to be the recipients of such noble speech, in the form of the Qur'an that was revealed to our beloved Messenger ﷺ. This Qur'an holds great power as well as the ability to reform, rectify, and revolutionalise through its eloquent presentations. Part of this unparalleled eloquence is its impressive use of various linguistic mechanisms and rhetorical devices to beautifully convey its message. Facts are wonderfully presented, as well as striking themes of *targhīb* (inspiring) and *tarhīb* (warning) that incentivise us, push us to yearn and desire, and certainly fear those things that Allah ﷻ wishes for us to fear. Another powerful mechanism employed in the Qur'an is the presentation of stories and examples in order to convey distinct facts and remarkable messages. In fact, these are some of the Qur'an's most effective mechanisms, known as *amthāl* (parables).

Regarding this, Allah ﷻ says in the Noble Qur'an,

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ، وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ

“These are the parables that we cite for mankind, and it is only those who ponder and understand that benefit from the parables.”²

² *Al-Ankabūt*, 43.

Further adding to this, Allah ﷻ says,

وَلَقَدْ صَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

“We have cited every type of parable in this Qur’an so that they can understand and think.”³

In another verse, Allah ﷻ says,

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“These are the parables we cite for mankind so that they can benefit and ponder.”⁴

Thus, we clearly understand from these verses that the purpose of the divine revelation of this Noble Book is for us to ponder, reflect, and benefit from its insightful wisdoms. To facilitate this, Allah ﷻ has placed within the Qur’an numerous parables that aid us in fulfilling these lofty aims. Another astounding quality of this linguistic mechanism is that upon surveying the parables found in the Qur’an, we will find not just one category of parables, but multiform parables of various categories.

Among these, the first category of Qur’anic parable is the chronicle—a non-fictitious historic parable which Allah ﷻ

³ *Al-Zumar*, 27.

⁴ *Al-Hasbr*, 21.



SECTION ONE



Parables





1

The Danger of Hypocrisy: The Parable of Fire and Light



In the Qur'an, Allah ﷻ primarily categorises humankind into three groups. We find this categorisation in the striking opening verses of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, where Allah first describes the sincere believers in five wonderful verses. Next, Allah ﷻ describes the *kuffār* (disbelievers) in two verses, which is then immediately followed by thirteen comprehensive verses meticulously describing the hypocrites.

This phenomenon of *nifāq* (hypocrisy) is an abstract concept to those living in lands of disbelief. Therefore, most people fail to fully comprehend this concept due to a lack of interaction with obvious hypocrites. This is because, in such lands, since Muslims are in a minority situation with no worldly benefits of being visibly Muslim, the frequent visitation of the houses of Allah, coupled with the general religious effort of those professing adherence to the Islamic

faith, is considered to be a true measure of the quality of a person's faith. In such circumstances, this is certainly a good measure of sincerity!

However, an important concept for us to grasp is that when Islam becomes a state religion with political dominance, the door to hypocrisy flings wide open. In such circumstances, you will discover individuals that do not hold sincere faith and belief within their hearts, yet they outwardly exhibit exemplary behaviour identical to the behaviour of sincere believers. They do this in order to attain the societal benefits of identifying as believers. For a living example of this, we need to look no further than the events that immediately followed the tragic incident that took place in New York on 11 September 2001 (9/11). After the horrific attacks, certain nefarious individuals hoping to mitigate the backlash against themselves—taken as ‘token Muslims’—would appear on satellite stations such as Fox News, spurring vile conjecture, levelling spurious accusations, and engaging in uncalled for criticism of our own people. It is as if these wicked individuals—people being presented as ‘Imams’ or ‘community leaders’—were attempting to distance themselves from people of their own skin colour and background. They were singing to the tune of the narrative of biased media channels that had dedicated themselves to hate-mongering. Such foolish individuals, with the intention of obtaining the meagre provisions and security of the *dunyā*, are selling themselves out, and in the process damning themselves in the Hereafter. They made

an unprofitable trade, exchanging their *dīn* for the *dunyā*.
What a foolish trade!

This is a prime example of the phenomenon of *nifāq*,
and perhaps the closest we will get in our times to seeing
that reality.

In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, Allah ﷻ says regarding the hypocrites,

مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ
فِي ظُلُمٍ لَّا يَبْصُرُونَ

*“Their example is that of someone who kindles a fire, but
when it lights up all around them, Allah takes away their
light, leaving them in complete darkness—unable to see.”*⁷

In this verse, Allah ﷻ presents an example to us that refers to
those hypocrites who profit from the benefits of outwardly
exhibiting Islam, yet their internal state is that of arrogant
refusal and sheer disbelief. They only exhibit belief for
the political and social advantages of doing so. Allah ﷻ
provides their example by comparing them to an individual
not possessing light nor fire, who asks someone to kindle a
fire for them. They appeal to the true believers and to the
Prophet ﷺ, seeking *hidāyah* (guidance) by means of an
illuminating light that emanates from a bright fire. They
originally possess a minimal amount of good within them;

⁷ *Al-Baqarah*, 17.

Allah ﷻ provides a symbolic parable in the Qur'an in regard to this snatching of light. Allah ﷻ says that the hypocrites will see the believers on the Day of Judgment, walking with the light of their faith towards Paradise.

Upon this, the hypocrite will say,

انْظُرُونَا نَقْتَبِسْ مِنْ نُورِكُمْ

*“Let us seek guidance from your light.”*⁸

Allah will then inform them that they will not be able to benefit from the light of the sincere believers on that Day, in the same way that they did not benefit from their light in the *dunyā*.

Allah ﷻ also says,

ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمٍ لَّا يَبْصُرُونَ

*“Allah shall leave them in the plural of darkness, not just one darkness but multiple layers of darkness.”*⁹

Thus, Allah will abandon them and not pay attention to them again.

⁸ *Al-Hadīd*, 13.

⁹ *Al-Baqarah*, 17.

7

Spending Sincerely for the Sake of Allah



In verse 266 of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, Allah ﷻ asks a rhetorical question in the final parable of this section,

أَيُّودُ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ تَكُونَ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ لَهُ
فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَأَصَابَهُ الْكِبَرُ وَلَهُ ذُرِّيَّةٌ ضُعَفَاءُ فَأَصَابَهَا إِعْصَارٌ فِيهِ نَارٌ
فَأَخْرَقَتْ ۚ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“Would any of you wish to have a garden with palm trees, grapevines, and all kinds of fruits with rivers flowing underneath and as they grow very old with dependent children, a fiery whirlwind hits the garden, burning it all up? This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so perhaps you will reflect.”⁴¹

⁴¹ *Al-Baqarah*, 266.

Allah ﷻ is presenting the case of an individual who owns a lush garden that contains a variety of valuable fruits and plants. The owner is profiting and benefitting from this garden, without having to lift a finger. This owner then becomes elderly and has young children, such that he becomes preoccupied and unable to undertake strenuous activity due to his age. Eventually, the time comes for this owner to leave this world and die. At this point, he needs to leave this ideal garden as a legacy for his young children, for they are still dependant, unable to earn for themselves, and do not have another source of income. However, in this sensitive situation, a ravaging fire-filled tornado razes and devastates the garden.

In this parable, Allah ﷻ is telling us that the person who donates wealth for the sake of showing off is similar to the person who owns a lush garden. However, when he is most in need of this lush garden on the Day of Judgement for harvesting rewards (similar to how the elderly owner needs it when passing away for the sake of his dependent children), it is completely obliterated before his eyes and absolutely nothing is left salvageable. Allah ﷻ is posing a rhetorical question in this verse, asking us if we would wish to be that unfortunate man. We would obviously not, for this unfortunate individual was deceived. This is because he did not act and donate for the sake of Allah ﷻ. Such an insincere donator would think that he has dazzled by donating thousands of dollars, so he would be deserving of a prime reward. However, as he donated to impress people and not for the sake of Allah ﷻ, on the Day of Judgement his situation will be as Allah ﷻ vividly describes,

9

Holding Tightly and Firmly to the Divine Rope of Allah



In verse 102 of *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, Allah ﷻ sets up the very first parable of the chapter by saying,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُوا إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

*“O believers! Be mindful of Allah in the way He deserves, and do not die except in [a state of full] submission [to Him].”*⁴⁷

In the following verse, Allah ﷻ then begins the actual parable,

وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا ۚ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

⁴⁷ *Āl ‘Imrān*, 102.

“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah and do not be divided. Remember Allah’s favour upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you—by His grace—became brothers. And you were at the brink of a large pit of fire and He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so that you may be [rightly] guided.”⁴⁸

This verse contains two instances of symbolism within it.

The first is found in,

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا

“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah”

To a person precariously hanging from a cliff or a drowning person, a rope coming from above signifies that there is an overarching authority that can save you. For all of us who are precariously hanging and drowning in this world, our authority above is Allah ﷻ, who says that He has extended His rope for us. Scholars have slightly differed about the meaning of the rope of Allah ﷻ. Some posit that it is the religion of Islam, some say it is the Qur’an, whilst others postulate that it is the united Muslim nation. The most precise opinion is that the rope of Allah ﷻ is the Qur’an itself, which is supported by the Hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ said,

⁴⁸ *Āl ‘Imrān*, 103.

وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

*“For Allah has [perfect] knowledge of all things.”*¹¹¹

This is where the Verse of Light ends, to be followed by a contrasting parable that discusses multiple layers of darkness.

May Allah ﷻ guide us to His light.



¹¹¹ Ibid.

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَلُ

نَضَّرَ بِهَا لِلنَّاسِ

لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

These are the parables we cite
for mankind so that they
can benefit and ponder.

AL-HASHR, 21.



28

The Positive Affirmation of Faith Through Observation



The next verse we will be exploring contains a beautiful aphorism from which multiple benefits can be derived. The aphorism we will be exploring is found in verse 260 of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, where the Qur'an states,

بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي

*“Yes I do, but just so my heart can be reassured.”*¹⁵⁶

The context of this verse is in relation to Ibrāhīm ؑ and his dispute with the evil king Nimrūd regarding the identity of the true Lord. Nimrūd had arrogantly claimed lordship for himself, so Ibrāhīm ؑ boldly rejected this claim and told him that my Lord Allah ﷻ is the only one who causes

¹⁵⁶ *Al-Baqarah*, 260.

death and can bring the dead back to life. When Ibrāhīm ؑ was later away from Nimrūd in seclusion, he asked Allah, ‘My Lord! Show me how you give life to the dead.’ Allah ﷻ responded, ‘Do you not have faith [that I can resurrect the dead]?’ It is then that Ibrāhīm ؑ made the famous statement,

بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي

*“Yes I do, but just so my heart can be reassured.”*¹⁵⁷

Ibrahim ؑ already had faith and believed in the proof beforehand, but he was still asking Allah ﷻ to show him the proof. This is as he just wanted his heart to be steadfast, secure, firm, and at complete ease. This makes this aphorism a very powerful phrase.

Humankind has been created weak, such that hearing of something does somewhat satisfy us. But only by physically seeing something do we attain complete satisfaction. In English, it is commonly said that ‘seeing is believing’. This is a reality, for the power of visuals in the human epistemological framework is greater than the power of speech. The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said in a Hadith,

لَيْسَ الْخَبْرُ كَالْمُعَايَنَةِ

“[Receiving] information is not like witnessing.”

¹⁵⁷ Al-Baqarah, 260.

The Qur'an is the word of Allah, it is the most eloquent and best of all speech. The Qur'an uses different rhetorical devices and parables to convey its message. Allah conveys to us facts, stories and examples as well as guidance and warnings throughout His book.

Allah says in the Qur'an: *'We have given every type of parable in this Qur'an so that they can understand and think'*. This beautiful book will take twenty-eight parables and aphorisms in the Qur'an and explain their context and meaning in order for us to understand, reflect and change our lives.



DR. YASIR QADHI was born in Houston, where he completed a B.Sc. in Chemical Engineering. Thereafter he pursued Islamic Studies at the University of Madinah and did a BA in Hadith Sciences and an MA in Islamic Theology. He then completed his PhD in Islamic Studies from Yale University. He is currently the Dean of The Islamic Seminary of America and resides in Dallas, Texas.



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