



## Aspects of Abraham's Devotion to God in the Quran

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### **Abstract :**

The present paper aims to study **the significance and spiritual** excellence of **Abraham** as they are described in the **Quran**. It also sheds light on a characteristic that had been a distinctive feature of Abraham's character in **every step** of his **journey**, namely: his unfeigned **devotion** to God. It is this devotion that is not only seen as the main motive for all his deeds, but it is also believed to be the main reason behind the exceptional praise God has heaped upon his Prophet in all the Holy Books.

In order to investigate this topic properly, the paper tackles some of the incidents which reveal the extent to which his devotion to his Creator had shaped his life. Such incidents include, but are not limited to, his readiness to sacrifice his own son, the way he stood up to Nimrod, his migration from Iraq to Makah, as well as going through the pains of being lit on fire with unchanging faith. Indeed, the story of his life provides ample opportunity for a thorough analysis of his dedication to God. This analysis is based on a detailed inventory of the Quranic verses which touch upon the issue, whether they directly mention the father of all holy prophets by name or not. For a clearer understanding, the paper also considers the **sayings of Prophet** Mohammad -as they are complementary to the Quran.

**Keywords:** Significance, Spiritual, Abraham, Quran, Journey, Devotion.



### **Introduction :**

The story of Prophet Abraham, peace be upon him, has been contemplated with utmost esteem by all the heavenly religions. In fact, they regard him as the father of all prophets. God created Mankind but chose Abraham as the person deserving of His unmitigated Love and Proximity. It only made sense for him to be God's elect after he proved to be of pure faith, absolute devotion, and total observance. In the Holy Qur'an, Abraham is mentioned repeatedly: a whole chapter (sura) is named after him and his story is invoked in 69 verses to consider and emulate. His journey is full of aspects of devoted worship, earnest love, and total observance of the Lord's commands and prohibitions. Abraham lived his life in Godly devotedness. His devotion was the drive behind every step he ever made- whatever he did, and whatever he did not do, his faith was at the center of it all.

The following is an attempt to classify some of these aspects according to their chronological order in the Holy Qur'an.

But before tackling these aspects, and for clarity purposes, it is essential to discuss the meaning of devotion in this context.



1. Defining Devotion: Linguistically: in Arabic, devotion pivots around the meaning of purity<sup>1</sup>, brightness<sup>2</sup>, and clearness<sup>3</sup>.

2. Idiomatic definition: Devotion is “for a person to seek through their words and deeds the countenance of God and His Satisfaction regardless of any profit or glory, title or appearance, advancement or regression which they might entail. The goal is for the person to rise above the weakness of their deeds and the baseness of character to connect directly with God”<sup>4</sup>. God calls on His last prophet and his followers to “worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion. Unquestionably, for Allah is the pure religion”<sup>5</sup>. In another instance, He shows him the centrality of devotion to faith: “Say, [O Muhammad], "Indeed, I have been commanded to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion”<sup>6</sup>.

“Through his traditions and sayings, the prophet of Islam has implored servants of God to make sure devotion is at the center of all their deeds, while warning them from using their acts of worship as a way of seeking people’s praise. Indeed, every work that lacks devotion can only result in rejection. God does not look at the appearance of people’s deed but looks into their hearts’ intentions and aspirations for deeds are evaluated according to the intentions behind them and the end-goal they seek.”<sup>7</sup>

The greatest achievement of the heart is to commit every deed and every word to God alone. A heart which lacks devotion is a heart empty of divine love, no matter how many acts of worship the person might engage in, for God only sees the heart. Devotion is the proof of the completion of faith since it unifies the desire and the desired allowing the individual to focus on one destination, one concern and one purpose. Everything in life ends in unity and all to which one aspires from their deeds, movement and stillness, life and death, is the Mighty Lord’s Countenance. Regret only comes from a deed that would steer one away from such a supreme purpose. “Devotion is a secret between the servant and his Lord. It cannot be known by an angel to record it, a demon to spoil it, or a fantasy to destroy it.”<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, devotion is to offer one’s movement and idleness to God. God then puts devotion in the hearts of those who honor Him. Among those pious men and women, we find Abraham on top of the list, with unparalleled levels of

<sup>1</sup> Zamakh’shari, *assas al-balagha (the Basis of Eloquence)*, Mohamad Uyun Soud,ed. Scientific Books publishing House: Beirut, 1998. Entry of ‘khalasa’ (devote).

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Seedah, *al-Muhkam wa al-Muheet al-A'tham ( The Great Book of Precise Language)*, A. Al-Hameed Handawi,ed. Scientific Books publishing House: Beirut, 2000. Entry of ‘khalasa’.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Jawhari, *Sihah fi ‘llugha (Dictionary of Veracious Language)*, Ahmad Attar,ed. Dar al-Ilem Publishing: Beirut, 1987. Entry of ‘khalasa’ (devote).

<sup>4</sup> Sayid Sabiq, *Islamona (Our Islam)*, Fath Publishing for Arab Media, 2009, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Qur’an*, az-Zumar (the Troops) Chapter, verses 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Qur’an*, az-Zumar (the Troops) Chapter, verse 11.

<sup>7</sup> Abdelkader Absi, *Haqa'iq at-Tasawuf (The Truths of Sufism)*, dar al-Irfan Publishing: 2008, Aleppo, 18<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 205.

<sup>8</sup> Al-junayd al-Baghdadi, *Taj al-Arifeen (the Crown of the Knowledgeable)*, Suad al-Hakeem,ed., dar Sharq Publishing, p.112.



dutifulness. The following section demonstrates aspects of Abraham's devotion and piety according to historical context.

First of all, it is worth indicating the general conditions of Abraham's journey. He came at a time when all his people worshiped idols and planets – all except from Abraham, his wife and his nephew. It is through Abraham, peace be upon him, that God erased the darkness and removed the evil. God granted him maturity in childhood, made him His emissary as a youth, and offered him His ultimate closeness in adulthood.



## Aspects of Devotion in the Story of Abraham peace be upon him:

### 1. Abraham's compassion while debating his father

God blessed Abraham with a good character and a kind heart, purified from anything but God. As a result, he was a guiding light. The Quranic verses we will consider in this first section demonstrate how God asked prophet Mohammad - peace and blessing be upon him- to teach his followers, i.e. the Muslim Ummah, the story of Abraham as he is the father of Arabs. At the dawn of Islam, Arabs were cognizant of the purity of his religion and appreciative of the nobleness of his status. When God says "the religion of your father Abraham", it is for them to learn from his story that they need to leave idol worshiping and follow the doctrine of their father. They used to say "Rather, they say, "Indeed, we found our fathers upon a religion, and we are in their footsteps [rightly] guided" ”<sup>9</sup>, so he reminded them that they are the descendants of Abraham who left the religion of his father and his people to loyally declare himself to God.

The first person Abraham tried to call to God was his father: Azar - known in the Hebrew Bible as Terah. Abraham felt his father was the worthiest of his advice given the blood bonds between them. He spoke tirelessly but in the most polite, kindest and sweetest of terms. He would say "O father!" again and again in an effort to both show and receive sympathy but as his father was getting more stubborn, he told him: "peace be with you". Azar was an arrogant man who relied on threats, estrangement and insults. The Qur'an describes Abraham's pleas as follows: "And mention in the Book [the story of] Abraham. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet. [Mention] when he said to his father, "O my father, why do you worship that which does not hear and does not see and will not benefit you at all? O my father, indeed there has come to me of knowledge that which has not come to you, so follow me; I will guide you to an even path. O my father, do not worship Satan. Indeed Satan has ever been, to the Most Merciful, disobedient. O my father, indeed I fear that there will touch you a punishment from the Most Merciful so you would be to Satan a companion."<sup>10</sup> God describes Abraham as a saint, which in Arabic is defined as being extremely honest and devoted, and a strong believer of God's word and verse.

One of the greatest reflections of devotion to God is mercy towards His creatures. The Quranic verse invoked previously shows the extent of Abraham's mercy towards his father as he used the nicest expressions in his exchange with him. He tried to convince him how wrong it is to worship idols that cannot hear his prayers or see his place without using harsh words. He showed him that they cannot do him any good. They cannot give him money and they cannot grant him glory! And when he had to tell him what he feared would happen him, he did not say {you are going to be punished or you are going to Hell} but he said "there

<sup>9</sup> Holy Quran, Az-zukhruf Chapter (the Ornaments of Gold), verse 22.

<sup>10</sup> Holy Quran, Maryam Chapter, verses 42-45.



will touch you a punishment". Clearly, Abraham's words are a gentler version since 'touch' in Arabic means light contact.

Also, "I fear" conveys the meaning of 'I care about you and I am worried that something bad might happen to you'<sup>11</sup>. Then Abraham reminded his father of the light and knowledge he has been blessed with despite his younger age: "O my father, indeed there has come to me of knowledge that which has not come to you, so follow me; I will guide you to an even path."<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Abraham did not describe his father as ignorant nor did he pretend to have complete knowledge. He simply said "there has come to me of knowledge that which has not come to you" as he urged him to follow his guidance to get all that he wished for and avoid all that he fears.

When he said: "O father, do not worship Satan", Abraham was calling on his father not to obey Satan as he was the one making Azar and his people worship the useless idols. Satan is a sinner, adamant on disobeying God and too arrogant to do his commands, as a result, he belongs to Hell. In asking his father not to follow Satan, Abraham was asking him not to be like Satan. No mind can find worshipping idols logical, but it is the devil's insinuations and temptations that make it possible. Consequently, worshipping idols is synonymous with worshipping Satan.

In the face of this sound and gentle advice, Azar's answer was not only rejection but also a stream of threats. As the Qur'an shows, the words he chose to use were as follows: "[His father] said, "Have you no desire for my gods, O Abraham? If you do not desist, I will surely stone you, so avoid me a prolonged time"."<sup>13</sup> It is only then when Abraham said "Peace be upon you" meaning "no harm shall come to you from me, you are safe as far as I am concerned"<sup>14</sup>. Then he once again dealt with his father's harsh attitude with gentleness and mercy: "I will ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. Indeed, He is ever gracious to me"<sup>15</sup>. When his father chose harsh words, Abraham still offered his prayers that his father would be guided and forgiven and helped to the path of faith and good. He knew God always listened to his prayers, so he kept praying for his father as he promised him until it was clear that he was an enemy of God, then he disavowed him: "And the request of forgiveness of Abraham for his father was only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became apparent to Abraham that

<sup>11</sup> Mutawalli Chaarawi, *Stories of Prophets and Emissaries*, p.80

<sup>12</sup> Holy Quran, Maryam Chapter, verse 43.

<sup>13</sup> Holy Quran, Maryam Chapter, verse 46.

<sup>14</sup> Abu Fidae Dimashqui, *Stories of the Prophets*, Mostafa Abd al-Wahed, ed., p.155 .

<sup>15</sup> Holy Quran, Maryam Chapter, verse 47.



his father was an enemy to Allah, he disassociated himself from him. Indeed was Abraham compassionate and patient.”<sup>16</sup>

It was devotion to God that acted as the drive behind Abraham's debate with his father and the mercy he showed towards him. The true believer sees God in all his deeds and words. Also, harshness and devotion can hardly coexist in one heart. Indeed, one cannot be truly devoted to God and fail to treat his creatures with kindness and mercy.

## **2. Abraham's trust in God when debating his people**

Since the very beginning, Abraham knew that convincing his people to worship God was a difficult mission. He knew that they could hurt him or even kill him as people are naturally expected to object to all that is new. However, Abraham's total trust in God and his readiness to obey His commands made his mission easier. His devotion to God was too perfect that he saw God in all which he did.

Abraham's people worshiped the sun and the moon and the planets. He wanted to draw their attention to how spoiled their beliefs are, but he was resolved to do so with a politeness worthy of a prophet. God says in the Qur'an: "And thus did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]"<sup>17</sup>. In this context, "thus" means like we showed Abraham the perversity of the faith of his father and his people, we show him "the realm" that is the supremacy and the greatness of the heavens and the earth. God showed Abraham the worshiping angels and the sky wonders and planets. He showed him the earth and what it contains from seas and mountains. He thus showed him the secrets of the universe and the mysteries of the earth and the skies so that he could infer without a doubt the oneness of God, the greatness of His capability and the vastness of His knowledge.

God says in the Holy Book: {So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "I like not those that disappear." And when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray." And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my lord; this is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah. Indeed, I have turned my face toward He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward truth, and I am not of those who associate others with Allah." And his people argued with him. He said, "Do you argue with me concerning Allah while He has guided me? And I fear not what you associate with Him [and will not be harmed] unless my Lord should will something. My Lord encompasses all things in knowledge; then will you not remember?"<sup>18</sup>}

<sup>16</sup> Holy Quran, Tawba Chapter (the Repentance), verse 114.

<sup>17</sup> The Holy Quran, al-An'aam (the Cattle) Chapter, verse 75.

<sup>18</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anaam (the Cattle) Chapter, verses 76-80.





These verses refer to how the debate between Abraham and his people developed. He started with noticing a great star at night, which he planned to use as a way to denounce his people's beliefs and to demonstrate their misguidedness. He alluded that he shared their views only to abolish them with sanity and rationality. When the star faded, Abraham said that it certainly was *not* a deity and that he did not like things which tend to fade and disappear, for God sure does not fade nor does he disappear. Gradually, Abraham went from demonstrating the ungodly nature of the stars to demonstrating that the moon, brightest and biggest as it is, was no god either. He saw the moon lighting the dark sky and he said to his people: "that must God" then when it faded he made sure they heard him deplore his regretful decision: "Oh! This can't be my God. Oh if God does not guide me and help see the truth I would end up one of the straying people". For his people, this was an insinuation as close to a clear declaration as possible. Then it was the rising sun's turn. Abraham explained that the sun was a god given its big dimensions. As the sun also fell down, Abraham declared his rejection for his people's misguided beliefs and his embracement of God's way: My heart is free from worshiping the stars and the planets, I only worship the Creator of the earth and the sky and the universe. As he pretended to be a non-believer, Abraham was the example of a great debater. In truth, he was a true believer in God's oneness and his conversations with his people were only a way to convey his message that they should worship God alone. The Prophets' Chapter in the Holy Qur'an provides another description of Abraham's debates: "And We had certainly given Abraham his sound judgement before, and We were of him well-Knowing. When he said to his father and his people, "What are these statues to which you are devoted?"<sup>19</sup>". In another chapter, God describes him as follows: "Indeed, Abraham was a [comprehensive] leader, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining toward truth, and he was not of those who associate others with Allah."<sup>20</sup> In another verse, God emphasizes Abraham's position as a debater: "And his people argued with him. He said, "Do you argue with me concerning Allah while He has guided me? And I fear not what you associate with Him [and will not be harmed] unless my Lord should will something. My Lord encompasses all things in knowledge; then will you not remember?"<sup>21</sup>. The reason why Abraham said "I fear not what you associate with God" and did not say "You should not fear what you associate with God" is because the nature of the preacher or the prophet's vocation is that he should follow what he preaches before asking the others to, and that he must not preach what he does not do.

Abraham's people disputed his calls and threatened that their idols would harm him if he did not accept them as his gods. His answer was to question their position. How could they dispute God's commands? how could they deny God's oneness? How could they expect him to cave to their demands and threats when

<sup>19</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiyae (the Prophets) Chapter, verses 51-52.

<sup>20</sup> The Holy Qur'an, an-Nahl (the Bee) Chapter, verse 120.

<sup>21</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anaam (the Cattle) Chapter, verse 80.





God had guided him and shown him the way? He asserted that their statues had no influence and that he did not fear them or care for them, since they can harm or benefit no one. How could a bunch of unseeing and unhearing stones harm or save anyone? If the statues held such power, why hadn't they already use it to punish him for his distrust? And since Abraham's points made so much sense, who among the two sides of this debate were worthy of security and salvation based on their beliefs? Who was right: worshiping He who created and manages the universe or taking statues which are incapable of harm or good as gods? God clarifies that "They who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice"<sup>22</sup> are the ones worthy of security. Indeed, those who believe in the existence of One God and worship Him alone without attributing associates to Him, those who keep their faith pure from sin and misdeed are the ones who will get security on doomsday and are the ones who are on the right path in this life and the hereafter. In the following verse, God celebrates Abraham's capability to win every debate he ever entered as one of God's miraculous offerings to his prophet: "And that was Our [conclusive] argument which We gave Abraham against his people"<sup>23</sup>.

Abraham's people insisted on keeping their misguided ways. They kept disputing his arguments in the hope of making him abandon his True Religion. However, they lacked a strong sensical argument. All they relied on was a bunch of fictitious tales: if you disavow our gods, they'll punish you...etc. and this is the argument of those who lack a real argument.

Some of Abraham's people worshiped the planets and the stars, others worshiped statues and idols. It was Abraham's trust in God, which was based on his devotion, that made him reach out to both parties in an intelligent and eloquent debate. In fact, and since a very young age, Abraham denounced idol worship. He stood up alone against a society where injustice and harshness prevailed, asking his people how they could worship statues that they made themselves.

The Poets' Chapter provides yet another description of Abraham's situation with his people: "And recite to them the news of Abraham, When he said to his father and his people, "What do you worship?" They said, "We worship idols and remain to them devoted." He said, "Do they hear you when you supplicate? Or do they benefit you, or do they harm?" They said, "But we found our fathers doing thus." He said, "Then do you see what you have been worshipping, You and your ancient forefathers? Indeed, they are enemies to me, except the Lord of the worlds, Who created me, and He [it is who] guides me. And it is He who feeds me and gives me drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me and who will cause me to die and then bring me to life and who I aspire that He will forgive me my sin on the Day of Recompense." [And he said], "My Lord, grant me authority and join me with the righteous"<sup>24</sup>. What, then, is the force which made Abraham peace

<sup>22</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anaam (the Cattle) Chapter, verse 82.

<sup>23</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anaam (the Cattle) Chapter, verse 83.

<sup>24</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Ashuaarae (the Poets) Chapter, verses 69-83.



be upon him defy his whole world to speak a truth that could cost him his life? It was his devotion to God. Devotion which God describes as “a mystery of My Mystery I entrust to the hearts of those I love among my servants”. Abraham debated his people patiently and asked them about what benefit can they reap from worshipping the statues, he tried to make them realize their mistake and abandon their misguided ways. As a result, Abraham's people confessed that their idols cannot hear or benefit or harm, and that they only worshiped them to emulate their forefathers. They “failed to find a convincing response to disprove Abraham's argument. All they could think of was the need to blindly imitate their fathers and grandfathers, but they could not provide a good reason for doing so”<sup>25</sup>.

When Abraham's repetitive denunciations and reminders fell on deaf ears, he decided to destroy the idols. He hoped that his people would abandon worshipping their idols if they saw that they were unable to even defend themselves. It was a practical proof of their uselessness and the practical proof tends to be more convincing and more shocking. The Qur'an describes the incident as “So he made them into fragments, except a large one among them, that they might return to it [and question]”<sup>26</sup>. Abraham destroyed all the idols except from the biggest one and “this was a clear clue if Abraham's people were minimally reasonable. If their idols were actually gods, they would have defended themselves against any harm”<sup>27</sup>. However, because of their limitless ignorance and great misguidedness, they wondered “Who has done this to our gods? Indeed, he is of the wrongdoers.”<sup>28</sup> Abraham was then ordered to appear before a huge gathering of his people and their leadership so that he would be interrogated and punished:

“They said, “Then bring him before the eyes of the people that they may testify.” They said, “Have you done this to our gods, O Abraham?” He said, “Rather, this - the largest of them - did it, so ask them, if they should [be able to] speak.” So they returned to [blaming] themselves and said [to each other], “Indeed, you are the wrongdoers.” Then they reversed themselves, [saying], “You have already known that these do not speak!” He said, “Then do you worship instead of Allah that which does not benefit you at all or harm you? Uff to you and to what you worship instead of Allah. Then will you not use reason?”<sup>29</sup>

Then they decided that he would be thrown in fire and killed. One of Abraham's most important goals was “to have all the idol-worshipping people gathered and convinced that they were misguided of putting their faith in useless statues”<sup>30</sup>. They started assembling firewood from everywhere they could and for

<sup>25</sup> Wahaba az-Zuhayli, *at-Tafsir al-Munir (the Enlightening Explanation)*, Dar al-Fikr al-Muassir, Damascus, 1418H, volume 19, p.167. [My own translation].

<sup>26</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiyae (the Prophets) Chapter, verse 58.

<sup>27</sup> Ismail Abu al-Fidae, *Qissas al-Anbiyae (Stories of the Prophets)*, p. 176. [My own translation].

<sup>28</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiyae (the Prophets) Chapter, verse 59.

<sup>29</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiyae (the Prophets) Chapter, verses 61-67.

<sup>30</sup> Ismail Abu al-Fidae, *Qissas al-Anbiyae (Stories of the Prophets)*, p. 178. [My own translation]



as long as they could, to the point that a sick woman would vow that she would take wood to Abraham's fire if she was ever to be cured. Then they took a huge container and they put all the wood in it and they torched it. The fire was set and it continued to grow and ignite until the flames reached frightening levels. Abraham was then "placed in one hand of a mangonel"<sup>31</sup>. Such is "the habit of tyrants: when they face opposition and they fail to argue logically, they concern themselves with punishment"<sup>32</sup>. "They said, "Burn him and support your gods - if you are to act"<sup>33</sup>.<sup>33</sup> They wanted him to burn and he kept his patience unchanged, his trust in God intact and his devotion to God as strong as ever. He never changed his position from the idol-worshipping issue. On the contrary, he upheld his beliefs for the sake of God and the cause of His Oneness despite the harm and the sky-high fire. This, indeed, is a great lesson of devotion and obedience to the commands of the Lord Creator.

On the other hand, God could never forsake Abraham or fail him. For he who devotes himself to God, God will have him prevail. As God the All-Knowing knew that Abraham was not to put himself in death's way unless he was totally devoted and incredibly obedient to Him, He had an unfathomable recompense for him. He saved his life by inverting the fire equation, so that it became coolness to a body filled with true faith and trust in God. They wanted victory and glory but God gave them loss and scorn. God describes the miraculous event in the Holy Qur'an: "Allah said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham." And they intended for him harm, but We made them the greatest losers"<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Ismail Abu al-Fidae, *Qissas al-Anbiyae (Stories of the Prophets)*, p. 178. [My own translation]

<sup>32</sup> Abu Abdallah al-Qurtobi, *al-Jami' li ahkam al-Qur'an (the Comprehensive Account of the Stipulations of the Qur'an)*, Ahmad al-Bardouni, ed., Dar-al-kutub al-Mesriya, 1964, volume 3, p.285. [My own translation] .

<sup>33</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiyae (the Prophets) Chapter, verse 68.

<sup>34</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiyae (the Prophets) Chapter, verse 69-70.



### 3. Seeking strength from God when debating the king who claimed to be god

“Have you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death," he said, "I give life and cause death." Abraham said, "Indeed, Allah brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So the disbeliever was overwhelmed [by astonishment], and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.”<sup>35</sup>

This verse shows that God showed Prophet Abraham peace be upon him the clear proofs of His existence and that the king in question was blind to light of truth. As a result, the king's arguments were flawed and debased, rooted in uncertainties and hallucinations. Nimrod asked Abraham about the God he was calling for them to preach, Abraham replied: my God gives life and death, he is the source of life and the cause of death. The tyrannical king was the first to arrogantly deny the facts declaring that he was the one to give life to people with capital punishment if he decided to grant them clemency, and he was the one to take life if he decided to execute people. To demonstrate, he had two men brought to him, he killed the first and pardoned the other<sup>36</sup>. This was the first sign of weakness in Nimrod's argument for what Abraham meant in his statement was: the creation of life from nothing and its removal from all creation, not only keeping someone alive or taking the life of a few people who were already sentenced to death. When Abraham saw how Nimrod kept deliberately ignoring the meaning of life-giving and life-taking, he moved to another argument that cannot be neglected. He stated that life and death are a manifestation of God's absolute power and will, exactly like the sun rising from the east. So, if the king was so sure of being a god, he should be able to change the pattern of the rise and fall of the sun and make it rise from the west instead.

Understandably, this debate ended in a total triumph for Abraham. Another victory for God's beloved prophet. Thus, God keeps grating victories to His devoted allies and servants while His enemies only face failure and humiliation.

It is known that most people fear arguing with kings, and that fear gets multiplied if that king is a brutal tyrant like Nimrod. For kings can harm their opposers and torture them heartlessly. As Nimrod was believed to be the king of his time, the ruler of the whole earth, what he could do goes beyond imagination. But Abraham peace be upon him was not like most people, because he got his

<sup>35</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqara (the Cow) Chapter, verse 258.

<sup>36</sup> Wahaba az-Zuhayli, *at-Tafsir al-Munir (the Enlightening Explanation)*, Dar al-Fikr al-Muassir, Damascus, 1418H, volume 3, p28. [My own translation] .



strength and courage from his Creator and he fearlessly sought to disprove the claims of pretentious king.

#### **4. Abraham and his wife Hajar's Trust in God and acceptance of His commands**

This is another aspect, not only of Abraham's devotion to God, but also of his wife's, Hajar (known in the Hebrew Bible as Hagar).

When Abraham and his first wife Sarah grew old, they had no child of their own to keep them company. Their desire for a child grew so tense that, hearing her husband's constant prayer for a son, Sarah asked Abraham to marry her maid Hajar. When the new bride gave birth to Ismail peace be upon him, a sad and jealous Sarah asked Abraham to take Hajar and her son somewhere she could not see.

And so Abraham and his new born left home, with no destination in mind. When they reached the place of the holy mosque (Kaaba) in Makkah, God ordered him to stop. It was a deserted area with no food, water, or companion. As per God's commands, Abraham left his bride and son there with the little food and water they brought for the road. Hagar followed the father of her child and asked him:

"O Abraham, where do you go and to whom do you leave us in this valley?"

"to God", he replied

"I accept", she interjected. In a different account, she said: "God shall not neglect us".

Abraham spent his whole adult life praying for a righteous son. He wished to hold him, to play with him, to enjoy his laughs and smiles, and to turn to him for help with his prophetic mission and his old age. He kept praying despite his oldness and feebleness: "My Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous"<sup>37</sup>. God finally answered his prayers and granted him his wish. He later gave him a second son, Isaac, then Abraham expressed his gratitude to God: "Praise to Allah, who has granted to me in old age Ishmael and Isaac. Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplication."<sup>38</sup>

Abraham went down his path, leaving a part of his heart behind, in full acceptance of God's ruling and facing patiently this trial. He prayed with a heart filled with certain belief in God: "Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may

<sup>37</sup> The Holy Qur'an, As-Safaat (Those who set the ranks) Chapter, verse 100.

<sup>38</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of Abraham, verse 39.





establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful.”<sup>39</sup>

Hajar stayed in the valley, facing her fate. She was so sad when her breastmilk dried up and she could not find water to quench her crying baby's thirst. She averted her eyes not to look at her baby's torment and she left for the mount Safa looking for help, then she went to Mount Marwa on the other end of the valley. She kept going back and forth between the two mountains. When she took the seventh trip between the mountains, she heard a voice and she said pleading: “Save us if you could”. Then the angel Jibril (Gabriel) showed and hit the dry land with his feet, and the water miraculously started flowing. It was the birth of the springs of Zamzam. The angel then told her: “do not be afraid, you are not forsaken. Here shall be the Lord's Mosque, it will be built by this kid and his father”<sup>40</sup>. It is worth mentioning that the trips between Safa and Marwa are part of the pilgrimage ceremonies in Islam.

God does not forsake, nor does He ignore the prayers of those who are obedient to His commands. Hajar finally managed to satiate her baby's thirst and people flocked to her side, asking for permission to share in the bounties God blessed her and her infant son with. She welcomed them and they grew fond of her. She, on the other hand, got used to her new people and grew to enjoy their company. Ismail was raised among their kids and he spoke their Arabic language. He was loved and revered. Abraham's wife thanked God for answering her husband's prayer.

Abraham kept visiting Ismail and his mother to enjoy their company and be assured of their wellbeing. He loved his son beyond measures and was greatly attached to him. It made no sense that Abraham would leave the son, who he loved so much and who he spent his whole life wishing to have, in a deserted valley with no food or water. But it only made sense for the beloved prophet of God to trust in and rely on his Lord. Such is the faith of the prophets and the path of the saints... Such is the way to a blissful existence in life and after death.

##### **5. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Ismail in Total Submission and Obedience to God.**

When Ismail grew up and was physically able to walk and work, his father saw in his sleep that God was ordering him to provide his son as an offering to Him. Abraham knew that prophets' dreams and visions were the truth. Abraham broke the news to his son in their conversation: “And when he reached with him [the

<sup>39</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of Abraham, verse 37.

<sup>40</sup> Mohamad Ibn Ismail, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Mustafa Adib, ed., Dar Ibn Katheer Publishing, Beirut 1987. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, volume 3, p. 1227.





age of] exertion, he said, "O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think."<sup>41</sup>

Abraham's journey consisted of a series of crises and ordeals. A man battling old age spent his days and nights hoping for a son to keep him company through his weaker years. When he finally got his wish and his life seemed complete at last, he was ordered to leave his son in a deserted valley. He obediently complied with his Lord's commands. There he was, once again, now ordered to sacrifice his son's life and his long-awaited joy to God! An unparalleled ordeal! The ultimate test for a great man! Indeed, Abraham was tested in accordance with his degree of devotedness, the highness of his rank, and the perfection of his faith.

He once again chose to comply with divine orders and told his son what he saw. Abraham's little boy replied: "O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast"<sup>42</sup>, helping his father execute his mission. Ismail asked his father to tie his hands and do as he was ordered. The Qur'an's account of this experience goes: "And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead"<sup>43</sup>, meaning "when they submitted the issue to God and entrusted Him with their fates and when they agreed to accept God's command"<sup>44</sup>. Abraham tied his son and made him lay on the side and anxiously passed the knife over his throat, but it would not cut the youth's skin. God's will and His power stopped it. Ismail then indicated to his father to put him on his face. He feared that seeing his face would soften his heart and would eventually stop him from doing as he was ordered. The father complied but the knife still would not cut the back of Ismail's neck. Abraham found himself in a tough position and he resorted to God to give him a refuge. In the face of Abraham's weakness, God showered him with mercy and answered his prayer and took his anguish away. "We called to him, "O Abraham, You have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial."<sup>45</sup> Abraham was extremely grateful and relieved to see his ordeal pass. The father and son were abundantly rewarded and they survived this trial with a stronger faith, purer hearts and firmer belief in God's graciousness and power. The verse just mentioned is a "celebration from God of Abraham and of his quick initiative to do as he was commanded. He did not overthink his options nor did he ask God to revoke his command"<sup>46</sup>.

God ransomed Ismail with a great sacrificial animal which Abraham slaughtered with the same knife. Sheep slaughter has since then become an

<sup>41</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of Abraham, verse 102.

<sup>42</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of Abraham, verse 102.

<sup>43</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of Abraham, verse 103.

<sup>44</sup> Tabari, *jami' al-Bayan fi ta'weeli aayi al-Qur'an (The Comprehensive Account in Interpreting the Verses of the Qur'an)*, Dar Hajer Publishing: 2001, volume 19, p.583.

<sup>45</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Chapter of Abraham, verses 104-106.

<sup>46</sup> Taher Bin Achour, *at-Thirru wa at-Tanweer (Liberation and Enlightenment)*, Tunisian House of Publishing, Vol 23, p.154.



important tradition and sunnah that all capable Muslims should engage in to honor and to emulate Abraham, his son Ismail and the leader of all prophets- peace be upon them all.

### **Some of the ways in which God rewarded Abraham:**

For God is the All-Gracious, the All-Generous, He never lets meritorious efforts go astray. Consequently, God rewarded Abraham's devotion with that which no mind could imagine. The following are some aspects of God's generous reward and outcomes of Abraham's devotion.

☛ **Intimacy- *khullah* الْكَلِيَّة**: In Arabic, the term refers to the highest levels of love. God says in the Qur'an: "And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend"<sup>47</sup>. It is also said that the meaning of *khullah* in this context, "to make him triumphant over whoever means to harm him: like when God saved Abraham when Nimrod tried to set him on fire, when God helped his argument took over any other argument, when God gave what his heart desired, and when God elected him a leader and an example (in worship and submission) to all who came after him. This is the meaning of God granting Abraham the Closeness of His Love – *khullah*."<sup>48</sup>

☛ **God made him the father of all prophets:** he is the leader of all the prophets who came after him and they are his descendants. God says in the Qur'an: "[we] placed in his descendants prophethood and scripture. And We gave him his reward in this world, and indeed, he is in the Hereafter among the righteous"<sup>49</sup>. Accordingly, God mentions in the Chapter of the Cattle sixteen prophets, all descendants of Abraham peace be upon him: "And We gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - all [of them] We guided. And Noah, We guided before; and among his descendants, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the doers of good. And Zechariah and John and Jesus and Elias - and all were of the righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot - and all [of them] We preferred over the worlds"<sup>50</sup>. God also granted him leadership: "And [mention, O Muhammad], when Abraham was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them. [ Allah ] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people." [Abraham] said, "And of my descendants?" [ Allah ] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers"<sup>51</sup>.

☛ Another outcome of Abraham's devotion and God's generosity is that God made **Abraham the standard against which people righteousness is measured**: "And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward

<sup>47</sup> The Holy Qur'an, an-Nissae (the Women) Chapter, verse 125.

<sup>48</sup> Tabari, *jami' al-Bayan fi ta'weeli aayi al-Qur'an* (The Comprehensive Account in Interpreting the Verses of the Qur'an), Dar Hajer Publishing: 2001, volume 19, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Ankabut (the Spider) Chapter, verse 27.

<sup>50</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Anaam (the Cattle) Chapter, verses 84-86.

<sup>51</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqara (the Cow) Chapter, verse 124.



truth? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend.”<sup>52</sup> Not only does He describe following the religion of Abraham as a desirable tribute, God even disparages those who fail to do so: “and who would be averse to the religion of Abraham except one who makes a fool of himself”<sup>53</sup>.

☛ **Celebration and Election:** “Indeed, Abraham was a [comprehensive] leader, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining toward truth, and he was not of those who associate others with Allah. [He was] grateful for His favors. Allah chose him and guided him to a straight path”<sup>54</sup>. In these verses, God celebrates his beloved emissary and the father of his prophets and declares him purified from polytheism<sup>55</sup>. He describes him as being a true devout and an *ummah* (a community). Abraham was an *ummah* in the sense that he had all the good traits gathered in him, as opposed to the fact that one person cannot acquire them all. He was a devout servant to God in the sense that he was constantly obedient to Him and always complying with His commands. God also describes Abraham as being on the true path of worship as he was continually dedicated to God, indifferent to all others.

☛ **Salvation and Protection:** the clearest instance of how God protected Abraham is when Nimrod set the great fire, threw him in the flames and he was not hurt at all. For fire is the creation of God and it only burns when He wills it. God ordered the fire: “O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham”<sup>56</sup> and so it was. Abraham left Nimrod’s fire walking on his legs with his clothes and hair intact, not to mention his skin and bones.

☛ **Answering his prayers:** the Qur’an is full of examples where God answered Abraham’s prayers. One of his prayers was to earn praise and be remembered beautifully: “and grant me a reputation of honor among later generations”<sup>57</sup>. The fact that all other religions honor Abraham, revere him, and even claim is evidence of his answered prayer. However, God put an end to their claims as he has declared Abraham a true Muslim: “Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the polytheists”<sup>58</sup>. It is argued that the part “We gave him good in this world” of the verse “and We gave him good in this world, and indeed, in the

<sup>52</sup> The Holy Qur’an, an-Nissae (the Women) Chapter, verse 125.

<sup>53</sup> The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqara (the Cow) Chapter, verse 130.

<sup>54</sup> The Holy Qur’an, an-Nahl (the Bee) Chapter, verses 120-121.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Qur’an al-Atheem (The Interpretation of the Holy Qur’an)*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiya Publishing: Beirut, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p. 281.

<sup>56</sup> The Holy Qur’an, al-Anbiyae (the Prophets) Chapter, verse 69.

<sup>57</sup> The Holy Qur’an, ashu’arae (the Poets) Chapter, verse 84.

<sup>58</sup> The Holy Qur’an, Al Imran (the Family of Imran) Chapter, verse 67.



Hereafter he will be among the righteous"<sup>59</sup> means that his prayers were answered during his lifetime.

Another example of his answered prayers is the fact that God granted him offspring after old age and hopelessness: "Praise to Allah, who has granted to me in old age Ishmael and Isaac. Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplication"<sup>60</sup>.

☛ **The righteous offspring:** another example of God's miraculous generosity towards Abraham is the fact that He made prophethood and scripture a stark feature among his descendants. Illustrations of this point are numerous in the Qur'an: "My Lord, make me an establisher of prayer, and [many] from my descendants. Our Lord, and accept my supplication"<sup>61</sup>; "And We have already sent Noah and Abraham and placed in their descendants prophethood and scripture; and among them is he who is guided, but many of them are defiantly disobedient"<sup>62</sup>; "So when he had left them and those they worshipped other than Allah, We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each [of them] We made a prophet. And We gave them of Our mercy, and we made for them a reputation of high honor"<sup>63</sup>.

God also chose Abraham and his son to build His Mosque which is the Holiest site and the first house of worship. It's the highest honor one could possibly hope for: "And [mention] when We made the House a place of return for the people and [a place of] security. And take, [O believers], from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer. And We charged Abraham and Ishmael, [saying], "Purify My House for those who perform Tawaf and those who are staying [there] for worship and those who bow and prostrate [in prayer]"<sup>64</sup>; "And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], "Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing. Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You. And show us our rites and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful. Our Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise."<sup>65</sup>".

## Conclusion

It has been shown that Abraham's story is full of lessons and morals. Whether in his experience with his own father or the incidents with his people, all which has been narrated to us should be used as a source of consideration and emulation. Indeed, throughout the Holy Qur'an, God urges us to follow the great example of

<sup>59</sup> The Holy Qur'an, an-Nahl (the Bee) Chapter, verse 122.

<sup>60</sup> The Holy Qur'an, the Chapter of Abraham, verse 39.

<sup>61</sup> The Holy Qur'an, the Chapter of Abraham, verse 40.

<sup>62</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Hadeed (the Iron) Chapter, verse 26 .

<sup>63</sup> The Holy Qur'an, the Chapter of Maryam, verses 49-50.

<sup>64</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqara (the Cow) Chapter, verse 125.

<sup>65</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqara (the Cow) Chapter, verse 127-129.



Abraham. He says: “the religion of your father, Abraham”<sup>66</sup>; “Then We revealed to you, [O Muhammad], to follow the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth”<sup>67</sup>; “there has already been for you an excellent pattern in Abraham and those with him”<sup>68</sup>; which all serve as a call to stick to Abraham's faith.

As it has been demonstrated throughout this paper, Abraham's story offers a multitude of ways to infer the aspects of devotion to God. His whole life was a series of trials which he confronted with unwavering faith and devotedness. It was due to his attitude towards these ordeals that God chose to save his prophet from them all. Indeed, Abraham's devotion must be the reason behind all the love, the praise, the salvation, the protection and the election which God had granted him in his life and in the Hereafter.

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<sup>66</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Hajj (the Pilgrimage) Chapter, verse 78.

<sup>67</sup> The Holy Qur'an, an-Nahl (the Bee) Chapter, verse 123.

<sup>68</sup> The Holy Qur'an, al-Mumtahina (she who is to be examined) Chapter, verse 4.



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