

CHAPTER IV

DEPICTION OF CRITICISM IN SURAH MARYAM VERSE

41-48

In the previous two chapters, criticism has been discussed, including its introduction, how to convey it, how to respond to it, to the introduction of its similar terms in the Qur`ān, and a discussion of the content of Surah Maryam verses 41-48 which was studied using the *tahlīliyy* interpretation model, until the understanding about the content is achieved. As for this chapter, an analysis is carried out to find out the depiction of the practice of criticism contained in Surah Maryam verses 41-48 based on the interpretations that have been presented in the third chapter, as well as based on the theory of criticism presented in the second chapter. This analysis aims to find out several things regarding to criticism in the content of Surah Maryam verses 41-48, including: the figure who criticized; the figure who was the target of the criticism; the point that was criticized; the statement of the criticism; the basis of the criticism; as well as example of the commission of the criticism that was depicted in it.

A. Identification of Criticism in Surah Maryam Verse 41-48

1. The Critic

The critic in surah Maryam verses 41-48 is the prophet Abraham, who has been appointed as a prophet by Allah Swt., and was carrying out his prophetic duties.²¹⁰ In the history of Islam, he has a very special position, one

²¹⁰ Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, *Tafsir Al-Qur`ānul Majīd an-Nūr*, vol. 3, 2481.

of which is because it was from him that other noble prophets were born, starting with his two descendants, Ishmael and Isaac, both of whom were also prophets. From the descendants of the prophet Isaac then prophets were born such as the prophet Jacob, the prophet Joseph, the prophet Job, and other prophets from Bani Isra`il such as the prophet Moses, David, Solomon, Zachariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus Likewise, from the descendants of the prophet Ishmael, was born our noble prophet, prophet Muhammad PbuH.²¹¹ In addition, among the advantages of the prophet Abraham is his obedience in carrying out all the commands of Allah swt., as can be seen in the very famous event, where he was willing to sacrifice his son, the prophet Ishmael, in obedience to Allah Swt.²¹² His obedience has also has been discussed previously, as explained in the content of surah Maryam verse 41, regarding the praise of Allah Swt. to the obedience of the prophet Abraham in justifying everything that is taught by Allah Swt.²¹³ In addition, his other exemplary quality was his courage in taking risks in preaching, such as when he had to face his father and his people who insisted on worshiping idols, and preaching to the king Namrud which resulted in him being burned alive.²¹⁴

As for the conditions for someone who criticizes, the first is that he can make sure that what he criticizes is real.²¹⁵ As for what criticized here was the worship of idols by his father, and this was a fact as seen in the discussion of

²¹¹ Zaimudin, "Karakter Nabi Abraham Dalam Al-Qur`ān," *Al-Fanar: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur`ān dan Tafsir*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Juli 2018, 35-74.

²¹² Zaimudin, "Karakter Nabi Abraham Dalam Al-Qur`ān," 35-74.

²¹³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 7, 458.

²¹⁴ Zaimudin, "Karakter Nabi Abraham Dalam Al-Qur`ān," 35-74.

²¹⁵ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 5.

the previous chapter. While the next condition is that the critic knows how it should be, as a basis (norm) for judging the reality that he wants to criticize.²¹⁶ In this case the prophet Abraham said that he had received knowledge that his father did not get, as a guide in judging his father's actions. This is stated in the Q.S. Maryam/19:43:

يَأْتِيَنِي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا



“O my father! To me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee, so follow me, I will guide thee to a way that is even and straight.”²¹⁷

2. The Target and The Object of Criticism

The object of criticism in Surah Maryam verses 41-48 is the worship of idols, which is an act of shirk. This worship is carried out by humans, which means that it fulfills the requirements as part of the object of criticism, namely works or deeds made by humans.²¹⁸ The target in this case is Azar, who is believed by some theologian to be the biological father of the prophet Abraham. However, regarding the identity of Azar, whether the biological father of the prophet Abraham or is his uncle, is still debated. Some *mufasssir* in their interpretation describe the figure of Azar as Abraham's biological father, such as Buya Hamka and Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy. Likewise in the work of interpretation from the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of

²¹⁶ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 9-10.

²¹⁷ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, 752.

²¹⁸ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 6-7.

Indonesia.²¹⁹ Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab has a tendency to assume that Azar is not the biological father of the prophet Abraham. However, in his interpretation, he seems to try to be neutral in the midst of the two differences of opinion.²²⁰ He wrote that literally, the word *abīhi* means ‘father.’ However, in writing his interpretation, he stated he would translate it as ‘parents’, which is considered more neutral, not giving a stipulation as to whether what is meant is the biological father or someone else who was treated as a father.²²¹

Because this research will not focus on identity, but rather on attitudes and character, there is no discussion that reveals the identity of Azar. As for mentioning, in this study, the term ‘*father*’ is used without specifying whether it means the biological father or someone else who was treated as a father.

Back to the discussion about the target of criticism, the person who is criticized must be a person who has the power and freedom for himself, to do anything. That way, someone can be held responsible for everything he does.²²² As for Azar, as far as is known, he is not described as having a mental disorder or the like which can make him act out of control. Nor is he described as being forced to do everything he does. He is described as a human in general, who has a mind and acts with his own consciousness. Because of that Azar was also possible to be the target of criticism.

²¹⁹ Egi Sukma Baihaki, “Identitas Āzar Dalam Literatur Tafsir Nusantara,” *Al-Fanar: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur`ān dan Tafsir*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Juli 2018, 1-18.

²²⁰ Egi Sukma Baihaki, “Identitas Āzar Dalam Literatur Tafsir Nusantara,” 1-18.

²²¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 9 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 249.

²²² R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 15.

In addition, the target of criticism must have an attachment or responsibility to fulfill a norm, which is required in a criticism.²²³ What was criticized here was the act of worshiping idols which was shirk, which was required to leave it, and follow what was proper, namely worshiping Allah Swt. and unite Him. To find out whether Azar had an attachment or responsibility to follow these demands, it can be seen in the content of Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 21-22:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ
السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا
وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

“O men! serve your Lord Who created you and those before you so that you may guard (against evil). Who made the earth a resting place for you and the heaven a canopy and (Who) sends down rain from the cloud then brings forth with it subsistence for you of the fruits; therefore do not set up rivals to Allah while you know.”

In the verses above, it is stated the obligation to worship Allah Swt.

(رَبُّ). This obligation is addressed to all human beings, whether disbelievers,

hypocrites, even those who are already believers.²²⁴ From this it can be ascertained that Azar has an attachment or responsibility to follow what he should, namely worship Allah Swt. only. So Azar was classified as who met the criteria to be a target for criticism.

3. The Criticism (The Statement)

²²³ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 17-18.

²²⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 145.

Criticism is a judgement on the value of something that comes from humans, related to its conformity with certain norms, including actions, thoughts or works. R.C. Kwant in his book mentions a few examples of criticism, such as: a child who hangs out with other children, then the child gives criticism by saying: “that child is naughty.”²²⁵ While making friends, the child has experienced what it feels like to be friend with that another child, which then comes to his mind the conclusion about that child’s value, which is ‘naughty,’ and then that conclusion he expresses as a criticism. That’s an overview of how someone criticizes.

As explained in the first chapter, the word ‘criticism’ can refers to the meaning of criticism as a statement, also can refers to the meaning of criticism as an act of expressing/delivering criticism.²²⁶ The story of the prophet Abraham in surah Maryam verses 41-48 was a series of acts of delivering criticism, namely negative criticism (judging that something doesn’t fullfil certain norm). While the sentence (the statement) of the criticism is listed in Q.S. Maryam/19:42 and Q.S. Maryam/19:44:

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لَا يَسْمَعُ وَلَا يُبْصِرُ وَلَا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ شَيْئًا

﴿٤٤﴾

“Behold, he said to his father: “ O my father! Why worship that which heareth not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing.”²²⁷

يَا أَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ عَصِيًّا ﴿٤٤﴾

²²⁵ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 10.

²²⁶ Victoria Bull, ed. *Oxford Learner’s Pocket Dictionary*, 240.

²²⁷ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, 752.

*“O my father! Serve not satan, for satan is a rebel against (Allah) Most Gracious.”*²²⁸

In the previous discussion, the level of clarity of criticism is divided into two, namely pre-predicative criticism (criticism not by words) and predicative criticism (criticism by words). The criticisms listed in the two paragraphs above are clearly classified as predicative criticism.

It can be seen in the interpretation of the verses above which have been described in the previous chapter, where the prophet Abraham trying to convey to his father that worshiping idols is an unreasonable act, and is hated by Allah Swt.²²⁹ He also warned his father not to follow Satan (by continuing to worship idols). Indirectly, what he is trying to say is that ‘you are wrong/perverted (by worshiping idols and being a follower of the devil).’

Furthermore, as described in the discussion of the interpretation of surah Maryam verses 41-48 in the previous chapter, it can be seen that the motivation of the prophet Abraham in preaching to his father was to save his father from misguidance, namely worshiping idols.²³⁰ So it can be concluded that his criticism is classified as constructive criticism, namely criticism with the right aim, namely evaluation to trigger improvement and progress.

4. Basis of Criticism

Criticism must have a basis, which becomes the benchmark in a judgment. The benchmark in the context of criticism is *‘what supposed to*

²²⁸ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān* , 752.

²²⁹ See page 61-64, 65-67.

²³⁰ See page 67-78.

be, which Kwant calls by the term ‘norm.’²³¹ And as mentioned earlier, the basis of the prophet Abraham in criticizing is the knowledge that he got from Allah SWT, as he stated by saying: “*O my father! To me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee*”²³² This knowledge is part of ‘*ilm at-tawhīd*’ (monotheism), including principles that Allah Swt. is the real god, who created the universe, and there is no god but Him.²³³ ‘*Ilm at-tawhīd*’ teaches that only Allah is the one who has the right to accept the worship of creatures, and Allah is the only one who must be worshiped. Worshiping other than Him is an act of shirk which is very sinful and is hated by Allah.²³⁴ So what is conveyed in ‘*ilm at-tawhīd*’ is ‘*what supposed to be.*’ As for idol worship like Azar did, is an act that should not be. For this reason, the digression must be rectified (by criticism).

In addition, referring to the interpretation of Surah Maryam verses 41-48 described in the previous chapter, it will be found that the prophet Abraham also criticized idol worship based on logic, namely that worshiping idols which are inanimate objects that cannot provide the slightest benefit and harm, is illogical.²³⁵ So it can be concluded that his understanding of correct logic was also his basis in criticizing in surah Maryam verses 41-48, whether it came from Allah together with the ‘knowledge’ referred before, or it was his own intelligence.

²³¹ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 11.

²³² See page 64-65.

²³³ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, vol. 16, 41.

²³⁴ Saidul Amin, “Eksistensi Kajian Tauhid Dalam Keilmuan Ushuluddin,” *Majalah Ilmu Pengetahuan dan Pemikiran Keagamaan Tajdid*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Juni 2019, 71-83.

²³⁵ See page 63-64.

Furthermore, it is necessary to remember again that the requirement for a norm to be used as a basis for criticism is that it is binding on the target of criticism.²³⁶ The ‘knowledge’ obtained by the prophet Abraham (that is, with regard to the obligation to acknowledge the oneness of Allah Swt. and the obligation to worship only Him²³⁷) does not only apply to certain groups, but applies to all mankind. Likewise, in doing various things in life, ideally humans can use their minds in the best possible way. This is because the mind is what makes humans noble and different from other living beings. If the mind is removed from humans, it is as if humans have turned into other creatures, or at worst, equated with animals.²³⁸

B. Example in Committing Criticism in Surah Maryam Verse 41 -48

1. Criticizing With Right Intention

Criticism is a source of Improvement. Improvement is a current condition that is better than the previous condition. The improvement is achieved when humans correct mistakes. In the process of these improvements, criticism appears and plays a role, as an judgement and consideration of what is good and what is not good and needs to be improved.²³⁹ So the essence of criticism is improvement. When found things that are not good, will be followed up by replacing them with better ones.

²³⁶ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 11.

²³⁷ See page 64-65.

²³⁸ Arifin Zein, “Tafsir Al-Qur`ān Tentang Akal (Sebuah Tinjauan Tematis),” *Jurnal At-Tibyan*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Desember 2017, 233-245.

²³⁹ R.C. Kwant, *Manusia dan Kritik*, 37-38.

In Islam it is also taught to ensure that all actions are based on straight intentions and goals. Someone will get the results of an action according to his intentions. If someone criticizes with the aim of correcting, then improvements will be achieved. If someone criticizes with the aim of demeaning others or other wrong purposes, then there is no benefit to be gained, but only bad things. This is in accordance with what is contained in a hadith, namely:

إنما الأعمال بالنيات وإنما لكل امرئ ما نوى فمن كانت هجرته إلى
دنيا يصيبها أو إلى امرأة ينكحها فهجرته إلى ما جاهر إليه (رواه
بخاري)²⁴⁰

“All actions depend on the intention, and (retribution) for each person (depends on) what is intended; Whoever intends to do hijrah because of the worldly things he wants to achieve, or because of a woman he wants to marry, then his hijrah is for what he intended.” (Narrated by Bukhari)

In Surah Maryam verses 41-47 it is described that Azar was in digression by worshiping idols. It is *shirk*, and is classified as a great sin, and gets the threat of hell by Allah Swt. This is a bad condition, which must be corrected and replaced with a better one, namely acknowledging the oneness of Allah, worshiping only Him, and safely entering heaven. This is what the prophet Abraham was trying to do throughout the story, namely releasing his father from this bad condition (*shirk*), to be brought to the right path, namely to unite Allah Swt. (*tawhīd*).

Said the prophet Abraham on Q.S. Maryam/19:45:

²⁴⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Vol. 1, (Beirut: Dār Ibn Katsīr, 2022), 7.

يَأْتِيَنِي إِني أَخَافُ أَنْ يَمَسَّكَ عَذَابٌ مِّنَ الرَّحْمَنِ فَتَكُونَ لِلشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيًّا



*“O my father! I fear lest a penalty afflict thee from (Allah) Most Gracious, so that thou become to satan a friend.”*²⁴¹

In the interpretation of this verse, it is found that the word *akhāfu*

(أَخَافُ) which means ‘I am afraid’ here shows the compassion of the prophet

Abraham and his concern for his father, hoping that his father would not be tormented. It means the prophet Abraham came and asked his father to stop committing shirk, (in addition to carrying out prophetic duties) because of his love for his father, and he was worried that his father was among those who were hated and punished by Allah Swt. This shows that the prophet Abraham had straight intentions and goals. And this is a manifestation of the true purpose of criticism, namely for improvement. Furthermore, his criticism in this verse is also classified as constructive criticism.

Meanwhile, in daily life it is still very often found the practice of criticism with the wrong purpose. Among the wrong aims of criticism that often occurs, is the desire to prove self superiority, to try to show that one is better than others. One then criticizes others to show that he has more advantages over the person being criticized.²⁴² There is also criticism based on hatred of certain people or groups, where one criticizes other people

²⁴¹ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān* , 752.

²⁴² Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 5.

because he doesn't like them, then through that criticism he tries to bring down prestige, humiliate, or vilify the target being criticized.²⁴³

There is even worse, namely criticism by certain people, who are paid and assigned to vilify certain targets. These people are known as *Buzzers*. Their purposes vary, but the most commonly known is for political purposes, where they are paid to harshly criticize, vilify, humiliate, and continue to highlight the shortcomings of certain people or groups in the political realm. This is common in politics, especially at election times, where their job is to undermine the prestige and electability of certain people or groups who are considered 'enemies.'²⁴⁴

As for the story of the prophet Abraham in surah Maryam verses 41-48 it can be seen clearly that he did not have any bad or wrong intentions and goals, other than just wanting to save his father from the wrath of Allah Swt.

2. Delivering Criticism With Politeness/Gentleness

As explained in the second chapter, it is known that criticism will be considered negative from the first place, by people in general.²⁴⁵ People who create works expect appreciation. Then people will feel annoyed and unhappy if what they get is just the opposite, namely negative comments that highlight their shortcomings.²⁴⁶ For this reason, it is very important for critics to convey their criticisms in a good way, so that people will listen, and the

²⁴³ Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 8.

²⁴⁴ Shiddiq Sugiono, "Fenomena Industri Buzzer di Indonesia: Sebuah Kajian Ekonomi Politik," *Communicatus: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Februari 2020, 47-66.

²⁴⁵ R. Garner, "The Impact And Implication Of Interpersonal Criticism For Police Executives," *Applied Psychology In Criminal Justice*, Vol.6, Numb. 2, 2010, 104-113.

²⁴⁶ Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 4.

purpose of criticism is achieved. As Wajnryb stated in his writing, that a good criticism must have arranged words that made sure not to sound negative, reduce the severity of criticism, use affirmative language, use negotiating language so as not to seem like imposing the criticism, and make it sounds like sharing experiences.²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, according to Listiani Aslim, conveying criticism should use good words, intonation, and demeanor and as much as possible avoid offensive expressions.²⁴⁸

As for surah Maryam verses 41-48, the prophet Abraham is also described showing good delivery, including good manners and gentle words. The main indication is in *lafz* “*abati*” (أَبْتِ), which is taken from the word ‘*ab*’ (أَب) that means ‘father,’ that is strung together with the letter ‘*tā*’, which is used repeatedly in these verses of Surah Maryam 41-48. That phrase is a gentle call by the prophet Abraham to his father, which calls like that show a polite attitude, or seem to plead for understanding.²⁴⁹ Quraish Shihab, Sayyid Quṭb, Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, and 'Alī aṣ-Ṣābūnī together agreed on this, that the act of the prophet Abraham in these verses show good etiquette and manners in da'wah, and in attitude towards parents.²⁵⁰ Likewise in the

²⁴⁷ R. Wajnryb, “Strategies For The Management And Delivery Of Criticism,” *EA Journal*, Vol. 11, Numb. 2, 74-84.

²⁴⁸ Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 23.

²⁴⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 7, 460.

²⁵⁰ See page 62.

interpretation of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, it is called “a gentle word that can be accepted by the mind.”²⁵¹

In other verses in the Qur`ān, it has also been taught to always reprimand, advise, or argue in the best possible way, so that what is conveyed can be accepted by the person who receives it more easily and gracefully. These lessons can be found among them in Q.S. Tāhā/20:43-44 which contains the story of the prophet Moses and the prophet Aaron whom commanded by Allah Swt. to preach to Pharaoh with gentle words. The verses in question read:

أَذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ ﴿٤٣﴾ فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ ﴿٤٤﴾

“Go, both of you, to Pharaoh. For he has indeed transgressed all bound. But speak to him mildly. Perchance he may take warning of fear (Allah)”²⁵²

And as stated in Q.S. an-Naḥl/16: 125:

... وَجَدِلْهُمْ بَالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ... ﴿١٢٥﴾

“...And argue with them in ways that are best...”²⁵³

From the verses above, it can be seen that the Qur`ān does have a concern for good delivery methods in advice, debate, and so on.

Ironically, the delivery of criticism in the bad way is still far more often practiced than the delivery of criticism in the good way.²⁵⁴ Whereas, the

²⁵¹ Departemen Agama RI, *Al-Qur`ān dan Tafsirnya*, Vol. 6, 63.

²⁵² ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān*, 772.

²⁵³ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān*, 669.

delivery of criticism in an arrogant way, with angry manner, with tendency of patronizing, in judgmental way, with surpression, or by condescending can lead to dislike or rejection of criticism, because it will firstly provoke anger or hurt.²⁵⁵ As a result, the good purpose of the criticism is not achieved because the target of the criticism is already offended, hurt, and doesn't want to hear the positive side of the criticism delivered.

3. Criticizing Based on Knowledge

In Q.S. Al-Hajj/22: 3 Allah Swt. said:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّبِعُ كُلَّ شَيْطَانٍ مَّرِيدٍ ﴿٣﴾

“And among men there is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge and follows every rebellious Shaitan.”

The content of this verse is about people who talk or argue about something, but are not equipped with knowledge or understanding of what is being discussed. In fact, mastery of a theory or certain knowledge is very important in arguing. People who have an opinion but cannot provide an argument based on knowledge, then their opinion will be weak and cannot be accepted.²⁵⁶ So a person without adequate knowledge should step back and not insist on joining to argue.²⁵⁷ In addition, it has also been explained that a

²⁵⁴ Karen Tracy, et al, “Bad And Good Criticism: A Descriptive Analysis,” *Journal Of Communication*, Vol. 37, Numb. 2, 1987, 46-59.

²⁵⁵ Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 148.

²⁵⁶ Eko Zulfikar, “Etika Diskusi Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur`ān,” *Jurnal Studi-Studi Ilmu Al-Qur`ān dan Hadis*, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 2019, 14.

²⁵⁷ Fajr Allāh ‘Abd al-Bārī, *Manāḥij al-Baḥts wa al-Adāb al-Hiwār wa al-Munāzarh*, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-‘Arabiyah, 2004), 113.

critic must have an idea of what should be, regarding to what he criticizes.²⁵⁸ Criticism delivered without a solid foundation will be in vain. People do not want to hear any input from others who do not understand the problems at hand.

As for the prophet Abraham shown to have had provisions in criticizing his father. This is evident in the interpretation of Q.S. Maryam/19:43, that he has been bestowed knowledge by Allah Swt., as he stated by saying: “*O my father! To me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee*”²⁵⁹ This knowledge is part of *‘ilm at-tawhīd* (monotheism), which includes knowledge of Islamic theology principles, namely that Allah Swt. is the true god, who created the universe, and that there is no god but Him.²⁶⁰

This verse teaches to follow or obey those who know better (has more knowledge). Even if someone is of high dignity or position, or is old in age, he still has to listen to or obey someone who is more knowledgeable, even if the person with knowledge is of a lower dignity or younger in age.²⁶¹ Moreover, in this case he had been appointed a prophet, which means that he had the authority to argue especially about religion and theology. So he can be categorized as a professional in his field. With orders from Allah Swt. and the gift of knowledge from Him, he came to his father to convey his criticism.

Adequate knowledge in criticizing needs to be considered by anyone who wants to criticize. He must make sure seriously that he is worthy of

²⁵⁸ See page 29-30.

²⁵⁹ See page 54-65.

²⁶⁰ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, vol. 16, 41.

²⁶¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 7, 462.

judging others. It may be that a person is too confident in criticizing and cursing others while he does not understand more than the person being criticized, or it may be that the criticized is much smarter. This could be due to a critic's tendency to feel better, higher, or smarter than the person being criticized.²⁶² This often occurs such as in public criticism of the president or state official, or by a student who abuses a preacher who is considered wrong. Whereas, actually the problem could be the people who are still too innocent to understand government's problems, and maybe the students have very little knowledge, so they cannot understand what the preacher whom they criticize understands.

4. Explaining What Went Wrong

Karen in her research to identify "good" and "bad" criticism, found that people do not like to be criticized only by being blamed, being called stupid, being called incompetent, and other judgmental expressions. He gave an example of a case that happened to a driver who was just learning, where he was criticized by being called stupid, without being explained how it should be, or where the error was that needed to be corrected. Such criticism only irritates the driver. A good criticism should explain where it went wrong, and how to fix it.²⁶³

As for the prophet Abraham in surah Maryam verses 41-48 had provided a good example, where he is described as trying to make his father

²⁶² Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 5.

²⁶³ Karen Tracy, et al, "Bad And Good Criticism: A Descriptive Analysis," 46-59.

understand, about where the fault lies in worshipping idols.²⁶⁴ In verse 42 he said: “O my father! Why worship that which heareth not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing?” He invited his father to think logically, that even humans who have various abilities, are still not worthy to be made gods by other humans. So it is very unreasonable to worship idols, a stone that is far lower in dignity than humans, who cannot hear and see, nor does it bring harm or benefit. The Prophet Abraham invited his father to reflect on this. This is an example of good criticism as Karen meant above. So someone who criticizes must avoid criticizing without clarity and good intentions to give input. Not explaining the mistakes that need to be corrected will be far from the essence of criticism, namely improvements and triggers for progress.

Regarding to the mention of the shortcomings of idols made by the prophet Abraham As. here, it seems as if he is insulting the gods of his people (idols), which is forbidden by Allah SWT. as stated in Q.S. al-An’ām/6: 108, namely:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ
كَذَلِكَ زَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا كَانُوا
يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

“Reville not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance.”²⁶⁵

However, it should be emphasized that what Abraham did. different from the action that is prohibited in surah al-An’ām verse 108 above. The

²⁶⁴ See page 63-64.

²⁶⁵ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, 325.

word *tasubbu* (تَسُبُّ) in the verse above is rooted in the verb *sabba-yasubbu* which means “to cursing” and “to disgrace.”²⁶⁶ Meanwhile, what Abraham As. did in surah Maryam verse 48 was not cursing or disgracing, but was criticizing by highlighting the shortcomings of idols so that they are not worthy of worship.

This is in line with Quraish Shihab in explaining the content of this surah al-An’ām verse 108. He explained that the word “*tasubbu*” in this verse means “*speech that contains the meaning of contempt for something, or the designation of a deficiency or disgrace towards it, whether it is true, especially if it is not true.*” As for reproaching opinions or actions, judging a religion as deviant, mentioning the weaknesses of a particular religious teaching are not included in the meaning of this word (*tasubbu*), especially if it is conveyed within the internal group or delivered politely and not offensive.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, what Abraham As. did in Surah Maryam verse 48 was not an act of insulting his father’s gods, but criticizing by explaining his shortcomings, namely not seeing, not hearing, and not being able to benefit or harm.

5. Criticizing With Modesty

Listiani in his book explains that there is a tendency in critics to feel better, smarter, more experienced than the person being criticized, so they

²⁶⁶ Imamuddin bin Syamsuri dan M. Zainal Arifin, *Jangan Nodai Agama*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2015), 4.

²⁶⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Vol. 4, 243.

feel entitled to judge the criticized person. In fact, it is not uncommon for people to criticize indeed to prove themselves, only so that people see themselves as better, more powerful than those criticized, so that the criticized person looks bad or stupid when compared to him. Goals like this can also affect attitudes, body language, and the use of words in criticizing, which seem self-aggrandizing.²⁶⁸ This is the character of *riyā`* and *‘ujub*, which is not liked by Allah Swt., also disliked by humans. Al-Imām al-Ghazālī willed to eliminate these traits, because these traits can trigger other despicable traits.²⁶⁹

As for the story of the prophet Abraham, as mentioned in the interpretation of surah Maryam verses 41-48 by Quraish Shihab and Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, during his efforts to preach to his father, he is described as being gentle and humble. This is shown in Q.S. Maryam/19:43 on the following expression:

... قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ ...

“...truly the knowledge has come to me which has not come to you...”²⁷⁰

According to Quraish Shihab, here used the phrase “مِنَ الْعِلْمِ” (*some of knowledge*) to give the impression that he had only little knowledge, so he had nothing to boast about. He only said that he was given knowledge, which that knowledge was not brought to his father. Something that is a gift cannot

²⁶⁸ Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 5.

²⁶⁹ Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Bidāyat al-Ḥidāyah*, (Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1998), 125.

²⁷⁰ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān*, 752.

be used to boast of one's greatness. Thus he was humble, did not claim to be clever and did not judge his father was stupid.²⁷¹

In the Qur`ān itself has been given a warning to all creatures not to act arrogantly, because pride (arrogance) is one of the most hated traits by Allah Swt. Allah Swt said in Q.S. Luqmān/31:18 follows:

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴿١٨﴾

*“And swell not to thy cheek (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth. For Allah loveth not any arrogant boaster.”*²⁷²

The Qur`ān also reminds us not to be proud of the knowledge we have, because the knowledge that exists in humans is only a gift from Allah, and Allah is the all-knowing, whose knowledge far exceeds humans. Allah Swt. said in Q.S. at-Ṭalāq/65: 12:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا ﴿١٢﴾

*“Allah is He who created seven firmaments, and of the earth a similar number. Through the midst of them (all) descends His command: that ye may know that Allah has power over all things, and that Allah comprehends all things in (Hi)s knowledge.”*²⁷³

6. Criticizing With Patience

²⁷¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 7, 468.

²⁷² ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān*, 1038.

²⁷³ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān*, 1488.

Karen in her research to identify good and bad criticism, found that no matter how well the delivery of criticism has been practiced, there is no guarantee that the target of criticism will give a good response as well.²⁷⁴ According to Listiani, humans have different backgrounds, both in terms of culture, language, experience, knowledge, intelligence, personality, and so on. This affects the way a person accepts and responds to criticism. So, it is not uncommon for criticism that has been conveyed in a good way but still gets a bad response.²⁷⁵

This is what happened to the prophet Abraham, who still received a harsh response from his father even though he had criticized him in a polite and gentle way. His father even threatened to kill him. But he remained patient and replied with a wise and ethical answer to the harsh words from his father in the previous verse. The father's harsh words is not repaid with similar harshment by the prophet Abraham, but instead by praying for goodness for him. Prophet Abraham replied with the words '*Salāmun 'alaika*' which means "may peace be upon you." In addition, he also prayed for his father by saying "*I will ask forgiveness for you or ask for guidance for you to my Lord.*"²⁷⁶ He replied gently because after all, he is still the son of his father and must still behave.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Karen Tracy, et al, "Bad And Good Criticism: A Descriptive Analysis," 46-59.

²⁷⁵ Listiani Aslim, *Saya Benci Kritik*, 26-27.

²⁷⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 7, 466.

²⁷⁷ Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, *Tafsir Al-Qur`ānul Majīd an-Nūr*, vol. 3, 2483.

So, as explained above, the critic must understand that criticism in a good way must still be sought, and at the same time must also be prepared to accept an inappropriate response.

About being patient with the response of people who are advised (criticised) this has also been taught by Allah Swt, where humans are encouraged to realize that guidance (*hidāyah*) does not come from humans, but from Allah and only He has the right to determine who He wants to give *hidāyah* to. This can be seen in QS. al-Qaṣaṣ/28:56 follows:

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ
بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

*“It is true thou wilt not be able to guide everyone whom thou lovest, but Allah guides those whom He will, and He knows best those who receive guidance.”*²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur`ān*, 976.