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Content Analysis of Abraham Story's Teaching Methods in the Holy Quran

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Abstract

The “Story-Based Language Teaching (SBLT)” is one of the most effective approaches in language pedagogy that addresses various elements and parameters in different texts. The aim of this study is to locate SBLT elements in one of the popular Holy Quran’s stories; namely, Abraham’s story known as a pedagogical text, based on Javadi Amoli (2006) and Farhadian’s (2011) Quranic pedagogical frameworks. To this end, the corpus of 130 verses containing the Abraham narration from various surahs was scrutinized and analyzed to extract their precious methods and strategies. To do that, the coding system was utilized to account for the frequency of the predominant method. Upon completion of the coding procedure, the inter-rater (coder) reliability was estimated and the results were confirmed by 81% reliability. The results illustrated that most of the Quranic pedagogical methods proposed by Javadi Amoli (2006) and Farhadian (2011) are manifested in Abraham’s story and some other methods were found by the present researcher through further analysis. The above-mentioned methods from the most repeated to the least ones are Storytelling, Repetition, Precise look, Wisdom, Encouragement, Socratic method, excellent examples, Sympathy, Metaphor, Parable method, Prayer, punishment, Discussion, Debate, Simile, Observation, Experience, Legislation, Holistic view, and Exemplification, respectively. Furthermore, it was confirmed that the dominant instructional methods in this story were inductive and explicit. The findings contribute to Quranic courses syllabus design and teaching pedagogy.

Keywords: The Holy Quran, Teaching methods, Story-Based Language Teaching (SBLT), content analysis, Abraham’s story, Education.

1. Introduction

Teaching and education are concepts that have been established from the creation of Adam (p.b.u.h), about 7000 years ago. Allah, who created men, is the

first and greatest teacher of humans, as his particular names indicate. The Almighty God sent some messengers and prophets as the divine teachers and accompanied them with some materials as their holy books



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and trained them through some methods to guide and teach people effectively (57:25).

The Holy Quran is the most perfect and complete divine book because it was the last holy book and more than any other book in the world values the science and knowledge and advises and encourages people to learn; though, it was revealed in ignorance and blindness of people (Bazargan, 1981). Moreover, this book is completely divine regarding grammar and writing. (Alavimehr, 2003)

1.1. Quranic Stories

The Quran is a unique divine book containing some specific characteristics and components. The Quranic stories have special and important features that differentiate them from any other story in the world. Understanding these features is so crucial to realize the main points and objects of the Quranic stories. Mahdavi (2002) states some of the most important ones:

“Selectivity and conciseness, dispersion and repetition, having a message and purposefulness, realism, characterization, fragmentation, objective description of events” (Chapter 4).

1.2. Significance of the Study

The other remarkable factor in this study is the reason which makes the researcher prefer the Abraham story to other prophets' stories in the Quran. It is noteworthy that Abraham is the divine, monotheist, and great prophet that all the scholars of the main religions in the world recognize and accept him. Moreover, the Almighty God assigns and blesses some valuable and exalted epithets and statuses to him and advises people to follow him. Salehimanesh (2006) indicates some of the Abraham epithets and characteristics:

“Having the responded prayers, Chosen by Allah, Having Submission toward God, Being Muslim, Shiaa and Submissive, Being Monotheist, Having great status in Mecca, Judging people, Fulfilling the

promises, Reluctance toward the divine enemies, Being Meek and competent, Being Repentant, Hopeful about the divine blesses, Having Prosperity in both worlds, Being Thankful, Being honest and loyal, Having great status in the God's threshold, Being confirmed by Allah, Being a sincere and favorite servant, Being the Muslim's father, Being a sample teacher, Having belief and pure heart, Being benefactor, Being insightful, Having a divine book, Being a good example for people, Accomplishing the servitude rights, Being polite, Having leadership position (Imamat)” (Javadi Amoli, 1997, p.351).

These factors plus many other features are considered as the motivation and reasons to allocate this study to the prophet Abraham.

1.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What methods of teaching are more frequently employed in the Holy Quran?
- 2) Are the employed teaching methods in the Holy Quran mostly inductive or deductive?
- 3) Are the employed teaching methods mostly explicit/focused or implicit/unfocused?

Based on the two last questions the following hypotheses are put forward:

H1: Most of the employed teaching methods in the Holy Quran are inductive.

H2: Most of the employed teaching methods in the Holy Quran are implicit /unfocused.

2. Literature Review

In this part, some of the major studies conducted concerning religious books specifically the Holy Quran and the teaching methods implied in them and utilizing SBLT in teaching are reviewed, though they are a limited number to consider.

Norman (2011) in her study focuses on the educational use of digital storytelling

within second language learning from an emic perspective. Digital storytelling, which can be described as a combination of the old storytelling tradition and new technology, was originally used for other purposes than education and learning. This study's main objective was to explore young learners' meta-reflections on potentials for learning when digital storytelling is utilized as a learner-centered second language learning activity in lower secondary school. She found that students realize digital storytelling as an all-embracing activity for learning in the sense that it can be used to obtain other goals, e.g. development of basic oral, written, or digital skills, or be the goal in itself, e.g. to develop content understanding. The study also showed that increased motivation for academic work was generally related to variation in the working method, more than to digital storytelling.

In the field of Quranic studies, Abbasi Haghighi (2009) conducted a study to investigate both theories of language acquisition and learning and the language teaching points in the Holy Quran to juxtapose two outstanding theories, which are Behaviorism and Cognitivism with the Holy Book. Moreover, he tries to prove that in the Holy Book, as a perfect and comprehensive book, all learning strategies can be seen and it can be demonstrated that most of the theories hold a biological mentality, irrespective of any divine soul which is the fundamental gap between biological mentality and the Holy Quran.

The other study is done by Khoddam (2010). Throughout the study, she explains one of the teaching methods employed in the Holy Quran, question and answering method which is called "The Socratic Method" in pedagogy. As there are large dimensions of divine and spiritual concepts mentioned in the Quran, she just focuses on teaching Monotheism through the Socratic Method.

Besides, Javadi Amoli (2006) introduced the Quranic pedagogical

methods like the following:

1. Wisdom, 2. Advice, 3. Debate, 4. Exemplification, 5. Storytelling, 6. Separation of allegorical expression from factual one, 7. The metaphor and observing politeness, 8. Violating the order of the scientific books, 9. Socratic Method, 10. A holistic view, 11. Expressing natural science, 12. A special way of expressing the secrets.

And the Quranic methods proposed by Farhadian (2011) include the following properties:

1. Exemplification, 2. The simile of reasonable concept to tangible one, 3. Observation, 4. Experience, 5. Socratic Method, 6. Debate, 7. Parable method, 8. Introduction of values and excellent examples, which are used as the framework of this study.

The next one was conducted by Delbary (1995). He divided the pedagogical methods of the Holy Quran in Abraham's story into two categories: direct and indirect. He considers some methods for each group and explains them briefly. At last, he specifies some methods such as Socratic Method, debate, ideogram, and introducing examples as the Abraham pedagogical methods in the Holy Quran and brings some examples to confirm them.

Regarding all the above-mentioned studies and researches, it seems that most aspects of the divine books especially the Holy Quran are not considered to enlighten the continuous road of teaching and learning to make it more fruitful, which the writer tries to do through the Abraham story in the great Quran.

3. Method

3.1. The Corpus of the Study

The materials used in this study include the verses in the story of the prophet Abraham in the Holy Quran. These verses are dispersed in various surahs in the Holy Quran. To locate these verses, the thematic interpretation "Manshur Javid", volume 11

by Jafar Sobhani (1992) is used. In the Prophet Abraham Chapter, all verses related to his story have been gathered together. Next, according to their interlocutors or their related era, they were divided into some categories and sub-branches or groups which were significant to meet these study goals. Besides, the English translation of these verses by Qarib was utilized to identify the meanings and concepts of these verses better. The data for this study was obtained from those surahs and verses which contain his narration and they were about 130 verses on the whole. Table 4.1. shows them precisely.

Table 1. The Materials of the Study

Name and Number of the Surah	Verse Number
Al- Baqara {2}(the Cow)	124-130, 258, 260
Ale- Imran {3} (the family of Imran)	67-68
Al- Anaam {6}(the Cattle)	74-84
At- Tauba{9} (the Repentance)	114
Hud {11}	69-73
Ibrahim {14}(Abraham)	35-40
Al- Nahl{16}(the Bee)	120-123
Maryam {19}(Mary)	41-49
Al- Anbiyaa{21}(the Prophets)	51-72
Al-Hajj {22}(the Pilgrimage)	26-27
Ash- Shuara {26}(the Poets)	69-82
Al- Ankaboot {29}(the Spider)	16-17, 25-31
Al- Ahzab {33}(The Clans)	7
As- Saaffaat {37} (Those drawn up in Ranks)	83-113
Saad {38} (the Letter)	45-47
Az -Zukhrof {43} (Ornaments of Gold)	26-27
Al- Mumtahina {60}	4

3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

The data provided in the above-mentioned surahs was analyzed within the mixture of the methods proposed by Javadi Amoli (2006) and Farhadian (2011). These identified methods are called "Quranic Pedagogical Methods", though; some other methods were identified through this study that were not included in the proposed methods. All the above-mentioned verses in each theme have been analyzed according to the pedagogical methods proposed by Javadi Amoli (2006),

Farhadian (2011), and the present author. Also, they have been analyzed again according to their implicitness /explicitness and inductive/deductive manner. Then, the frequency of them was calculated to find out the predominant methods in every subject or theme of Prophet Abraham's story in the Holy Quran.

3.3. Instruments

As it was mentioned earlier, the methods used to analyze the data were the mixture of both methods plus some supplementary methods extracted through the study. To simplify the analysis procedure a coding system was defined as illustrated in Tables 4.2. and 4.3. Also, some of these methods to some extent implied special meanings in the Holy Quran. Within the present study framework, some of the methods, meanings, and definitions are provided to better clarify the author's intention.

Exemplification: Javadi Amoli (2006) defines this method as "Descending and simplifying the exalted concepts of the Quran to the simple ones and showing the reality of them" (p.215).

Simile: Javadi Amoli (2006) also implies this method as "describing the reasonable concepts by comparing them with tangible ones. (Javadi Amoli, 2006, p.218)

Experience: Farhadian (2011) explains this method as "trying to do new Divine orders or some novel paths" (p. 294).

Socratic Method: Asking some questions of the audience without waiting for an answer and just to make people pay attention to the answers themselves. This method is based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas (Farhadian, 2011).

Debate: Farhadian (2011) defines this as "When an individual (prophet) accepts the belief of another party to prepare the favorable condition to indicate his correct

divine truth” (p. 299).

Parable method: Comparing and contrasting the opposite concepts, the prophet makes people find out the correct choice. (“Parable Discovery”, 2012)

Metaphor: Using polite and metaphoric language and not using any objectionable or taboo words. (Javadi Amoli, 2006, p. 220)

Wisdom (Hikmat): Tabatabaee (1958) defines it as” applying the logical reasoning which leads to the truth without any doubt” (p. 534).

Precise look: Paying attention to the details and every aspect of the story.

Sympathy: All prophets and divine teachers speak to their interlocutors, from every group or any level of the society, gently and are sympathetic towards them. (Abbasi Moghaddam, 1997)

Punishment: Using special language to advise people and recite the other world’s catastrophe which makes them think about their acts specifically bad and wrong ones and repent from doing them again.

Legislation: When the Almighty God states the rules and orders to human beings especially to the prophets (Javadi Amoli, 1996).

Prayer: Teaching some important concepts to people through some prayers and wishes and making them hopeful about God's blessings (Amrollahi, 2010).

Table 2. The Pedagogical Methods and their Codes

Methods	Codes
Exemplification	A
The simile of reasonable concepts to tangible ones	B
Observation	C
Experience	D
Storytelling	E
Socratic method	F
Debate	G
Parable method	H
Introduction of values and excellent figures	I
Repetition*	J
Metaphor	K

Holistic view	L
Wisdom	M
Precise look*	N
Sympathy*	O
punishment*	P
Encouragement *	Q
Legislation*	R
Discussion*	S
Prayer *	T

*Additional methods proposed by the researcher.

Table 3. The Instructional Methods and their Codes

Methods	Codes
Inductive	U
Deductive	V
Implicit	W
Explicit	X

3.3.1. The Reliability of Coding

To make sure that the coding system is an appropriate instrument for the study and the results of the study are authentic and reliable, the researcher asked two experts in Quranic sciences, to evaluate the verses through the study coding system. Upon completion of the coding procedure, the inter-rater (coder) reliability was estimated and the results were confirmed by 81% reliability.

3.4. Data Analysis

This part focused on the analysis of all verses that contain the prophet Abraham’s story in the Holy Quran. According to the themes and situations of Abraham’s life, the verses are categorized into 10 groups. To identify the verse methods precisely each verse group was analyzed considering the verses methods, implicit/explicit manner, and inductive/deductive instructional view; separately. The following tables illustrate the analysis procedure clearly. The verses English meanings were omitted for the paper word limitation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Group 1

Table 4 presents a discussion of Abraham with his father, Azar. This scene of Abraham’s story includes 11 verses.

Table 4. The Methods Used in Discussion of Abraham with his Father, Azar

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/ Explicit	Inductive/ deductive	Dominant methods
Anaam/74; Maryam/41-48; Taubah/114; Mumtahina/4	K-F-G-P-O-Q-K-M-I-T-H	Explicit	Inductive	Sympathy

As the table illustrates, the “sympathy” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham’s story. Also, this part is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.2. Group 2

Table 5 presents a discussion of Abraham with Sabaists (star-worshippers).

This scene of Abraham’s story includes 9 verses.

Table 5. The Methods Used in Discussion of Abraham with Sabaists

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/ Explicit	Inductive/ deductive	Dominant methods
Anaam/75- 83	K-F-G-Q- K- M-I- -H –C-B	Explicit	Inductive	Debate

As the table illustrates, the “debate” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham’s story. Moreover, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.3. Group 3

Table 6 presents a discussion of Abraham with idolaters. This scene of Abraham’s story includes 25 verses.

Table 6. The Methods Used in Discussion of Abraham with Idolaters

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/ Explicit	Inductive/ deductive	Dominant methods
Anbiya/52-56; Shuara/69-82 ; Ankaboot /16,17,25; Zukhruf/26-27; Baqarah/258	S-K-M-F-B -O-Q-J- H-C -S-P-D-G	Explicit	Inductive	Wisdom

As the table shows, the “wisdom” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham’s story. Moreover, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.4. Group 4

Table 7 presents the decision on breaking the idols. This scene of Abraham’s story includes 23 verses.

Table 7. The Methods Used in Decision on Breaking the Idols

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/ Explicit	Inductive/ deductive	Dominant methods
Anbiya/59-67; Saaffat/85-96	K-M-F-B- L -H-C -P-D-G-N	Explicit	Inductive	Socratic Method

As the table illustrates, the “Socratic Method” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham’s story. Also, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.5. Group 5

Table 8 presents the reactions of idolaters toward breaking the idols. This scene of Abraham’s story includes 6 verses.

Table 8. The Methods Used in Reactions of Idolaters toward Breaking the Idols

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/ Explicit	Inductive/ deductive	Dominant methods
Anbiya/68-71; Saaffat/97,98	O-Q-R -P -N	Explicit- Implicit	Inductive	punishment

As the table shows, the “punishment” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham’s story. Moreover, this part of

the story is narrated inductively and both implicitly and explicitly (the numbers were equal).

4.6. Group 6

Table 9 presents the immigration of Abraham to Palestine and birth of Isaac

and Ishmael. This scene of Abraham's story includes 17 verses.

Table 9. The Methods Used in Verses Group 6

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/Explicit	Inductive/deductive	Dominant methods
Hud/69-73; Ankaboot /6,27,31; Ibrahim/39; Saffat/99-113; Anaam/84; Maryam/49; Anbiya/72	O-Q-R – P-N	Explicit	Inductive	encouragement

As the table illustrates, the “encouragement” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham's story. Also, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.7. Group 7

Table 10 presents the reconstruction of Ka'bah. This scene of Abraham's story includes 7 verses.

Table 10. The Methods Used in Verses Group7

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/Explicit	Inductive/deductive	Dominant methods
Hajj/26-27; Baqarah/125-129	T-O-I- R- M- H- K-	Explicit	Inductive	prayer

As the table shows, the “prayer” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham's story. Also, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.8. Group 8

Table 11 presents the great trial of Prophet Abraham. This scene of Abraham's story includes 7 verses.

Table 11. The Methods Used in Verses Group 8

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/Explicit	Inductive/deductive	Dominant methods
Saffaat/102-108	D-T-N-B-I-M	Explicit	Inductive	experience

As the table shows, the “experience” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham's story. Also, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.9. Group 9

Table 12 presents Abraham's prayers. This scene of Abraham's story includes 5 verses.

Table 12. The Methods Used in Verses Group 9

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/Explicit	Inductive/deductive	Dominant methods
Ibrahim/35-40	O-H-T- M	Explicit	Inductive	prayer

As the table illustrates, the “prayer” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham's story. Besides, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.10. Group 10

Table 13 presents the Prophet Abraham's character in the Quran. This scene of Abraham's story includes 20 verses.

Table 13. The Methods Used in Verses Group 10

Verse Address	Pedagogical Methods	Implicit/Explicit	Inductive/deductive	Dominant methods
Al-Baqarah/124,130,260; ALE-Imran/67-68; Nahl/120-123; Anbiya/51;Ahzab/7; Saffaat/83,84,109,110,111; Sad/45-47; Mumtahina/4	I-A-M-Q-K-R -H-C-D-P-F-L	Explicit	Inductive	Excellent figures

As the table illustrates, the “Excellent figures” is the dominant method in this scene of Abraham’s story. Also, this part of the story is narrated inductively and explicitly.

4.11. The Final Results of the Study

To make every scene of Abraham’s story more tangible and to retrieve their meaning simpler, all verses groups, their methods, frequencies, and varieties are provided in the following tables separately.

Table 14. The Methods of Abraham Story’s Scenes

Group (scene) Name	Frequency (number of verses)	Methods’ Frequency	Dominant Method
1	11	10	sympathy
2	9	9	debate
3	25	12	wisdom
4	23	11	Socratic method
5	6	4	punishment
6	17	11	encouragement
7	7	7	prayer
8	7	5	experience
9	5	4	prayer
10	16	12	excellent figures

The final result of the study according to the explicit/implicit and inductive/deductive manner of verses is illustrated through the following tables on the whole.

Table 15. The Explicit/Implicit Manner of Verses.

	Explicit	Implicit	Total
Frequency	77	53	130

According to table 5.12, most of the verses in the Abraham story are expressed explicitly.

The following table illustrates the

inductive/deductive manner of verses.

Table 16. The Inductive/Deductive Manner of Verses

	Inductive	Deductive	Total
Frequency	98	32	130

Due to table 16, the most frequent method to express the verses is the inductive method.

5. Conclusion

According to the data analysis of the Abraham story in the Holy Quran, the following results are presumed based on which the research questions are answered.

Considering that the Almighty God in most verses of the great Quran uses the storytelling method to teach the right path and better life to people and narrates these stories precisely with most details and repeats them in various surahs, the storytelling, precise look, and repetition methods are regarded as common methods which prevail other methods in all scenes of Abraham story.

The first research question was "What methods of teaching are utilized in the Holy Quran (especially in Abraham’s story)?" The answer to the question is that according to the findings of the study various methods are utilized in the story of Prophet Abraham in the Holy Quran. Some of them have been proposed by Javadi Amoli (2006) and Farhadian (2011) as “Quranic Pedagogical Methods”. Most of them (i.e. about 13 methods) are confirmed through the study, and the others (i.e. about 8 methods) are extracted during the study by the author. The confirmed “Quranic Pedagogical Methods” by Javadi Amoli

(2006) and Farhadian (2011) are as follows:

1.Wisdom, 2.Advice, 3.Debate, 4.Exemplification, 5.Storytelling, 6.The metaphor and observing politeness, 7.Socratic method, 8.A holistic view, 9.Simile of reasonable concepts to tangible ones, 10.Observation, 11.Experience, 12.Parable method, 13. Excellent examples.

The proposed methods by the researcher are as follows:

1. Repetition, 2.Precise look, 3.Gentle speech & Sympathy, 4.Advice & punishment, 5.Encouragement & reward, 6.Legislation, 7.Discussion, 8.Prayer & hopefulness.

According to the findings of the method analysis in figure 4.1., the rest of the methods proposed by Javadi Amoli (2006) and Farhadian (2011) i.e. separation of allegorical expression from factual one, violating the order of the scientific books, expressing natural science, a special way of expressing the secrets, scientific trip, are not confirmed in this study.

It seems necessary to mention that in the majority of verses, there is more than one method, and it is one of the great miracles of the Holy Quran. Consequently, there is no correspondence between the number of verses and the total frequency of methods, however, the repetition times are important for the study.

The most frequent method in the Abraham story in the Holy Quran is wisdom with 37 times of repetition. The other frequent methods are encouragement & reward (29 times), Socratic method (25 times), the introduction of values and excellent examples (25 times), gentle speech & sympathy (21times), metaphor and observing politeness (20 times), Parable method (16 times), prayer & hopefulness (14 times), advice & punishment (14 times) and discussion (11 times) respectively.

In the narration of Abraham in the noble Quran God Almighty narrates most of

Abraham's and some of his interlocutors' dialogues and reactions precisely. As a result, the methods utilized in the narration of Abraham in the Quran are almost the methods Abraham used towards his audiences and interlocutors, too. It means that the prophet Abraham for teaching his family and people, even the illegitimate ruler, used wisdom (logical reasoning) and encouragement frequently and used exemplification or holistic view rarely.

The second question of the study was "are the employed teaching methods (in the Abraham's story) mostly explicit/focused or implicit/unfocused?" Based on the results of the study shown in Table 5.11., most of the verses concepts in the Holy Quran in Abraham story are expressed explicitly, about 59%, and the rest of the verses are stated implicitly, about 41% (see table 5.11.). It means that God Almighty as a first and best teacher indicates the divine concepts, orders, and teaching materials mostly explicitly, directly, and focused to make people aware of every important point and aspect of the guidance path and leaves no doubt for them.

The third question of the study is "are the employed teaching methods in the Holy Quran mostly inductive or deductive?" According to the findings of the study shown in table 5.12., from about 130 verses of the noble Quran in Abraham's story 75% of them (98 verses) are stated inductively, and the rest of them, i.e. 25% (32 verses), is stated deductively.

It is noticeable that to narrate the Prophet Abraham's story in each surah, Allah starts from a special angle in a very detailed manner, inductively, and continues the story to the more general aspect of his life. Then, He states some teaching concepts and lessons from Abraham's life. For instance, Allah states even every act and word of Abraham's wife and states his dialogue with the angels and through it, He shows his great power in giving baby even to the very old

couples.

It is noteworthy that, the Lord in all scenes and subjects of the Abraham story uses various methods and repeats some of these methods in different surahs and verses according to their importance. For instance, in this story, the majority of verses are allocated to “discussion of Abraham with idolaters” (about 25 verses) which is the most important subject in Abraham’s prophethood. Consequently, the Almighty God as the best teacher repeats this subject in various surahs, through various methods (12 methods) and from various dimensions.

The other noticeable result is that in each subject and scene of Abraham’s narration multi-methods are utilized, though, a specific method is the predominant according to its atmosphere and audience. For example, in the “discussion of Abraham with his father” the dominant method according to its audience is “sympathy”.

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