

Rereading of the Story of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) in the Quran Based on Motifs*

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Introduction

The stories in the Quran are a rich treasure of faith-based, ethical, and behavioral knowledge. One of the most prominent stories, told in an artistic and unique manner, is the story of Prophet Ibrahim (AS). The stories of the prophets in the Quran are each like a narrative, with each narrative containing a specific motif. The most important characteristic of a motif is its repetitive and evocative nature; in other words, the motif is an element that subtly recurs in the story to strengthen the central theme. By examining these stories, identifying and understanding motifs help us gain a better insight into the role of the prophets in the creation and continuation of human civilizations. Given Prophet Ibrahim's (AS) role in establishing a monotheistic society, this paper examines the motifs of dreams, supplication, trials, and argumentation in his story. Since the views of the contemporary Quranic scholar Mohammad Baqir Behbudi were particularly helpful in explaining some of these motifs in the story of Ibrahim (AS), his Quranic studies have been used.

Research Method

This article, using a descriptive-analytical method and applying the motif element from narratology, re-examines part of the story of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) in the Quran. In this method, by focusing on the recurrence of elements and components, we studied the frequency of the repetition of certain elements in the story of Ibrahim (AS) in the Quran. Furthermore, this method addresses the repeated appearance of motifs in the story. These recurring elements are signs, and following them leads to the discovery and understanding of something beyond the text.

Research Findings

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The examination of the story of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) in the Quran reveals that four key motifs can be identified in this story. These motifs include supplication for offspring, trial, dreams (visions), and argumentation.

1. Motif of Supplication for Offspring and Descendants: This includes requests for the leadership (imamate) for his descendants, for the safety of the dwelling place of his family, for the acceptance of the building of the Kaaba by him and his son, the teaching of Hajj rituals to them, a plea for the people's affection toward his family, prayers for the righteousness of his offspring, and for their guidance by raising a messenger from among themselves. He also prays for their submission to God and for them to be among those who establish prayer and avoid idolatry.
2. Motif of Argumentation: Argumentation is derived from "hujjah" and means reason and proof. Several instances of Prophet Ibrahim's (AS) argumentation are reported in the Quran, all of which center on monotheism. These include his argumentation with Azar, with idol worshippers before and after breaking their idols, with Nimrod, and with his people.
3. Motif of Trial (Ibtala with Words): In revisiting the trials of Ibrahim (AS), it can be said that his trials primarily occurred within his family and among his people. In one stage, he expresses his rejection of polytheism to his people and relatives. In another trial, he is forced to separate from Azar over the issue of monotheism and is subjected to the fire of the Nimrodians. He is also tried by having to leave his homeland and later is tested by being commanded to leave his wife and child in the desert, culminating in the most severe trial when he is ordered by God to sacrifice his son.

4. Motif of Dreams

- Dream of Learning Hajj Rituals: One of Behbudi's views is that Prophet Ibrahim (AS) asked God to show him how to perform the Hajj rituals, and God revealed the rituals to him in a dream.
- Dream of Sacrificing His Son: Another of Ibrahim's (AS) dreams in the Quran is the vision of sacrificing his son, mentioned in verse 102 of Surah As-Saffat.
- Vision of the Kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth: According to Behbudi, the term "ra'i" in verse 76 of Surah As-Saffat does not refer to vision with the eyes but to a dream, as Ibrahim (AS) had this vision during his prophethood. Consequently, after this vision, he addressed his people and his father, calling them ignorant for worshipping idols. Had it been an optical vision, seeing one large or small star would not have been possible without seeing other stars as well.
- Seeing How the Dead are Resurrected: Behbudi holds that Ibrahim's (AS) connection with the unseen world was through dreams; thus, he asked, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." However, he received his answer in the waking world, in the form of the actual resurrection.

Conclusion

The motif is an element that subtly recurs within a work. One of the motifs in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) in the Quran is argumentation and reasoning. From a civilization-building perspective, this motif illustrates how one of the fundamental pillars of any civilization is its reliance on rationality.

Another motif is trial. These trials signify struggle, effort, endurance, and patience in the process of civilization-building. From an individual perspective, these trials contribute to personal growth, while from a civilizational viewpoint, they demonstrate the capacity for patience and perseverance necessary for laying the foundations of a civilization. The trials of Prophet Ibrahim (AS), such as his migration and enduring rejection from a community, can be understood in the context of reform and civilization-building. Another motif in the story of Ibrahim (AS) is supplication for descendants, which reflects the concern for the continuation of a civilizational mission across generations. The motif of dreams in this story, primarily educational in nature, underscores the concern for proper and clear instruction in matters of belief (such as monotheism, resurrection, and prophethood) as well as in ethics and religious law, like the teaching of Hajj rituals. In conclusion, in the realm of religious practice, civilization, reason, argumentation, vision (ra'i), and trial are all intertwined to support the spiritual growth and elevation of humanity.

Keywords: Holy Quran, civilizational reading of religious texts, story of Ibrahim (AS), motif, Mohammad Baqir Behbudi.

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