

السَّلَامُ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلِ اللَّهِ

Prophets Abraham

(Ibrāhīm) [A.S]

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Review the status of Prophet Abraham by discussing how he is described in the Holy Qur'an
- Research the qualities of Prophets and trustees of God explained in the Holy Qur'an

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

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 in history. He is known as the 'Father of Monotheism', a title that emphasises the amazing role he played in inviting people to the worship of Allah (SWT). In this regard, the Qur'an so eloquently describes him in the following way:

“Lo! Abraham was a nation obedient to Allah, by nature upright, and he was not of the idolaters” (16:120)

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا وَلم يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

This great prophet 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!

In this lesson, we will focus on several of the titles given to Prophet Abraham (as). The purpose of this study is so that we can see what qualities are required for a person to have such a great guiding influence on the world, both in his time and for millennia to follow.

SUBMISSION

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“When his Lord said to him, Submit!, he said: I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds.” (2:131)

Here, the submission of Prophet Abraham (as) is praised. Submission of one thing to another is when the former does not disobey or repel the latter.

The base for all of Prophet Abraham’s great qualities is his absolute and complete submission to Allah (SWT). This is demonstrated throughout his life: his solitary opposition to his people and their idol-worship, his migration from his home country to a strange land, his settling of his family in a barren and sparsely populated land and finally his willingness to sacrifice his son.

TRUTHFULNESS

وَأذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا

“And mention in the Book Abraham; surely he was a truthful man, a prophet.”

Prophet Ibrāhīm (as) is truthful in many respects, the most important of which is that he stood for the True belief in the Allah, the One Lord. He not only believed in this Truth, but he did whatever was possible to teach, spread and act according to this Truth. The importance of this quality is emphasised by the fact that it is mentioned before he is even introduced as a prophet in this āyah.

BRAVERY

We have discussed the bravery of Prophet Abraham (as) in previous years. One great manifestation of his bravery is the destruction of the idols that his people worshipped, without fear of the consequences of this for his personal safety:

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

WISE PREACHING

Prophet Abraham (as) used many different approaches with his people. At times, he was direct, telling them in simple words that they were worshipping idols who could not harm or benefit them. At other times, he would take action to show them the falsity of their views in a practical way, such as when he urges them to ask the main idol if it had destroyed the other idols. At yet other times, he would use a more subtle approach, by seemingly agreeing with a group of people before logically disproving their false beliefs.

“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...” (6:76)

STRENGTH AND INSIGHT

وَأذْكُرْ عِبَادَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ أُولِي الْأَيْدِي وَالْأَبْصَارِ

“And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of power and insight.” (38:45)

This āyah indicates that Prophet Abraham (as) possessed strength and ability when it came to obeying Allah (SWT). This is explained in other parts of the Qur’an as being engaged in virtuous action, prayer, charity and worship.

Insight refers to the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. In the case of Prophet Abraham (as), this also meant being ma’sūm, as in another part of the Qur’an Allah (SWT) says:

“and We revealed to them the doing of good” (21:73)

This indicates that all the actions of Prophet Abraham (as) and other Prophets were guided by revelation or inspiration from Allah (SWT).

While we are not able to receive revelation, we can purify our souls through virtuous deeds so that we may receive a lower form of guidance from Allah (SWT) that leads us to further virtuous action and helps us achieve wisdom and insight.

FORBEARANCE AND COMPASSION

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّاهٌ مُنِيبٌ

Most surely Abraham was forbearing, compassionate, oft-returning (to Allah) (11:75) (76)

The context of the above āyah is amazing. The angels visit Abraham (as) and inform of the good news that he is going to be granted a child. After this, they inform him that their next mission is to visit the community of Prophet Lot and bring down God's punishment upon them. When Prophet Abraham (as) hears this, he begins to plead with the angels to delay the punishment upon this community. He also expresses his concern that Prophet Lot is still among that community.

Allah (SWT) praises Prophet Abraham (as) greatly for this action. He describes him in three ways:

- Forbearing: meaning he was not quick to punish people or ask for them to be punished. Rather, he remained patient and wanted to give people respite
- Compassionate: the misguidance of people would affect him severely, such that he would be in pain and distress out of concern for people
- Oft-returning: he would turn to Allah (SWT) when distressed by these things

This āyah shows that forbearance and compassion are among the traits of a leader. A leader is patient and caring for his community, and does not quickly give up on them.

DISASSOCIATION FROM DISBELIEVERS

Prophet Abraham's (as) compassion and forbearance should not be misunderstood. While he did not pray for disbelievers to be punished and cared about their guidance, at the same time, he willingly cut his relations with stubborn disbelievers in an attempt to show them the falsity of their beliefs and forbid them from evil.

He is praised for this action more than once in the Qur'an, and we are specifically commanded to take him as a role model when it comes to this issue.

فَدَكَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا

لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَاءٌ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا

بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا

بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ

“Indeed, there is for you a good example in Abraham and those with him when they said to their people: Surely we are clear of you and of what you serve besides Allah; we declare ourselves to be clear of you, and enmity and hatred have appeared between us and you forever until you believe in Allah alone...” (60:4)

This āyah perfectly captures the approach of Prophet Abraham (as): once his people showed themselves to be stubborn to the truth and continued with false beliefs and evil actions, he cut relations with them and even showed enmity to them. However, despite this, he left the door open to them to repent and return saying ‘until you believe in Allah...’ This shows that he never lost hope in people and always hoped they would be guided.

CARE FOR COMING GENERATIONS

One of the points repeatedly emphasised in relation to Prophet Abraham (as) in the Qur'an is his care for future generations. He often prays for his offspring:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ

“And when Ibrahim said: My Lord! Make this city secure, and save me and my sons from worshipping idols” (14:35)

He requests Allah (SWT) to make his offspring leaders like himself:

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۗ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

“And when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make you an Imam of men. Ibrahim said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the unjust, said He.” (2:124)

Most importantly, he advised his offspring to remain on the path of Truth and worship of Allah, the One Lord:

وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبَ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمُ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

“And the same did Abraham enjoin on his sons and (so did) Jacob. O my sons! Surely Allah has chosen for you (this) faith, therefore die not unless you are Muslims.”
(2:132)

This is a more specific aspect of the compassionate guidance of Prophet Abraham (as). He was concerned about not only his current generation, but the generations to come after him. Besides his general concern, he was also specifically concerned about his own offspring, due to his greater responsibility towards them.

There are great lessons here for us too. We should have a long-term approach and vision when it comes to the guidance of a community, considering not only the current generation but those to come. We also learn that we should focus on our own children and grandchildren, because if all parents focused on the guidance of their children, this would lead to a society which has a pious and virtuous future generation.

THE STATUS OF PROPHET ABRAHAM (AS)

The qualities that this great prophet displayed meant that he made some great achievements. He is described in the following āyat as:

- Reaching certainty
- Seeing the unseen world of malakūt
- Achieving the status of Imamah
- Being a nation unto himself

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

“And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and that he might be of those who are certain.” (6:75)

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“Lo! Abraham was a nation obedient to Allah, by nature upright, and he was not of the idolaters” (16:120)

There are many lessons for us in the life of Prophet Abraham (as). In this lesson, we have considered some of the lessons related to the qualities that led to him having such a great influence and legacy. If we hope to be leaders, and to have a legacy that beyond our own lifetime, then we should respond to the command of the Holy Qur’an to take Prophet Abraham (as) as a role model.

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

In the last lesson, we discussed some of the great qualities of Prophet Abraham (as), qualities that made gave him an amazing legacy which lasts till today.

In this lesson, we will briefly review a specific quality of Prophet Abraham (as), that of trust in Allah (SWT):

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.¹ 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.

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. Jibrāil, 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!”

Jibrāil responded “then ask your lord!!”

Prophet Abraham turned and told Jibrāil:

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

Prophet Abraham was indirectly telling Jibrāil 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”

Research Assignment

In relation to lesson 1 of this unit, undertake some research to see what qualities the Holy Qur’an praises when speaking about the Prophets in general. Are some, most or all of these qualities shared? Can we attain these qualities? Which do you think are the three most important qualities? Use a Qur’an search engine and search the names of a number of Prophets (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad (saw)) to help you find material for your response. Bring your response to class next week for discussion.

ⁱ 40 Hadith- Imam Khomaini