A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO PROPHET IBRĀHĪM (PEACE BE UPON HIM)

Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was one of the most renowned and revered prophets of Allah. He holds the title of *Khalīl-Allāh*, meaning "the close friend of Allah". He has been mentioned sixty-nine times in the Qur'an, with fifteen times of those mentions in *Sūrah al-Baqarah* alone. An entire *Sūrah* (chapter) of the Qur'an is also named after him. He was one of the resolute prophets (*Ulu al-ʿAzm*), as referenced in this Qur'anic verse:

> و إذ أخذنا من النبيين ميثاقهم و منك و من نوح و إبراهيم و موسي و عيسي بن مريم و أخذنا منهم ميثاقا غليظا
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> And remember when We took from the prophets their covenant, and from you (O Muhammad), and from Nūh, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and ʿĪsā, son of Maryam. And We took from them a strong covenant (33:7).

Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was born in Babylon. His father's name was Tārih. For a period, Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) 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 particular manner. At that time, there were no believers other than Ibrāhīm, his wife Sarah, and his nephew, Prophet Lūt (upon them be peace). A prophet was needed to clearly and intellectually explain the futility of worshipping anyone or anything other than Allah. A prophet endowed with unparalleled wisdom was required, and that prophet was indeed Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) married Sarah, who initially did not have any children. She herself advised Ibrāhīm (peace

be upon him) to take her maidservant as a wife, who was called Hājar. She gave birth to Ismāʿīl when Ibrāhīm was 86 years old. Later, Allāh gave glad-tidings to Ibrāhīm that Sarah too would give birth to a child. Hence, Ishāq was born to Sarah, thirteen years later after the birth of Prophet Ismāʿīl.

Thereafter, all the prophets and messengers after Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) descended from his own children. Ismāʿīl is the father of the Arabs who lived in Hijaz. He was the forefather of our master Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Ibn ʿAbbās reports that five prophets spoke Arabic: Prophet Muhammad, Ismāʿīl, Shuʿayb, Ṣālih and Hūd (peace be upon them). The rest primarily spoke Syriac (Suriani), except for Prophet Mūsā (peace be upon him), who spoke Hebrew.

Prophet Ishāq, on the other hand, was the father of Prophet Yaʿqūb, also known as Isrā'īl. All the prophets of Banū Isrā'īl—including Prophet's Mūsā and ʿĪsā—descended from this lineage. Thus, every divine scripture revealed after Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was sent to his descendants. Even his nephew, Prophet Lūṭ (peace be upon him), was among the noble recipients of prophethood.

Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) holds such a lofty status that during *al-Isrā' wa'l-Miʿrāj,* Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ encountered him in the highest heaven. here, he saw him seated beside *al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr*—the celestial counterpart of the Kaʿbah. While our Prophet ﷺ described Prophet's Mūsā and ʿĪsā (peace be upon them) in detail, when asked about Prophet Ibrāhīm's appearance, he responded simply, "Look at me."

Allah has honoured Prophet Ibrāhīm with numerous exalted titles in the Holy Qur'ān, among them:

إن إبراهيم كان أمة قانتا لله حنيفا و لم 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).

إن إبراهيم لأواه حليم

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

ما كان إبراهيم يهوديا و لا نصرانيا و لكن كان حنيفا مسلما و ما 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).

إذ قال له ربه أَسلمْ قال أسلمت لرب العالمين

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

ENDURING LEGACY

Though Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) lived thousands of years ago, his profound influence remains deeply embedded in our faith. In fact, we honour him daily in numerous ways, a testament to his timeless legacy.

1. **The *Durūd Ibrāhīm* in Every *Ṣalāh***: In each prayer, we recite the *Ṣalāt Ibrāhīmiyyah*, sending blessings upon him and his family. We also echo his heartfelt supplications. But why is he specifically mentioned in our *ṣalāh*? Scholars explain that it is because he and his son, Prophet Ismāʿīl (peace be upon them), rebuilt the Kaʿbah Sharīf—the prayer direction (*qiblah*) for all Muslims. As a divine reward for his devotion, Allāh ordained that he and his family be remembered in every prayer offered toward the Kaʿbah.
2. **The natural Sunnas**: *Sunan al-Fiṭrah* represent a set of divinely-inspired hygienic practices observed by all prophets and messengers, which Muslims are encouraged to uphold. These noble traditions serve two essential purposes: (i) maintaining physical and spiritual purity (ii) a means to distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims.

   These include acts such circumcision, removal of private hair, trimming the moustache, clipping the fingernails and removing underarm hair. We are informed that these practices originally stem from Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him).
3. **Ḥajj**: Most aspects of the Ḥajj pilgrimage reverberates with the footsteps of Prophet Ibrāhīm and his noble family: *Tawāf* (circling the Kaʿbah), *Saʿy*, Zamzam, *Maqām Ibrāhīm* (Station of Ibrāhīm)

and Mina. After the flood of Nūḥ, it was Prophet Ibrāhīm who first reconstructed the House of Allah. Upon completing this sacred task, he immediately turned to divine supplication with words that echo through the ages:

ربنا تقبل منا انك انت السميع العليم

Our Lord! Accept this from us, You are the all-Hearing, the all-Knowing (2:127).

This moment encapsulates a profound spiritual lesson: True success lies not in completion, but in divine acceptance. Whenever we accomplish any worthy deed, our first response should be this same heartfelt *duʿā* - seeking Allah's pleasure above all else.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF IBRĀHĪM WITH THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD ﷺ

Prophet Ibrāhīm was a forefather of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Any remembrance of Ibrāhīm is, in reality, a remembrance of the Chosen One (*al-Muṣṭafā*), Muḥammad ﷺ. When individuals speak favourably of one's own father, grandfathers, and forefathers, a sense of happiness and pride is naturally felt. And so, the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ would undoubtedly approve of the remembrance of his forefather, Ibrāhīm.

Our Prophet ﷺ famously declared that all his male and female ancestors, extending back to Ādam, were Muslims. This implies that the ancestors of Ibrāhīm were also Muslims.

This point is significant because the Qur'ān seemingly describes Ibrāhīm's father as a *mushrik* (polytheist). However, this is not the case; rather, the word *ab* in this context signifies 'uncle' and not 'biological father'. Semitic cultures customarily referred to uncles as 'father'. This linguistic practice is also validated within the Qur'ān. Prophet Yaʿqūb, when he was about to depart from this world, enquired of his sons whom they would worship after his passing. They replied:

نعبد إلهك و إله ابائك إبراهيم و إسماعيل و إسحاق

"We shall worship your Lord, the Lord of your forefathers: Ibrāhīm, Ismāʿīl and Isḥāq" (2:133).

Ismāʿīl was the uncle of Yaʿqūb, not his father. Yet, he is described using the word *ābāʾ* (plural of *ab*).

Further evidence is found in the Qur'ān. Praying for the forgiveness of non-believers (*kuffār*) is explicitly forbidden in Islam. Allāh describes in the Qur'ān the supplication made by Ibrāhīm:

> "Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and the believers, on the Day when the reckoning shall be established" (14:41).

This verse clearly indicates that Ibrāhīm supplicated to Allāh for the forgiveness of his parents. He would only have been permitted to make such a supplication if they were Muslims, not polytheists.

A FEW, KEY EVENTS FROM HIS LIFE

Family man

Perhaps more than other prophets and messengers, a significant amount of information is provided concerning the family of Ibrāhīm. There is divine wisdom behind every act of Allāh. In each *ṣalāh*, Muslims send *Durūd* (salutations and blessings) upon him and his family when they recite:

> اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ
>
> "O Allāh, bestow Your favour upon Muḥammad and upon the family of Muḥammad, as You bestowed Your favour upon Ibrāhīm and upon the family of Ibrāhīm. Verily, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious."

Why is there a requirement to remember not only Ibrāhīm but also his family? The answer lies in the fact that his family serves as a radiant example of an ideal Muslim family. Today, valuable lessons on family life can be derived from his model. In essence, several themes recur throughout his family life: obedience, faith, and communication.

a. **The Trust and Obedience of Hājar to Ibrāhīm**: Ibrāhīm journeyed to Makkah with his wife, Hājar, and his son, Ismāʿīl, who was then a young child. At that time, Makkah was a barren and desolate place, devoid of water. Ibrāhīm departed, leaving his wife and son in this desolate valley. Hājar called out, "Where are you going, leaving us in this place where there is no one?" She repeated her question, but Ibrāhīm offered no response. Eventually, she enquired, "Has Allāh commanded you to do this?" He replied in the affirmative. She responded, "In that case, Allāh will never forsake us."

   Hājar demonstrated obedience to her husband and placed her trust in his decision. This constitutes a vital element for a successful household.

b. **Ismāʿīl to Ibrāhīm**: Allāh commanded Ibrāhīm to place a knife to his son's neck, and he was prepared to comply. Ismāʿīl did not object by arguing that (i) murder is ḥarām (forbidden), (ii) he was a Muslim and not an infidel, or (iii) the instruction was conveyed merely through a dream. He exhibited nothing but obedience. Children today should cultivate the habit of listening more and questioning less.

c. **Ibrāhīm to His Lord**: Allah instructed Ibrāhīm to reside in a place devoid of water and with scarcely any signs of life, and he complied. This is why he is described in the Qurʾān as *qānit* (قَانِت), signifying one who lowers his head in obedience.

d. **Communication**: Allah instructed Ibrāhīm to sacrifice his son through a dream, which, for prophets, is invariably truthful. Thereafter, Ibrāhīm engaged in dialogue with his son, explaining what he had witnessed in his dream and what was required of him. He conversed with him and sought his opinion. There was genuine dialogue and *shūrā* (consultation). They learned from one another. Throughout this process, the son remained informed of the situation and submitted to his father's authority.

   This teaches that communication is the key to a successful family. There must always be dialogue, as exemplified by Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl.

The failure of families today stems from a lack of communication. Individuals often fail to engage in meaningful conversation. Many elders initiate interactions with youngsters by issuing directives or prohibitions, which does not constitute dialogue but rather the imposition of commands. Furthermore, the ubiquitous smartphone has stifled human interaction. Upon returning home, parents should enquire about their children's experiences at school and madrasah.

THE GREAT THINKER

Islamic history has been blessed with numerous great thinkers and philosophers, such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Dhahabī, Ibn Khaldūn, and, more recently, Allāma Iqbāl. These figures drew inspiration from Ibrāhīm, who was the first philosopher in Islam, a great thinker (*mufakkir*). He appealed to people through his God-given intellect. All great Muslim thinkers, philosophers, and theorists, in reality, derive their inspiration from him.

All prophets possess exceptional intelligence. Indeed, *fitāna* (discernment, intelligence) is one of the four essential attributes of all prophets and messengers, according to Islamic scholars, the others being *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *tablīgh* (conveyance of the message), and *amāna* (trustworthiness). Here are a few examples of Ibrāhīm's intelligence:

i. **Nimrūd and life and death**
When Ibrāhīm preached the oneness of Allāh to Nimrūd, he introduced Allāh as the One "*Who gives life and death*" (Qur'ān 2:258). Nimrūd dismissed this and brought two individuals before Ibrāhīm: one was a prisoner awaiting execution, and the other was an innocent, free man. He killed the innocent man and granted freedom to the prisoner, remarking: "*I can cause life and death [too]*" (2:258). Ibrāhīm then demonstrated his intelligence by stating 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 the importance of engaging in intellectual dialogue with non-Muslims, out-thinking and out-smarting them, rather than resorting to shouting. Ibrāhīm dominated the debate through wisdom.

b. **The Sun, Stars and the Moon**

On one occasion, Ibrāhīm observed the stars and questioned, "Is this my Lord?" When the star set, he declared, "I do not love the ones that set." Upon seeing the moon shining, he asked, "Is this my Lord?" Again, when it set, he concluded that something that sets cannot be a god. Finally, he beheld the sun and enquired, "Is this my Lord, this is bigger?" When the sun set, he stated, "This cannot be my Lord, for it rises and sets. A true Lord is the One who is ever-present."

Ibrāhīm's message was: "Do not worship the sun, moon, and stars. Worship and love the One Who created them."

Ibrāhīm also taught the importance of utilising nature to reach Allāh. One should observe the existence of Allāh in the world. Alija Ali Izetbegovic remarked that when an archaeologist discovers a spoon on an ancient site, he automatically assumes it was manufactured by someone. Moments later, he may come across a skull. Why doesn't he assume the same for this skull?

c. **Story of the idols**

In the Qur'ān, Allah recounts a story concerning Ibrāhīm. One day, when all the idol worshippers had departed for a festival, Ibrāhīm remained behind and destroyed all their idols, except for the largest one, upon which he left the axe hanging. Upon their return, the idol worshippers were shocked and summoned Ibrāhīm publicly. When questioned, "Who did this to our gods?" he simply replied, "He did. Ask him if you want." They knew their gods could not speak, and thus Ibrāhīm had made his point clear.

The story effectively illustrates the futile nature of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). It also teaches the importance of differentiating between criticism and the criticiser.

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

- The criticism: Ibrāhīm asked them to reflect on why they worshipped stones that could not (i) protect themselves, let alone others, and (ii) could not identify who had caused the damage. The Qur'ān mentions that, briefly, they did reflect on this point:

  فرجعوا إلى أنفسهم فقالوا إنكم أنتم الظالمون ثم نكسوا على رؤوسهم لقد علمت ما هؤلاء ينطقون

  So they turned to one another and said, "In fact, you yourselves are the wrongdoers." Then, hanging their heads they reversed their position (and replied to Ibrāhīm,) "You already knew that they do not speak" (21:64-65).

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

- The criticiser: Ibrāhīm deserved praise.

  However, the infidels hated the criticiser and decided to punish him. They cast him into a cauldron of fire, but Allāh rendered it cool and safe for him. Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr reports that the people gathered firewood from every available source, and the blaze reached the sky. Then, they placed Ibrāhīm in a catapult and launched him into the fire. By the command of Allāh, the fire became cool and did not harm him. It is said that he remained in the fire for forty days.

  The story reflects typical human behaviour: focusing on the criticiser while ignoring the criticism.

  Human nature inclines us to prefer praise over criticism. However, criticism is more beneficial in the long run. Praise does not enhance productivity and creativity, whereas criticism does. In sports, athletes learn more from defeat than from victory. Many self-made millionaires experience significant losses and defeats, often citing those setbacks as catalysts for their success.

  Today, when criticised, individuals often become defensive, perceiving the criticism as a personal attack, or they disregard it entirely. This is why there is a lack of peace and personal, spiritual development.

Ibrāhīm and family

On the occasion of Ḥajj and Eid al-Aḍḥā, the Prophet Ibrāhīm is remembered. Importantly, the remembrance extends not only to him but to his entire family. The Qur'ān and Sunnah provide a detailed account of their lives. This is because their story serves as a brilliant blueprint for what constitutes an exemplary Muslim family.

Trust, obedience, faith and communication; these are the main ingredients as taught by Ibrāhīm. Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was a family man. That is why he prayed for family in the *duʿā* we read in every *ṣalāh*.

Friends, leisure, enjoyment, and employment are all important, but family should always come first. They should be prioritised for zakāh, *qurbānī*, donations of clothing, time spent Eid, and expressions of happiness.

Submit to Allāh as Ibrāhīm did

What Allāh decrees must be followed. One is not a true believer until one's desires align with the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. One should adapt one's lifestyle to Islam, rather than attempting to adapt Islam to one's lifestyle. One's daily schedule should be adjusted according to *ṣalāh* times, not the other way around.

Embrace criticism

One should embrace criticism and, more importantly, cultivate self-criticism. When one accepts criticism, one's *nafs* (ego) is challenged, leading to humility. Anything that diminishes the ego is beneficial. Only Allah and His Messenger ﷺ are perfect.