

Our Forefather Ibrāhīm - peace be upon him

A brief introduction to Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him)

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was one of the most famous and respected prophets of Allāh. He has the title of *Khalīl Allāh*, meaning the close friend of Allāh. He has been mentioned sixty-nine times in the Qur'ān, fifteen times in Sūrah al-Baqarah alone. He has a Sūrah named after him. He was one of the one resolute prophets (*Ulu'l Azm*), taken from this Qur'ānic 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 Nūh, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and Isā, the son of Maryam. And We took from them a strong covenant (33: 7).

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was born in Babylon. His father's name was Tārih. For a period, Ibrāhīm 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 Ibrāhīm, Sāra and his nephew Sayyidunā Lūt (peace be upon them). A prophet was needed to clearly and intellectually explain the futile nature of worshipping anyone or anything other than Allāh. A prophet who had unparalleled wisdom. That prophet had to be Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him).

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) married Sāra, who unfortunately did not have any children at first. She herself advised Ibrāhīm to take her slave girl as a wife, who was called Hājar. She gave birth to Ismā'il when Ibrāhīm was 86 years old. Later, Allāh gave glad-tidings to Ibrāhīm that Sāra too would give birth to a child. Hence, Ishāq was born to Sāra, thirteen years later after the birth of Sayyidunā Ismā'il.

Thereafter, all prophets and messengers after Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) really stemmed from him (peace be upon him). Ismā'il is the father of the Arabs who lived in Hijaz. He was the forefather of Sayyidunā Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ibn Abbās reports that five prophets spoke Arabic - Sayyidunā Muhammad, Ismā'il, Shu'ayb, Sālih and Hūd (peace be upon them). All others spoke Suriani, with the exception of Mūsā, who spoke Hebrew.

Sayyidunā Ishāq, on the other hand, was the father of Sayyidunā Ya'qūb, also called Isrā'il. All the prophets of Banū Isrā'il, like Sayyidunā Mūsā and Isā, came from this side of the family. Any book revealed to a Messenger after Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm was from his children. His own nephew was Sayyidunā Lūt (peace be upon him).

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) is so important that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) met him on the night of *al-Isrā wa'l Mi'rāj*. He saw him on the highest heaven, resting next to the *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*, the replica of the Ka'ba in the heavens. Our Prophet described Sayyidunā Mūsā and Isā in great detail. When he was asked to describe Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him), he simply replied, 'Look at me'.

Allāh describes him with many favourable titles in the Holy Qur'ān:

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

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

ان ابراهيم لأواه حلیم

Indeed Ibrāhīm was one who invoked Allāh, forbearing (9: 114).

ما كان ابراهيم يهوديا ولا نصرانيا ولكن كان حنيفا مسلما وما كان من المشركين

Ibrāhīm was neither a Jew or Christian, but he was a Muslim, inclined to Allāh. 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

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (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. Durūd Ibrāhīm: In each Salāh, we send Durūd upon him and his family. In each Salāh, we recite his Du'ās. Why is Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) mentioned in the Salāh? The answer given by the scholars is that Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) and his son were responsible for re-building the Ka'ba Sharīf, the Qibla of all Muslims. As a reward for his endeavours, he and his family are now mentioned in every Salāh 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 Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him).

iii. Hajj: Most of the places and rituals of Hajj have a link to Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) and his family such as Tawāf, Sa'y, Zamzam, Maqām Ibrāhīm and Mina. Moreover, he was the first to re-build the Ka'ba after the flood of Sayyidunā Nūh (peace be upon him). As he finished it, he did nothing but pray for Allāh 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 Allāh to accept the endeavours.

His relationship with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was the forefather of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Any remembrance of Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (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 Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him).

Our Prophet (peace be upon him) famously declared that all of his male and female ancestors till Adam were all Muslims. This means that Ibrāhīm's ancestors were also Muslims. This is important to mention because *seemingly*, the Qur'ān describes Ibrāhīm'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'ān too. Sayyidunā Ya'qūb (peace be upon him) 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 Ibrāhīm, Ismā'īl and Ishāq' (2: 133)

Sayyidunā Ismā'īl was the uncle of Sayyidunā Ya'qūb (peace be upon him) and not the father. Yet he has been described with the word *Abā* (plural of 'Ab').

There is additional proof in the Qur'ān. Praying for the infidels is clearly forbidden in Islam. In the Qur'ān, 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 Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) 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 Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm's (peace be upon him) family. Behind every act of Allāh there is wisdom. Why are we required to remember not just him, but his family? In each Salāh we send Durūd 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 **Hājar to Ibrāhīm**. Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) came to Makka with his wife Hājar and his son Ismā'īl, who was only a child at the time. At the time, Makka was a barren place and there certainly was no water there. Ibrāhīm 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 Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) did not reply. Eventually she asked, 'Has Allāh ordered you to do this?' He replied in the affirmative. She replied, 'In that case, Allāh will never desert us.' Hājar was obedient to her husband. She trusted his decision. This is an ingredient to a successful home.

b. **Ismā'īl to Ibrāhīm**. Allāh asked Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) to put a knife to his son's neck. He was ready to do it. Ismā'īl 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. **Ibrāhīm to His Lord**. Allāh asked Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) to live in a place where there was no water or barely any sign of life. Yet, he did it. This is why he is described in the Quran as Qānit (قانت), meaning the one who drops his head in obedience.

d. **Communication**. Allāh had instructed Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) to sacrifice his son via a dream, which, for prophets, is always truthful. Thereafter Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) 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 *shūra*. 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 Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl (peace be upon them) 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. Perhaps worse still, the smart phone has killed off all human communication. On the way home, we should ask what the children did at school and madrassa.

b. The great thinker

We know that in Islamic history, we have been blessed with many great thinkers and philosophers, such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīna, al-Dhahabī, Ibn Khaldūn and more recently, Allāma Iqbāl. All of them derive inspiration from Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him). Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) 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, Fitāna, Tablīgh, Amāna*). Here are just a few examples of Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm's intelligence.

i. Nimrūd and life and death

When Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) preached the oneness of Allāh to Nimrūd, he introduced Allāh as the one 'Who gives life and death' (2: 258). Nimrūd dismissed this and brought two people in front of Ibrāhīm; 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). Ibrāhīm then showed his intelligence by saying to Nimrūd:

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

Upon this, Nimrūd 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. Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (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.

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm's (peace be upon him) message was 'Do not worship the sun, moon and the stars. Worship and love the One Who created them.'

What Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) also taught us here was to use nature to reach Allāh. Look around and see the existence of Allāh 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?

c. Story of the idols

In the Qur'ān, Allāh mentions a brilliant story relating to Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him). One day, when all the idol worshippers had gone to a festival, Ibrāhīm (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 Ibrāhīm 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 Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm 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: Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (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 Qur'ān 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 thought about it and spoke among themselves: 'You yourselves are the wrongdoers!' They hung their heads, confounded, and said: 'Indeed you know [O Ibrāhīm] that these idols do not speak' (21: 64-65).

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

b. The criticiser: If anything, Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (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 Allāh made it cool and peace for him. Hāfiz Ibn Kathīr reports that the people gathered firewood from every place possible. The blaze reached the sky. Then they placed Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) in a catapult and threw him into the fire. By the command of Allāh 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 are have no peace and no sense of personal, spiritual development.

Conclusion

Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) and family

On the occasion of Hajj and Eid al-Adha, we remember the great prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him). Importantly, we do not remember just him but his entire family. The Qur'ān 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 Ibrāhīm. Ibrāhīm was a family man. That is why he prayed for family in the Du'ā we read in every Salāh.

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

Submit to Allāh like Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) did

What Allāh 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 Salāh times, Salāh 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 Allāh and His Messenger (peace be upon him) are perfect.

Learn from children

We learned a lot from Sayyidunā Ismā'il (peace be upon him), 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 toy 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 - all 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 Salām. 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 Salām 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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