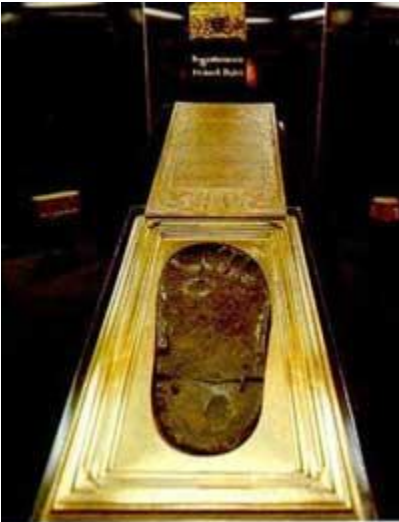


## The Story of Ibrahim's Sacrifice\*

Brothers and Sisters, all of us know the story of Ibrahim's sacrifice and we say that it was a test by Allah (Glorified be He). But do we really understand what Ibrahim went through? Do we appreciate what it was like to be Ibrahim? Can we grasp in thought what happened? Why is it that we regard Ibrahim as the father of faith? What was it that he achieved?



Ibraheem's footsteps (peace be uponhim)

Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him) is distinguished in the Qur'an with the title of Khaleel Allah (the intimate friend of Allah). In the Qur'an Allah says: [For Allah did take Ibrahim for (an intimate) friend] (An-Nisa' 4:125).

He is also described in the Qur'an as a model: [Ibrahim was indeed a model. Devoutly obedient to Allah, and true in faith, and he joined not gods with Allah] (An-Nahl 16: 120).

Ibrahim was born among the star- and idol-worshipping people of Chaldea, in the home of Azar, his father, the idol-maker of the tribe. Ibrahim was among the *kuffar* (unbelievers), but not of them, like a spring of *tawheed* (monotheism) arising out of the swamp of *shirk* (polytheism). The Qur'an tells us [Lo! Ibrahim said to his father Azar: Do you take idols for God? For I see you and your people in manifest error?] (Al-An'am 6:74).

From the revolt in the house of Azar, his father, Ibrahim went on to challenge the polytheism of his people. Indeed Ibrahim is known as history's great idol-smasher, as the founder of monotheism, and as the crusher of ignorance.

There are numerous verses in the Qur'an that describe how Ibrahim argued against idol worshipers, his rational arguments against skeptics and those who worshiped celestial bodies, how he dealt with unbelievers, how he preached to his people. For instance, Allah says: [Hast thou not turned thy vision to one who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God granted him power? Abraham said: "My Lord is He who giveth life and death." He said: "I give life and death." Said Abraham: "But it is God that causeth the sun to rise from the East: Do then cause it to rise from the West." Thus was he confounded who (in arrogance) rejected Faith. Nor doth God give guidance to a people unjust." (Al-Baqarah 2: 258)

In another example: [We bestowed aforetime on Ibrahim his rectitude of conduct, and well were We acquainted with him. Behold! he said to his father and his people, "What are these images to which ye are (so assiduously) devoted?" They said, "We found our fathers worshiping them." He said, "Indeed ye have been in manifest error-ye and your fathers." They said, "Have you brought us the Truth, or are you one of those who jest?" He said, "Nay, your Lord is the Lord of heavens and the earth, He who created them (from nothing): I am a witness to this (truth). And by God, I have a plan for your idols-after ye go away and turn your backs." So he broke them to pieces, (all) but the biggest of them, that they might turn (and address themselves) to it. They said, "Who has done this to our gods? He must indeed be some man of impiety!" They said, "We heard a youth talk of them: he is called Ibrahim." They said, "Then bring him before the eyes of the people, that they may bear witness." They said, "Art thou the one that did this with our gods, O Ibrahim?" He said, "Nay, this was done by-This is their biggest one! Ask them, if they speak intelligently!" So they turned to themselves and said, "Surely ye are the ones in the wrong!" Then were they confounded with shame; (they said:) "Thou knowest full well that these idols do not speak!" (Ibrahim) said, "Do ye then worship, besides God, things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm? Fie upon you, and upon the things that ye worship besides God! Have ye no sense?" They said, "Burn him and protect your gods, if ye do (anything at all)!" (Al-Anbiya' 21: 51-68)

As usual, when falsehood is defeated on intellectual grounds, it resorts to plotting and oppression. The response of his people to his *da`wah* is given in Surat Al-Ankabut: [So naught was the answer of (Ibrahim's) people except that they said: Slay him or burn him] (Al-Ankabut 29: 24). Ibrahim could

have given up his message and his beliefs to save himself from the fire of Nimrod. But he chose martyrdom. He chose to die for Allah's message to live. He chose to step into the fire of ignorance and tyranny in order to save humanity from the fire of ignorance and tyranny. So he was cast into the fire.

But Allah had a different plan for Ibrahim and he was unhurt, by the grace of Allah (Glorified be He): [But Allah did save him from the fire. Verily in this are signs for people who believe] (Al-`Ankabut 29: 24). Allah also says: [We said, "O fire! Be cool and a means of safety for Ibrahim" (al-Anbiya' 21: 69). His miracle did not refrain the idol worshipers from continuing for very long years their plots, persecution, abuse, cruelty, and isolation against Ibrahim; but he remained uncompromising, unshakable in his beliefs, patient in his suffering, gentle in his manners until he made his *hijrah* (immigration) to the lands of Aram and Canaan.

He left the land of his fathers to become a stranger in the land of promise.

Brothers and sisters, it was indeed a land of promise. A land where Ibrahim continued a lifetime of struggle, *da`wah*, movement, bearing alone the heavy responsibility of the mission of *tawheed* in an age of darkness, oppression, prejudice and ignorance. Ibrahim did not have children. And through-out his century of prophethood and service of Allah, as Ibrahim grew older, his desire to have a son grew stronger. The now old Prophet Ibrahim desperately longed for a son but his wife Sarah was barren.

["O my Lord! Grant me a righteous son!"] (As-Saffat 37: 100) was his call to Allah.

Against every expectation, Allah fulfilled His promise of making Ibrahim the seed of a great line of prophets, the root of the great universal religions. [So we gave him the good news of a forbearing boy] (As-Saffat 37: 101).

Allah brought mercy to the agedness, loneliness, hopelessness, and anguish of his trustworthy Messenger. For Ibrahim, Isma`il was not just a son for a sonless father; he was the end of a life of waiting, the reward of a century of suffering, the fruit of his life, the hope after despair, and the young boy of an old father.

Isma`il being the promise of future generations was in some sense the whole world for Ibrahim.

So there was joy and rejoicing in Ibrahim's house as Isma`il was quickly growing under the sun of his father's love.

But Allah decided that it was not to remain so.

Brothers and sisters, Ibrahim was to be tried once more. Ibrahim had a vision in which he was commanded by Allah to slaughter his only son.

Brothers and sisters, why should Ibrahim, whose entire life was devoted to prophethood, to jihad, to removing ignorance, to laying the foundations of *tawheed*, be tried once again?

Is it because man should not rest?

Is it because man should not be deceived by 100 years of jihad and victories?

Is it because he should not think of himself without weakness?

Is it for the fact that whatever we fix our eyes upon in this world will blind us?

And finally, is it because the higher the spiritual height we reach, the greater is the danger of falling?

Brothers and sisters, it is not possible to convey in words what it must have meant for Ibrahim to be commanded by Allah (Glorified be He) to sacrifice his only son Isma`il. The magnitude of the pain does not allow the imagination to enclose it. It inspires fear and trembling.

How could Ibrahim take his beloved son, the fruit of his life, the joy of his heart, the meaning of his living and staying, his Isma`il, and hold him on the ground, put a knife to his throat and kill him?

If it were only the slaughter of Ibrahim at the hand of Isma`il, how easy! But no! The young Isma`il must die and the old and aged Ibrahim must remain!

Ibrahim, the steel-like idol-smasher must have felt torn apart!

Within him, there must have been a war, the greatest jihad. Which war? The war between Allah and Isma`il! The difficulty of choice!

Which should Ibrahim choose?

Love of Allah or love of self?

Prophethood or fatherhood?

Loyalty to Allah or loyalty to family?

Faith or emotion?

Truth or falsehood?

Conscience or instinct?

Responsibility or pleasure?

Duty or right?

*Tawheed* or *shirk*?

Advancing or remaining?

To become or to be?

And finally, Allah or Isma`il?

What should Ibrahim choose?

Brothers and sisters, Ibrahim did not choose immediately. He doubted and wavered under the crushing force of pain and anguish. Only after the third vision did he finally decide to carry out Allah's command. This is reflected in the Hajj ritual of stoning the three idols representing Iblis, who tempted Ibrahim to disobey Allah.

When a truth enhances one's earthly life, most people become seekers of truth. But when a truth opposes life and leads to problems, loss, and dangers, the seekers of truth are few in number.

Iblis works wherever he finds traces of fear, weakness, doubt, despair, envy, selfishness, and even great affection towards someone or something. Iblis sometimes blows logical reasons, intellectual and religious justifications to achieve his ends.

For instance, we may imagine that, under the powerful crush of his pain and distress, Ibrahim could have used many justifications. Perhaps the meaning of *dhabh* (slaughter) is just metaphorical and means kill your ego. Perhaps Isma`il might be a general noun and not Ibrahim's son. Perhaps "slaughter Isma`il" actually means "slaughter the love of Isma`il." Ibrahim could have also tried many interpretations of his vision.

But Ibrahim Khaleel Allah, the intimate friend of Allah, had faith in Allah and he knew that Allah (Glorified be He) demanded the sacrifice. Ibrahim's conscience would make a mockery of all these logical justifications and reasons.

Ibrahim chose the love of Allah over the love of self, prophethood over fatherhood, loyalty to Allah over loyalty to family, truth over falsehood, conscience over instinct, responsibility over pleasure, duty over right, *tawheed* over *shirk*. He preferred advancing to remaining.

Ibrahim chose Allah and gave up Isma`il.

Brothers and sisters, in Mina, an amazing and frightening conversation between a father and a son took place.

Ibrahim said to Isma`il: ["O my son, I see in a vision that I offer you in sacrifice. Now see what is your view?"] (As-Saffat 37: 102)

What frightening words for a child to hear!

Isma`il could have kept silent. He could have asked Ibrahim to refrain.

But Isma`il also had faith. He submitted to Allah's will. Realizing his father's distress, Isma`il gave him these comforting words: ["O my father! Do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah so wills, patient and constant." (As-Saffat 37: 102)

*Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!*

Ibrahim consulted his son, who willingly offered himself to Allah's command. The choice of Ibrahim was sacrifice. That of Isma`il was self-sacrifice, martyrdom.

This gave Ibrahim strength. Ibrahim tied his heart to Allah, he took the Isma`il of his life in one hand and the knife of his faith in the other and he walked until he reached the place of sacrifice. Ibrahim was suffering while believing and at every moment it was possible for him to retract and turn back. Yet he laid Isma`il on the ground, putting his face away from him to give strength to his crushed soul and paralyzed hand. And so he slaughtered Isma`il. But, by Allah's grace, the knife did not cut.

Ibrahim received a sheep and was called by Allah: ["O Ibrahim! You have confirmed the Vision; thus indeed do We reward those who do right; this is indeed the manifest trial!"] (As-Saffat 37: 104-105)

*Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!*

Brothers and sisters, Ibrahim gained everything and kept Isma`il. This means that the God of Ibrahim is not thirsty for blood like the Aztec gods or Hindu gods were thirsty for blood.

It is the people, the servants of Allah, who are hungry, and hungry of sheep meat.

Brothers and sisters, this means that from the very beginning Allah did not want Isma`il to be slaughtered. He wanted Ibrahim to be the slaughterer of Isma`il. When he became so, the slaughter became useless.

Allah, from the beginning, wanted Isma`il to be the slaughter of Allah. And when it happened, his sacrifice became useless.

Mankind has needs but Allah has no needs. He is Self-Sufficient. Allah (Glorified be He) in His wisdom raised Ibrahim to the highest peak of sacrificing his Isma`il without sacrificing Isma`il. Allah (Glorified be He) promoted Isma`il to the highest peak of being the great sacrifice of Allah without bringing any harm to him.

This event is not about the torment and torture of mankind but about the perfection of humanity, the freedom from the prison of instinct and selfishness and about the elevation of spirit.

This momentous event also teaches us, through Ibrahim, that human life- Isma`il's, Ibrahim's, everyone's-acquires its meaning and value from Allah, the Source of Creation, and not from nature. It signifies that the good things in life, represented by Isma`il, derive their value not from the mere fact that they exist and can be valued, enjoyed, and delighted in, but from Allah, the Source of Creation Himself. Ibrahim was, in some sense, giving back Isma`il to receive him again on the proper basis.

Brothers and sisters, different people prioritize differently their loyalty to Allah, to the family, and to the nation or state. A secular mind owes absolute duty to the nation (and the family); whereas a religious conscience owes absolute duty to Allah. For a secular mind, Ibrahim was willing to MURDER Isma`il, but for a religious conscience he was willing to SACRIFICE Isma`il. Ibrahim therefore instructs that we should owe absolute duty only to Allah and it is our relationship to Allah that ought to transcend and determine our relation to family and nation and not vice-versa.

Brothers and sisters, there still is a lot to understand and discover about this momentous event. These are only a few possible meanings. Only a few, and just possible, because as Ibrahim taught us to be less

complacent and more critical about having attained faith. We should be less complacent and more critical about having attained understanding.

Brothers and sisters, the Isma`il of Ibrahim was his son. But for you, who is your Isma`il? What is it? Your degree? Your reputation? Your position? Your money? Your home? Your car? Your beloved? Your family? Your knowledge? Your title? Your dress? Your fame? Your soul? Your spirituality? Your beauty? Your strength? Your career?

How does one know?

Well, you know this yourself. One can only give its signs to you.

Whatever is in your eyes that holds the place of Isma`il in the eyes of Ibrahim!

Whatever weakens you on the way of faith!

Whatever stops you in your movement!

Whatever brings doubt to your responsibility!

Whatever has enchained your freedom!

Whatever leads you to compromise and justification!

That very thing that deafens your ears before the Message of Truth!

Whatever calls you to remain with yourself!

Whatever causes you to flee from your duty!

Whoever or whatever keeps you behind in order to remain with her, him, or it!

Brothers and sisters, these are the signs of our Isma`ils. Let us search for them in ourselves and let us slaughter them to move towards Allah (Glorified be He) and to remove the real knife from the throat of oppressed Muslims all over the world particularly in Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq and Kashmir.

Brothers and sisters, let us revolt against the heartless worshipers that we have become.

Remember our `eid is not a `eid of victory. It is the `Eid of Sacrifice (Adha).

- Excerpted with slight modifications from [www.Islaam.com](http://www.Islaam.com)

## **Ibrahim and Isma`il: Model for Sacrifice \***

**By Dr. Munir El-Kassem\*\***

**Dec. 26, 2005**

Hajj and `Eid Al-Adha take us back in history to the time of a 97-year-old man being asked to take the life of a 13-year-old boy. Who is that man? And who is that boy? And who is the one who is making this request? If we know who the three points in this equation are, we would have a better perspective on life and on what life is all about.

The man who was asked at 97 years of age to take the life of a 13-year-old boy is none other than the close friend of Allah, the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), the father of the prophets and messengers. And the 13-year-old boy whose life Ibrahim was asked to take is none other than his own son. Ibrahim had waited for 83 years to see him walk around him, touch him, and give him the pleasure of being a father. All of us know what that means; all of us know what it really means for your son or daughter to come and show his or her love that he or she possesses for you.

But when the boy reached the age when he was able to run and play around his father, Ibrahim went to him and said, "My darling son, I saw in my dream that I was sacrificing you." We all know that the dreams of prophets and messengers are forms of revelation from Allah Almighty. So it was the truth.

Now, who was the one who made that request? It was none other than Allah. The One Who created life had asked Ibrahim to take the life of his son away. And we know that His decree was that Isma`il's life would not be taken away, but it was a lesson for humanity to understand what life is all about.

Allah wanted Ibrahim to teach humanity a lesson. Thus, brothers and sisters, we have to understand this lesson and reflect upon it. There are two things in life that Allah Almighty made beautiful in this life. These two things are mentioned in the Qur'an more than once:

**(Wealth and children are an ornament of the life of the world.)** (Al-Kahf 18:46)

That is it! Wealth and children make life beautiful. Look what happened! Allah Almighty chose one individual to sacrifice one of these two things, and He did not ask any other human being to do the same. One individual was enough to sacrifice one of these two things, and that is his child, and He asked all of us to sacrifice the second one, wealth, so that by seeing how one man was able to do something which we cannot, we are able to sacrifice the second of the ornaments of life. Because Ibrahim passed the test, Allah Almighty called him an ummah (one man equal to a whole nation, a whole ummah).

One individual became an ummah. Why? Because Ibrahim passed the test of a whole ummah. He was asked to sacrifice one of the two things that are ornaments of life, and all of us have been asked to sacrifice the second. So because of that, he indeed, is an ummah in the same way that we are an ummah. He truly deserves that title:

**(Lo! Abraham was an ummah, obedient to Allah.)** (An-Nahl 16:120)

This is the spirit of `Eid Al-Adha. We have to sacrifice, brothers and sisters, when we are called upon to sacrifice what we really like to keep:

**(Ye will not attain unto *Birr* (piety and perfect goodness) until ye spend of that which ye love.)** (Aal `Imran 3:92)

If you have a lot of money and you take a thousand dollars and give it, this would not be *birr*. *Birr* is to have two dollars and to give one of the dollars away although you need the two dollars and would like to keep them for essentials. This is a sacrifice. Sacrifice is to do something that is difficult to do. This is sacrifice. It is not a sacrifice to do an easy thing and then to appear at the surface as if you did a lot. No, only Allah Almighty knows what sacrifice is all about. So, brothers and sisters, after we finish this *salah*, let's go and consider what we really need to sacrifice. Each one of us has an Isma`il in his or her life that needs to be sacrificed—each one of us!

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\* Based on a [Friday sermon](#) delivered by Dr. Munir El-Kassem on January 21, 2005 at the Islamic Centre of Southwest Ontario, Ontario, Canada.

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## The Concept of Animal Sacrifice in Islam \*

January 12, 2005

Sacrifice is not a pillar of Islam. We must look at the occurrences in a contextual manner, understanding not only the pre-Islamic institution of sacrifice, the Qur'anic reforms concerning this practice, and the continuance of sacrifice in the Muslim world, but also the context in which the Qur'anic revelations occurred. For it seems that with many people, both non-Muslims and Muslims alike, context is the key that they are missing.

With this in mind, let us start with the situation as it was in pre-Islamic Arabia with regard to animal sacrifice. Not only did the pagan Arabs sacrifice to a variety of gods in hopes of attaining protection or some favor or material gain, but so, too, did the Jews of that day seek to appease the One True God by blood sacrifice and burnt offerings. Even the Christian community felt Jesus to be the last sacrifice, the final lamb, so to speak, in an otherwise valid tradition of animal sacrifice (where one's sins are absolved by the blood of another).



Islam, however, broke away from this longstanding tradition of appeasing an "angry God" and instead demanded personal sacrifice and submission as the only way to die before death and reach "*fana*" or "extinction in Allah." The notion of "vicarious atonement of sin" (absolving one's sins through the blood of another) is nowhere to be found in the Qur'an. Neither is the idea of gaining favor by offering the life of another to Allah. In Islam, all that is demanded as a sacrifice is one's personal willingness to submit one's ego and individual will to Allah.

One only has to look at how the Qur'an treats this subject, to see a marked difference regarding sacrifice and whether or not Allah is appeased by blood. The Qur'anic account of the sacrifice of Isma`il ultimately speaks against blood atonement. Allah says: **«Then when (the son) reached (the age of (serious) work with him, he said: "Oh my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: Now see what is thy view!" (The son) said: "Oh my father! Do As thou art commanded: Thou wilt find me, if Allah so wills one practicing patience and constancy!" So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), We called out to him, "Oh Ibrahim! Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!" Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For this was obviously a trial and We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.»** (As-Safat 37:102-107)

Notice that the Qur'an never says that Allah told Ibrahim to kill (sacrifice) his son. Though subtle, this is very important, for the moral lesson is very different from that which appears in the Bible. Here, it teaches us that Ibrahim had a dream in which he saw himself slaughtering his son. Ibrahim believed the dream and thought that the dream was from Allah, but the Qur'an never says that the dream was from Allah. However, in Ibrahim and Isma`il's willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice—Ibrahim of his son, Isma`il of his own life—they are able to transcend notions of self and false attachment to the material realm, thus removing a veil between themselves and Allah, enabling Allah's mercy to descend upon them as the Spirit of Truth and illuminate them with divine wisdom (thus preventing a miscarriage of justice and once and for all correcting the false notion of vicarious atonement of sin).

For, certainly, Allah, the Ever Merciful, Most Compassionate, would never ask a father to go against His command of "thou shall not kill" and kill his own son in order to be accepted by Him. For the Qur'an teaches us that Allah never advocates evil (see 7:28 and 16:90) and that only Satan advocates evil and vice (24:21). The notion that Allah would want us to do an immoral act runs counter to Allah's justice.

As far as the yearly tradition that has followed this event (that is, the sacrificing of a ram to commemorate Ibrahim and Isma`il's great self sacrifice), we must understand it and the Qur'anic versus that pertain to animal sacrifice, in relation to the time and place circumstances under which these revelations were received and how people were trying to make a personal sacrifice by sharing their limited means of survival with the poorer members of their community.

That is to say, the underlying implication of Islam's attitude toward ritual slaughter is not that of blood atonement, or seeking favor with Allah through another's death, but rather, the act of thanking Allah for one's sustenance and the personal sacrifice of sharing one's possessions and valuable food with one's fellow humans. The ritual itself is NOT the sacrifice. It is merely a method of killing where the individuals kill as quickly as possible and acknowledge that only Allah has the right to take a life and that they do so as a humble member of Allah's creation in need of sustenance just like every other species in Allah's creation.

So let us examine some of the appropriate verses in the Qur'an to see what it has to say about sacrifice and how it related to life in 500 C.E. Arabia. (Also included is commentary by Yusuf Ali to show that even someone who was pro-sacrifice with an understanding of animals as subject to humans, did not champion wanton cruelty or notions of blood atonement.) Allah says: **«In them ye have benefits for a term appointed: In the end their place of sacrifice is near the Ancient House.»** (Al-Hajj 22:33)

(The word 'In them' refers to cattle or animals offered for sacrifice. It is quite true that they are useful in many ways to humans, e.g., camels in desert countries are useful as mounts or for carrying burdens or for giving milk, and so, for horses and oxen; and camels and oxen are also good for meat, and camel's hair can be woven into cloth; goats and sheep also yield milk and meat, and hair or wool. But if they are used for sacrifice, they become symbols by which people show that they are willing to give up some of their own benefits for the sake of satisfying the needs of their poorer brethren.) (Yusuf Ali commentary)

Allah also says: **«To every people did We appoint rites (of sacrifice) that they might celebrate the name of Allah over the sustenance He gave them from animals (fit for food). But your God is One God: Submit then your wills to Him (In Islam): and give thou the good news to those who humble themselves.»** (Al-Hajj 22:34)

(This is the true end of sacrifice, not propitiation of higher powers, for Allah is One, and He does not delight in flesh and blood, but a symbol of thanksgiving to Allah by sharing meat with fellow humans. The solemn pronouncement of Allah's name over the sacrifice is an essential part of the rite.) (Yusuf Ali commentary)

Allah says further: **«It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for His guidance to you: And proclaim the Good News to all who do right.»** (Al-Hajj 22:37)

(No one should suppose that meat or blood is acceptable to the One True God. It was a pagan fancy that Allah could be appeased by blood sacrifice. But Allah does accept the offering of our hearts, and as a symbol of such offer, some visible institution is necessary. He has given us power over the brute creation, and permitted us to eat meat, but only if we pronounce His name at the solemn act of taking life, for without this solemn invocation, we are apt to forget the sacredness of life. By this invocation we are reminded that wanton cruelty is not in our thoughts, but only the need for food ...) (Yusuf Ali commentary)

It is quite clear from the Qur'anic passages above that the issue of animal sacrifice is in relation to the role animals played in Arabian society at that place and time (as well as other societies with similar climates and culture), in that humans are commanded to give thanks to Allah and praise Allah for the sustenance He has given them and that they should sacrifice something of value to themselves to demonstrate their appreciation for what they have been given (which in their case was the very animals on which their survival was based).

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- Excerpted, with modifications, from: [www.islamveg.com](http://www.islamveg.com)



# Ibrahim (Abraham)

## Description of Abraham and his Family

Some of the People of the Book stated that his name was Abraham Ibn Tarikh, Ibn Nahur, Ibn Sarough, Ibn Raghu, Ibn Phaligh, Ibn Aher, Ibn Shalih, Ibn Arfghshand, Ibn Sam, Ibn Noah. They said that when Tarikh was seventy five years old, he had Abraham, Nahor (Nohour) and Haran. Haran had a son named Lot (Lut). They also said that Abraham was the middle child and that Haran died in the lifetime of his father in the land where he was born, the land of the Chaldeans (Al-Kaldanieen), also known as Babylonia. At that time some people worshipped idols of stone and wood; others worshipped the planets, stars, sun and moon; still others worshipped their kings and rulers. Abraham was born into that atmosphere, into a typical family of that ancient time. The head of the family was not even an ordinary idolater, but was one who totally rejected Allah and who used to make the idols with his own hands. Some traditions claimed that Abraham's father died before his birth and that he was raised by an uncle whom Abraham called father. Other traditions said that his father was alive and was named Azer. Into that family Abraham was born, destined to stand against his own family, against the entire system of his community. In brief, he stood against all kinds of polytheism.

## Abraham's Childhood

He was endowed with spiritual understanding from an early age. Allah enlightened his heart and mind and gave him wisdom from childhood. Allah the Almighty stated: And indeed We bestowed aforetime on Abraham his (portion of) guidance, and We were Well-Acquainted with him (as to his Belief in the Oneness of Allah, etc.). Surah 21: 51

During his early childhood Abraham realized that his father made strange statues. One day, he asked him about what it was he made. His father replied that he made statues of gods. Abraham was astonished and he spontaneously rejected the idea. Being a child, he played with such statues, sitting on their backs as people sit on the backs of donkeys and mules. One day, his father saw him riding the statue of Mardukh and he became furious. He ordered his son not to play with it again. Abraham asked: "What is this statue, father? It has big ears, bigger than ours." His father answered: "It is Mardukh, the god of gods, son! These big ears show his deep knowledge." This made Abraham laugh. He was only seven years old at that time.

## Abraham's Hatred for Idols

Years passed and Abraham grew. Since his childhood his heart had been full of hatred for these idols. He could not understand how a sane person could make a statue and then worship what he had made. He noticed that these idols did not eat, drink, or talk, and that they could not even turn themselves right-side-up if someone turned them up-side down. How, then, could people believe that such statues could harm or benefit them?

Abraham's people had a big temple full of idols, in the middle of which was a niche accommodating the biggest gods which were of different kinds, qualities, and shapes. Abraham, who used to go to the temple with his father when he was a child, greatly despised all that wood and stone. What surprised him was the way his people behaved when they entered the temple: they bowed and started to cry, begging and imploring their gods for help as if the idols could hear or understand these requests!

At first, such a sight seemed funny to Abraham, but later he began to feel angry. Was it not astonishing that all those people could be deceived? What added to the problem was that his father wanted him to be a priest when he was grown. He wanted nothing more from his son than that he revere those statues, yet Abraham never stopped displaying his hatred and disdain of them.

## Abraham Discovers Allah

One night Abraham left his house to go to a mountain. He walked alone in the dark until he chose a cave in the mountain, where he sat resting his back against its wall. He looked at the sky. He had hardly seen it

when he remembered that he was looking at planets and stars which were worshipped by some people on earth. His young heart was filled with tremendous pain. He considered what was beyond the moon, the stars and the planets (i.e. Allah) and was astonished that these celestial bodies were worshipped by men when they had been created to worship and obey their Creator, appearing and disappearing at His command.

Therefore, Abraham addressed his people who worshipped celestial bodies, as Almighty Allah revealed: Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he be one of those who have Faith with certainty. When the night covered him over with darkness he saw a star. He said: "This is my lord." But when it set, he said: "I like not those that set." When he saw the moon rising up he said: "This is my lord." But when it set he said: "Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among the erring people." When he saw the sun rising up, he said: "This is my lord. This is greater." But when it set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from all that you join as partners in worship with Allah. Verily, I have turned my face towards Him Who has created the heavens and the earth Hanifan (Islamic Monotheism, i.e., worshipping none but Allah Alone) and I am not of Al-Mushrikeen (those who worship others besides Allah)." Surah 6: 75-79

## Abraham Reasons with Celestial Worshipper

His people disputed with him. He said: "Do you dispute with me concerning Allah while He has guided me and I fear not those whom you associate with Allah in worship. (Nothing can happen to me) except when my Lord (Allah) wills something. My Lord comprehends in His Knowledge all things. Will you not then remember?"

"And how should I fear those whom you associate in worship with Allah (though they can neither benefit nor harm), while you fear not that you have joined in worship with Allah things for which He has not sent down to you any authority. (So) which of the two parties has more right to be in security? If you but know."

It is those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah and worship none but Him Alone) and confuse not their belief with Zulm (wrong, i.e., by worshipping others besides Allah), for them (only) there is security and they are the guided. And that was Our Proof which We gave Abraham against his people. We raise whom We will in degrees. Certainly your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing. Surah 7: 80-83

In that debate, Abraham clarified to his people that these celestial bodies do not serve as deities and cannot be worshipped as partners with Allah the Almighty. Indeed, these bodies are created things, fashioned, controlled, managed and made to serve. They appear sometimes and disappear at others, going out of sight from our world. However, Allah the Almighty does not lose sight of anything, and nothing can be hidden from Him. He is without end, everlasting without disappearance. There is no other deity but Allah.

Abraham made clear to them, first, that the celestial bodies are unworthy of worship and, second, that they are among the signs of Allah. Almighty Allah commanded: And from among His Signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Prostrate not to the sun nor to the moon, but prostrate to Allah Who created them, if you (really) worship Him. Surah 41: 37

## The Celestial Worshipper's Arguments

Abraham's reasoning helped to reveal the truth, and then the conflict between him and his people began, for the worshipers of the stars and planets did not stand mute. They began arguing and threatening Abraham.

Abraham replied: "Do you dispute with me concerning Allah while He has guided me, and I fear not those whom you associate with Allah in worship. (Nothing can happen to me) except when my Lord (Allah) wills something. My Lord comprehends in His Knowledge all things. Will you not then remember? And how should I fear those whom you associate in worship with Allah (though they can neither benefit nor harm), while you fear not that you have joined in worship with Allah things for which He has not sent down to you any authority. (So) which of the two parties has more right to be in security? . . . if you but know! It is those who believe (in the oneness of Allah and worship none but Him Alone) and confuse not their belief with Zulm (wrong i.e. by worshipping others besides Allah), for them (only) there is security and they are the guided." Surah 6: 80-82

The curtains are drawn on the first category of people, those who were worshipping celestial bodies. The next situation reveals the second group, those who were practicing idolatry.

## Abraham Reasons with the Idolaters - Surah 21

Allah gave Abraham the reasoning he needed the first time and every time he argued with his people. Almighty Allah declared: And that was Our Proof which We gave Abraham against his people. We raise whom We will in degrees. Certainly your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing. Surah 6: 83

Abraham did his best to make his people heedful to the belief in the oneness of Almighty Allah and to the worship of Him alone. He bade them to firmly renounce the worship of idols. He said to his father and his people: "What are these images, to which you are devoted?" They said "We found our fathers worshipping them." He said: "Indeed you and your fathers have been in manifest error." They said: "Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of those who play about?" He said: "Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who created them and of that I am one of the witnesses." Surah 21: 52-56

### Abraham reasons with his Father

All was finished between Abraham and his people and the struggle began. The most amazed and furious was his father (or his uncle who had raised him), for, as it is well known, he not only worshipped idols but sculptured and sold them as well. Abraham felt that it was his duty as a good son to advise his father against this evil so that he could be saved from Allah's punishment.

Being a wise son, he did not make his father feel foolish, nor did he openly laugh at his conduct. He told him that he loved him, thereby hoping to generate fatherly love. Then he gently asked him why he worshipped lifeless idols who could not hear, see, or protect him. Before his father could become angry he hastily added: "O my father! Verily! There has come to me of knowledge that which came not unto you. So follow me. I will guide you to a Straight Path. O my father! Worship not Satan. Verily! Satan has been a rebel against the Most Beneficent (Allah). O my father! Verily! I fear lest a torment from the Most Beneficent (Allah) overtake you, so that you become a companion of Satan (in the Hell-Fire)."

He (the father) said: "Do you reject my gods, O Abraham? If you stop not (this), I will indeed stone you. So get away from me safely before I punish you." Abraham said: "Peace be on you! I will ask Forgiveness of my Lord for you. Verily! He is unto me, Ever Most Gracious. And I shall turn away from you and from those whom you invoke besides Allah. Surah 19: 43-48

### Abraham debates with the Idolaters

His father's harsh treatment did not stop Abraham from delivering the message of truth. Angry and sad to see people prostrate before idols, he was determined to stamp out these practices and went to the town to debate with the people, knowing full well that he might suffer harm.

Like a wise doctor searching for the cause of a sickness so as to prescribe the proper cure, or like a judge who questions the accused sharply so that he might detect the truth, Abraham asked them: "Do the idols see you when you prostrate before them? Do they benefit you in any way?" They quickly tried to defend their beliefs. They argued that they knew their idols were lifeless but that their forefathers had worshipped them; to them this was proof enough for their belief.

Abraham explained that their forefathers had been wrong. This angered them and they retorted: "Are you condemning our gods and our forefathers? Or are you just joking?"

Abraham showed no fear as he replied: "I am serious. I come to you with a true religion. I have been sent with guidance from our Lord Who alone is worthy of worship, Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and Who regulates all affairs of life, unlike the dumb idols which are just stone and wood."

To convince them that the idols could not harm him, he challenged: "I have already condemned them; if they had any power they would have harmed me by now!"

### Abraham reasons with the Idolaters, Second Time

Almighty Allah recounted: And recite to them the story of Abraham. When he said to his father and his people: "What do you worship?" They said: "We worship idols, and to them we are ever devoted." He said: "Do they hear you, when you call (on them)? Or do they benefit you or do they harm (you)?" They said: "Nay, but we found our fathers doing so."

He said: "Do you observe that which you been worshipping, - You and your ancient fathers? - Verily! They are enemies to me, save the Lord of the Alamin (mankind, jinn, and all that exists); Who has created me, and it is He Who guides me; and it is He Who feeds me and gives me to drink. And when I am ill, it is He

who cures me; and Who will cause me to die and then will bring me to life (again); and Who, I hope will forgive me my faults on the Day of Recompense, (the Day of Resurrection)." Surah 26: 69-82

In another surah The Almighty revealed: And (remember) Abraham when he said to his people: "Worship Allah (Alone), and fear Him, that is better for you if you did but know. You worship besides Allah only idols, and you only invent falsehood. Verily, those whom you worship besides Allah have no power to give you provision, so seek your provision from Allah (Alone), and worship Him (Alone), and be grateful to Him. To Him (Alone) you will be brought back. And if you deny, then nations before you have denied (their Messengers). And the duty of the Messenger is only to convey (the Message) plainly."

Say: "Travel in the land and see how (Allah) originated creation, and then Allah will bring forth (resurrect) the creation of the Hereafter (i.e., resurrection after death). Verily, Allah is Able to do all things."

He punishes whom He wills, and shows mercy to whom He wills, and to Him you will be returned. And you cannot escape in the earth or in the heaven. And besides Allah you have neither any Wali (Protector or Guardian) nor any Helper. And those who disbelieve in the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allah and the Meeting with Him, - it is they who have no hope of My Mercy, and it is they who will have a painful torment.

## Abraham Breaks the Idols

He explained to them the beauty of Allah's creation, His power and wisdom. Idol worship is detested by Allah, for Allah is the Lord of the universe Who created mankind, guided him, provided him with food and drink, and cured him when he was sick, and Who will cause him to die and be raised up again. It was He to Whom Abraham prayed and Who would forgive his sins on the Day of Judgment. However, they would not give up but clung fast to idolatry.

Abraham left his father's house and abandoned his people and what they worshipped. He decided to do something about their state of disbelief, but did not reveal it. He knew that there was going to be a great celebration on the other bank of the river which would be attended by all the people. Abraham waited until the city was empty, then came out cautiously, directing his steps towards the temple. The streets leading to it were empty and the temple itself was deserted, for the priests had also gone to the festival outside the city.

Abraham went there carrying a sharp ax. He looked at the stone and wood statues of the gods and at the food laid in front of them as offerings. He approached one of the statues and asked: The food in front of you is getting cold. Why don't you eat?" The statue kept silent and rigid. Abraham asked the other statues around him: "Will you not eat (of the offering before you)?" Surah 37: 91

He was mocking them for he knew they would not eat. He once again asked then: "What is the matter with you that you do speak not?" Surah 37: 92

He then raised his ax and started smashing the false gods worshipped by the people. He destroyed them all except one, on whose neck he hung the ax. After this his anger subsided and he felt at peace. He left the temple. He had fulfilled his vow to show his people a practical proof of their foolishness in worshipping something other than Allah.

## The Idolaters Questions Abraham

When the people returned, they were shocked to see their gods smashed to pieces, lying scattered all over the temple. They began to guess who had done that to their idols, and Abraham's name came to their minds.

Allah the Almighty said: They said: "Who has done this to our aliah (gods)? He must indeed be one of the wrongdoers." They said: "We heard a young man talking (against) them who is called Abraham." They said: "Then bring him before the eyes of the people, that they may testify." They said: "Are you the one who has done this to our gods, O Abraham?" (Abraham) said: "Nay, this one, the biggest of them (idols) did it. Ask them, if they can speak!"

So they turned to themselves and said: "Verily, you are the Zalimun (polytheists and wrong-doers)." Then they turned to themselves (their first thought and said). "Indeed you (Abraham) know well that these (idols) speak not!" (Abraham) said: "Do you then worship besides Allah, things that can neither profit you, nor harm you? Fie upon you, and upon that which you worship besides Allah! Have you then no sense?" Surah 21: 59-67

Furious, they demanded that Abraham be arrested and tried. Abraham did not resist. This was precisely what he had been aiming for, so that he could show them up in public for their foolish beliefs.

At the trial they asked him if he was responsible for breaking the idols. Smiling, he told them to ask the biggest idol, which was still whole. He told them that he must be the culprit! They replied that he knew well that the idol could not speak or move, which gave Abraham the chance to prove the foolishness of worshipping these lifeless objects.

They then realized the senselessness of their beliefs; however, their arrogance would not allow them to admit their foolishness. All they could do was use their power of authority - as tyrants usually do - to punish Abraham. They kept him in chains and planned their revenge.

### The Idolaters Try to burn Abraham

Anger was burning in their hearts. They decided to throw Abraham into the biggest fire they could build. All the citizens were ordered to gather wood as a service to their gods. Ignorant, sick women vowed that if they were cured they would donate so much wood to burn Abraham. For several days they collected fuel. They dug a deep pit, filled it with firewood and ignited it. They brought a catapult with which to cast Abraham into the fire. Abraham was put on the catapult, his hands and feet tied. The fire was ready with its flames reaching the sky. The people stood away from the pit because of the great heat. Then the chief priest gave his order to cast Abraham into the fire.

The angel Gabriel came near Abraham's head and asked him: "O Abraham, do you wish for anything?" Abraham replied: "Nothing from you."

The catapult was shot, and Abraham was cast into the fire, but his descent into the blaze was as a descent on steps in a cool garden. The flames were still there, but they did not burn, for Allah the Almighty had issued His command: "O fire! Be you coolness and safety for Abraham." Surah 21: 69

The fire submitted to the will of Allah, becoming cool and safe for Abraham. It only burned his bonds, and he sat in the midst of the fire as if he were sitting in a garden. He glorified and praised Allah the Almighty, with a heart that contained only his love for Allah. There was not any vacant space therein for fear, awe, or worry. It was filled with love only.

Fear and awe were dead, and the fire was turned into coolness, making the air pleasant. Those who love Allah as Abraham did do not fear.

### The Faith of the Believers

Almighty Allah declared: Those (i.e., believers) unto whom the people (hypocrites) said: "Verily, the people (pagans) have gathered against you (a great army), therefore, fear them." But it (only) increased them in Faith, and they said: 'Allah (Alone) is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs (for us)."

So they returned with Grace and Bounty from Allah. No harm touched them; and they followed the good Pleasure of Allah. And Allah is the Owner of Great Bounty. It is only Satan that suggests to you the fear of his Auliya supporters and friends (polytheists, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah and in His Messenger Muhammad), so fear them not, but fear Me, if you are (true) believers." Surah 3: 173-175

### The People's reaction to the Fire

The throng, the chiefs, and the priests sat watching the fire from a distance. It was burning their faces and nearly suffocating them. It kept burning for such a long time that the disbelievers thought it would never be extinguished.

When it did burn out, they were greatly amazed to find Abraham coming out of the pit untouched by the fire. Their faces were black from the smoke, but his was bright with the light and grace of Allah. The raging fire had become cool for Abraham and had only charred the ropes which held him. He walked out of the fire as if he were walking out of a garden. Cries of astonishment were heard from the heathens. They wanted to harm him, but We made them the worst losers. Surah 21:70

This miracle shamed the tyrants, but it did not cool the flame of anger in their hearts. However, after this event many of the people followed Abraham, although some kept their belief a secret for fear of harm or death at the hands of the rulers.

### Abraham's Dialogue with Namrud

Abraham had established a definite reasoning against idolators. Nothing was left for him except to reason against the people who proclaimed themselves gods.

When the king, Namrud, heard of Abraham's safe exit from the fire he became very angry. He feared that the status of godhead he had proclaimed for himself was now challenged by an ordinary human being. He summoned Abraham to the palace and held a dialogue with him, which Allah the Almighty recounted: Have you not thought about him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord (Allah), because Allah had given him the kingdom? When Abraham said (to him). 'My Lord (Allah) is He Who gives life and causes death.' He said: "I give life and cause death." Abraham said: "Verily! Allah causes the sun to rise from the east; then cause it you to rise from the west." So the disbeliever was utterly defeated. And Allah guides not the people who are Zalimeen (wrongdoers, etc.). Surah 2: 258

## Abraham Emigrates

Abraham's fame spread throughout the entire kingdom. People talked about how he had been saved from the blazing fire and how he had debated with the king and left him speechless. In the meantime, Abraham continued calling people to believe in Allah, exerting a great effort to guide his people to the right path. He tried every means to convince them. However, in spite of his love and care for his people, they felt angry and deserted him. Only one woman and one man of his people shared his belief in Allah. The woman's name was Sarah and she became his wife. The man's name was Lot (Lut), and he became a prophet.

When Abraham realized that no one else was going to believe in his call, he decided to emigrate. He left his people and traveled with his wife and Lot to a city called Ur, then to another called Haran, and then to Palestine.

Allah the Almighty told us: So Lot believed in him (Abraham's message of Islamic Monotheism). He (Abraham) said: "I will emigrate for the sake of my Lord. Verily. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. Surah 29: 26

After Palestine, Abraham traveled to Egypt, calling people to believe in Allah wherever he traveled, judging fairly between people, and guiding them to truth and righteousness.

## Hadith about Abraham, Sarah, and Hajar

Abu Hurairah narrated that Abraham did not tell a lie except on three occasions, twice for the sake of Allah (Exalted and Almighty) when he said: "I am sick," (when his people were holding a festival in honor of their gods, Abraham excused himself by saying he was sick; see Surah 37: 89), and when he said: "(I have not done this but) the big idol has done it." The (third was) that while Abraham and Sarah (his wife) were going (on a journey), they passed by (the territory of) a tyrant. Someone said to the tyrant: 'This man (i.e., Abraham ) is accompanied by a very charming lady.' So, he sent for Abraham and asked him about Sarah saying: "Who is this lady?" Abraham said: "She is my sister."

Abraham went to Sarah and said: "O Sarah! There are no believers on the surface of the earth except you and me. This man asked me about you and I have told him that you are my sister, do not contradict my statement." The tyrant then called Sarah, and when she went to him, he tried to take hold of her with his hand, but (his hand got stiff and) he was confounded. He asked Sarah: "Pray to Allah for me, and I shall not harm you." So Sarah asked Allah to cure him and he got cured. He tried to take hold of her for the second time, but (his hand got as stiff as or stiffer than before and) he was more confounded. He again requested Sarah: "Pray to Allah for me, and I will not harm you." Sarah asked Allah again, and he became all right. He then called one of his guards (who had brought her) and said: 'You have not brought me a human being but have brought me a devil.'

The tyrant then gave Hajar as a maid servant to Sarah. Sarah came back (to Abraham) while he was praying. Abraham, gesturing with his hand, asked: "What has happened?" She replied: "Allah has spoiled the evil plot of the infidel (or immoral person) and gave me Hajar for service." Abu Hurairah then addressed his listeners saying: 'That (Hajar) was your mother, O Bani Ma-is-Sama (i.e., the Arab, the descendants of Ishmael, Hajar's son).'

## Hajar and Sarah

Abraham's wife Sarah was sterile. She had been given an Egyptian woman, Hajar, as a servant. Abraham had aged, and his hair was gray after many years spent in calling people to Allah. Sarah thought that she

and Abraham were lonely because she could not have a child. Therefore, she offered her husband her servant Hajar in marriage. Hajar gave birth to her first son Ishmael (Ismail) when Abraham was an old man.

### Abraham Questions Resurrection

Abraham lived on earth worshipping Allah and calling people to monotheism, but he was journeying to Allah, knowing that his days on earth were limited and that they would be followed by death, and finally, resurrection. The knowledge of life after death filled Abraham with peace, love, and certitude.

One day, he begged Allah to show him how He brought the dead back to life. Allah commanded Abraham to take four birds, cut them up, mingle their body parts, divide them into four portions, and place them on top of four different hills, then call back the birds in Allah's name. Abraham did as he was told.

Immediately the mingled parts of the birds separated to join their original bodies in different places, and the birds flew back to Abraham.

Almighty Allah revealed: And (remember) when Abraham said: 'My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.' Allah said: "Do you not believe?" Abraham said: "Yes (I believe), but to be stronger in Faith." He said: "Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you (then slaughter them, cut them into pieces), and then put a portion of them on every hill, and call them, they will come to you in haste. And know that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise." Surah 2: 260