

## **Reconstructing the Logic of Prophetic Da'wah: A Cognitive and Philosophical Analysis of Abraham's Strategy in QS. Al-Anbiya (57-67) Based on Al-Tabari**

Article	Abstract
<p><b>Author</b>                      Mahfud Alfaozi<sup>1</sup>, Miftahul Khoirin<sup>2</sup>, Imam Ma'arif Hidayat<sup>3</sup>, Wiwit Kurniawan<sup>4</sup></p> <p><sup>1</sup>STIQ Miftahul Huda Rawalo, Banyumas, Indonesia  <sup>2</sup>UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri, Purwokerto, Indonesia  <sup>4</sup>Indiana University, Bloomington, USA</p> <p><b>Corresponding Author:</b>                      Mahfud Alfaozi                      Email: mahfudalfaozi7@gmail.com</p> <p><b>Data:</b>                      Received: Feb 13, 2026;                      Accepted: April 15, 2026;                      Published: Mei 1, 2026</p>	<p>Contemporary Islamic preaching (da'wah) faces the challenge of engaging with an increasingly critical and skeptical society, necessitating a shift towards more rational approaches. The Qur'anic narrative of Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim A.S.) offers a timeless prototype for logic-based persuasive communication. This study aims to analyze and reconstruct the model of logical da'wah employed by Prophet Abraham as depicted in the classical exegesis of Imam Al-Tabari on Surah Al-Anbiya [21], verses 57-67. Employing a qualitative library research method, this study uses content analysis to examine Al-Tabari's commentary. The analysis is guided by a theoretical framework combining principles of logic (Socratic Method, <i>reductio ad absurdum</i>) and communication psychology (Cognitive Dissonance Theory). The findings reveal that Al-Tabari's narrative constructs Abraham's da'wah not as a simple debate, but as a sophisticated, multi-stage performative strategy. This model involves: (1) a provocative action (da'wah bi al-hal) that functions as a practical <i>reductio ad absurdum</i>; (2) an intelligent dialogue (da'wah bi al-lisan) that implements the Socratic Method through rhetorical dissembling (<i>ma'aridh</i>); and (3) the deliberate inducement of cognitive dissonance to trigger an internal realization in the audience. This study concludes that the model of Abraham's da'wah, as unveiled from Al-Tabari's tafsir, provides a rich, psychological, and rational blueprint for persuasive communication, holding significant relevance for addressing contemporary challenges.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Abrahamic Da'wah Model, Logical Argumentation, Tafsir Al-Tabari, Socratic Method, <i>Reductio ad Absurdum</i>, Cognitive Dissonance, <i>Ma'aridh</i>.</p>

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## **Introduction**

Contemporary Islamic da'wah faces complex challenges, primarily due to the currents of globalization and the information revolution that have shaped an increasingly critical and skeptical society (Sumbulah 2019). This phenomenon demands that preachers (dai) no longer rely on dogmatic, one-way approaches, but instead shift towards more dialogical, persuasive methods grounded in rational argumentation (hikmah). The Qur'anic injunction in Surah An-Nahl [16]:125 to invite to the path of the Lord with wisdom, good instruction, and the best form of debate, provides a theological foundation for the urgency of methodological adaptation in da'wah (Shihab 2013). In this context, hikmah is understood not only as sagacity but also as the capacity to present robust, logical arguments capable of intellectually addressing an audience's doubts.

The Qur'an itself presents various prototypes of the ideal dai, and one of the most prominent figures in the use of rational hujjah (argument) is Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim A.S.). Elevated as Khalilullah (the Friend of God), Abraham is renowned not only for his steadfast faith but also for his adeptness in dialogue and dismantling the pagan logic of his people through systematic reasoning (al-Faruqi 1992). The narratives of his dialogues, whether with his father, his people, or a tyrannical ruler like King Nimrod, represent a curriculum of da'wah that emphasizes the power of the intellect to arrive at the truth of Tawhid. This Abrahamic model of da'wah demonstrates that faith and logic are not contradictory entities but rather mutually reinforcing ones. From a philosophical perspective, Abraham's method prefigures a foundationalist epistemology, where certainty is built upon logical axioms rather than blind acceptance (Watt 1998).

Research on the da'wah model of Prophet Abraham in Surah Al-Anbiya [21]:57-67 occupies a strategic position amidst the dynamics of globalization and digital transformation, which demand a reactualization of religious messages through more solutive and relevant approaches (Daulay, 2024). Although recent studies have confirmed that Abraham's intellect-and-knowledge-based da'wah method is highly effective in facing value shifts in the millennial era (Antasari, 2023), and have identified the mujadalah argumentation pattern as an instrument for dismantling intellectual doubt (Budiono, 2020), a lacuna remains in the deep integration of this communication logic with the authority of classical exegesis. The unique position of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which collaborates modern communication theory with the

narrative reconstruction found in the tafsir bi al-ma'tshur of Imam Al-Tabari to uncover a systematic stage of argumentation (Hamzah, 2024). By integrating the analysis of concrete action (da'wah bi al-hal) and verbal rhetoric (da'wah bi al-lisan) as recorded in classical literature, this study aims to formulate a credible ethical and strategic framework for da'wah communication to address the future challenges of information disruption and artificial intelligence.

One of the most representative episodes of the logical genius of Prophet Abraham's da'wah is recorded in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Anbiya [21]:57-67. This sequence of verses presents not only a verbal dialogue but also a "logical act" through the provocative action of destroying idols, designed to create cognitive dissonance in the minds of his people (Mir 1986). This event serves as a rich case study, showcasing a da'wah strategy that holistically integrates real action (da'wah bi al-hal) and verbal argumentation (da'wah bi al-lisan) to achieve the ultimate goal: the audience's rational awareness of the fallacy of their beliefs. The narrative's power lies in its dramatization of a logical proof, transforming a theological principle into an empirical, observable reality (Ricoeur 1991).

To grasp the depth of the strategy and logic behind this narrative, this research will refer to the authoritative commentary of a classical exegete, Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari (d. 310 H/923 CE). His magnum opus, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil ay al-Qur'an*, is considered a foundational pillar in Qur'anic studies, particularly for its rigorous methodology based on transmitted reports (tafsir bi al-ma'tshur) (Rippin 2006). By presenting various narrations from the salaf generation, Al-Tabari not only explains the literal meaning of a verse but also reconstructs its historical and narrative context, making it an invaluable source for analyzing how an event in the Qur'an was understood by the earliest generations of Islam (Al-Tabari 2001). His work bridges the gap between textual reception and contextual narrative, providing the primary data for this study's theoretical reconstruction.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to answer the central question: How does Imam Al-Tabari, in his exegesis, construct and unveil the logical model of da'wah employed by Prophet Abraham in the event narrated in Surah Al-Anbiya [21]:57-67? Accordingly, this article will conduct an in-depth analysis of Al-Tabari's tafsir to reconstruct the stages of Abraham's argumentation, identify the logical techniques employed, and reveal the relevance of this da'wah model for contemporary practice.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a library research approach to conduct an in-depth analysis of relevant texts (Moleong 2017). The data analysis procedure was carried out systematically through qualitative content analysis techniques with the following stages:

1. The units of analysis in this research include physical units in the form of linguistic structures within the verses, narrative units in the form of narrated explanations within Al-Tabari's commentary, and referential units related to rhetorical and logical concepts (Krippendorff, 2022).
2. Data collected through documentation techniques were classified into thematic categories, namely: the pre-action stage (dialectical logic), the action stage (logical provocation), and the post-action stage (syllogistic conclusion), following the narrative arc constructed by Al-Tabari.
3. The data were analyzed using a theoretical framework of classical logic and communication, such as the Socratic Method for testing the consistency of arguments, *reductio ad absurdum* for demonstrating internal contradictions in an interlocutor's position, and Cognitive Dissonance Theory for dissecting the psychological-intellectual impact of Abraham's actions (Antasari, 2023; Festinger 1957).
4. The final stage involves drawing conclusions through a synthesis of the exegetical data and the theoretical framework to reconstruct a coherent model of Prophet Abraham's da'wah logic that is applicable in contemporary contexts.

## Results

This section presents the findings from the analysis of Imam Al-Tabari's *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil ay al-Qur'an*, focusing on his interpretation of QS. Al-Anbiya [21]:57-67. Al-Tabari's exegesis is presented systematically according to the sequence of verses to reconstruct the narrative logic of Prophet Abraham's da'wah as perceived by this classical exegete. These findings serve as the primary data to be interpreted more deeply in the Discussion section.

### I. The Planning Stage and the Oath (Verse 57)

وَتَاللَّهِ لَأَكِيدَنَّ أَصْنَامَكُمْ بَعْدَ أَنْ تُولُوا مُدْبِرِينَ

(Prophet Abraham said in his heart,) 'By Allah, I will surely plan a stratagem against your idols

after you have gone away.”

On verse 57, "And by Allah, I will surely plan a stratagem against your idols after you have gone away," Al-Tabari focuses his interpretation on two aspects: the nature of Abraham's oath and the meaning of the word \*kayd\* (stratagem). He presents a narration from Qatadah and others explaining that this oath was uttered by Abraham privately or in a low voice (\*fa asarraha\*), yet it was heard by some of his people (Al-Tabari 2001). Regarding the meaning of \*kayd\*, Al-Tabari interprets it not as a reprehensible deception but as a "strategy" or a secret "plan" to expose the impotence of those idols. This framing establishes from the outset that Abraham's action was not an impulsive act of vandalism but a calculated, rational, and strategic maneuver (Rahman 1980).

## 2. The Provocative Action and Execution of the Plan (Verse 58)

فَجَعَلَهُمْ جُذُذًا إِلَّا كَبِيرًا لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يُرْجَعُونَ

“So he (Abraham) made them into shattered fragments, except for a large (idol) belonging to them, that they might return to it (for questioning).”

Explaining verse 58, "So he made them shattered fragments (\*judhadhan\*), except for the largest one," Al-Tabari presents narrations detailing the execution of the action. He quotes the narrative from As-Suddi and Mujahid, which describes Abraham using an axe (\*fa's\*) to smash all the idols into pieces (Al-Tabari 2001). A crucial point in Al-Tabari's commentary is his emphasis on Abraham's deliberate action of sparing the largest idol and, according to one narration, placing the axe on the neck or hand of that statue (Al-Tabari 2001). In Al-Tabari's exposition, this theatrical act was no coincidence but a key element prepared to trigger dialogue and invert the logic of his people in the subsequent stage. This act is deeply semiotic, transforming a physical object into a sign of epistemic rupture (Barthes 1972).

## 3. The Dialogue and Logical Maneuver (Verses 59-63)

قَالُوا مَنْ فَعَلَ هَذَا بِآلِهَتِنَا إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

“They said, 'Who has done this to our gods? Indeed, he is of the wrongdoers.'”

قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا فَتًى يَذُكُرُهُمْ يُقَالُ لَهُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ

“They (some of the idolaters) said, 'We heard a young man censure them. He is called Abraham.'”

قَالُوا فَأْتُوا بِهِ عَلَىٰ أَعْيُنِ النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْهَدُونَ ٦١

"They said, '(If so,) then bring him before the eyes of the people, that they may bear witness."

When his people returned and discovered the destruction, they immediately suspected Abraham. The climax of this narrative, according to Al-Tabari, transpires during the interrogation in verses 62-63. When asked, "Are you the one who did this to our gods, O Abraham?" Abraham replied, "Rather, the largest of them, this one, did it. So, ask them, if they can speak." Al-Tabari does not interpret this response as a lie. Instead, he presents a narration categorizing this utterance as *\*ma'aridh\** (dissembling/an equivocal statement), a statement whose apparent meaning differs from reality but is intended for a higher purpose of truth (Al-Tabari 2001). This interpretation aligns with other classical exegetes like Ibn Kathir, who affirms that Abraham's objective was to "remind them that these statues cannot speak" and thereby guide them to the logical conclusion of their deities' powerlessness (Ibn Kathir 1999). Abraham's response functions as a brilliant rhetorical maneuver, shifting the focus from himself and compelling his people to directly confront the absurdity of their beliefs. It is a classic case of using indirect speech acts to achieve a perlocutionary effect greater than a direct assertion could accomplish (Searle 1979).

#### 4. The Moment of Reflection and Acknowledgment (Verses 64-65)

Abraham's strategy proves successful, as depicted in verse 64, "Then they returned to their (sound) judgment (*\*faraja'u ila anfusihim\**)." Al-Tabari interprets this phrase as a moment of profound introspection. He explains that Abraham's people began blaming one another in their hearts, acknowledging that they themselves were the wrongdoers for leaving their gods unguarded, while also realizing that those gods were indeed incapable of defending themselves (Al-Tabari 2001). This moment of internal awareness reaches its peak with the verbal admission in verse 65, "...You (Abraham) certainly know that these (idols) do not speak." For Al-Tabari, this is the point where Abraham's *\*hujjah\** (argument) has cornered his people. They explicitly concede a fact they had long ignored: the total impotence of their idols. Their acknowledgment is not merely verbal but signals a fundamental shift in their psychological state, a prereflective awareness becoming a conscious admission (Piaget 1952).

#### 5. The Final Conclusion and Decisive Argument (Verses 66-67)

Having successfully obtained this admission, Abraham immediately launches his final

argument. In interpreting verses 66-67, Al-Tabari explains that Abraham uses his people's own confession as the foundation for his conclusive *\*hujjah\**. Abraham's rhetorical questions, "Do you then worship besides Allah that which cannot benefit you at all nor harm you? Uff to you and to what you worship besides Allah! Will you not then understand?" are viewed as a knockout blow that concludes the debate (Al-Tabari 2001). Abraham no longer needs to prove anything; he merely articulates the logical conclusion of what they have just admitted. The forceful statement "Uff to you..." serves as a final affirmation that exposes their entire belief system as irrational.

## Discussion

This section presents an interpretive analysis of the findings from Al-Tabari's Tafsir. While the Research Results section addresses "what" Al-Tabari said, this Discussion section answers "why" and "how" the da'wah strategy operates, using the lenses of communication theory, logic, and psychology previously outlined. This analysis demonstrates that the narrative presented by Al-Tabari, when dissected, unveils an extraordinarily sophisticated and multi-dimensional da'wah model. The model can be understood as a dramaturgical performance, where the sequence of acts moves the audience from ignorance to self-realized truth (Goffman 1959).

### I. The Synergy of Da'wah bi al-Hal and bi al-Lisan: A Planned Communication Performance

Al-Tabari's interpretation explicitly shows that Abraham's da'wah was not a series of isolated actions but a holistic, premeditated "communication performance." The act of destroying the idols (*da'wah bi al-hal*) is inseparable from the argumentative dialogue that follows (*da'wah bi al-lisan*). The physical action functions as a catalyst, a dramatic and provocative conversation opener designed to create the ideal psychological conditions for the acceptance of a verbal argument (Aziz 2017). By emphasizing the planning aspect (*\*kayd\**) from the start and the placing of the axe on the largest idol, Al-Tabari confirms that the action was a semiotically loaded act. It was not vandalism but a "speaking act" that set the stage for the climactic dialogue. This synergy aligns with modern principles of persuasive communication, where a message is more effective if preceded by an attention-grabbing event that creates a "need to know" in the audience (Perloff 2020). Furthermore, this can be analyzed as a planned sign system, where the broken idols constitute a semiotic field that silently screams the message before a single word is spoken (Eco 1976). This act transforms the physical space of

the temple into a pedagogical stage.

## 2. The Ma'aridh Maneuver as an Implementation of the Socratic Method

The core of Abraham's logical brilliance lies in his response in verse 63. Al-Tabari's interpretation, which categorizes this response as *ma'aridh* (equivocal statement), is the analytical key (Al-Tabari 2001). It shows that Abraham was not lying but applying a rhetorical technique functionally identical to the Socratic Method. Instead of giving a direct affirmative or negative answer that would end the dialogue, Abraham poses a counter-hypothesis ("Rather, the largest of them did it...") that forces his people to think and test the premise for themselves (Vlastos 1983; Benson 2000). By adding "so ask them, if they can speak," Abraham effectively shifts the burden of proof onto his interlocutors and guides them to arrive at his desired conclusion through their own reasoning. This is the very essence of the Socratic *\*elenchus\**: exposing the contradictions in someone's beliefs not by lecturing but by asking the right questions, turning the interlocutor's own cognitive framework against them (Nails 2006). In the Islamic rhetorical tradition, this represents a systematic application of *\*burhan\** (demonstrative proof) wherein evidence is drawn from the opponent's own acknowledged premises, leading to an inevitable rational conclusion (Fakhri 2019; Gwynne 2014).

## 3. The Act of Destruction as a Practical Reductio ad Absurdum

If the dialogue is an implementation of the Socratic Method, then the physical action is a *reductio ad absurdum* in a practical form. This form of argument works by temporarily assuming a premise and then demonstrating that this premise leads to an absurd, logically unacceptable conclusion (Rescher 2025; Copi & Cohen 2009). The premise held by his people was: "These idols are gods possessing power." Abraham brings this premise to its logical consequence through a "field experiment." By destroying the idols, a scenario that should be impossible if the premise were true, he visually demonstrates the absurdity of that belief. Al-Tabari's narrative, which details the fragments of the statues (*judhadhan*) and their impotence to defend themselves, serves as empirical evidence that lays bare the fallacy of his people's initial premise (Al-Tabari 2001; Festinger 1957). This action can be framed as a kind of proto-experimentalism. Abraham does not merely argue that the idols are powerless; he creates a controlled environment where their powerlessness is empirically demonstrated, making the abstract logical principle of contradiction a tangible, observable reality (Hacking 1983).

## 4. The Peak of Persuasion: Creating and Resolving Cognitive Dissonance

The combination of practical *\*reductio ad absurdum\** (the action) and the Socratic

Method (the dialogue) cumulatively created a state of intense psychological discomfort for Abraham's people. It is here that Cognitive Dissonance Theory becomes profoundly relevant (Festinger 1957). They were confronted with two mutually conflicting cognitions: (1) "My belief: these idols are powerful gods," and (2) "The reality before my eyes: these idols are shattered and cannot even speak." This confrontation forces the mind toward an urgent resolution, as human cognition abhors inconsistency and seeks homeostasis (Harmon-Jones & Mills 2019). Al-Tabari's interpretation of the phrase *\*faraja'u ila anfusihim\** ("they returned to their sound judgment") can be understood as a precise description of this peak moment of dissonance. To alleviate this psychological and intellectual headache, the only rational way out was to reject one of the cognitions. Their admission in verse 65, "You certainly know that these (idols) do not speak," is the moment they finally chose empirical reality and rejected their old belief to resolve the dissonance. The resolution of this dissonance did not come through Abraham's direct instruction, but through their own rational self-correction, marking the zenith of his persuasive success (Cooper 2007). The strategy is not merely argumentative but deeply pedagogical, as it activates the audience's latent rationality and allows them to become agents in their own enlightenment (Freire 1970).

## **Conclusion**

This research stemmed from the question of how Imam Al-Tabari, through his exegesis, constructs the logical da'wah model used by Prophet Abraham in confronting his people as narrated in QS. Al-Anbiya [21]:57-67. Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that Al-Tabari's interpretation not only presents a story but reconstructs a da'wah strategy that is profoundly structured, rational, and psychologically sophisticated. Abraham's da'wah model is not a linear debate but a multi-stage communication performance that synergizes action and word. This model can be summarized in four fundamental stages: (1) A Provocative Planned Action, where the destruction of idols functions as da'wah bi al-hal and a practical *reductio ad absurdum* argument to expose the absurdity of paganism; (2) A Socratic Dialogical Maneuver, where an equivocal answer (*\*ma'aridh\**) is used to reverse the burden of proof and force the interlocutor into independent reasoning; (3) The Creation of Cognitive Dissonance, a psychological tactic to create mental discomfort that drives the audience towards a moment of introspection (*\*faraja'u ila anfusihim\**); and (4) A Logical Conclusion, where the interlocutor's own admission is used as the premise to present an irrefutable conclusion of

Tawhid.

Implicitly, this research offers several significant contributions. For Qur'anic and Tafsir studies, this research demonstrates how a classical tafsir of the *bi al-ma'tshur* genre, such as Al-Tabari's, can be analyzed with a modern theoretical framework (logic and communication science) to reveal deeper, more structured layers of meaning. This affirms that classical books of tafsir are not merely compilations of narrations but are also rich narrative constructs of rhetorical strategy. For da'wah studies, this research offers a concrete, historical, and Qur'an-based model of rational da'wah. This Abrahamic model serves as a relevant alternative for contemporary da'wah practice, which often encounters skeptical and critical audiences, by offering a dialogical approach that empowers the intellect rather than relying on dogmatic indoctrination. Its application could extend to interfaith dialogue or addressing atheistic arguments, where demonstrating internal contradictions in a belief system is more effective than direct refutation.

This research certainly has limitations, primarily because it focuses solely on the interpretation of one exegete, Imam Al-Tabari. Therefore, further research is highly encouraged. Some suggestions for future studies include: (1) Conducting a comparative study by analyzing the interpretations of exegetes with different orientations, such as rationalist (*Mu'tazilah*) or modern exegetes, to see if there are differences in the construction of Abraham's da'wah logic model. (2) Applying the same analytical framework to other narratives of prophetic debates in the Qur'an, such as the dialogue of Prophet Moses with Pharaoh. (3) Conducting empirical research to test the effectiveness of applying this Abrahamic Da'wah Model in the context of digital da'wah communication or in interfaith dialogue forums.

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