

Our Forefather Ibrahim - peace be upon him

A brief introduction to Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him)

Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was one of the most famous and respected prophets of Allah. He has the title of *Khalil Allah*, meaning the close friend of Allah. He has been mentioned sixty-nine times in the Qur'an, fifteen times in Surah al-Baqarah alone. He has a Surah named after him. He was one of the one resolute prophets (*Ulul Azm*), taken from this Quranic verse:

و اذ اخذنا من النبيين ميثاقهم و منك و من نوح و ابراهيم و موسي و عيسي بن مريم و اخذنا منهم ميثاقا غليظا

And remember when We took from the prophets their covenant, and from you (O Muhammad), and from Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and Isa, the son of Maryam. And We took from them a strong covenant (33: 7)

Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was born in Babylon. His father's name was Tarih. For a period, Ibrahim lived in Damascus. There were people there who worshipped the seven stars in the sky. Every night, they would turn their faces towards the North Pole and worship the stars in their peculiar manner. So there were no believers except Ibrahim, Sara and his nephew Lut. A prophet was needed to clearly and intellectually explain the futile nature of worshipping anyone or anything other than Allah. A prophet who had unparalleled wisdom. That prophet had to be Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) married Sara, who unfortunately did not have any children at first. She herself advised Ibrahim to take her slave girl as a wife, who was called Hajar. She gave birth to Ismail when Ibrahim was 86 years old. Later, Allah gave glad-tidings to Ibrahim that Sara too would give birth to a child. Hence, Ishaq was born to Sara, thirteen years later after the birth of Ismail.

Thereafter, all prophets and messengers after Ibrahim really stemmed from him (peace be upon him). Ismail is the father of the Arabs who lived in Hijaz. He was the forefather of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ibn Abbas reports that five prophets spoke Arabic - Muhammad, Ismail, Shu'ayb, Salih and Hud (peace be upon them). All others spoke Suriani, with the exception of Musa, who spoke Hebrew.

Ishaq, on the other hand, was the father of Yaqub, also called Isra'il. All the prophets of Bani Isra'il, like Musa and Isa, came from this side of the family. Any book revealed to a Messenger after Ibrahim was from his children. His own nephew was Lut (peace be upon him).

Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is so important that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) met him on the night of *Isra wa'l Miraj*. He saw him on the highest heaven, resting next to the *al-Bayt al-Mamur*, the replica of the Ka'ba in the heavens. Our Prophet described Musa and Isa in great detail. When he was asked to describe Ibrahim, he replied, 'Look at me'.

Allah describes him with many favourable titles in the Holy Qur'an:

ان ابراهيم كان امة قانتا لله حنيفا و لم يك من المشركين شاكرا لانعمه

Certainly Ibrahim was an Ummah, subservient to Allah and Hanif (inclined to Allah). And he was not from the polytheists. [He was] thankful for Allah's favours (16: 120-1)

ان ابراهيم لأواه حلیم

Indeed Ibrahim was one who invoked Allah, forbearing (9: 114)

ما كان ابراهيم يهوديا و لا نصرانيا و لكن كان حنيفا مسلما و ما كان من المشركين

Ibrahim was neither a Jew or Christian, but he was a Muslim, inclined to Allah. And he was not a polytheist (3: 67)

اذ قال له ربه أسلم قال اسلمت لرب العالمين

Remember when his Lord said 'Submit!' He replied 'I have submitted to the Lord of the worlds (2: 131)

His religious legacy

Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) may have lived thousands of years ago, but our religion today owes a lot to him and indeed we remember him abundantly on a daily basis. For example:

i. Durud Ibrahim: In each Salah, we send Durud upon him and his family. In each Salah, we recite his Duas. Why is Ibrahim mentioned in the Salah and no other prophet or messenger? The answer given by the scholars is that Ibrahim and his son were responsible for re-building the Ka'ba Sharif, the Qibla of all Muslims. As a reward for his endeavours, he and his family are now mentioned in every Salah performed in that direction.

ii. The natural Sunnas: *Sunan al-Fitra* refers to the hygienic practices that all prophets and messengers adhered to, and we too are encouraged to adopt. The purpose is two-fold (i) to ensure basic hygiene and cleanliness (ii) a means to distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims. These include acts such as circumcision, shaving the private hair, trimming the moustache, clipping the finger nails and removing arm pit hair. We are informed that these practices originally stem from Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

iii. Hajj: Most of the places and rituals of Hajj have a link to Ibrahim and his family such as Tawaf, Sa'y, Zamzam, Maqam Jamarat, Ibrahim and Mina. Moreover, he was the first to re-build the Ka'ba after the flood of Nuh. As he finished it, he did nothing but pray for Allah to accept his endeavours.

ربنا تقبل منا انك انت السميع العليم

Our Lord! Please accept from us, certainly You are the all-Listening, the all-Knowing (2: 127)

This itself is an important lesson for us. When we accomplish something, we should first ask Allah to accept the endeavours.

His relationship with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the forefather of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Any remembrance of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) is in reality the remembrance of the Chosen One, peace be upon him. When people speak well of our father, grandfathers and forefathers, we feel happy and proud. So Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would certainly approve of us remembering his forefather Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

Our Prophet famously declared that all of his male and female ancestors till Adam were all Muslims. This means that Ibrahim's ancestors were also Muslims.

This is important to mention because *seemingly*, the Qur'an describes Ibrahim's father as a *mushrik*. This is not the case. Rather the word 'Ab' here means uncle and not father. Semites used to call their uncles 'father'. This practice is validated by the Qur'an too. Ya'qub was about to leave this world when he asked his sons who they would worship after him. They replied:

نعبد الهك و اله ابائك ابراهيم و اسماعيل و اسحاق

'We shall worship your Lord, the Lord of your fathers Ibrahim, Ismail and Ishaq' (2: 133)

Ismail was the uncle of Yaqub and not the father. Yet he has been described with the word Abaa (plural of 'Ab').

There is additional proof in the Qur'an. Praying for the infidels is clearly forbidden in Islam. In the Qur'an, Allāh describes the supplication made by Ibrāhīm:

'O our Lord! Forgive me, and my parents and the believers on the day when the reckoning shall come to pass.' (14:41).

Clearly, this verse indicates that Ibrāhīm prayed to Allāh for the forgiveness of his parents. He would only be permitted to do this if they were Muslims, not polytheists.

A few, key events from his life

a. Family man

Perhaps more than other prophets and messengers, we are told so much information about Sayyiduna Ibrahim's (peace be upon him) family. Behind every act of Allah there is wisdom. Why are we required to remember not just him but his family? In each Salah we send Durud upon him and his family when we recite:

اللهم صل علي محمد و علي ال محمد كما صليت علي ابراهيم و علي ال ابراهيم انك حميد مجيد

So clearly, his family must be important too. What's the answer?

The answer is that his family is a radiant example of a perfect, Muslim family. Today, we can learn about how to run a family from his role model. In short, a few themes recur throughout his family life; obedience, faith and communication.

Trust, Obedience & Communication

a. The trust and obedience of **Hajar to Ibrahim**. Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) came to Makka with his wife Hajar and his son Ismail, who was only a child at the time. At the time, Makka was a barren place and there certainly was no water there. Ibrahim left his wife and son in this valley and walked away. His wife called out 'Where are you going, leaving us here where there is no one?' She asked repeatedly and Ibrahim (peace be upon him) did not reply. Eventually she asked, 'Has Allah ordered you to do this?' He replied in the affirmative. She replied, 'In that case, Allah will never desert us.'

Hajar was obedient to her husband. She trusted his decision. This is an ingredient to a successful home.

b. **Ismail to Ibrahim**. Allah asked Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) to put a knife to his son's neck. He was ready to do it. Ismail did not object by arguing that (i) murder is haram (ii) he's a Muslim not an infidel (iii) the instructions merely came via a dream. He showed nothing but obedience. Children today should listen more and question less.

c. **Ibrahim to His Lord**. Allah asked Ibrahim to live in a place where there was no water or living. Yet, he did it. This is why he is described in the Quran as Qanit (قانت) meaning the one who drops his head in obedience.

d. **Communication**. Allah had instructed Ibrahim to sacrifice his son via a dream, which, for prophets, is always truthful. Thereafter Ibrahim talked to his son and explained what he saw in his dream and what was required from him. He conversed with him and listened to his opinion. There was actual dialogue and *shura*. They learned from one another. All the long, the son knew what was happening and so he submitted to his authority.

This teaches us that the key to a successful family is communication. There must always be dialogue, like Ibrahim and Ismail showed.

The failure of the family today is because of the lack of communication. No one talks to one another in this day and age. Today, most of the elders start the sentences with the youngsters with either 'do this' or 'don't do this.' This is not dialogue, this is ordering and prohibiting. On the way home, we should ask what the children did at school and madrassa. Perhaps worse still, the smart phone has killed off communication.

b. The great thinker

We know that in Islamic history, we have been blessed with many great thinkers and philosophers, such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, al-Dhahabi, Ibn Khaldun and more recently, Allama Iqbal. All of them derive inspiration from Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Ibrahim was the first philosopher in Islam. He was a great thinker, a *mufakkir*. He appealed to people via his God-given intellect. All great Muslim thinkers, philosophers and theorists in reality derive their inspiration from him.

All prophets are unbelievably clever. In fact, it is one of the four attributes to be found in all prophets and messengers according to the scholars (*Sidq, Fitana, Tabligh, Amana*). Here are just a few examples of Sayyiduna Ibrahim's intelligence.

a. Nimrud and life and death

When Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) preached the oneness of Allah to Nimrud, he introduced Allah as the one 'Who gives life and death' (2: 258). Nimrud dismissed this and brought two people in front of Ibrahim; one was a prisoner who was about to be executed and one was an innocent, free man. He killed the innocent man and granted freedom to the prisoner and then remarked: 'I can cause life and death [too]' (2: 258). Ibrahim then showed his intelligence by saying to Nimrud:

'Verily! Allah causes the sun to rise from the east; then cause it to rise from the west.'

Upon this, Nimrud was left speechless (2: 258).

This teaches us to exchange in intellectual dialogue with non-Muslims. Out think them and out smart them. Do not out-shout someone. Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) dominated the debate thanks to wisdom.

b. The sun, stars and the moon

On one occasion, he saw the stars and asked 'This is my Lord?' When it set, he said 'I do not love the ones that set.' When he saw the moon shining, he asked 'this is my Lord?' Again, it set and so he concluded that something that sets cannot be a god. Finally he saw the sun and asked 'is this my Lord, this is bigger?' When the sun set, he said 'this cannot be my Lord, for it rises and sets. A true Lord is the One who is ever present.

Ibrahim's message was 'Do not worship the sun, moon and the stars. Worship and love the one Who created them.'

What Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) also taught us here was to use nature to reach Allah. Look around and see the existence of Allah in this beautiful world around you. Alija Ali Izetbegovic remarked that when an archaeologist discovers a spoon on an ancient site, then he automatically assumes it was made by someone. Moments later, he may come across a skull. Why doesn't he assume the same for this too? The magicians of Fir'awn of this day and age are the scientists. They are the ones who should be proclaiming 'we believe in the Lord of the Worlds'.

c. Story of the idols

In the Qur'an, Allah mentions a brilliant story relating to Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him). One day, when all the idol worshippers had gone to a festival, Ibrahim (peace be upon him) stayed behind and destroyed all their idols bar the largest one. He left the axe hanging on him. When they returned, they were shocked and summoned Ibrahim publicly. When asked 'who did this to our gods?' he simply replied 'He did. Ask him if you want.' They knew their gods could not speak and so Ibrahim had made his point very clear.

The story is very simple and powerful in explaining the futile nature of *shirk*. But there is something else we can learn too, which is very relevant for today - learn to differentiate between the criticism and the criticiser.

In this story, there are two elements, the criticism and the criticiser.

a. The criticism: Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) asked them to reflect why they worshipped stones that could not (i) protect themselves, let alone others. Had they had been true gods, they could have defended themselves (ii) could not tell them who had caused the damage. The Quran mentioned that even though it was for a brief moment, they did think and reflect about this point.

فرجعوا الي انفسهم فقالوا انكم انتم الظالمون ثم نكسوا علي رؤوسهم لقد علمت ما هؤلاء ينطقون

So they turned to themselves [and said] 'Indeed you know [O Ibrahim] that these idols do not speak' (21: 65)

But soon after, they returned to their ill-beliefs and thoughts.

b. The criticiser: If anything, Sayyiduna Ibrahim (peace be upon him) deserved praise.

But the infidels hated the criticiser and decided to punish him. They threw him into a cauldron of fire, but Allah made it cool and peace for him. Hafiz Ibn Kathir reports that the people gathered firewood from every place possible. The blaze reached the sky. Then they placed Ibrahim in a catapult and threw him into the fire. By the command of Allah the fire became cool and did not harm him. It is said he was in the fire for forty days.

The story is brilliant in the sense it reflects typical, human behaviour. We go after the criticiser and ignore the criticism.

Of the two, human nature is such that we would prefer praise over criticism any day. But which is more beneficial to us in the long run? Praise does not make us more productive and creative, only criticism does that. In sports, players learn more in defeat than they do in victory. Most self-built millionaires suffer from immense loss and defeat at some point in their career. Many pinpoint that defeat as the reason for their success.

In this day and age, when someone criticises us, we, go on the offensive, take the criticism as a personal attack, or totally ignore the criticism. This is precisely why we have no peace and no sense of personal, spiritual development.

Conclusion

Ibrahim and family

On the occasion of Hajj and Eid al-Adha, we remember the great prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Importantly, we do not remember just him but his entire family. The Quran and Sunna offer a detailed outline of their life. Why? Because it is a brilliant blueprint for what constitutes a great, Muslim family.

Trust, obedience, faith and communication. These are the main ingredients as taught by Ibrahim. Ibrahim was a family man. That is why he prayed for family in the Dua we read in every Salah.

Friends, good times, enjoyment, employment, but family first. They are first for Zakah, Qurbani, old clothes, time on Eid and happiness.

Submit to Allah like Ibrahim did

What Allah says, goes. You are not a believer until your desires meet the desires of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). We shift our lifestyle to Islam not the other way around. Your lifestyle adjusts according to Salah times, Salah times do not adjust to your lifestyle.

Embrace criticism

Embrace criticism sometimes and be self-critical first and foremost. When you take criticism, your *nafs* takes a shot. It brings down the ego. Anything that brings down the ego must be a good thing. Only Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him) are perfect.

Learn from children

We learned a lot from Ismail, who was only a small child then. We can still learn from children if we reflect and contemplate. Can we learn from them?

- a. For instance, children build houses and then dismantle it without any thought. They make and break. As we grow older however, we become more and more sentimental about our possessions. Children in this respect are better than us.
- b. Children do not know colour. They do not know the difference between a black and white child - are equal to them. Go to a nursery and you will find that children do not differentiate. They only see ability, never disability. No child is born racist, we introduce it to them. No child is born greedy. No child is born a terrorist.
- c. Children fight and make up immediately. Watch how siblings bicker with one another all day and then sleep in the same room that evening. As we get older, we lose Fitra and adopt Fitna. Our disputes last decades and only conclude in court, not with a Salam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught us that no disagreement should last more than three days. And the best one is the one who does Salam first. Hence we should learn from our kids.
- d. Children find happiness in the simplest manners, the basic gestures and hugs. We have everything and are still grumpy.

In short, we change the state of Fitra to Fitna. We, somehow, have more to learn from children than children learn from us.

On the other hand, children should remember that even a glance to their parents warrants the reward of an accepted Hajj.

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