

السَّلَامُ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلِ اللَّهِ

PROPHET IBRAHIM^[A.S]

نبي الله إبراهيم (ع)

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Lesson 1: Abraham's (as) Bravery

PROPHET ABRAHAM^(AS) IN THE QUR'AN

As we have learnt in previous years, Prophet Abraham (as) was one of the greatest prophets that lived. He has been mentioned 69 times in the Holy Qur'an in over 25 chapters with one chapter named after him. Indeed, Allah (SWT) through this Prophet has taught us numerous lessons some of which we have come across in previous studies. Allah (SWT) tested Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) with various tests, and every time he passed those tests, Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) was given titles by Allah (SWT) Himself! We shall discuss a few of these titles of Prophet Ibrāhīm (as).

- 1- "Man of truth" (19:41) (كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا) - Allah(SWT) refers to him as a person who would not pretend or lie at any time.
- 2- "A Nation obedient to Allah"(16:120)- (إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا) In this incredible title, Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) is referred to as an entire nation either due to the huge role he played in shaping his society or that he was like a nation by himself against all the idolaters of his time!
- 3- "Chosen Friend of Allah (SWT)" (Khalilullah). This unique title was given to him because in his entire life he did not reject any of Allah's (SWT) creatures and never asked for his need from anyone other than Allah (SWT).
- 4- He was a man of "strength and insight" (أُولَى الْأَيْدِي وَالْأَبْصَارِ)(38:45) indicating that not only was he brave and courageous, he was also wise in his approach when confronting the idol worshippers of his time. We shall discuss this particular characteristic in some more detail.

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand that Prophet Abraham was one of the Principal Prophets
- Should understand the concept of courage
- Should discuss the roots of courage
- Discuss the real examples of courage
- Discuss the Sacrifice of Prophet Abraham (as)
- Discuss the quality of Trust in God (Tawakkul)

PROPHET ABRAHAM'S BRAVERY AS A YOUTH

The king at the time of Prophet Ibrahim (as), Namrud, discovered that a person of the stature of Prophet Ibrahim (as) would be born and so he ordered the execution of all baby boys. Prophet Ibrahim's (as) mother, due to this threat, gave birth to him in a cave. She remained secluded from her community until Prophet Ibrahim (as) grew up into a young boy.

On returning to the city, he began talking to his uncle Āzar, who had an Idol-making workshop. Even at this tender age he used to bravely challenge those who came to his uncle's shop to buy idols (refer to the Holy Qur'an 26:69-82 to get an idea of the arguments he raised). The only answer they could come up with was that their ancestors were doing it and therefore they did the same.

One particular incident stood out. In Babylonia, it was a day of festivities- the idolaters would gather once a year in open fields to have a celebration. Prophet Ibrahim (as) had had enough of their idol worship:

“Then he cast a glance at the stars and said: Verily, I am sick of what you worship.” (37: 88-89)

So he went to their temple and mocked at the idols: “Then he turned towards their gods and said: Do you not eat? What ails you that you no speak?” (37: 91-92) Then he smashed every single idol except for the chief idol, who he left intact.

“Then he started striking them down with his right hand” (37:93).

His intention was to teach the idolaters a very powerful and profound message. The people called Prophet Ibrahim (as) to the scene and asked him if it was he who did that with their gods. He in turn pointed to the chief idol, left intact by him, and asked them to find out the truth from him.

“Then they were turned down on their heads (utterly confounded). They said: You know full well that these idols do not speak!” (21:65).

Prophet Ibrahim (as) had the best of the argument. The people knew the idols could not speak. They turned to each other and confessed their folly and hung their heads in shame. When they admitted that their idols could not speak, Prophet Ibrahim (as) said to them

“What! Do you worship then beside Allah that which cannot profit you, or do you harm? Fie on you and on those you worship beside Allah. What! Do you not understand?” (2: 66-67)

PROPHET ABRAHAM' WISDOM

Although Prophet Ibrahim (as) was incredibly brave, he was also very wise, he would very cleverly pass the message in a subtle yet very profound manner by relating with people first (on a common ground) then gently guiding them to the right path.

This narrative from the Holy Qur'an in Surah An'am (6:76-78) explains one such incident:

“So when the night overshadowed him, he saw a star; said he: Is this my Lord? So when it set, he said: I do not love the setting ones. Then when he saw the moon rising, he said: Is this my Lord? So when it set, he said: If my Lord had not guided me I should certainly be of the erring people. Then when he saw the sun rising, he said: Is this my Lord? Is this the greatest? So when it set, he said: O my people! Surely I am clear of what you set up (with Allah). Surely I have turned myself, being upright, wholly to Him Who originated the heavens and the earth, and I am not of the polytheists.”

This clearly indicates his method of introducing to the people the idea of Allah (SWT) subtly yet profoundly.

BRAVERY IN ISLAM

Prophet Ibrahim (as) was extremely courageous and took calculated risks in confronting the idolaters of his time. He was never cowardly and always stood up to oppressors and informed people of the truth. A courageous person understands danger, and chooses to overcome their fear and proceed to face the danger and act according to their values. It is not fearlessness, recklessness, or rashness. It is a well-considered, wise, and brave decision to behave constructively despite the fear, discomfort, or temptation. Courage is a strength drawn from a wise balance between the weaknesses of cowardice and recklessness. It is the discipline to act on wisely-chosen values rather than an impulse.

Imam al-Ḥasan (as) was once asked about courage. He replied:

“It is to know when to stand up to one’s opponents and when to be patient in the face of criticism and slander”.ⁱ

Because courage allows us to act on Islamic values rather than our impulses, its virtue has long been recognized in Islam. Taking meaningless or pointless risks for weak or poor values does not make that action brave even though it may mean overcoming one’s fears.

A coward cannot avoid committing sins or saying the truth because it is easier to lie and sin (in the short run). Imam ‘Ali (as) has said:

“Beware of cowardice for it is a source of defect and shame”ⁱⁱ

There are three types of courage and bravery:

- 1- **Physical Bravery**- Demonstrating physical prowess, overcoming fear—especially fear of death, and launching an attack or an offensive effort are often considered the hallmarks of courage.
- 2- **Endurance**- Sometimes the most difficult obstacles are fatigue, boredom, and other chronic stressors such as relentless bad weather, lack of food or shelter, disrespect, uncertainty, and other annoyances and difficulties. Enduring in the face of these obstacles requires courage.
- 3- **Moral Courage**- Moral courage is choosing to risk embarrassment rather than tolerate injustice. There are five essential elements of moral courage, Presence and recognition of a moral situation, moral choice- knowing your religion and values to make a choice, behaviour—acting to carry out the moral decision, individuality—stepping away from the group and taking personal responsibility for this action, and fear—knowing the risks; facing the fear and overcoming it.

While physical courage is inevitably defeated by fatigue or age, moral courage can be strengthened by repeated use.

Without risking imprisonment or making headlines, we can exercise moral courage every day by being impeccable with our word, doing our best, acting on Islamic principles and values, and refusing the temptation to comply with, assist with, or ignore dishonest, unfair, coercive, cruel, wasteful, or deceptive practices encountered during your everyday activities.ⁱⁱⁱ

THE ROOTS OF COURAGE

What are the factors that make a person truly brave, in the correct definition that we have discussed so far? There are three main qualities that ensure bravery:

- 1- **Fear of Allah (SWT) only**. Courage and bravery is the fruit of the fear of Allah (SWT)- just like Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) who feared no one except Allah (SWT) and therefore was extremely brave. Fear of the punishments in Hell, or the fear of being embarrassed in the eyes of Allah (SWT) may motivate us to have courage in facing our fears. Allah (SWT) tells us that the Prophets were chosen because they had this very characteristic:

“Those who deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and do not fear anyone but Allah; and Allah is sufficient to take account.” (33:39)

- 2- **Trust in Allah (SWT)**. If one were to trust completely in Allah (SWT) he would bear with any test put forward to him. This was manifested brilliantly by the Muslims at the time of the Holy Prophet (saw) after the battle of Uḥud:

“Those to whom the people said: Surely men have gathered against you, therefore fear them, but this increased their faith, and they said: Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector. So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them and they followed the pleasure of Allah; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace.” (3:173-174)

- 3- **Knowledge and wisdom**- To be able to cut out a tumour in a person is difficult but someone who has the knowledge (such as a surgeon) is able to overcome that fear and do the right thing. Similarly, when we are afraid of telling the truth, if we know of the punishments in the Hereafter for lying, we would not do it.

HOW DO WE BECOME BRAVE?

The Holy Prophet once asked his companions: “Shall I tell you who is the toughest and strongest from among you?” They replied: “yes, do tell us!” The Prophet (saw) said:

“The strongest and toughest of you is who, when he is happy, his happiness does not lead him to committing sin or doing anything wrong, and when he gets angry, his anger does not prevent him from speaking the truth, and when he is empowered in any way, he does not take hold of that which is not lawfully his.”

Therefore, the easiest way to become brave is do what Allah (SWT) has commanded us to do and avoid what He has told us to avoid! Good characteristics such as generosity, knowledge, self-control all help in building bravery and courage to do the right thing.

Exercise

Discuss with your teacher how you can demonstrate bravery in your everyday life. Each student in the class should give one way in which he/she can exercise bravery. Have any recent scenarios in your life required you to show bravery?

Review Questions

Q1. Why is Prophet Abraham (as) called the “Friend of Allah”?

- He gives Allah (SWT) gifts
- He likes Allah (SWT)
- He never took help from anyone except Allah (SWT)

Q2. Prophet Abraham (as) was brave because

- He stood against the idolaters of his time
- He took calculated and measured risks to achieve an outcome
- He did not seek the help of anyone except Allah (SWT)

Q3. Which of the following actions is actual bravery?

- Eating a cockroach as a dare
- Telling the truth when someone else got blamed for your error or mistake
- Taking a dangerous jump from a height to impress your friends

Lesson 2: Prophet Abraham’s Trust in Allah (SWT)

We learnt in the last lesson the incredible bravery of Prophet Abraham (as) which was due to his immense love and trust in Allah (SWT). In this lesson we will continue to discuss the life of Prophet Abraham (as) and how he managed to achieve such a tremendous amount of trust in Allah (SWT).

ALLAH GRANTS CERTAINTY TO ABRAHAM

Prophet Abraham (as) had a very high status with Allah (SWT) as we have seen in the previous lessons and because he passed so many tests Allah (SWT) had given him, he was granted a very special gift, that of witnessing the actual demonstration of how Allah (SWT) brings the dead to life.

And (remember) when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead." He (Allah) said: "Do you not believe?" He [Ibrahim (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." (2:260)

It has to be made clear that this very action of Allah (SWT) helped Prophet Abraham increase in his confidence and trust in Allah (SWT). Prophet Abraham witnessed the miracle of life where the 4 birds before his very eyes re-formed and flew to him.

TRUST IN ALLAH (SWT)- TAWAKKUL

The more we know Allah (SWT) after turning to Him, the more we will acknowledge that Allah (SWT) is the ONLY being with any power in the universe! If we really know this, and take Allah (SWT) as our sole helper, we cannot be afraid of *anything* except Allah!

Imam Ja’far al-Şādiq (a) was asked regarding the words of God Almighty:

“And whoever puts his trust in God, then God suffices him” (65:3).

The Imam (as) said:

“There are various degrees of trust in God. Of them one is that you should put your trust in God in all your affairs, being well pleased with whatever God does to you, knowing for certain that he does not cease in His goodness and grace towards you, and that the command therein rests with Him. So put your trust in God, leaving that to Him and relying upon Him in regard to that and everything other than that.”

To take Allah (SWT) as our sole helper is to have tawakkul in Allah (SWT). Therefore, tawakkul means entrusting all the matters to the Master and relying upon Him fully.^{iv} Prophet Abraham (as) was a true example of what it means to trust in Allah (SWT) and every stage of His life he demonstrated this.

There are 4 types of ways people put their trust in Allah (SWT)

- 1- There are those who only claim on their tongue to trust In Allah (SWT) but this belief has not reached their hearts. For instance, someone who says “I trust In Allah (SWT)”, yet when they face difficulty, they go to other than Allah (SWT) for help!^v
- 2- Then there are those who say they trust in Allah (SWT) but also say they do not need to learn about Islam or the world because they trust Allah (SWT). For instance, they don’t wash their hands before eating saying that we trust in Allah that He will not make us sick! These people are misguided and have not understood or acknowledged Allah (SWT) at all.
- 3- Then there are those who can logically claim to trust in Allah (SWT) and rationally can explain their thoughts but faith has not really entered their hearts. When it comes to practical aspects of trust in Allah (SWT), they are still shaky.
- 4- The true meaning and type of trust we should have in Allah (SWT) is that which was demonstrated so brilliantly by Prophet Abraham (as), that which has penetrated the heart and the whole being. Let us see how Prophet Abraham (as) trusted in Allah (SWT).

The enlightening narrative of the story of Prophet Abraham continues from when he demolished the idols in the temple of the idolaters when they had left the town to celebrate. When they returned they were furious with Abraham:

“They said: Burn him and help your gods, if you are going to do (anything).” (21:68).

They managed to provoke enmity in their people, utilising the argument that if they burnt Abraham they will be able to avenge the injustice done to their gods! Historians have gone into vivid detail of this event saying that firewood was collected for 40 days, and ladies were selling their jewellery to support the creation of the fire that would burn Abraham.

Finally the day arrived, and Prophet Abraham, this young boy, was made to face the fire, a fire that was so big that birds could not fly over it. Allah (SWT) describes it as “*bonyaan*” (37:97), flames on top of flames, a furnace which had to be walled in! It was so big that they could not approach it and had to use a catapult to throw him into the fire, with his hands and legs bound.

A GARDEN OF FIRE

As soon as the rope that would catapult Prophet Abraham (as) into the mountain of flames was cut, the angels in the heavens began asking Allah (SWT) to help him. Jibraīl, with permission of Allah (SWT) descended to Abraham and offered help saying:

“Do you need any help?”

To which Abraham replied:

“From you no, from the lords of the worlds, Yes!”

Jibraīl responded “*then ask your lord!!*”

Prophet Abraham turned and told Jibraīl:

“His knowledge of my situation suffices as my request to Him”

Prophet Abraham was indirectly telling Jibraīl that Allah (SWT) knew full well the situation he was in! Others say that Abraham Prayed to Allah (SWT) saying

“O One, O One, You are needless, the one who begets not nor is he begotten and none is like him, In God I trust!”

This was when Allah (SWT) said:

“We said: O Fire! Be cool and safe for Abraham.” (21:69)

When Prophet Abraham landed in the fire it became safe and cool like a garden! This was also where Allah (SWT) said:

“And Allah did take Abraham for a friend.” (4:125)

Our sixth Imam, commenting on this āyah, said:

“Indeed Allah(SWT) did take Abraham as a Khalīl because he never intended nor did he ever ask anyone other than God”

HOW DO WE GAIN TAWAKKUL?

There are a few steps we can take to gain complete trust in the Almighty.

- 1- Strengthen our belief in Him, learn about Allah, think about His creation, and think about His power and magnificence. This deeper acknowledgement of Allah (SWT) leads to us recognising that there is no power in the universe except Allah (SWT) and therefore we should trust only Him!
- 2- Leave any affairs that are beyond your control in the hands of Allah (SWT). If you have control over something, like studying to do well in an exam, then you must exercise your control but after you have studied and you try your best in an exam, you have to trust in Allah (SWT) to help you pass!
- 3- Reduce sins and increase good deeds- Sins blacken our hearts and reduce our belief in Allah (SWT) whereas if we try our best to obey the commands of Allah (SWT), He will grant us knowledge of Himself and then we can develop trust in Him.

There are many other ways to increase our trust in Allah which we shall discuss in the future years.

BENEFITS OF TAWAKKUL

There are innumerable benefits of having complete trust in Allah (SWT). We shall discuss only a few here.

- 1- Allah (SWT) loves those who trust Him. Allah(SWT) says in the Holy Qur’an:

“... then place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who trust (Him) (Qur'an, 3: 159)

- 2- Fearlessness and bravery- One who has trust in Allah (SWT) can never fear another human being or even indeed Jinn! If the most powerful Being in the universe is protecting you when you are facing injustice or tyranny, can you be afraid!?

- 3- One’s tawakkul in God guarantees his success in this world and the Hereafter, no matter how difficult the tasks, harsh the conditions, or powerful the enemy. Imam ‘Ali (as) says;

“Tawakkul on God is [source of] relief from every evil and protection from every enemy.”

Review Questions

Q1. Which of the following is an example of trusting Allah (SWT) in its correct definition?

- a. Leaving the car unlocked in the parking lot saying “I trust in Allah (SWT)”
- b. Taking medication for an illness then saying “I trust In Allah (SWT)”
- c. Trying to lift your car with your hands to change the tyre saying “God will help me”
- d. Going into an exam without studying or preparing and expecting Allah to help you.

Q2. Prophet Abraham (as) trusted Allah (SWT) to save him because

- a. He knew that Allah (SWT) was the only one who could save him.
- b. He had done so many good deeds and thought he deserved to be saved.
- c. He thought God needed him for continuing the message of monotheism and therefore had to save him.
- d. He sent the angels to save him.

Q3. We can gain trust in Allah by:

- a. Avoiding all sins
- b. Doing exactly what Allah (SWT) tells us to do
- c. Increasing our faith by learning about our religion.
- d. Thanking Allah (SWT) for all the gifts He has bestowed upon us
- e. All the above

ⁱ Mizanul Hikmah Tradition 3218

ⁱⁱ Ibid. tradition 1042

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.emotionalcompetency.com/courage.htm>

^{iv} 40 Hadith- Imam Khomani

^v Teachers, please use relevant examples for the students to illustrate this point.