209088 - Teaching children to memorise the Quran using illustrations

the question

We hope that you will watch these videos [link redacted], in which there is recitation of Juz' 'Amma, accompanied by illustrations. The aim is to make a connection between the words of Allah and the illustrations, to help the child memorise and understand easily.

The problem is that I read a comment on one of these videos saying that they are a Shi'a production. Is this correct? What do you advise us to do?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Teaching methods used with children come under the heading of customs and traditions, and are subject to the rulings thereon. They do not come under the heading of acts of worship, which are tawqeefi [i.e., based on Revelation and sound texts of hadeeth, with no room for ijtihad], or the rulings thereon. Flexibility with regard to customs and traditions is one of the main reasons why Islamic teachings are suitable for every time and place, and this is one of the most important guidelines that the mufti should pay attention to before issuing rulings.

During the modern era, educational methods have developed greatly, and schools are competing in introducing these methods in order to attain the best results in educating young minds and making information accessible and understandable in the best and soundest way. The educational process is no longer solely verbal, based on reading a text and listening. Rather it is now based on watching and touching, which has led to the introduction of visual images, both static and moving, as well as interaction, movement, and hands-on exercises. All of these elements have led to the development of the educational process as we see it today.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) – who is the master of teachers – used effective educational methods according to what was available at his time. He drew shapes or diagrams that were suited to the idea that he wanted to convey, as is proven in a report from ‘Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) drew a square, then he drew a line in the middle of it, extending beyond the square, then he drew small lines on either side of the line in the middle, and he said: “This [the line in the middle of the square] is man, and this [the square] is his death that encompasses him. This line that extends beyond [the square]is his aspiration, and these small lines are the vicissitudes of life; if he manages to evade this one, that one will ensnare him, and if he manages to evade that one, another one will ensnare him.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6417).

He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) also taught them by giving practical demonstrations, because that is more effective and has a greater impact on the memory. He prayed on the minbar – when it was first built – in front of the people, then he said: “O people, I did that so that you could follow my lead and learn my prayer.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (917) and Muslim (544).

Another typical method was to give examples and likenesses, so as to make an idea or concept easier to understand, using various similes and metaphors. One example of that is the hadith of an-Nu‘maan ibn Basheer (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The likeness of the one who adheres to the limits set by Allah and the one who transgresses those limits is that of people who drew lots for places on a ship. Some of them got places in the upper part and some of them got places in the lower part. When those who were in the lower part needed water, they had to pass by those who were above them, so they said: Why don’t we make a hole in our part of the ship, then we will not have to bother those who are above us? If those (who were in the upper part of the ship) let them do what they wanted, they would all be doomed, but if they prevented them from doing that, they would be safe and all of them would be safe.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2493).

Thus we learn from the example of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that

the field of educational methods is broad in scope, and comes under the heading of customs and traditions. Islamic teachings encourage the use of different educational methods, and there are no reservations in Islamic teaching concerning that, so that people will be able to use the methods that are appropriate to their time and place. What matters is achieving the best results in conveying the message of truth, and spreading values and good morals.

Secondly:

Although the guidelines regarding methods of education and expression indicate that, generally speaking, they are permissible, this ruling is not applicable without reservations when it comes to teaching the text of the Quran , and we cannot say that it is acceptable to show that video during the recitation. In this case, we should be very careful and take our time in assessing the matter. If someone thinks it is appropriate to do that, it is not permissible for him to show images that have to do with matters of the unseen, whether that has to do with things in the past that we did not witness; or matters of the present where we do not know what something looks like, such as Paradise and Hell, the terrors of the grave, the world of the angels, and even the world of the jinn and shayaateen (devils); or matters of the unseen such as what will happen on the Day of Resurrection and in the hereafter.

If the images show things in the present world that are tangible and of which people have knowledge and which they could see and understand, then we must be certain and sure that this is indeed the intended meaning of the verse, which must be recited properly and precisely. That should be established by people of knowledge, who oversee the production of such material.

Distinguishing between the unseen world, which is not to be depicted, and the seen world, of which it is permissible to show some images, once we have established that this is indeed the intended meaning of the verse, is a distinction that is very difficult to make in the case of something like Juz' 'Amma, most of which discusses matters of the unseen and the hereafter.

See a previous discussion of this issue on our website in the answer to question no. 131472.

Thirdly:

With regard to the video clips mentioned in the question, we have watched most of them and have found in them many things that are obviously contrary to Islamic teachings, as well as abhorrent things that we must warn against and strive to correct in any future production, that should be supervised by people of knowledge and virtue. These include the following:

1.

Depiction of the bodies of the Messengers and Prophets, whilst hiding their faces. This is something that the majority of contemporary scholars disallow, because all the details having to do with the Messengers and Prophets – even the outline of their figures and their movements, are subject to veneration and respect. Therefore depicting them inevitably undermines their sublime position and exposes their high status to distortion.

2.

Depiction of the angels as resembling humans, but with wings, and in a manner that resembles what the Christians have in their churches and homes of depictions of the Messiah and his mother Maryam (peace be upon them both). Depicting the angels is also tantamount to lying and fabricating, and speaking of issues of the unseen on the basis of falsehood, speculation and conjecture.

3.

The recitation is not well done, and contains many mistakes according to the well-known rules of tajweed. One would expect such educational material to reach a high level of precision.

4.

These clips depict Paradise and Hell, the world of the unseen and details thereof that are mentioned in the Quran , in verses which describe them and tell us of what will happen. The scholars explained the ruling on depicting such things in many fatwas; we will quote from some of them here:

The Permanent Committee (vol. 3, 1/140) was asked the following question:

I came across a book entitled Tareeq al-Mustaqbal (The Way of the Future), which contains a drawing of the Last Day, showing the Siraat (bridge over Hell), the Mizaan (Balance), Paradise and Hell. I hope you can explain the correct ruling on such matters.

They replied:

It is not permissible to distribute this book which is entitled Tareeq al-Mustaqbal, because of what it contains of depictions of matters of the unseen and of the hereafter, such as Paradise and Hell, and the Siraat and the Mizaan, because no one can know how these things are in reality, and because this undermines their significance. It comes under the heading of newly-invented matters, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) warned against newly-invented matters. What should be done is to ban the printing, publication and distribution of this book. End quote.

‘Abd al-‘Azeez Aal ash-Shaykh – Saalih al-Fawzaan – ‘Abdullah ibn Ghadyaan – ‘Abdullah ar-Rukbaan – Ahmad al-Mubaaraki

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

What is the ruling on drawing a garden as if it represents Paradise, and drawing a fire as if it represents Hell?

He replied:

That is not permissible, because we do not know how they are, as Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And no soul knows what has been hidden for them of comfort for eyes as reward for what they used to do” [as-Sajdah 32:17]. And no one knows how the fire is, for it is more intense than the fire of this world by sixty-ninefold, including the extremely hot fires of this world, such as fire produced by gas and so on, and whatever is more intense than that. Can anyone depict Hell? No one can do that, so tell the one who tries to do that that this is haraam. Unfortunately people nowadays have started to regard matters of the unseen

as being similar to what we see in this world.

This has been explained previously on our website in the answers to questions no. 103075 and 22723.

5.

It seems that these videos are supervised by some Shi'ah, based on the mark that appears on the top left of the screen, and based on the names of those who uploaded these clips. This is something that gives rise to suspicion and doubt, because there should be supervision by committees of specialists in tafseer and education, who are known for their righteousness and soundness of methodology, and are qualified in knowledge and education; such people should supervise the production of such video clips, and this matter should not be left to the judgement of individuals to work out ways of presenting the meanings of the Quran in images, and thus risk falling into the errors mentioned above, or to take advantage of the innocence of children to instil in their minds an understanding of the verses in the way in which they see it and want the children to understand it, especially as the matters that should be avoided in this regard are so many, as becomes clear when one reflects on the meanings of the verses and starts thinking of what meanings could be depicted in the form of drawings that make it easier for the child to understand. It is quite clear that there are many meanings and goals that are to be found in the Quran , hence it not possible to set out general guidelines dealing with all of them. Therefore it is essential that trustworthy scholars supervise the production of such educational material.

From the above we may conclude that we are not opposed, in principle, to using illustrations for children to explain some meanings of the Quran , but we are opposed to what that may lead to of risks and wrong ideas, and we warn against overstepping the limits in these productions, which could lead to undermining the status of the Quran and cause young people not to hold it in high esteem.

And Allah knows best.