Parables in the Quran

Parable: A simple story illustrating a moral or religious lesson, using comparison or analogy. Parables give a depth of understanding, providing the reader with a mental picture of the subject matter.

Allah (Subhanuhu wa ta’ala) uses parables to describe important concepts that need to be well understood; such as dunya, shirk, kufr and hypocrisy.

In Surat Al-Ankabut ayah 43, Allah (Subhanuhu wa ta’ala) says “And these similitudes We put forward for mankind, but none will grasp their meaning except those who have knowledge.”

Each parable consists of three parts:

1. The subject to be understood (in this case, hypocrisy)
2. The parable; the comparison with another subject.
3. The similarity between the two.

PARABLE 1

مَتَلَّهُمْ كَمَثلٍ الَّذِي أَسْتَوْقَدَ نَاراً فَلَمَّا أُصِيبَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ دَهْبٌ اللَّهُ بِنُورٍ هُمْ

Their example is like the example of one who lit a fire so when the light surrounded him, Allah took away their light

وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظَلْمَاتٍ لَا يَبِصُرُونَ

And left them in darkness not able to see

استَوْقَدَ نَاراً Lit a fire
The person was in darkness. The word استُوْلْمَد indicates that he asked for help to light a fire i.e. he was unable to light it himself.

حَوْلَةٍ Around him

The light is around him only, and not all around, suggesting its weakness. He feels secure in this light.

ذَهَبَ To go

This is used without connectors, indicating sudden movement

بِنُورِهِم their light

Note that this light is written in the plural form (i.e. their light, not his light), where as before the light was mentioned in a single form. This is a possible indication of a leader and his followers.

ظُلْمَاتٍ darkness this is in plural form.

There are many levels of darkness. Darkness of the night, darkness of the clouds, and increased awareness of darkness after the light is taken away. This darkness symbolizes the darkness of their doubts, darkness of their disbelief and hypocrisy, the darkness in their hearts.

لاَ يَبْصِرُونَ they are not able to see.

They feel fear and confusion at such a state; as they experience darkness after having the light, unable to find their way.

In this ayah, Allah (Subhanuhu wa ta'ala) has explained the traits of the munafiq using not one but two examples.

Before knowledge came to them, the hypocrites were in darkness (disbelief). Then they were given the light (the knowledge of Islam), which is compared to نَارًا (fire) in this parable. They used this knowledge, not to ponder on; but to
take the light from the believers (اعتصروا) as they lived in their midst. This light had some effect on them but only a little and only for a while. The basis of their belief was weak, so they changed as their situation changed.

Their light will be taken away after their death (ذهب). This is why the indication is of a sudden movement as death approaches suddenly. The security of this life is cut off after death, then Allah (Subhanuhu wa ta’ala) will leave them in darkness. There will be darkness upon darkness - Darkness of their sins, their hypocrisy, disbelief, their graves, hereafter, siraat and eventually hellfire.

In Surat Al Munafiqun Ayah 3 Allah (Subhanuhu wa ta’ala) says “That is because they believed, then disbelieved, therefore their hearts are sealed, so they understand not.”

They are deaf, dumb and blind, they will not return

Deaf

To the knowledge of Islam, they cannot hear the truth

Dumb

They cannot say anything that may benefit them.

Blind

Blind to the ayaat of Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala); in total darkness and deviation.

In Surat Al-An’aam Ayah 25 Allah (Subhanuhu wa ta’ala) says “And of them there are some Who listen to you, but We have set veils on their hearts, so they understand it not, and deafness in their ears, if they see every one of the ayaat they will not believe therein.”
It is due to their own disbelief that these people have come to such a loss. They do not use their body parts for anything good. They are not deaf, dumb and blind in the literal sense; rather they are unable to use their eyes, ears and tongues to benefit from useful knowledge. This parable indicates that the person believed then disbelieved and this latter disbelief left them in total darkness so they could not return to their previous state (لا يَزْجَعُونَ).

This similitude describes the case of Major Hypocrisy – the one who will be out of the boundaries of Islam. A person in this category appears to be a Muslim; but in his heart he hates Islam and despises Muslims.

Ibn Al Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) explained that there are 6 categories of major nifaaq (hypocrisy):

1. To belie the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)
2. To belie the sunnah (even if it is one hadith)
3. To hate the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)
4. To hate the sunnah (even if it is one hadith)
5. To feel happy when the Muslims are defeated
6. To feel sad when the Muslims are victorious.

Parable 2

Or like heavy rain, from the sky in it darkness, thunder and lightning; they thrust their fingers in their ears

Relates here to the knowledge, guidance, risalah (the message).
From the sky

All knowledge descends from Allah

- Darkness.

The darkness of the night, rain and clouds to symbolize the darkness of the doubts, disbelief and hypocrisy

- Thunder

This is commonly used in the Quran and Sunnah to refer to warnings.

- Lightning

These are the evidences found within the Quran. This light of faith is sometimes felt in the hearts of these hypocrites.

In Surat Ar-Raad Ayah 13, Allah (Subhanahu wa ta’ala) tells us about the sound of thunder “And Ar-Raad (thunder) glorifies and praises Him, and so do the angels in awe of Him.”

Some tafseers say that the thunder and lightning are angels working towards Allah (Subhanahu wa ta’ala)’s commands of bringing rain.

The heavy rain from the skies, here, relates to the knowledge, from the Quran and Sunnah coming down as a rahma (mercy), giving life to the hearts; just as water gives life to the earth. This is beautifully explained in the following Hadith:

Narrated Abu Musa: The Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) said, "The example of guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is like abundant rain falling on the earth, some of which was fertile soil that absorbed rain water and brought forth vegetation and grass in abundance. (And) another portion of it was hard and held the rain water and Allah benefited the people with it and they utilized it for drinking, making their
animals drink from it and for irrigation of the land for cultivation. (And) a portion of it was barren which could neither hold the water nor bring forth vegetation (then that land gave no benefits). The first is the example of the person who comprehends Allah’s religion and gets benefit (from the knowledge) which Allah has revealed through me (the Prophets and learns and then teaches others. The last example is that of a person who does not care for it and does not take Allah’s guidance revealed through me (He is like that barren land.)" (Ref: Sahih Bukhari. Book of Knowledge.Volume 1, Book 3, Number 79)

Therefore, according to the hadith, the hearts of mankind are of three types:
* The first type is the heart that accepts all that is in the Quran and Sunnah, resulting in a flourishing soul.
* The second is the heart that acquires the knowledge but does not ponder on it or benefit fully from it, however may pass on the knowledge to others and benefit them.
* The third type of heart is the heart of the hypocrite or disbeliever that does not care for knowledge nor benefit others.

The darkness, thunder and lightning refer to the different types of ayaat in the Quran.

Some of the verses are like darkness – meaning they can be an affliction and darkness for a munafiq as it exposes their inner doubts. Some of the verses are like thunder – they are a wake up call, a warning to surrender; while some verses are like lightening – clear and evident (such as the scientific evidences etc).

To keep out the thunderbolt (that strikes and burns) for fear of death .Allah ever encompasses the disbelievers
The hypocrites are scared to death of the warnings in the Quran, the evidence within it further confirms the truth of the warnings, so they block their ears in order to protect themselves from being exposed and destroyed. They forget that no matter how much they shut their eyes and ears; they are bound by Allah’s all encompassing will and decision. The escape is to Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala) alone.

مَ مَادلُماللْبمَرلْقلُم مَخلْيمَفلُمأمَبلْ مَارمَهلُ لْم لُ َّ مَامأمَضمَاءملمَ لُ م َّشمَولْالْمفلِ هلِمومَإ لِذمَامأمَ لْ مَ مَم مَ مَ لْ لِ لْمقمَا لُوالْم

The lightning almost snatches away their sight, whenever it flashes for them, they walk in it, and when darkness covers them, they stand still.

The lightning almost snatches away their sight.

Their blindness depends on the strength of light and level of surrounding darkness. The lightning (evidence in the Quran) itself is so strong it blinds them momentarily.

كلَّمَا أَضَنَّ لَهُم مَّشَأً فِيهٍ Whenever it flashes for them, they walk therein

When they read verses of the Quran that are in accordance to their desires they follow the religion. Whenever the hypocrites acquire a share in the victories of Islam, they are content.

وَإِذَا أَظْلَمْ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُواً And when darkness covers them, they stand still.

But when a verse is read that goes against their desires they will not accept and may revert to disbelief. When calamities and difficulties arise, they blame everything on the religion.

In Surat Al-Hajj Ayah 11, Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala) says “And among mankind is he who worships Allah as it were, upon the very edge (i.e. in doubt); if good befalls him, he is content therewith; but if a trail befalls him, he turns back on his face (i.e. reverts back to disbelief after embracing Islam). He loses both this world and the Hereafter. That is the evident loss.”
And if Allah willed He could have taken away their hearing and their sight. Indeed Allah has power over all things.

If Allah willed He could have taken away their hearing and their sight. This is because they abandoned the truth after they had knowledge of it. However, there is a sign of hope for this group of hypocrites, as Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala) has not taken away their hearing and sight (unlike the first group mentioned in the first parable). Hence, this type may turn back and return to Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala).

Indeed Allah has power over all things. This ayah is a reminder that Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala) is all powerful, and His ability completely encompasses us.

A person who has minor nifaaq will not be out of the fold of Islam. However, this person possesses traits of the hypocrites, which they need to rid themselves of, or they are in danger of falling into major nifaaq.

Some ayaat of the Quran are a test for those who doubt it but these doubts are only in the heart of a hypocrite, for example, only the hypocrites showed confusion when the direction of the qibla was changed.

In summary, these ayaat describe two types of hypocrites. The first type of hypocrite, (major nifaaq) is in utter darkness and unable to return to the truth. The second type, (those who have minor nifaaq) are those who have a little Eman (faith) left in their hearts but sometimes they reject the truth. Allah
(subhanahu wa ta'ala) warns them to take heed as He alone has power over all things.