

A Semiotic Analysis of the Quranic Narrative of Abraham's (AS) Dream of Sacrificing His Son

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Abstract

Some researchers consider the Quranic narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son, and its Torah pre-text, as evidence of the possibility of God issuing commands that contradict ethics. The Torah narrative explicitly states the command to sacrifice, but such explicitness is absent in the Quranic narrative. The aim of the semiotic analysis of the Quranic narrative is to uncover the hidden and implicit meanings of the text in order to decode the command that Abraham was tasked with through the dream. In this method, the Quranic narrative is analyzed from the perspectives of "Trans-textuality," "Intertextuality," "Hyper-textuality," "Archi-textuality," "Para-textuality," and "Intra-textuality." The semiotic analysis of this Quranic narrative from the perspective of "Intertextuality" shows that its partial presence with the Torah pre-text is close to zero. This analysis also shows that the Quranic narrative is a transformation of the Torah pre-text and, unlike it, has the significant addition of Abraham's dream and does not indicate a command to sacrifice. The analysis of the Quranic narrative from the perspective of Para-textuality and Intra-textuality shows that

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Abraham was commanded to confirm the interpretation of his dream, that is, to prove that he believed that the knife would not cut his son's throat with God's permission.

Keywords: Trans-textuality, Intra-textuality, Sacrifice of Isaac, Text Semiotics.

Introduction

According to the Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice, after Abraham had been seeing in his sleep for some time that he was sacrificing his son, he submitted to God and laid his son's forehead on the ground to carry out His command. However, before his son was sacrificed, a call from God informed him that he had confirmed his dream (cf. al-Şāffāt/100-112). In the Torah pre-text (Hypo-text) of this narrative, it is stated that God commands Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac - whom he loves very much - for Him; but Abraham, after taking the initial steps to sacrifice Isaac and proving his obedience, is forbidden from harming him (cf. Bible, Genesis, Chapter 22, verses 1-12).

The Torah narrative has been subject to interpretation and critique by a number of Western thinkers. Kant explicitly considered Abraham's behavior immoral (cf. Caputo, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 67). However, Soren Kierkegaard – as commentators on his works have stated – views Abraham's action as a teleological suspension of the ethical to reaffirm it (cf. Kierkegaard, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 24).

The Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice has, in turn, provoked reflection among Muslim commentators. Some of these reflections focus on deciphering the command that Abraham was tasked with carrying out through the dream. For example, in *Ibn 'Arabī's* mystical reading, the dream of Abraham does not signify a command to sacrifice his son. In his view, the divine call in the Quranic narrative, which reports Abraham's confirmation of the dream, carries a negative connotation, indicating that Abraham confirmed the appearance of his dream instead of confirming God and finding his way to the inner meaning of his dream; that is, he affirmed that his dream signified the sacrifice of his son (cf. Ibn 'Arabī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 3, 489). This interpretation of "Confirming the Dream" by *Ibn 'Arabī* indicates Abraham's neglect of the inner meaning of his dream and is inconsistent with the praise of Abraham in the Quranic narrative for confirming his dream.

In the Mu'tazilite theological reading of the Quranic narrative, Abraham was not commanded to sacrifice his son, but rather they

believe that he was commanded to carry out the preliminaries of the sacrifice (Ibn 'Ādil, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 16, 333). *Shaykh Ṭūsī* (cf. Ṭūsī, n.d.: 8, 518) and *Shaykh Ṭabrisī* (cf. Ṭabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 8, 708) have defended this reading. They cannot accept that God initially commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son and then abrogated it before the time for acting on this command arrived. The Mu'tazilites consider the abrogation of a command before the time of its fulfillment as an indication of the reprehensibility of what is commanded, or as implying God's ignorance of its reprehensibility, both of which are impossible for God. They believe that God's command reveals the goodness of what is commanded, and the very act of God commanding does not originate any goodness (cf. Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 26, 348-349 and Ibn Taymīyyah, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 9, 138).

From *Ṭabrisī's* perspective, Abraham's confirmation of the dream in the divine call to him – without him having sacrificed his son – indicates that he was not initially commanded to sacrifice his son. This is because if such a command had existed, his action would have been a confirmation of part of his dream, but not the entire dream (cf. Ṭabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 8, 708). In critiquing this view, it must be said that the Quranic narrative refers to Abraham's success in a manifest trial (al-Ṣāffāt/106). How can being commanded to perform the preliminaries of slaughter and succeeding in doing so be considered an example of success in a manifest trial? It seems that *Shaykh Ṭūsī* has tried to answer this question, as he emphasizes that Abraham, based on a supposition that had overcome his mind following the dream, was waiting to carry out the command of slaughter if it was issued by God, but contrary to his expectation, God did not command him to perform the slaughter (cf. Ṭūsī, n.d.: 8, 518). However, this answer by the Shaykh, at best, demonstrates Abraham's success in a vague trial and does not indicate his success in a manifest trial.

Fakhr Rāzī, in arguing with the Mu'tazilites, considers the merit of a burdensome command that is abrogated before the time for acting upon it arrives to lie not in carrying out the commanded action, but in

the very act of commanding. This is because as soon as the servant submits to that command, the very act of submission prepares his soul for obedience and submission. Influenced by his Ash'ari school of thought in negating rational judgment of good and evil, he does not consider the issuance of commands such as the command to sacrifice one's son by God to be reprehensible (cf. Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 26, 349), and by implicitly accepting the possibility of conflict between religion and ethics, he has staunchly defended the implication of Abraham's dream regarding the necessity of sacrificing his son (cf. Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 26, 346). In *Fakhr Rāzī's* interpretation, Abraham's "Confirmation of the Dream" means his acknowledgment of the obligatory nature of his dream (cf. Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 26, 348). In critiquing *Fakhr Rāzī's* interpretation of "Confirmation of the Dream," it must be said that merely considering the dream obligatory is not a suitable reason for praising Abraham in the Quranic narrative.

Decoding the command that Abraham was tasked with through a dream sheds new light on a better understanding of the Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice. This article, in line with achieving this goal, addresses the semiotics of this narrative from the perspective of the classical "intertextuality" theory and Genette's "Trans-textuality" theory, and attempts to answer the following questions:

- A) From the perspective of textual semiotics, what differences between the Quranic narrative and the Torah pre-text lead its reading in a different direction?
- B) From the perspective of textual semiotics, what command from God does the dream of sacrificing Abraham's son in Surah al-Şāffāt indicate?

1. Research Background

The subject of most articles written by contemporary researchers in connection with the Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice is the identification of the name of the sacrificed son: The article "Investigating the Transferability of the Narrative of Isaac (AS) being the Sacrificed Son in the Interpretation of *Majma' al-Bayān*"

(Moaddab; Oveysi, Journal of Quran and Hadith Research, 2014 AD/1394 SH: No. 16) is the most recent article in this field. This Quranic narrative has received less attention from contemporary researchers from the perspective of decoding the command that Abraham received through the dream, and in this regard, only the article "A Comparison of the Narrative of the Sacrifice of a Child by Abraham in the Mysticism of *Ibn 'Arabī* and the Existentialist View of Kierkegaard" (Sarebannejad and Akvan, Journal of Philosophy, 2022 AD/1401 SH: No. 39) has been written, which implicitly analyzes *Ibn 'Arabī*'s mystical analysis of this command, but so far no scientific research has been conducted that, by applying the "Textual Semiotics" method in the analysis of this Quranic narrative, has addressed the decoding of the command that Abraham received through the dream. Although the article "Narrative Focus in the Story of Prophet Abraham Based on Genette's View" (Farhangi and Kazempour, Journal of Literary and Rhetorical Research, 2015 AD/1393 SH: No. 8) has a slight methodological similarity with the present article, it analyzes a different story, namely the story of Abraham's birth.

2. Methodology

In this article, the Quranic narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son is analyzed using the method of textual semiotics. The goal of textual semiotics is to search for its hidden and implicit meanings. Semiotic analysis, along with rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, and content analysis, are common methods of text analysis (cf. Chandler, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 33).

3. Conceptualization

In the semiotic analysis of the Quranic narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son, the text of this narrative is examined from the perspective of "Intra-textuality" and "Trans-textuality." In the following, these terms and related terms used in this article are defined:

3.1. Intra-textuality

Intra-textuality is based on the interconnectedness of the parts and structural and semantic levels of a text. Aristotle first raised the necessity of correlation and interaction between the parts of a literary work. He refers to the concept of "Organic Unity," according to which all elements of the text, like a living being, necessarily create a binding relationship (Farahbakhsh, *Journal of Criticism of Language and Foreign Literature*, 2022 AD/1401 SH: No. 28).

3.2. Trans-textuality

G rard Genette is the originator of the term "Trans-textuality," and his innovative term, in terms of concept, is close to the term "intertextuality" in Kristeva's works. However, Genette addresses the idea of "Inter-textuality" in a more systematic and extensive way than her, and uses the term "Intertextuality" in a different sense to describe a specific type of "Trans-textuality." The important difference in Genette's approach is that he seeks to examine the types of influence and being influenced between texts in the form of the term "Trans-textuality." This examination, as Genette has described, is in the form of five types of relationships (cf. Namvar Motlaq, *Journal of Human Sciences Research*, 2007 AD/1386 SH: No. 56), which are defined below:

3.2.1. Intertextuality

Unlike Kristeva, Genette uses the term "Intertextuality" in a more limited dimension. Genette's meaning of intertextual relationship is a kind of co-presence of a part, meaning that a part of one text is present in another text. This presence can take the form of an explicit and verbal presence, such as a quotation; an implicit and hidden presence, such as plagiarism; or an implied and allusive presence (cf. Namvar Motlaq, *Journal of Human Sciences Research*, 2007 AD/1386 SH: No. 56).

3.2.2. Hyper-textuality

In the semiotics of the text, from the perspective of the "Hyper-textuality" relationship, the overall connection and adaptation of a

subsequent text (hypertext) with a previous text (hypo-text) is examined, unlike the examination of "Intertextuality," in which the presence of parts of one text in another text is examined. This presence can be in the form of an explicit and literal presence such as a quotation, an implicit and hidden presence such as plagiarism, or an implicit and allusive presence (cf. Namvar Motlaq, *Journal of Human Sciences Research*, 2007 AD/1386 SH: No. 56).

3.2.3. Archi-textuality

In Genette's theory, "Archi-textuality" refers to the longitudinal relationship of a text with its genre. It focuses on examining the signs through which the text links itself to a specific genre (cf. Namvar Motlaq, *Journal of Research in the Humanities*, 2007 AD/1386 SH: No. 56).

3.2.4. Para-textuality

Genette's "Para-text" refers to texts that are outside the central narrative but are related to it in some way. Para-texts can be attached to or separate from the main text and cover a wide range. Even other works by the author can be considered para-texts because they influence the way the central narrative is read and interpreted (cf. Porter, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 398). Para-texts surround the central text like satellites and are the thresholds for entering it. Genette divides para-texts into two categories, internal and external, based on their spatial connection to or separation from the central text (cf. Namvar Motlaq, *Journal of Research in the Humanities*, 2007 AD/1386 SH: No. 56).

3.2.5. Meta-textuality

Genette uses the term "Meta-textuality" to refer to the interpretive relationship between one text and another that links them together. For example, interpretations of the Bible can be cited as examples of its meta-text (cf. Namvar Motlaq, *Journal of Research in the Humanities*, 2007 AD/1386 SH: No. 56).

4. The Meta-text of the Quranic Narrative of Abraham's Dream of Sacrificing His Son

The importance of examining the meta-text of the Quranic narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son lies in the fact that their influence on contemporary readings of this Quranic narrative can be traced.

Not only does the text, as the subject of reading, possess an intertextual nature, but the act of reading itself also has an intertextual nature. Fredric Jameson believes that texts that have been previously read are read through the layers of sediment prior interpretations (see Chandler, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 283). In the introduction to this article, sufficient reference was made to various readings of this Quranic narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son, readings that show that the implication of Abraham's dream regarding the command to sacrifice his son is a matter of disagreement, and there is no consensus on this matter.

5. The Quranic Narrative of the Dream of Sacrifice from the Perspective of "Intertextuality," "Hyper-textuality," and "Architextuality"

Examining the Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice from Genette's perspective of "Intertextuality" reveals that no phrase or sentence can be found that is present in both the Torah narrative and the Quranic narrative. However, the Torah narrative mentions a ram whose horns were caught in a tree, indicating that the ram was large and had long horns. It seems that the Quranic narrative's reference to the greatness of the sacrifice that was ransomed (al-Şāffāt/107) implicitly refers to this same ram. Apart from these instances, no other specific presence is observed between the two narratives.

From the perspective of hyper-textuality, the Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice is a transformational hypertext of its Torah pre-text. Compared to the Torah narrative, it has a smaller volume, but despite the overall reduction of the text, signs have been added to it that places its reading and interpretation on a new path. The Quranic narrative, from its very beginning, contains the addition of Abraham's

dream, which has no trace in the Torah pre-text. In the Torah narrative, it is explicitly stated that Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, whereas in the Quranic narrative, there is no explicit mention of such a command, and the content of the divine command is not specified. Another difference between the two narratives is that in the Quranic narrative, Abraham consults his son about carrying out the divine command, and both submit to it. However, in the Torah narrative, only Abraham's being tested is mentioned, and Isaac is unaware of the divine command and his father's decision to sacrifice him. When he asks his father about the lack of a lamb for the sacrifice, he receives an evasive answer from his father, who tells him: "God will provide for himself." (Bible, Genesis, Chapter 22, verses 7-8) In the midst of the Torah narrative, the angel of God forbids Abraham from harming his son, but the divine call in the Quranic narrative contains no prohibition; rather, it has an admiring content and shows that Abraham has successfully confirmed his dream. The Torah narrative explicitly states that the sacrifice was Isaac and the place of sacrifice was Mount Moriah, whereas the Quranic narrative does not specify the name of the sacrifice or the place of sacrifice. Another comparison from the perspective of "intertextuality" shows that only at the beginning of the Torah narrative is Abraham's love for his son Isaac explicitly stated (Bible, Genesis, Chapter 22, verse 2), but in addition to the beginning of the Quranic narrative, there are also signs of Abraham's paternal affection at the end: "At the beginning of the Quranic narrative, the announcement to Abraham of the birth of a gentle son, the affectionate address "O! My son," and his consultation with his son," (al-Şāffāt/101-102) implicitly indicate Abraham's paternal affection for Ishmael, and at the end of the Quranic narrative, with the mention of the announcement of Isaac's birth (al-Şāffāt/112), Abraham's paternal affection is once again alluded to. In the Torah narrative, there is no sign of the son's affection for the father, but in the Quranic narrative, the address "O! My father" and the son's sincere obedience to the father (al-Şāffāt/102) indicate the son's affection for the father.

Examining the Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice from the perspective of "hyper-textuality" and comparing it with the Torah pre-text shows a kind of "Transgression" and genre change in the Quranic narrative:

"From the perspective of hyper-textuality, the Torah pre-text begins by referring to the time, place, and names of the characters, and explicitly introduces the place of sacrifice as Mount Moriah and the sacrifice as Isaac, and throughout the narrative, the time of the events and their exact location are mentioned, therefore, this narrative is reproduced in connection with ethnography and a historical genre; but the Quranic narrative omits the times and does not even explicitly refer to the place or name of Abraham's son. Instead of repeating emotional signs in the Quranic narrative, such as a father's prayer for a child, the acceptance of his prayer, and the glad tidings of the birth of a forbearing son, the affectionate address between father and son, the father's respect for the son and seeking his opinion, the son's sincere submission to the father, and the father's renewed glad tidings of the birth of a righteous son named Isaac, and the juxtaposition of all these signs with the dream of sacrifice and laying the son's forehead on the ground, it indicates that the Quranic narrative is revealed in connection with a romantic genre."

6. Extrinsic Pretexts of the Quranic Narrative of the Dream of Sacrifice

The narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son is located in the middle of Surah *al-Şāffāt* (al-Şāffāt/100-112). This surah is located after Surah *Yāsīn*. The last two verses of Surah *Yāsīn*, which act as a preface to Surah *al-Şāffāt*, emphasize God's power to create whatever He wills and the dominion of all things being in God's hand (82-83). Commentators have mentioned similar meanings for "*Malakūt*" such as "God's complete control with dominance and supremacy" (Ibn 'Aĵĵbah, 2010 AD: 5, 34) and "God's ownership accompanied by power and dominance." (Sāmarā'ī, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 2, 279)

In other Quranic and extrinsic pretexts of the narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrifice, his name is also used in connection

with the divine *Malakūt*: The Holy Quran states that in order for Abraham's belief in the oneness of God's Lordship in the realm of the universe to become certainty, God continuously and at various times showed him His *Malakūt* (al-An'ām/75). For example, by bringing birds back to life, God showed Abraham that even the dispersion of the parts of their bodies does not prevent Him from gathering and reviving them and other dead people (al-Baqarah/260).

Some, like *Fakhr Rāzī*, may link the Quranic narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrifice to a pretext such as the verse "Indeed, Allah decrees what He intends" (al-Mā'idah/1) - which, according to him, indicates the absolute nature of God's legislative will and the issuance of any kind of command from Him (cf. *Fakhr Rāzī*, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 26, 279).

They interpret it, but considering the verse "And Allah intends no injustice to the worlds," (Āli 'Imrān/108) such an absolute interpretation must be rejected. This is because God, from the outset and with His free, creative will, has limited His legislative demands from humans to the realm of mercy, justice, and benevolence (al-An'ām/54 and al-Naḥl/90), and the contradiction of the creative with the legislative is impossible. Therefore, God's legislative demands from His intimate friend and confidant, Abraham (al-Nisa/125), must be interpreted in connection with their friendly and loving relationship.

7. The Inner Pretexts of the Quranic Narrative of Sacrifice

Surah *al-Şāffāt*, which contains the Quranic narrative of sacrifice in its midst, has acquired a continuous and coherent structure through the repetition of certain concepts and verses at various intervals. By mentioning the miracles of the messengers' salvation, it seeks to prove the Lordship of God and the belonging of the dominion of everything to Him. In the very opening verses, this Surah is adorned with the word of monotheism, namely the mention of "Indeed, your God is One." (al-Şāffāt/4) Through the repetition of the verse "Except the chosen servants of Allah" at various intervals (al-Şāffāt/40, 74, 128, 160, 169), the monotheistic servants of God are praised. As a

conclusion, at the end of the Surah, God is glorified, and after peace upon the "Messengers," the Lord of the worlds is praised. Also, this Surah acquires a coherent structure at various intervals through repeated praise of the "Messengers" and mentioning them as "Doers of good." (al-Şāffāt/80, 105, 110, 121, 131)

The narrative of the sacrifice of Abraham's son in the middle of Surah al-Şāffāt is surrounded on both sides by two layers of meaning. These layers can be named, in order from the outside in, the semantic layer of "*Şāffāt* and *Şāffūn*" and the semantic layer of "*Mursalān*."

The semantic layer of "*Şāffāt* and *Şāffūn*" is linked at the beginning of the Surah with "*al-Şāffāt*" and at the end with "*al-Şāffūn*." "*al-Şāffūn*" is divine hosts who, by overcoming obstacles, help the Messengers (al-Şāffāt/171-173). At the beginning of the Surah, "*al-Şāffāt*" is mentioned, and immediately after that, their first attribute, "*Zājirah*" (those who restrain), is mentioned. Furthermore, it refers to the adornment of the sky with stars and the protection of this beauty from the harm of devils by means of a "Piercing Flame":

Apparently, "*al-Şāffāt*" (Those Ranged in Ranks) is constantly on standby and aligned, driving away devils with piercing flames – which explains their deterrent nature – to preserve the beauty of the sky (al-Şāffāt/1-10). In fact, the semantic layer of "*Şāffāt* and *Şāffūn*" begins by referring to "*al-Şāffāt*" as extraordinary guardians of the beauty of the stars in the sky and ends by referring to "*al-Şāffūn*" as extraordinary guardians of the "*Mursalān*" (Messengers). Since in this surah (chapter), the "*Mursalān*" are repeatedly counted among the "*Muhsinīn*" (those who do good) (al-Şāffāt/80, 105, 110, 121, 131), and considering the semantic connection between the description of "*Muhsinīn*" with the concept of "*Husn*" (goodness) and "Beauty," it can be argued that, just as "*al-Şāffāt*" extraordinarily protect the stars as the source of the sky's beauty, "*al-Şāffūn*" extraordinarily protect the "*Mursalān*" as the source of the earth's beauty.

Within the semantic layer of "*Şāffāt* and *Şāffūn*" lies the semantic layer of "*Mursalān*": the semantic layer of "*Mursalān*" begins at the beginning with the verse "And We had already sent among them warners" (al-Şāffāt/72) and the story of Noah's miraculous salvation,

and this semantic layer ends at the end with the story of Jonah's miraculous salvation and his sending to a people of over a hundred thousand (al-Şāffāt/139-147). In the semantic layer of "*Mursalān*," the miracles of the *Mursalān*'s salvation are mentioned explicitly or implicitly: Overcoming the drowning power of water and the salvation of Noah, overcoming the burning power of fire and the salvation of Abraham, overcoming the drowning power of water and the salvation of Moses and Aaron, and overcoming the drowning power of water and the salvation of Jonah are among these miracles. These narratives are linked together by "Sending Peace" upon Noah, Abraham, Moses and Aaron, and Elias (al-Şāffāt/79, 109, 120, and 130), creating a unified texture.

The story of Abraham is located in the middle of Surah *al-Şāffāt* and at the heart of the semantic layer of "*Mursalān*," and it narrates two events from his life: The first event is the miracle of his salvation from the burning power of fire, and the second event is the dream of sacrificing his son. In the first event, his gaze at the stars is mentioned (al-Şāffāt/88). With this gaze, Abraham realizes that he is becoming ill. *Ṭabrisī* says that he understood the arrival of the time of fever and illness that habitually afflicted him through the indication of the stars (*Ṭabrisī*, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 8, 702).

Since Abraham was a keen observer, he clearly observed that changes in weather and the emergence of different seasons coincided with changes in the position of stars in the zodiac constellations. Therefore, by observing a specific change in the position of the stars, he predicted the recurrence of his chronic and annual illness. It is likely that Abraham looked at the stars on the night of Nowruz, which coincides with the beginning of spring and the prevalence of allergic diseases, because in one narration, Nowruz is introduced as the day of breaking the idols (*Majlisī*, n.d.: 43, 12).

Abraham, who always carefully observed the correlation of natural phenomena, saw no influence from idols in his observations. Observing their inability to eat and speak, he attacked and broke the idols to prove to his people that they had no role in creation or human destiny (cf. al-Şāffāt/85-96). But his people plotted and, to prove that

the wrath of the idols would destroy him, cast Abraham into the fire. Abraham, who had repeatedly observed that the phenomenon of burning coincided with contact with fire, was surprised to see that the fire, by God's permission, became cool and safe for him. It was here that he first observed a manifestation of God's kingdom with his own eyes and encountered a new face of existence, contrary to his previous experience of the correlation between fire and burning. This extraordinary observation led him to ask God to guide him (al-Şāffāt/99) and to reveal to him the secrets of the occurrence of phenomena.

Immediately after the narrative of Abraham's miraculous salvation from the burning fire and before the narrative of the miracle of the salvation of Moses, Aaron, and their family from great sorrow, comes the narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son. The narrative of Abraham's miraculous salvation from the burning fire also comes after the narrative of the miracle of the salvation of Noah and his family from great sorrow:

In analyzing the Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrifice from the perspective of "Intertextuality," it became clear that, unlike its Torah pre-text, this narrative makes no explicit reference to a direct command from God instructing Abraham to sacrifice his son.

In the narrative of Noah, the verse "And We saved him and his family from the great distress," (al-Şāffāt/76) and in the narrative of Moses and Aaron, the verse "And We saved them and their people from the great distress" (al-Şāffāt/115) explicitly state that they were saved from a great sorrow. The placement of the narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son within these narratives, all of which recount extraordinary miracles of salvation, indicates that this narrative is also a report of an extraordinary miracle of salvation. The verb "*Fadaynā*" (We ransomed) in the verse "And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice" (al-Şāffāt/107) from the latter narrative, where the pronoun "*Hā*" refers to the ransomed one, Abraham's son, evokes the verb "*Najjaynā*" (We saved) in the two verses related to the narratives of Noah and Moses and Aaron as companion narratives, and has a meaning close to "Saving": "It is said: *Fādāhu* and *Fādāhu*,

when he gives his ransom and rescues him." (Jawharī, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 6, 2453) Therefore, it can be argued that Abraham's son was saved from a great sorrow by the sacrifice of a great offering, that is, the sorrow that would have entered his heart when he imagined seeing his kind father in the act of sacrificing him.

8. The Quranic Narrative of the Dream of Sacrifice from an Intra-textual Perspective

The Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrificing a son implicitly announces the glad tidings of the birth of Ishmael at its beginning, and in this part, the phrase "Reached with him [the age of] endeavor" (al-Şāffāt/101) is reminiscent of the *Sa'y* (walking) between *Şafā* and *Marwa* and the miracle of the *Zamzam* spring, which saved Hagar from the sorrow of thirst and the perishing of Ishmael. The reason for this claim is that in a narration from Imam *Şādiq* (AS), "*al-Sa'y*" is interpreted as the *Sa'y* of Abraham and Ishmael in "*Mas'ā*," which is the distance between *Şafā* and *Marwa* (Ṭabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 8, 710). The Quranic narrative of the dream of sacrificing a son, at its end, refers to the glad tidings of the birth of Isaac - Abraham's other son (al-Şāffāt/112), which is reminiscent of the miracle of Sarah's pregnancy in old age and her salvation from the sorrow of childlessness (cf. Hūd/71-73).

Unlike the Torah narrative, the Quranic narrative includes the significant addition of Abraham's dream, which is absent in the Torah. It seems that the Quran's reference to Abraham's dream at the very beginning of the Quranic narrative aims to guide its interpretation in a different direction. The second instance where the dream is mentioned in this narrative is in the verse "You have indeed fulfilled the vision. Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good" (al-Şāffāt/105), referring to the moment when Abraham had placed his son's forehead on the ground, and God, in an admiring call, announced that he had confirmed his vision without sacrificing his son (al-Şāffāt/103-105). This admiring divine call to Abraham – without him having sacrificed his son – indicates that his dream did not imply sacrificing his son,

and confirming the dream was possible for Abraham without performing it.

In language, "*Taşdīq*" (confirmation) is synonymous with "*Tahqīq*" (verification) and "*Ithbāt*" (establishment): "*al-Taḥqīq: Haqqal Amr: Athbatuhū wa Şaddaqahū*," (Musa, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 1, 71) which creates the hypothesis that "*Taşdīq*" does not merely mean "Approving" and "Considering true." Furthermore, the semantics of "*Taşdīq*" in the Holy Quran show that this infinitive and its derivatives do not merely mean "Approving" and "Considering true," but rather, beyond that, mean "Establishing the truth of" or "Proving to be true." For example, Moses asks God Almighty to accompany him with Aaron so that, with his eloquent speech, he can confirm him against the deniers (al-Qaşaş/34). *Fakhr Rāzī* does not consider the meaning of "*Taşdīq*" in this verse to be merely calling Moses truthful. In his view, "*Taşdīq*" means the establishment of Moses' truthfulness by Aaron, which includes explaining various reasons with eloquent language and responding to doubts and arguing with the disbelievers (cf. *Fakhr Rāzī*, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 24, 597).

Sometimes, the confirmation of a reality occurs before its occurrence. For example, the resurrection of man after death and his punishment is a reality related to the afterlife, but the people of Paradise, in this world and before the Day of Judgment occurs, have confirmed its occurrence with their good deeds and have proven its truthfulness with their actions.

In the initial section of Surah *al-Şāffāt*, there is mention of those in Paradise who, in this world, through their actions, affirmed the resurrection after death and the afterlife punishment (al-Şāffāt/52-53).

Based on the semantics of "Affirmation," it can be argued that Abraham's mission was, in fact, to prove through his actions that he considered his dream to be true, which is another interpretation of affirming the dream. But the important question is: What does it mean to prove that one considers his dream to be true? To answer this question, we can draw upon Joseph's words in response to the

interpretation of his dream: when he observed the "Realization" (*Miṣḍāq*) of his childhood dream, he equated it with the interpretation of his dream and acknowledged that God had made his dream true: "This is the interpretation of my dream of before. My Lord has made it true." (Yūsuf/100) *Ibn 'Āshūr* interprets the "Interpretation of the dream" in this verse as meaning the "Realization of his dream." (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 12, 119) The interpretation of "*Ta'wīl*" (Interpretation) as "Realization" (*Miṣḍāq*) is also seen in the views of some other commentators. For example, *Marāghī* interprets "*Ta'wīl*" in the verse "You have taught me [something] of the interpretation of dreams" (Yūsuf/101) as meaning the "Realization of the dream," (Marāghī, n.d.: 13, 45) and *Zulfaqari* interprets "*Ta'wīl*" in the verse "No food will come to you that you will be provided but I will inform you of its interpretation before it comes to you" (Yūsuf/37) as meaning "Determining the realization before it comes." (Zulfaqari, 2017 AD/1397 SH: 12, 308) On the Day of Judgment, the "*Ta'wīl*" of the warnings in the Holy Quran will come, meaning that God, by bringing their realization, will prove to the disbelievers that the warnings of the divine messengers were true: "The day its interpretation comes, those who had forgotten it before will say: The messengers of our Lord had come with the truth." (al-A'rāf/53) But the disbelievers do not believe in the truth of these warnings until that time because their "Realization" has not come to them, so they deny it: "But they have denied that which they encompass not in knowledge, and whose interpretation has not yet come to them." (Yūnus/39) *Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā* interprets "*Ta'wīl*" in this verse as meaning a "Realization of it." (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 11, 373)

Therefore, "*Ta'wīl* of the dream" in its nominal sense means the realization that the dream foretells, and when God brings this realization, the "*It'yān Ta'wīl*" and its subsequent affirmation occur, proving the truth of the dream.

Another way to validate a dream is to prove the rightness of understanding the dream before its manifestation occurs, which can

be called a "Priori Validation." For example, before the seven years of drought and barrenness – that is, the interpretation and manifestation that Joseph provided for the dream of the King of Egypt – arrived, the king, by storing the wheat in warehouses, validated Joseph's interpretation of his dream (Yūsuf/43-48).

For Abraham to validate his dream, two scenarios are conceivable. The first scenario is that he himself provides the interpretation of his dream, meaning he himself takes action to bring about the manifestation of his dream, which is a posteriori validation. The second scenario is a priori validation, meaning that before the interpretation and manifestation of his dream occur, he behaves in a way that proves he considers the interpretation of his dream to be true. Now, the important question is: what was the interpretation of his dream, and what event was it foretelling as its manifestation? In the previous section, and in examining the paratextual texts of the narrative of the sacrifice, it was shown that the placement of the narrative of the dream of sacrifice within three narratives related to the miraculous rescues of messengers indicates that the narrative of the dream of sacrifice also inherently foretells a miracle of extraordinary salvation. Therefore, the interpretation of Abraham's dream relates to an event that signifies a miracle of extraordinary salvation.

The use of present tense verbs in Abraham's narration of his dream carries important points for understanding the interpretation of his dream. In this narration, the present tense verbs "*Arā*" (I see) and "*Adhbaḥu*" (I sacrifice) are used: "O! My son, indeed, I see in a dream that I am sacrificing you." (al-Şāffāt/102)

The use of the present tense verb "*Arā*" in Abraham's narration of his dream indicates that he had been seeing this dream for some time and continuously. *Muqātil* mentions this period as three consecutive nights (Balkhī, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 3, 615). Also, Abraham's use of the present tense verb "*Adhbaḥuk*" (I sacrifice you) indicates that in the dream, he saw himself engaged in sacrificing Ishmael, but this present tense verb, unlike the past tense verb "*Dhabaḥtuk*," (I sacrificed you) does not indicate that he

saw the cutting of his son's throat and his being sacrificed in the dream.

Ṭarīthīthī, emphasizing the present tense of the verb "*Adhbaḥuk*" and highlighting the difference in meaning compared to the past tense verb "*Dhabaḥtuk*," asserts that Abraham did not see in his dream that he had sacrificed his son. Rather, he reported that he saw himself engaged in the act of sacrificing his son. Therefore, Abraham said, "I am sacrificing," and did not say, "I sacrificed." (*Ṭarīthīthī*, 2015 AD/1436 AH: 498) *Ṭarīthīthī*'s point is that Abraham did not see himself cutting his son's throat in the dream, but rather saw himself engaged in the act of sacrificing his son.

A semantic analysis of the present tense verb "*Adhbaḥu*" reveals that this verb can refer to two external instances of being engaged in sacrifice:

- 1) Being engaged in cutting the throat;
- 2) Being engaged in drawing a knife across the throat.

The verb "*Adhbaḥu*," with the first instance, namely "Being engaged in cutting the throat," evokes a fraction of a second in which the son's throat is suddenly cut. Therefore, from the perspective of the linguistic convention of language experts, the continuous sacrifice of the son during this short period of time is not conceivable unless the number of sacrifices is large. Therefore, assuming there is only one sacrifice, the present tense verb "*Adhbaḥu*" - which indicates the continuous engagement in sacrifice in the present time - is more conceivably the second instance, namely "Being engaged in drawing a knife across the throat." This instance occurs when, despite the knife being drawn across the throat, the son's throat is not cut due to an obstacle or the occurrence of a miracle, and a span of the present time passes in this situation. In this case, if the slaughter is asked, "What are you doing?" he will say: "*Annī Adhbaḥu*": "I am sacrificing." Based on this semantic analysis, "Being engaged in drawing a knife across the throat without the throat being cut" is the more apparent instance of the present tense verb "*Adhbaḥu*" in reporting

Abraham's dream, while the first instance, namely "Being engaged in cutting the throat," is not as apparent.

It is important to note that the demise of the sacrificed animal, and consequently, the time elapsed after the throat is cut until the animal dies, is irrelevant to the meaning of "Sacrifice" (*Dhibh*) and is not one of its semantic components. According to *Ṭabrisī*, the verb "*Dhubiḥa*" (was sacrificed) is sometimes used in the language to refer to an animal whose throat has been cut but is not yet dead, meaning that the animal "was sacrificed." This example is evidence that "*Dhibh*" does not necessarily imply the death of the sacrificed animal (*Ṭabrisī*, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 8, 708). Therefore, the use of the present tense verb "*Adhbaḥu*" (I sacrifice) in Abraham's account of his dream does not necessarily imply the killing of his son, and "Cutting his son's throat" is not the most obvious instance of this verb. Rather, the most obvious instance is that Abraham saw himself in the dream drawing a knife across Ishmael's throat without seeing him sacrificed and killed as a result of the sacrifice, and without seeing his throat being cut. Some commentators believe that Abraham saw nothing more in the dream than drawing a knife across Ishmael's throat (cf. Ibn 'Aṭṭīyah, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 4, 482; Zuḥaylī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 3, 2182). *Shaykh Ṭūsī* believes that the present tense verb "*Adhbaḥu*" in Abraham's dream has a metaphorical usage and therefore does not necessarily imply the cutting of his son's throat. He accepts the metaphorical implication of the verb "*Adhbaḥu*" as referring to the preliminaries of sacrifice (cf. *Ṭūsī*, n.d.: 8, 518).

The praise and commendation of Abraham for confirming his dream

(al-*Ṣāffāt*/105) without him actually cutting his son's throat and killing him is strong intra-textual evidence that shows that the interpretation, or the instance, of Abraham's dream was not the cutting of his son's throat and his subsequent death, and it shows that the use of the present tense verb "*Adhbaḥu*" in Abraham's account of his dream did not imply this instance. If the interpretation of Abraham's dream was the killing of his son

following his engagement in cutting his throat, then confirming such a dream would not be praiseworthy and commendable, because everyone confirms that if a father engages in cutting his son's throat, he will certainly be killed.

Therefore, the interpretation or instantiation of Abraham's dream must be such that Abraham's act of placing his son's forehead on the ground is, in some way, a confirmation of his dream, and this confirmation is of a quality worthy of divine praise and commendation. To achieve this, we can draw upon the concept of prior confirmation of a dream – as discussed in relation to the Egyptian king's dream. Prior confirmation of a dream is equivalent to affirming the truth of the instance to which the dream alludes, before that instance occurs.

The instance, or the interpretation of Abraham's dream, was a remarkable and subsequent event, the confirmation of which, prior to its occurrence, was considered a manifest trial. Considering the juxtaposition of Abraham's dream with the miracle of fire control, one can surmise that the event which God foretold in the dream, and which was the instance and interpretation of Abraham's dream, was the occurrence of this miracle: "He will be engaged in sacrificing his son, but God, who holds dominion over all things, including fire and the knife, will prevent his son's throat from being cut." Abraham's mission was to confirm the occurrence of this extraordinary event before it happened. That is, he had to prove that he believed the dream's indication of the knife being restrained by God's permission and his son remaining unharmed to be true. Abraham's success in this manifest trial was due to the fact that, believing that the knife's sharpness would be restrained by God's permission, he placed his son's forehead on the ground and prepared to draw the knife across his throat. By this action, he practically proved his heart's belief in the truth of the interpretation, or the instance, of his dream. However, before Abraham's dream was interpreted and its instance occurred in reality, God accepted Abraham's prior confirmation, because his mission in God's knowledge was only the prior confirmation of his dream, and he

was not tasked in divine knowledge with actualizing the interpretation of his dream.

Conclusion

The semiotic analysis of the Quranic narrative of Abraham's dream of sacrificing his son examines the text of this Quranic narrative from the perspective of Genette's theory of "Trans-textuality" and the classical theory of "Intertextuality."

By applying the theory of "Trans-textuality," the connection of this Quranic narrative with related texts was examined in the form of five defined relationships: "Archi-textuality," "Intertextuality," "Hyper-textuality," "Meta-textuality," and "Para-textuality." The "Archi-textual" examination reveals that in different readings of this Quranic narrative, the implication of Abraham's dream regarding the command to sacrifice his son is a point of contention: *Fakhr Rāzī* defends its implication, while *Shaykh Ṭūsī* and *Ibn 'Arabī* do not accept this view. The "Intertextual" analysis shows that the partial presence of this Quranic narrative with its pre-text, namely the Torah narrative, is close to zero. Analyzing the Quranic narrative from the perspective of "Hyper-textuality" shows that this narrative is a transformational hypertext of its Torah pre-text, containing the addition of Abraham's dream and, unlike the Torah narrative, does not explicitly state the command to sacrifice the son. From the perspective of "Meta-textuality," the Quranic narrative, unlike the Torah narrative, lacks a historical style and possesses a romantic genre. A semiotic analysis of the Quranic narrative from the perspective of "Para-textuality" reveals that the prefatory allusions of Surah *Yāsīn* to the kingdom of God and His divine dominion over the worlds, followed by the para-textual emphases of Surah *al-Şāffāt* on preserving the beauty of the sky by overcoming the devils and preserving the messengers by overcoming the drowning power of water and the burning power of fire, are aimed at shaping the reading of Abraham's dream in connection with a miracle. A semiotic analysis of the Quranic narrative from the perspective of the classical theory of "Intra-

textuality" shows that Abraham's mission was not to sacrifice his son, but to confirm the interpretation of his dream. The interpretation of Abraham's dream, or rather its manifestation, was this miracle: "He would be engaged in sacrificing his son, but God, who holds the kingdom of everything, including fire and the knife, would prevent his son's throat from being cut." Abraham's mission was to confirm the occurrence of this extraordinary event before it happened. That is, he had to prove that he believed his dream implied the knife being restrained by God's permission and his son not being harmed. When Abraham earnestly tried to confirm his dream by bringing its interpretation and proving that he believed in the manifestation of his dream, God accepted his incomplete action as a prior confirmation of his dream.

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