

## Abraham

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Prophet Abraham, known as Ibraaheem in Arabic, was born around 2,000 years before Jesus close to Ur, 200 miles from Baghdad. The young Ibraaheem questioned the religion surrounding him.

Like those around him, his father Azar was an idol worshipper, possibly even a sculptor of them; hence Abraham's first call was directed to him. Born with a child's uncorrupted belief that the world has a Lord, Ibraaheem was instinctively aware of the truth about Him.

**["And mention in the Book (the Qur'aan) Abraham, indeed he was a man of truth, a Prophet."]**

Ibraaheem began questioning his father's idol-worship,

**["When he said to his father: O my father! Why do you worship that which neither hears, not nor sees, nor can avail you in anything? O my father! Lo! There has come to me of knowledge that which came not to you. So follow me, and I will lead you on a right path. O my father! Worship not Satan. Lo! Satan is a rebel to the Beneficent. O my father! Lo! I fear lest a punishment from the Beneficent should overtake you so that you become a comrade of Satan."]<sup>1</sup>**

**["Do you take idols as gods?"]<sup>2</sup>**

The reply from his father was natural rejection of a challenge by another not only much younger than him, but also his offspring, a challenge made against years of tradition and norm.

**[He (the father) said: "Do you reject my gods, O Abraham? If you do not stop, I will indeed stone you. So get away from me safely before I punish you."]<sup>3</sup>**

Ibraaheem stayed firm in his stance on misdirected worship of his father and those that surrounded him. In his rejection of idolatry Ibraaheem began his spiritual journey to the Lord of the Worlds. Contemplating on the universe shifted his attention from the creation to

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'aan [19:42-45]

<sup>2</sup> Qur'aan [6:74]

<sup>3</sup> Qur'aan [19:46]

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the Creator, and with it came the opportunity to further his call that the only deity which deserved worship was God, Almighty. The Qur'aan tells us:

**["When the night grew dark upon him, he beheld a star, and said, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said: 'I love not things that set.'"]<sup>4</sup>**

Ibraaheem had presented the example of the stars to them, so incomprehensible to them as to be seen as something greater than man with attributes of various powers he has not. But in the setting of the stars Ibraaheem saw their inability to appear as they desired, but rather only at night.

Another example of something even greater is a heavenly body more beautiful, and larger, visible in daytime as well! However, the horizon cut off its majesty:

**["And when he saw the moon rising up, he exclaimed: 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said: 'Unless my Lord guides me, I surely shall become one of the folk who are astray.'"]<sup>5</sup>**

Then as his culminating example, he brought forth to contemplate something even bigger, one of the most powerful objects of creation, without which life itself was an impossibility.

**["And when he saw the sun rising, he cried: "This is my Lord! This is greater!" But when the sun set, he said, "O my people! Surely I am free from that which you associate with God. Verily, I have turned my face towards Him Who has created the heavens and the earth, away from idolatry, and I am not of those who associate others with God.""]<sup>6</sup>**

Thus Ibraaheem proved to his satisfaction and the consternation of his peers that the Lord of the worlds was not to be found in the creations that their idols represented, but was, rather, the entity who created them and everything which they could see and perceive; that the Lord does not necessarily need to be seen in order to be worshipped. He is an All-Able Lord, not bound by limitations as the creations found in this world are.

**["And We verily gave Ibraaheem of old his proper course."]<sup>7</sup>**

However, despite these proofs his people still argued with him.<sup>8</sup> They said:

**["Nay, but we found our wise fathers acting in this way."]<sup>9</sup>**

He denied that one's ancestors are necessarily right, or that we should slavishly follow their customs, by saying:

**"Verily you and your fathers were in plain error."**

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<sup>4</sup> Qur'aan [6:76]

<sup>5</sup> Qur'aan [6:77]

<sup>6</sup> Qur'aan [6:78]

<sup>7</sup> Qur'aan [21:51]

<sup>8</sup> Qur'aan [6:80]

<sup>9</sup> Qur'aan [26:74]

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His message was simple:

**["Worship God, and keep your duty to Him; that is better for you if you did but know. You worship instead of God only idols, and you only invent a lie. Lo! Those whom you worship instead of God own no provision for you. So seek your provision from God, and worship Him, and give thanks to Him, (for) to Him you will be brought back."]<sup>10</sup>**

Then the time came when preaching had to be accompanied with physical action. Ibraaheem planned a bold and decisive blow at idolatry, a plan which had hinted involved their idols,

**["And, by God, I shall circumvent your idols after you have gone away and turned your backs."]<sup>11</sup>**

It was time for a religious festival, for which they would leave town, and Ibraaheem was invited to attend. So, when he glanced up at the stars and excused himself, saying;

**["Lo! I feel sick!"]<sup>12</sup>**

his peers left without him. As the temple was deserted, this became his opportunity. He made his way there, approaching the gold-plated idols, which had elaborate meals the priests had left in front of them. Mocking them in disbelief:

**["He turned to their gods and said: 'Will you not eat? What ails you that you speak not?"]<sup>13</sup>**

After all what could delude man to worship gods of his own carving?

**["Then he attacked them, striking with his right hand."]<sup>14</sup>**

The Qur'aan tells us,

**["He reduced them to fragments, all except the chief of them."]<sup>15</sup>**

When the temple priests returned, they were shocked to see the sacrilege, the destruction of the temple. They were wondering who could have done this to their idols when someone mentioned the name of Ibraaheem, explaining that he used to speak ill of them. When they called him to their presence, it was for Ibraaheem to show them their foolishness:

**["He said: Worship you that which you yourselves do carve when God has created you and what you make?"]<sup>16</sup>**

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<sup>10</sup> Qur'aan [29:16-19]

<sup>11</sup> Qur'aan [21:57]

<sup>12</sup> Qur'aan [37:89]

<sup>13</sup> Qur'aan [37:91-2]

<sup>14</sup> Qur'aan [37:93]

<sup>15</sup> Qur'aan [21:58]

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Their anger was mounting; in no mood for being preached to, they got straight to the point:

**["Is it you who has done this to our gods, O Ibraaheem?"]<sup>17</sup>**

But Ibraaheem had left the largest idol untouched for a reason:

**["He said: 'But this, their chief has done it. So question them, if they can speak!'"<sup>18</sup>**

When Ibraaheem so challenged them, they were cast into confusion. They blamed each other for not guarding the idols and, refusing to meet his eyes, said:

**["Indeed you know well these speak not!"]<sup>19</sup>**

So Ibraaheem pressed his case.

**["He said: 'Worship you then instead of God that which cannot profit you at all, nor harm you? Fie on you and all that you worship instead of God! Have you then no sense?'"<sup>20</sup>**

The accusers had become the accused. They were accused of logical inconsistency, and so had no answer for Ibraaheem. Because Ibraaheem's reasoning was unanswerable, their response was rage and fury, and they condemned Ibraaheem to be burned alive,

**["Build for him a building and fling him in the red hot fire."]<sup>21</sup>**

The townspeople all helped in gathering wood for the fire, until it was the largest fire they had ever seen. The young Ibraaheem submitted to the fate chosen for him by the Lord of the Worlds. He did not lose faith, rather the trial made him stronger. Ibraaheem did not flinch in the face of a fiery death even at this tender age; rather his last words before entering it were,

**"God is sufficient for me and He is the best disposer of affairs."<sup>22</sup>**

Here again is an example of Ibraaheem proving true to the trials he faced. His belief in the True God was tested here, and he proved that he was even prepared to surrender his existence to the call of God. His belief was evidenced by his action.

God had not willed that this be the fate of Ibraaheem, for he had a great mission ahead of him. Thus He saved Ibraaheem as a sign for him and his people as well...

**["We said: 'O fire, be coolness and peace for Ibraaheem. And they wished to set a snare for him, but We made them the greater losers."]**

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<sup>16</sup> Qur'aan [37:95]

<sup>17</sup> Qur'aan [21:62]

<sup>18</sup> Qur'aan [21:63]

<sup>19</sup> Qur'aan [21:65]

<sup>20</sup> Qur'aan [21:67]

<sup>21</sup> Qur'aan [37:97]

<sup>22</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree

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Ibraaheem escaped the fire unharmed.

After years of persecution, Ibraaheem and his family likely migrated to Harran in south-eastern Turkey to continue preaching the truth. While in Harran, Ibraaheem continued to preach to his father, but his father was equally persistent in his rejection. Finally, he said,

**“If you cease not, I shall surely stone you. Depart from me a long while!”**

Banished by his father, Ibraaheem parted with kind words,

**“Peace be to you! I shall ask forgiveness of my Lord for you. Lo! He is ever gracious to me. I shall withdraw from you and that to which you pray beside God, and I shall pray to my Lord. It may be that, in prayer to my Lord, I shall not be unblessed.”**

After years of unsuccessful preaching and anguish at the probable fate of his father in the Hereafter, tender-hearted Ibraaheem kept his promise to pray for his father. It was a promise Allaah rejected in the end<sup>23</sup>. When Ibraaheem left behind Harran and the idolaters, he provided an example for us. Allaah recommends part and warns against part of what he announced:

**[“Indeed there is for you a good example in Ibraaheem and those with him, when they said to their people: ‘We are clear of you and of that which you serve besides Allaah. We disbelieve in you and there has arisen enmity and hatred between us and you forever until you believe in Allaah alone’ - except for the saying of Ibraaheem to his father, ‘I will surely ask forgiveness for you, but I have not (power to do) for you anything against Allaah.’”]**<sup>24</sup>

Ibraaheem migrated to Egypt, where he met the Pharaoh. Sarah, a beautiful and charming woman, attracted the attention of the Pharaoh. When asked about his relationship with Sarah, Ibraaheem replied that she was his sister - he meant his sister in faith. Through her, a statement was about to be made to the Egyptians to submit to Allaah. Thinking she was available for his use, the Pharaoh quickly summoned Sarah who, on Ibraaheem’s instructions, kept quiet about her relationship with him. Sarah, however, was a chaste woman, and she turned to Allaah in prayer. The moment Pharaoh reached for Sarah, his upper body paralyzed. He cried to Sarah in distress, promising to release her if she would release him! She, however, simply prayed to Allaah for his release, to demonstrate that only

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<sup>23</sup> It is not (proper) for the Prophet and those who believe to ask Allaah’s Forgiveness for the Mushrikoon (polytheists, idolaters, pagans, disbelievers In the Oneness of Allaah) even though they be of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are the dwellers of the Fire (because they died In a state of disbelief). And [Ibraaheem's (Abraham)] invoking (of Allaah) for his father's forgiveness was only because of a promise he [Ibraaheem (Abraham)] had made to him (his father). But when it became clear to him [Ibraaheem (Abraham)] that he (his father) is an enemy to Allaah, he dissociated himself from him. Verily Ibraaheem (Abraham) was Al-Awwah (has fifteen different meanings but the correct one seems to be that He used to invoke Allaah with humility, glorify Him and remember Him much), and was forbearing. (Tafseer al-Qurtubee). Qur’aan [9:113-114]

<sup>24</sup> Qur’aan [60:4]

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He has the power, if He wills, to protect her. Only after a failed third attempt did he finally let her go. Sarah returned to Ibraaheem, accompanied by Hagar, a gift from Pharaoh to propitiate one so protected by Allaah. She had delivered a powerful message to the pagan Egyptians, yet still the Pharaoh misdirected his propitiation, which should have been directed towards Allaah.

Loaded with gifts, Ibraaheem returned to Palestine. Yet Sarah and Ibraaheem continued to be childless, despite divine promises that he will have many descendants. Driven by altruism, Sarah suggested that Ibraaheem take Hagar, her handmaiden, as a second wife to bear him a child on her behalf. While in Palestine, Ibraaheem married Hagar who bore him a son, Ishmael.

While Ishmael was still nursing, Ibraaheem was commanded by Allaah to take Hagar and Ishmael to a barren valley of Bakka 700 miles southeast of Hebron. In later times it would be called Makkah. Ibraaheem left them there with a skin of water and a leather bag full of dates. As Ibraaheem began walking away leaving them behind, Hagar became anxious about what was happening. Ibraaheem did not look back. Hagar chased him, 'O Ibraaheem, where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we can enjoy, nor is there anything here?' Ibraaheem hurried his pace. Finally, Hagar asked, 'Has Allaah asked you to do so?' Suddenly, Ibraaheem stopped, turned back and said, 'Yes!' Feeling a degree of comfort in this answer, Hagar asked, 'O Ibraaheem, to whom are you leaving us?' 'I am leaving you to Allaah's care,' Ibraaheem replied. Hagar submitted to her Lord, 'I am satisfied to be with Allaah!'<sup>25</sup> She traced her way back to little Ishmael. Ibraaheem left with prayers for his wife and child, which he prayed when he was out of sight.

Soon, the water and dates were gone and Hagar's desperation increased. Unable to quench her thirst or to breastfeed her little baby, Hagar began searching for water. She began climbing the rocky incline of a nearby hill. 'Maybe there is a caravan passing by,' she thought to herself. She ran between the two hills of Safa and Marwa seven times looking for signs of water, and then she heard a voice. Looking down in the valley, she saw someone standing next to Ishmael. It was the angel Gabriel, who hit the ground next to the baby with his heel as she came rushing down the hill, and water came gushing out. It was a miracle! Hagar tried to make a basin around it to keep it from flowing out and filled her skin. 'Do not be afraid of being neglected,' the angel said, 'for this is the House of Allaah which will be built by this boy and his father, and Allaah never neglects his people.'<sup>26</sup> It was not long afterwards that the tribe of Jurham, migrating in its usual pattern from southern Arabia, stopped as they passed the valley of Makkah. They were unaccustomed to seeing birds flying in its direction, as it was known to be dry and lifeless, so they went to see where it was going.

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<sup>25</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree

<sup>26</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree

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When they saw the abundant water, they asked the mother and child if they would share it with them. Eventually, they settled in Makkah and Ishmael grew up among them.

During a reunion with his family in Makkah after years of separation, Allaah commanded Ibraaheem to sacrifice his son through a dream; the son he had recently met again after a decade of prayers and separation. Ibraaheem consulted his son to see if he understood,

**["(Ibraaheem) said: 'O my dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. So look, what think you?' He said: 'O my father! Do that which you are commanded. God willing, you shall find me of the patient.'" ]<sup>27</sup>**

The pious son of a pious father was committed to submit to Allaah and willingly agreed to be sacrificed. Ibraaheem was commanded to take his son to Mina, about four miles east of Makkah, where he laid him out for slaughter. Just as Ibraaheem's knife was poised to descend, a voice stopped him,

**["We called to him: 'O Ibraaheem: You have already fulfilled the vision.' Lo! Thus do We reward the good. Lo! That verily was a clear test." ]<sup>28</sup>**

Ibraaheem was guided to ransom Ishmael with a ram,

**['then We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.']**

Upon Ibraaheem's return to Palestine, he was visited by the angels, who gave him and Sarah the good news of a son, Isaac, with the words

**["Lo! We bring you good tidings of a boy possessing wisdom." ]<sup>29</sup>**

In one of his later trips to Makkah the two built the Ka'bah on Allaah's command. While the father and son were building the Ka'bah, they prayed:

**["Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! You, only You, are the Hearer, the Knower. Our Lord! And make us Muslims (submissive to You) and of our seed a Muslim nation (submissive to You), and show us our ways of worship, and forgive toward us. Lo! You, only You, are the Forgiving, the Merciful. Our Lord! And raise up in their midst a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your revelations, and shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom and shall purify them of their sins. Lo! You, only You, are the Mighty, the Wise." ]<sup>30</sup>**

Before leaving Makkah, Ibraaheem made a special prayer to Allaah. He asked for Makkah to be blessed, protection for his family from false worship, blessing for Ishmael and his descendants, regular Salaah for his descendants, and forgiveness for himself, his parents,

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<sup>27</sup> Qur'aan [37:101-102]

<sup>28</sup> Qur'aan [37:104-106]

<sup>29</sup> Qur'aan [15:53]

<sup>30</sup> Qur'aan [2:127-129]

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and all believers<sup>31</sup>. Ibraaheem's prayer for a Messenger, and for Ishmael's descendents, was answered several thousand years later when Allaah raised Prophet Muhammad (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) among the Arabs.

He was now to proclaim an obligation binding on every believer in One God to make pilgrimage to the Ka'bah<sup>32</sup>. Why this is not mentioned in Judaism and Christianity in the present day is puzzling, but may be due to deliberate omission from their religious teaching as it moves the focus of their belief from 'the Promised Land' to a land where 'the chosen people of the 'Banee Israel' were not settled.

### Ibraaheem and Hajj

Several rites of Hajj commemorate events of Ibraaheem and his family. After going around the Ka'bah, a Muslim prays two rak'ah Salaah behind the Station of Ibraaheem, the stone on which he stood to build the Ka'bah. After the prayers, a Muslim drinks from Zamzam, the miracle water provided by Gabriel that saved the lives of Hagar and Ishmael. The rite of saa'i – walking between Safa and Marwa – commemorates Hagar's desperate search for water when she and her baby were alone in Makkah. The sacrifice of an animal in Mina is after Ibraaheem's willingness to sacrifice his son for Allaah's sake. Lastly, the stoning of the three pillars - jamaraat - at Mina exemplifies Ibraaheem's rejection of satanic temptations to prevent him from sacrificing Ishmael.

Ibraaheem, 'The one whom Allaah chose for His love' – khaleel-ullah – about whom Allaah said,

**"I will make you a leader to the nations."<sup>33</sup>**

returned to Palestine and died there.

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<sup>31</sup> Qur'aan [14:35-41]

<sup>32</sup> Qur'aan [22:27]

<sup>33</sup> Qur'aan [2:125]