

## From Sectarian Labels to Universal Ethics: Human Deviance in Abrahamic Scriptures

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### Abstract

Research concerning the theme of human misguidance within the Qur'ān, the Tanakh, and the Gospel has predominantly evolved within the distinct hermeneutical frameworks intrinsic to each tradition. This approach often yields sectarian interpretations that employ the concept of misguidance as a marker of theological identity. A significant gap in the scholarship persists due to the paucity of comparative studies that integrate philological analysis with ethical reflection across these sacred texts. This article seeks to address this lacuna by investigating the concept of human misguidance across the three Abrahamic traditions as a universal ethical typology, employing Paul Ricoeur's narrative-hermeneutical methodology. The analysis focuses on the expressions *al-maghḍūb* and *al-dāllīn* in Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, the notion of *qəshēh 'ōref* ("stiff-necked people") in the Tanakh, and the parable of the Lost Sheep in the Gospel. Utilizing Ricoeur's three-stage mimesis framework—prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration—this study examines the linguistic and historical contexts of each concept, synthesizes them into a coherent comparative interpretive structure, and recontextualizes them within a contemporary ethical framework. The findings demonstrate that, despite linguistic and theological divergences, the three Abrahamic traditions conceptualize misguidance as an anthropological condition characterized by conscious rebellion against truth, hardness of heart, and existential loss arising from human ignorance or vulnerability. This article argues that misguidance is more accurately understood as a universal moral category rather than a sectarian designation. Theoretically, these findings contribute to the field of comparative Qur'anic hermeneutics, while practically they offer an ethical-theological foundation for fostering interfaith dialogue in contemporary pluralistic contexts.



[Kajian tentang kesesatan manusia dalam Al-Qur'an, Tanakh, dan Injil selama ini cenderung berkembang dalam kerangka tafsir internal masing-masing tradisi dan kerap terjebak dalam pembacaan sektarian yang menempatkan konsep kesesatan sebagai penanda identitas teologis. Minimnya kajian komparatif lintas kitab suci yang mengintegrasikan analisis filologis dan refleksi etis menunjukkan adanya celah penelitian yang signifikan. Artikel ini bertujuan mengkaji konsep kesesatan manusia dalam tiga tradisi Abrahamik sebagai tipologi etis universal melalui pendekatan hermeneutika naratif Paul Ricoeur. Penelitian ini memfokuskan analisis pada istilah *al-maghdūb* dan *ad-ḍāllīn* dalam Surah *al-Fātiḥah*, konsep *qesheh 'ōref* (orang yang keras kepala) dalam Tanakh, serta perumpamaan *lost sheep* dalam Injil. Dengan menggunakan kerangka tiga tahap *mimesis*–*prafigurasional*, *konfiguratif*, dan *refigurasional*–*studi* ini menelusuri horizon linguistik dan historis masing-masing konsep, mensintesiskannya dalam satu struktur makna komparatif, serta merefigurasikannya dalam konteks etis kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun berbeda dalam bahasa dan aksentuasi teologis, ketiga tradisi Abrahamik merepresentasikan kesesatan sebagai pengalaman antropologis yang mencakup pembangkangan sadar terhadap kebenaran, ketertutupan hati, dan keterhilangan akibat kebodohan atau kerapuhan manusia. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa konsep kesesatan lebih tepat dipahami sebagai kategori moral universal daripada label sektarian. Secara teoretis, temuan ini memperkaya hermeneutika komparatif Al-Qur'an, sementara secara praktis ia menawarkan landasan etis-teologis bagi penguatan dialog antaragama dalam konteks pluralisme kontemporer.]

**Keywords:** Comparative Hermeneutics, Qur'an–Bible Intertextuality, Ethical Typology of Deviation, Paul Ricoeur's Narrative Hermeneutics, Interreligious Ethics

## Introduction

The Qur'ān, theologically regarded as *al-kitāb al-khātim* (the final revelation), assumes a corrective and complementary function in relation to the preceding sacred scriptures within the Abrahamic religious tradition.<sup>1</sup> This function does not inherently position earlier scriptures in opposition; rather, it establishes a framework for a hermeneutical dialogue that is simultaneously critical and

<sup>1</sup> See: Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, "The Qur'ān and the Bible: Abrogation (Naskh) or Confirmation (Taṣḍīq)?," *Religions* 14, no. 7 (June 2023): 856, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070856>; Hüseyin Halil, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān with the Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (November 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.10144>; Hüseyin Halil, "Reconciling the Qur'ān and the Bible: A New Approach to Scriptural Dialogue," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (September 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10763>.

affirming.<sup>2</sup> Several contemporary Muslim scholars argue that narratives found in Jewish and Christian scriptures may function as *al-mukammil* (complementary), provided that they are interpreted with appropriate methodological rigor and ethical sensitivity. For instance, Syed Muhammad Adib al-Ja'farī underscores respect for other religions as a fundamental element of the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, particularly the objective of preserving religion (*hifz al-dīn*).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Alī, in his discussion of Qur'anic intertextuality, acknowledges the potential of employing the Bible as an interpretive reference, contingent upon a critical and non-dogmatic approach.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary intertextual scholarship demonstrates that numerous central themes within the Qur'ān exhibit narrative and conceptual affinities with Jewish and Christian scriptures, including historical accounts, moral symbolism, and ethical-religious frameworks.<sup>5</sup> A frequently cited example is the notion of the straight path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) in Qur'ān 1:6 (Sūrat al-Fātiḥah), which corresponds to the expression “paths of righteousness” found in the Psalms and.<sup>6</sup> These parallels indicate that intertextual dialogue among sacred texts is not a modern artificial construct but is deeply embedded within the symbolic and ethical traditions that have long characterized the Abrahamic faiths.

Within the Qur'anic corpus, Sūrat al-Fātiḥah occupies a pivotal position in both the ritual and theological dimensions of Muslim religious life. Its concise structure encapsulates the foundational scope of Islamic theology, affirming divine unity while simultaneously functioning as a supplication for ethical and existential guidance.<sup>7</sup> Of particular significance is the concluding segment of this sūrah—namely, the references to *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn*—which has generated sustained hermeneutical debate. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpret these expressions as historical designations referring respectively to Jewish and

<sup>2</sup> Nur Anis Rochmawati, “Cross-Reference Terhadap Bibel dalam The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary Karya Abdullah Yusuf Ali,” *NUN: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara* 7, no. 2 (2021): 330.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Al Jafari and Syed Muhammad Adib Termizi, “Menghormati Agama Lain sebagai Pelengkap terhadap Penjagaan Agama Islam dalam Maqasid Al-Shariah,” *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2021): 111.

<sup>4</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an: Complete Translation with Selected Notes* (Markfield: Kube Publishing, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> See: Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Rochmawati, “Cross-Reference terhadap Bibel dalam The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary Karya Abdullah Yusuf Ali,” 343–45.

<sup>7</sup> See: Shaik Abdullah bin Hassan Mydin and Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, “Pandangan Alam Islam: Analisis dari Perspektif Surah al-Fatihah,” 2019, 423; S. Nurjanah, “Kosmologi dan Sains dalam Islam,” *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 18, no. 1 (2013): 109–22.

Christian communities.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, modern interpreters including Muḥammad ‘Abduh and M. Quraish Shihab emphasize their universal ethical dimensions, construing these terms as typological representations applicable across religious traditions: those who consciously reject truth and those who deviate due to ignorance or epistemic limitation.<sup>9</sup>

The transition from an identificatory reading to an ethical-universal interpretation represents a significant methodological development in contemporary Qur’anic exegesis.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, this discourse has largely remained confined to the internal hermeneutical dynamics of the Islamic tradition. The conceptual relationship between *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn* and analogous notions in the Tanakh and the Gospel has rarely been examined through a systematic philosophical-hermeneutical framework. The Tanakh, for example, employs the metaphor of the “stiff-necked people” (*qēshēh ‘ōref*) to denote deliberate rebellion against the divine will,<sup>11</sup> whereas the Gospel utilizes the parable of the Lost Sheep to depict human existential loss and the need for restoration.<sup>12</sup>

In recent decades, interreligious hermeneutics influenced by Paul Ricoeur’s philosophy has foregrounded interfaith dialogue through concepts such as linguistic hospitality, cross-reading of sacred texts, and the recognition of the provisional character of religious truth claims.<sup>13</sup> Hustwit conceptualizes religious truth claims as rational hypotheses emerging from the dialectical interaction between language and transcendent reality, thereby rendering them open to dialogue and critical evaluation across religious traditions. Likewise, Moyaert demonstrates that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics furnishes an anthropological and ethical foundation for transformative comparative reading. As an alternative methodological proposal, Hedges advances comparative theology grounded in Gadamerian hermeneutics, emphasizing the fusion of horizons; however, this approach diverges from Ricoeur’s

<sup>8</sup> See: Muhammad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Tafsir Jami’ al-Bayan ‘an Ta’wil Ay al-Qur’an* (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2022), 1:260–66; Ismail Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir Juz 1* (Bandung: Sinar Baru Algensindo, 2015), 242–60.

<sup>9</sup> See: Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an* (Tangerang Selatan: Lentera Hati, 2017), 1:75–77; Siti Rihadatul Aisy, Komala Sari, and Andi Rosa, “Penafsiran Surat Al-Fatihah dalam Tafsir al-Manar Karya Muhammad Abduh,” *Jurnal Intelek Insan Cendekia* 1, no. 10 (2024): 7137–54.

<sup>10</sup> See: Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, Revised edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur’an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> N. Thyr, “Gildas and a Stiff-Necked People,” *Studia Celtica*, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Joel Willits, “Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 63, no. 1 (2017): 365–82.

<sup>13</sup> See: J.R. Hustwit, *Interreligious Hermeneutics and the Pursuit of Truth*, in *Interrelig. Hermeneutics and the Pursuit of Truth*, Interreligious Hermeneutics and the Pursuit of Truth (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2014), 131, Scopus; Marianne Moyaert, “Ricoeur and the Wager of Interreligious Ritual Participation,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 3 (May 2017): 173–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1312491>.

by allowing a less explicit process of ethical refiguration.<sup>14</sup> Existing studies on *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn* largely remain within the confines of internal Islamic exegesis.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, attempts to integrate the Qur'anic concept of misguidance with the metaphor of rebellion in the Tanakh and the narrative of loss in the Gospel through a narrative-hermeneutical framework remain insufficiently developed. This lacuna constitutes the central scholarly problem addressed in the present study.

The present study undertakes a comparative analysis of the concept of human misguidance across the three Abrahamic traditions by employing Paul Ricoeur's narrative-hermeneutical framework. Specifically, it examines the terms *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn* in Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, the portrayal of the stiff-necked people in the Tanakh (Exodus 32:9; Deuteronomy 9:6, 13), and the parable of the Lost Sheep in the Gospels (Luke 15:3–7; Matthew 18:12–14). Through Ricoeur's three stages of mimesis—prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration—this study not only conducts a philological comparison of these texts but also situates them within a universal ethical typology concerning the human relationship with divine truth.

### **The Conceptualization of Human Misguidance in the Qur'ān: *al-Maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn***

In Paul Ricoeur's account of narrative hermeneutics, the stage of prefiguration (*mimesis I*) constitutes an initial delineation of the domain of action and meaning, which is pre-structured by language, symbols, and tradition prior to its articulation within a more complex narrative configuration. At this stage, analysis focuses on elucidating the semantic field, historical context, and religious horizon that inform the foundational understanding of key terms within a sacred text, without an immediate aim of normative synthesis or cross-traditional ethical evaluation. Accordingly, *mimesis I* functions as a necessary precondition for subsequent comparative interpretation rather than as a space for articulating definitive conclusions.

Within the Qur'anic context, Q. 1:7 (Sūrat al-Fātiḥah) constitutes the *locus classicus* for the present discussion due to its inclusion of two pivotal expressions—*al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn*—which denote distinct modes of human deviation from divine guidance. These expressions function not merely as normative theological categories but also as anthropological metaphors that depict a fractured

<sup>14</sup> Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," *Religions* 7, no. 1 (January 2016): 7, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7010007>.

<sup>15</sup> See: Muchammad Faz Tazakka, "Pergeseran Makna Al-Maghdub dan al-Dhallin dalam QS al-Fatihah Ayat 7," *Ta'wiluna: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an, Tafsir dan Pemikiran Islam* 5, no. 3 (2024): 678–88; Elina Nurjannah, Abdullah Hadani, and Muhammad Akhdan Muzakki, "A Contextual Interpretation of the Secrets of Surah Al-Fatihah," *Taqaddumi* 4, no. 2 (2024): 122–34.



relationship between the human subject and God, manifested either in conscious rejection of truth or in a loss of orientation resulting from ignorance.

Etymologically, the term *al-maghḍūb* derives from the root *ghaḍiba-yaghaḍabu*, which conveys the meaning of anger or wrath accompanied by an inclination toward retribution.<sup>16</sup> Ibn Manẓūr, in *Lisān al-‘Arab*, defines *ghaḍab* as the antonym of *riḍā* (contentment), thereby framing it as a relational state of divine displeasure provoked by disobedience or rebellion against established norms.<sup>17</sup> In the context of Q. 1:7, *al-maghḍūb* denotes those who incur divine wrath as a consequence of denial and deliberate rejection of God’s guidance.

The expression *al-ḍāllīn* is the plural active participle derived from the root *ḍalla-yaḍillu*, which signifies deviation from guidance or a state of being lost (Tazakka 2024). Al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī explains that *ḍalāl* or *ḍalālah* refers to departure from the correct path or movement toward an erroneous objective, whether in literal or metaphorical usage.<sup>18</sup> In Q. 1:7, *al-ḍāllīn* linguistically indicates a condition of epistemic and spiritual disorientation, namely the human inability to recognize or sustain a proper orientation toward truth.<sup>19</sup>

Both expressions are deeply embedded within the linguistic and cultural milieu of pre-Islamic Arabia. In Jāhilī poetry, the root *ghaḍiba* frequently denotes anger arising from violations of honor, betrayal, or defiance of tribal norms—transgressions that often resulted in social sanction or communal exclusion. Within this cultural framework, an individual characterized by *ghaḍab* was understood as one who knowingly transgressed established conventions (Islam 2023, 1625–1629; Izutsu 2002). By contrast, the root *ḍalla* was commonly employed by poets such as Imru’ al-Qays and Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā to describe experiences of desert disorientation, existential uncertainty, or aimless wandering.<sup>20</sup> The figure of the *ḍāll* in this milieu was not necessarily morally culpable but rather portrayed as vulnerable and in need of guidance. Consequently, the Qur’anic deployment of *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn* may be read as moral metaphors already intelligible within the collective consciousness of early Arab society.

Within the classical *tafsīr* tradition, these two expressions have been interpreted predominantly through an identificatory lens. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, interprets *al-maghḍūb* as referring to the Jews, linking this reading to Q. 5:60 and substantiating it through reports classified as authentic, including the narration

<sup>16</sup> Wendi Parwanto, “Structure of Epistemology and Sufism Patterns on Malay-Jawi Interpretation,” *Al-Kawakib* 3 (2022): 130–38.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisan Al-Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2000), 649.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Raghib Al-Ashfahani, *Kamus Al-Qur’an*, ed. Ahmad Zaini Dahlan (Depok: Pustaka Khazanah Fawa’id, 2017), 1:861–63.

<sup>19</sup> Rizki Gumilar, *Tafsir Lughawi Surah Al-Fatihah* (Jombang: CV Nakomu, 2025), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Yahya Saleh Hasan Dahami, “Zuhayr Ibn Abi Sulma: The Man of Wisdom and Peacemaking,” *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research* 1, no. 1 (2019): 71–84.

transmitted by Ismā'īl ibn Abī Khālid in *Musnad Aḥmad*, in which the Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have stated: “Those who have incurred wrath are the Jews”.<sup>21</sup> Within the same exegetical framework, *al-ḍāllīn* is understood as designating Christians, with reference to Q. 5:77, which addresses the People of the Book who transgress and go astray.<sup>22</sup> Ibn Kathīr adopts a comparable approach, citing reports related to the conversion narrative of ‘Adī ibn Ḥātim, transmitted by al-Tirmidhī and classified as *ḥasan gharīb*.<sup>23</sup> These interpretations are presented here descriptively in order to situate the historical logic of classical *tafsīr*, rather than to assert their universal normativity.

This classical exegetical paradigm is marked by three defining features: a consistent tendency toward group identification, a reliance on ḥadīth as the principal source of interpretive validation, and a polemical orientation shaped by the historical encounters between the early Muslim community and Jewish and Christian groups. As a result, classical *tafsīr* largely prioritizes historical and identificatory concerns over symbolic readings capable of transcending their original socio-historical context.

In contrast, many contemporary *mufasssīrūn* advance a more reflective and universal hermeneutical approach. In *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, Hamka deliberately refrains from associating *al-maghḍūb* or *al-ḍāllīn* with specific religious communities. He interprets *al-maghḍūb* as those who recognize the truth yet consciously reject it, while *al-ḍāllīn* refers to individuals who err due to the absence of adequate spiritual guidance (Hamka 2020, 84). This perspective is reinforced through a narrative strategy that employs moral exempla aimed at cultivating ethical awareness without denigrating particular groups.<sup>24</sup>

A similar hermeneutical stance is evident in M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsīr al-Mishbāḥ*. Shihab argues that references to Jews and Christians in certain prophetic traditions should be understood as context-specific illustrations pertinent to the socio-historical circumstances of the early Muslim community. Since the Qur'ān itself does not explicitly identify the referents of *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn*, these categories remain open and may encompass any individuals who exhibit analogous patterns of deviation in their relationship with divine truth.<sup>25</sup>

Within the Qur'anic prefigurational horizon, *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn* thus represent two fundamental modes of human error: deliberate rejection of truth and misguidance arising from ignorance. These modes transcend sectarian boundaries and instead reflect recurrent existential patterns observable throughout human

<sup>21</sup> Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, 1:259.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, 1:266.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathir Juz 1*, 146–47.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad Yusry Affandy Md Isa, “Penghayatan Akidah dalam Surah Al-Fatihah Menurut Perspektif Hamka,” *Jurnal YADIM* 3, no. 2 (2023): 72–91.

<sup>25</sup> Shihab, *Tafsīr Al-Mishbah: Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*, 1:75.

history.<sup>26</sup> This conceptual groundwork prepares the way for the subsequent configurational stage (*mimesis* II), in which the Qur'anic understanding of misguidance will be systematically compared with parallel notions in the Tanakh and the Gospel.

### **The Conceptualization of Human Rebellion in the Tanakh: Qeshēh-ʿōref**

Within the Jewish tradition, human misguidance is not primarily articulated through the metaphor of losing one's way—as is frequently the case in many Qur'anic passages—but rather through the imagery of active rebellion against the divine will within a covenantal framework. A key expression encapsulating this disposition is *qēshēh-ʿōref* (קֶשֶׁה-עֹרֵף), commonly rendered as “stiff-necked people.” This phrase appears repeatedly in the Tanakh, particularly in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, to characterize the Israelites' resistance to divine command despite having received revelation, law, and direct experiences of deliverance.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most explicit occurrences of this expression is found in Exodus 32:9, which reads: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stiff-necked people.’” (Exod. 32:9, NRSV). This statement appears within the narrative of the golden calf episode, a decisive moment that exposes the moral and spiritual collapse of Israel immediately following the ratification of the Sinai covenant. The episode reveals a theological paradox that recurs throughout the Tanakh: those who stand in closest proximity to divine revelation are subject to the most severe forms of divine reproach.<sup>28</sup>

From a philological perspective, the noun *ʿōref* (עֹרֵף) denotes the “neck,” more precisely the nape or back of the neck. The adjective *qēshēh* (קֶשֶׁה) derives from the root *qāshāh* (קָשָׁה), conveying meanings of hardness, rigidity, or resistance to yielding. Across various contexts in the Hebrew Bible, this root denotes an inner disposition marked by obstinacy and an unwillingness to respond to instruction, correction, or discipline.<sup>29</sup> Semantically, therefore, the expression *qēshēh-ʿōref* signifies deliberate and willful rebellion rather than mere ignorance or cognitive deficiency.

<sup>26</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*.

<sup>27</sup> See: Paulus Ajong, “Kualitas Hard Skill dan Soft Skill Kepemimpinan Musa,” *Ungu Madahi: Jurnal STAK Abdi Wacana* 1, no. 1 (2024): 52; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> See: Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Anton Sitorus and Iwan Setiawan Tarigan, “Teologi Berhala Berbasis Keluaran 32:1–14,” *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Agama dan Filsafat* 4, no. 2 (2025): 496–503.

<sup>29</sup> See: Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000); Andreas Joswanto, Carolina Etnasari Anjaya, and Yonatan Alex Arifianto, “Dosa Anak Lembu Emas dan Citra Diri Harun,” *EPIGRAPHE* 6, no. 1 (2022): 89–100.



The semantic force of this metaphor becomes clearer when situated within the agrarian world of ancient Israel. The imagery underlying *qēshēh-‘ōref* draws from the behavior of draft animals—particularly oxen—that stiffen their necks to resist the yoke and refuse the guidance of the plowman. Within the symbolic universe of the Tanakh, the yoke represents authority, order, and rightful submission, whereas resistance to the yoke signifies defiance of divinely instituted order.<sup>30</sup> This agrarian metaphor is subsequently transposed into the moral and theological register to describe those who consciously reject divine governance.

The use of this imagery underscores that *qēshēh-‘ōref* does not merely denote a violation of legal norms but rather an entrenched resistance to the covenantal relationship itself. In Deuteronomy 9:6, Israel is again described as a stiff-necked people, even as the text emphasizes that possession of the promised land is granted not on the basis of moral merit but solely due to divine grace and fidelity to covenantal promise. The passage articulates a pointed theological critique: religious knowledge and salvific experience do not guarantee obedience unless accompanied by humility and openness to transformation.<sup>31</sup>

Within the theological horizon of the Tanakh, the designation of Israel as *qēshēh-‘ōref* thus functions as an internal and reflective critique. It portrays misguidance not as the absence of knowledge of God, but as a failure to respond ethically and faithfully to the demands inherent in covenantal proximity. As such, the term operates as an ethical admonition against spiritual pride and resistance to moral renewal within the Jewish tradition itself.<sup>32</sup>

When placed in conceptual dialogue with the Qur’ān, *qēshēh-‘ōref* exhibits a clear structural parallel with the notion of *al-maghḍūb*. Both concepts refer to individuals who incur divine displeasure not because of ignorance, but due to the deliberate rejection of known truth. In both traditions, nearness to revelation intensifies moral responsibility rather than serving as a safeguard against error.

Within the prefigurational horizon of the Tanakh, therefore, *qēshēh-‘ōref* should not be understood solely as a historical designation for ancient Israel but as a universal anthropological typology. It functions as a moral mirror, exposing a recurrent human tendency—across religious traditions—to resist truths that are already recognized. This conceptual framing prepares the ground for the subsequent comparative stage, in which the motif of rebellion in the Tanakh will be

<sup>30</sup> See: Sahat Martua Sinaga and Ryna Heppy Tambunan, “Prinsip Rendah Hati dalam Kepemimpinan Yosua,” *Harvester: Jurnal Teologi dan Kepemimpinan Kristen* 6, no. 1 (2021): 1–19; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Michael Ufok Udoekpo, “Revisiting Sinai Covenant Theology, Its Values and Resonances for Today,” *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 2, no. 6 (2022): 9–16, <https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2022.2.6.81>; Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*.

examined alongside the Qur'anic conception of misguidance and the Gospel's narrative of loss.

### **The Conceptualization of Human Lostness in the Gospel: The Lost Sheep**

The Gospel tradition primarily conceptualizes human waywardness not as active rebellion or conscious rejection of the divine will, but rather as a condition of existential loss that necessitates the initiative of divine compassion. A paradigmatic metaphor expressing this understanding is the parable of the Lost Sheep, found in the Gospels of Luke 15:3–7 and Matthew 18:12–14. When approached through Paul Ricoeur's framework of narrative hermeneutics, this parable—at the prefigurative stage (*mimesis I*)—functions as an initial field of meaning that shapes the Gospel's conception of the relationship between humanity, sin, and divine salvation, prior to its systematic theological elaboration.

From a philological standpoint, the key Greek expression employed in this parable is τὸ πρόβατον τὸ ἀπολωλός (*to probaton to apolōlos*), conventionally translated as “the lost sheep.” The participle ἀπολωλός (*apolōlos*) is the perfect active form of the verb ἀπόλλυμι (*apollymi*), whose semantic range encompasses meanings such as “to perish,” “to be destroyed,” “to be lost,” or “to deviate from one's intended purpose.” In the Gospel context, however, the term does not necessarily denote irreversible destruction; rather, it signifies a state of relational dislocation and existential misorientation that remains open to recovery.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the condition described is reversible and relational rather than conclusively eschatological.

The narrative structure of the parable portrays a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep in order to seek out a single one that has gone astray, rejoicing upon its recovery. This pattern frames waywardness not as a terminal state but as the occasion for redemptive initiative. Narrative emphasis falls not on the fault or transgression of the sheep, but on the shepherd's deliberate action to search, find, and restore what has been lost. Within this symbolic framework, the lost sheep represents an individual who has forfeited existential orientation yet remains fully encompassed by divine compassion that precedes formal repentance.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the Qur'anic concept of *al-maghḍūb* or the Tanakhic notion of *qēshēh-ōref*, both of which foreground deliberate rejection and moral defiance, the metaphor of the lost sheep accentuates human fragility, ignorance, and vulnerability. Waywardness is thus construed as an inherent dimension of the

<sup>33</sup> See: Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Agustinus Faot, Jonathan Octavianus, and Connie Laurina, “Principles of Salvation Undertaken According to the Bible,” *Kerugma: Theological Journal* 4, no. 2 (2021): 29.

<sup>34</sup> See: Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1972); Oki Hermawati et al., “Teachers as Shepherds in Christian Schools,” 2022, 202.

human condition rather than solely as a willful act of rebellion against divine command. Within this interpretive horizon, the possibility of restoration remains ever-present, as the parable centers not on human responsibility alone but on divine initiative and care.

The anthropological dimension of this metaphor is further illuminated by historical studies of first-century Palestinian shepherding practices. MacMillan observes that sheep are naturally prone to disorientation, possess limited navigational capacity, and depend entirely on the shepherd's guidance for survival.<sup>35</sup> When applied to human existence, this imagery depicts individuals as lacking sufficient wisdom to orient themselves rightly, susceptible to error and moral failure, and often unaware of the deeper existential consequences of their actions.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, waywardness in the Gospel is intrinsically linked to the ontological dependence of humanity upon divine guidance.

Within the broader theological horizon of the Gospel, the parable of the Lost Sheep presents God as a compassionate shepherd who actively seeks and initiates the restoration of the lost. Waywardness is not portrayed as the primary ground for condemnation but as the condition that elicits salvific response. The God-human relationship is therefore characterized by mercy and grace that precede repentance, a theme central to the theological visions of both Luke and Matthew.<sup>37</sup>

When examined in conceptual dialogue with the Qur'ān and the Tanakh, the metaphor of the lost sheep reveals both structural parallels and significant theological divergences. All three traditions acknowledge humanity's propensity to deviate from divine intention and emphasize the necessity of guidance or restoration. Nevertheless, the Gospel places particular emphasis on God's proactive love toward the lost individual, whereas the Qur'ān and the Tanakh underscore moral accountability and the consequences of rejecting known truth.

At the configurational stage (mimesis II), the semantic relationships among these four constructions of human waywardness across the Abrahamic traditions are brought into comparative synthesis, as summarized in Table 1, with attention to their differing conceptions of misguidance, divine response, and ethical implication..

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas MacMillan, *The Shepherd's Life: A History of the British Sheepfold* (London: HarperCollins, 2020), 52–53.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel Sukanta Ginting, "Pemeliharaan Tuhan atas Umat-Nya melalui Relasi Gembala dan Domba Berdasarkan Mazmur 23:1–4," *Pistis: Jurnal Teologi Terapan* 23, no. 2 (2023): 147–59.

<sup>37</sup> See: Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

**Table 1**  
**Semantic Correspondences among the Key Terms**

Language	Term	Root	Literal Meaning	Theological Connotation
Arabic	<i>al-maghḍūb</i>	gh-ḍ-b (غ-ض-ب)	Those who incur wrath	Conscious rejection of known truth
Arabic	<i>al-ḍāllīn</i>	ḍ-l-l (ض-ل-ل)	Those who are astray	Loss of direction due to ignorance
Hebrew	<i>qesheh 'ōref</i>	q-š-h / ' -r-p (ק-ש-ח / ע-ר-פ)	“Stiff-necked”	Deliberate rebellion against truth
Greek	<i>apolōlos</i>	<i>apollymi</i> (ἀπόλλυμι)	The lost sheep	Estrangement from truth with the possibility of restoration

Source: Author's semantic analysis

Within the prefigurative horizon of the Gospel, therefore, the lost sheep functions not as a symbol of condemnation but as an anthropological metaphor for human loss that is always accompanied by the possibility of restoration. This reading aligns with contemporary cross-traditional hermeneutical approaches that reframe waywardness from a marker of group identity into a universal typology of the human condition. Through this lens, the Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the Tanakh—despite their divergent languages, symbols, and theological emphases—collectively articulate a shared anthropological insight: human beings are prone to straying, yet remain persistently addressed by a divine summons to return.

### **Toward a Conceptual Synthesis of Human Misguidance in the Abrahamic Traditions**

Paul Ricoeur conceptualizes the second stage of mimesis (mimesis II) as the configurative stage, involves the synthesis of previously discrete elements—such as words, symbols, metaphors, and theological horizons—into a coherent unity of meaning. At this level, the text is no longer approached as a collection of isolated units but is apprehended as a meaningful narrative shaped through the process of emplotment. This process entails the organization of events and symbols into intelligible patterns that allow human experience to be understood as an integrated

and structured whole.<sup>38</sup> Configuration thus functions as an interpretive space in which diverse horizons of meaning may interact and illuminate one another without being reduced to a single homogenizing framework.

In the present study, the configurative stage operates as a hermeneutical dialogue among four key expressions drawn from the three Abrahamic traditions: *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn* in the Qur'ān, *qēshēh-ōref* in the Tanakh, and *apolōlos* in the Gospel tradition. Although these expressions emerge from distinct linguistic, symbolic, and theological contexts, at the level of configuration they enter into dialogical interaction as narrative articulations of analogous human experiences. This interaction reveals that misguidance is not fundamentally rooted in sectarian or communal identity, but is instead anthropological and universal in scope.

From a semantic and ethical perspective, these four concepts may be situated along a continuous moral spectrum. In the Qur'ān, *al-maghḍūb* designates those who have recognized divine truth yet consciously reject it through arrogance and moral defiance, whereas *al-ḍāllīn* refers to those who are misguided due to ignorance and the absence of epistemic or spiritual orientation. Together, these terms represent two primary modalities of human error: deviation arising from willful rejection and deviation stemming from deficient knowledge. In the Tanakh, the designation *'am qēshēh-ōref* ("a stiff-necked people") signifies the obstinate resistance of Israel to the divine will despite covenantal proximity and adequate knowledge of the law. By contrast, in the Gospel, the parable of the Lost Sheep employs the term *apolōlos* to depict a condition of being lost not as the result of deliberate rebellion, but rather as a consequence of human fragility, vulnerability, and existential disorientation.

When these concepts are integrated within a unified narrative framework, it becomes apparent that variations in terminology and metaphor do not signal contradictory meanings, but rather reflect differing theological emphases applied to a shared human experience. The Qur'ān and the Tanakh place greater stress on moral responsibility and the ethical consequences of rejecting known truth, whereas the Gospel foregrounds divine compassion and initiative oriented toward restoration. Nevertheless, all three traditions converge upon a common anthropological insight: human beings are inherently prone to deviation and remain in need of divine guidance, correction, or restoration.

From Ricoeur's perspective, this act of configuration constitutes a hermeneutical achievement whereby heterogeneous elements are integrated into a new unity of meaning while preserving the internal distinctions of each tradition. The resulting unity does not amount to a theological synthesis that erases particularities; rather, it establishes a shared narrative structure that enables ethical

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<sup>38</sup> See: Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 53–56; Maria Teresa Russo, "Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Arc and the Narrative Turn in the Ethics of Care," *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2021): 448.



reflection across religious boundaries.<sup>39</sup> Through this process, *al-maghḍūb*, *al-ḍāllīn*, *qeshēh-ōref*, and *apolōlos* are no longer read merely as confessional or polemical categories, but as symbolic expressions of a universal ethical experience encompassing rebellion, alienation, and humanity's persistent search for divine truth.

**Table 2**  
**Comparative Overview of Human Misguidance in the Abrahamic Traditions**

Aspect	Islam	Judaism	Christianity
Primary Sources	The Qur'ān, Sūrat al-Fātiḥah (1:7)	The Tanakh, Exodus 32:9; Deuteronomy 9:6	The Gospel, Matthew 18:12–14; Luke 15:3–7
Core Meaning	Humans who incur divine displeasure ( <i>al-maghḍūb</i> ) or go astray ( <i>al-ḍāllīn</i> ) through rejection of or loss of guidance.	“Stiff-necked” people ( <i>qesheh-ōref</i> ) who obstinately resist God's will.	“The lost sheep,” symbolizing humans who have lost their life orientation.
Theological Emphasis	Two forms of deviation: conscious rejection of truth and misguidance due to ignorance.	Deliberate rebellion despite knowledge of divine truth and covenant.	Existential lostness rooted in vulnerability, with the possibility of restoration.
Ethical Focus	A warning against rejecting truth and falling into error through arrogance or ignorance.	A call to humility, obedience, and submission to divine authority.	An emphasis on repentance and divine compassion toward the lost.

Source: Author's analysis

Accordingly, the configurative stage demonstrates that the concept of misguidance within the three Abrahamic traditions functions not simply as a marker of religious identity or as an instrument of theological polemic, but as a profound reflection on the human condition in relation to truth. This synthesized narrative horizon provides the necessary bridge to the refigurative stage (*mimesis III*), in which the configured textual world encounters the reader's world and contemporary contexts, thereby enabling a renewed ethical reading that speaks to modern human experience and the demands of interfaith engagement.

<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 54.

### Refiguring Human Misguidance as a Universal Ethical Typology

Ricoeur's hermeneutical model identifies mimesis III as the stage in which the "world of the text," constituted through the prior stages of prefiguration and configuration, enters into dialogical engagement with the "world of the reader." At this level, meaning exceeds the boundaries of narrative structure or conceptual synthesis and is transformed into ethical reflection situated within contemporary human experience. Refiguration thus represents the process through which sacred texts are reread in light of present social and moral realities, while preserving their historical depth and theological integrity.<sup>40</sup>

Within this horizon, the notion of human error—as articulated through *al-maghḍūb*, *al-ḍāllīn*, the designation *qəshēh-ʿōref* ("stiff-necked"), and the metaphor of the lost sheep—can no longer be interpreted as an exclusive attribution to particular religious communities. Rather, these concepts emerge as typologies of human behavior that transcend religious affiliation, cultural context, and historical period. Individuals who consciously reject truth, obstinately resist moral guidance, or become disoriented through ignorance, negligence, or existential vulnerability may embody these patterns of deviation regardless of confessional identity. Accordingly, these terms function as universal anthropological symbols rather than sectarian labels.

This universalizing interpretation finds substantial support within contemporary currents of interfaith hermeneutics and theology. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, Shihab argues that *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍāllīn* should not be understood as fixed theological classifications but as enduring moral admonitions applicable to any individual who persists in deliberate rejection of truth or error arising from ignorance.<sup>41</sup> In Jewish biblical theology, Michael Fishbane interprets the designation *qəshēh-ʿōref* not merely as a historical critique of ancient Israel, but as an archetypal symbol expressing humanity's recurrent tendency toward spiritual pride and resistance to divine correction.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, within contemporary Christian theology, N. T. Wright reads the parable of the Lost Sheep as an articulation of the universal human condition—marked by vulnerability and dependence upon divine initiative—without confining its meaning to a narrowly defined Christian community.<sup>43</sup>

Viewed through the refigurative lens, these concepts of error acquire pronounced ethical relevance within contemporary social contexts. In line with

<sup>40</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008), 23.

<sup>41</sup> Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*, 1:57.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Jewish Biblical Interpretation: Medieval and Modern* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024).

<sup>43</sup> N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019).

Ricoeur's assertion that the meaning of a text is not static but continually unfolds through its encounter with lived human situations,<sup>44</sup> these figures may be reinterpreted as modern social metaphors. The figure of *al-maghḍūb* may be understood to represent individuals who recognize the value of truth and justice yet consciously manipulate these principles for personal advantage, ideological domination, or the pursuit of power. The *qēshēh- 'ōref* are embodied by individuals or groups who resist self-critique, reject moral accountability, and persist in error despite compelling evidence to the contrary. Meanwhile, *al-ḍallīn* and the lost sheep symbolize the predicament of contemporary subjects who are overwhelmed by informational excess, confronted with ethical relativism, and afflicted by a crisis of moral orientation due to insufficient grounding in knowledge, wisdom, and ethical discernment.

At this stage, refiguration affirms that the central ethical thrust of the three Abrahamic traditions is not the condemnation of "the other," but rather a reflective summons addressed to every individual to recognize the ever-present possibility of deviation within themselves. Error is not externalized as the fault of competing communities; instead, it is acknowledged as an inherent potential within human existence that may be overcome only through humility, openness to truth, and a willingness to be guided by transcendent moral values. In this way, Ricoeur's hermeneutics enables sacred texts to speak critically and transformatively to contemporary human life, while simultaneously providing a robust ethical foundation for constructive and dialogical interfaith engagement.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that human misguidance in the Qur'ān, the Tanakh, and the Gospel cannot be adequately understood as a marker of theological or sectarian identity. Rather, a comparative narrative-hermeneutical reading reveals a more consequential finding: across the three Abrahamic traditions, misguidance functions as a universal ethical typology that articulates recurring patterns of human deviation from divine truth. Through Paul Ricoeur's threefold schema of mimesis, the Qur'anic concepts of *al-maghḍūb* and *al-ḍallīn*, the Tanakhic metaphor of *qēshēh- 'ōref*, and the Gospel's parable of the Lost Sheep emerge as distinct yet structurally analogous symbols of conscious rebellion, moral obstinacy, and existential disorientation. This convergence becomes visible only through a cross-textual, narrative configuration and constitutes the study's principal original contribution.

While each tradition frames misguidance through metaphors rooted in its own linguistic and historical context, the configurative and refigurative analyses show that these differences do not produce incompatible moral visions. Instead, they delineate a shared ethical spectrum in which misguidance is internalized as a

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<sup>44</sup> Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, 23.

persistent human possibility rather than externalized onto religious others. In contemporary contexts, these symbols function as incisive ethical critiques of the manipulation of truth, resistance to moral accountability, and widespread disorientation under conditions of epistemic excess and value relativism.

Theoretically, this study advances comparative Qur'anic hermeneutics by repositioning Qur'anic exegesis within a non-hierarchical dialogue with Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions, without erasing their theological particularities. Practically, it offers an ethical-theological framework for interfaith engagement grounded in shared human vulnerability rather than polemical differentiation. The study is limited, however, by its focus on selected paradigmatic texts and metaphors; further research could expand this model to broader scriptural corpora and lived religious practices. Nonetheless, by reframing misguidance as a universal moral challenge, this article contributes a constructive paradigm for ethical reflection and interreligious dialogue in pluralistic societies.

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