

Part One

Prophet Ibrahim as a role model

We often see the term “role model” in newspapers and magazines. It refers to someone who leads the sort of life that you would like to live. Many of us choose our favorite sports star or film star as our role model because we are impressed by the glitter and flair of these wealthy people. However, if we stopped to think about what kind of lives the stars really lead, perhaps we would have second thoughts about our choice of role model. How many of these stars have never known or have forgotten Allah in their quest for fame and riches! How often are they consumed by hate, envy, violence, drugs and other evils! Who really wants that kind of life? Certainly not we Muslims.

The Qur’an tells us that the prophets should be our role models, and Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) in particular is frequently mentioned. He was obedient to Allah, upright, and he did not worship any god but Allah. He turned away from those who worshipped idols, even from his own father. He was grateful to Allah for the blessings which were bestowed on him. He was rewarded with good in this world and he is among the righteous in the hereafter.

Prophet Ibrahim’s call

Prophet Ibrahim’s (alayhis salam) father, Azer, was a stone carver. He carved the images of the idols which his people worshipped. Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) grew up in an atmosphere of paganism, in which Allah was just one of many gods worshipped by his people. But Allah chose Ibrahim (alayhis salam) to be His prophet. Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) saw a star when it rose and called upon it as his lord, but when it set he realized that it was powerless. He called upon the moon when it rose in the sky, but it too disappeared as it set. Then he decided to worship the sun when it rose, but even the sun with all its brilliance had to set each evening. It was at this point that Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) was ready to acknowledge the supremacy of the Creator of all the heavenly bodies, the Lord of all creation, and a being without equal and without partners. He tried unsuccessfully to persuade his father and his people to discard the useless idols and to submit themselves wholly to Allah. He promised his father that he would pray for forgiveness for him, and since he had promised, he did pray. But we are told in the Qur’an that we should shun pagans and we should not pray for them (Qur’an 9:113-114).

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Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) asked his people why they worshipped those idols which they

themselves had made, instead of the true God who had created everything and everybody. The people answered that they worshipped the idols because their fathers had done so. One day, when no one was about, Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) took his right hand and smashed the idols to pieces, all except the biggest. The people came running, asking who had destroyed their gods. Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) pointed to the big god and said, "He did it. Why don't you ask them?" But of course those fragments of stone were not able to speak and the people knew in their hearts that the big stone could not have destroyed them. So Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) asked, "Why do you worship these powerless rocks instead of Allah who is all powerful?" Then the people were very angry and they seized Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) and threw him into a blazing fire. But Allah was with Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) and made the blaze feel cool to him. Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) emerged from the fire unharmed.

In Arabia at the time of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), three religious groups claimed ancestry to the prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam). They were the Christians, the Jews, and the pagan idol-worshippers. But the religion of Ibrahim (alayhis salam) was none of these three. His religion was truly that of Islam, a total submission to the will of Allah. It is he who should serve as our role model, a man of unswerving faith in troubled times.

You can read about Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) as a role model and about his disputes over the idols in the following suras of the Qur'an: 2:130, 135, 258; 3:67; 6:74-83; 16:120-123; 19:41-50; 21:51-71; 26:70-82; 37:83-98; 60:4-6.

Part Two

As you may recall, most of the people at the time of Ibrahim (alayhis salam) were idol worshippers. There were very few people who heeded the words of Ibrahim (alayhis salam). One of the people who did follow in the way of Allah was his wife, Sarah. She and Ibrahim (alayhis salam) had been married for many years but did not have any children. As they became more elderly, it seemed apparent that they would never have a family. Sarah therefore gave Ibrahim (alayhis salam) her slavewoman, Hajra, as a wife, in the hopes that she would be able to bear a child for him. Ibrahim (alayhis salam) prayed for a righteous son and his prayer was answered. To him and Hajra was born the son Ismail (alayhis salam).

Ismail (alayhis salam) grew up strong in the belief of Allah. When he had become old enough to have become helpful, Ibrahim (alayhis salam) saw in a vision from Allah that he was to sacrifice his son. You can imagine how heavy-hearted he was at the thought of giving up that long-awaited son. But he never thought to go against the command of Allah. He went to his son and told him of the vision and asked him what he thought of it. Now Ismail (alayhis salam), although very young, never hesitated. If it was Allah's will, he said, he would go along with it.

Ibrahim (alayhis salam) and Ismail (alayhis salam) prepared for the sacrifice and just as Ibrahim (alayhis salam) was about to perform it, Allah intervened. Allah provided a ram for sacrifice in place of Ismail (alayhis salam), for Ibrahim (alayhis salam) and Ismail (alayhis salam) had passed the test of faith which Allah had set for them.

Some time later, the angels who were being sent to Lut (alayhis salam) stopped at Ibrahim's (alayhis salam) home. When he saw the two strangers, he roasted a calf in order to entertain them. When he saw that they did not eat, he mistrusted and feared them. But they told him not to be afraid. Sarah was there and she laughed when they told her she would have a son. She couldn't believe it. She was an old woman and her husband an old man. They told her not to wonder at Allah's decree, for he can do all things.

Ibrahim (alayhis salam), too, couldn't believe his ears when they told him that he would father another son endowed with wisdom. He asked the messengers how they could say such a thing when he was such an old man. But they assured him that they were telling the truth.

Just as the angels had foretold, a son was born to Sarah and Ibrahim (alayhis salam). He was named Ishaq (alayhis salam) and he later became the father of Yaqub (alayhis salam). It is from Ishaq (alayhis salam) that the children of Israel trace their roots.

It is from Ismail (alayhis salam), Ibrahim's (alayhis salam) first-born son, that the people of Arabia trace their lineage. Thus can two peoples, the Jews and the Arabs, trace their beginnings back to a single ancestor, Ibrahim (alayhis salam), the father of Ismail (alayhis salam) and Ishaq (alayhis salam).

You can read about Ibrahim (alayhis salam) and his sons in the following surat of the Qur'an 11:69-76, 15:51-56, and 37: 99-111.