

THE PROPHET IBRAHIM IN THE QUR'AN

Emine YARIMBAŞ

PhD Candidate in Marmara U., Theology Faculty

Abstract: *In the Qur'an, two hundred and forty-five verses contained in twenty-five suras are dedicated to Ibrahim, no complete single account can be found but one of the suras (14.) bears his name. Throughout these verses, we can easily trace the roots of a prototype figure both in his faith and way of life. In the following paper first his personality then his faith and way of life will be analyzed.*

Key terms: *Ibrahim, Sacrifice, Ismael.*

WHO IS IBRAHIM?

Ibrahim belongs to the path (shia, lineage) of Noah¹ (that is Nova) and has a free heart (qalb selim)², He is among those to whom the religion was prescribed after Noah, but before Musa (that is Moses), Isa (that is Jesus) and Muhammed³. He is called "intimate friend of God" (halilullah)⁴. He preaches monotheism to his father and his people. His father's name is Azar who is a craftsman of idols⁵. The Qur'an mentions Ibrahim as "a saint, a prophet" (siddik nabi)⁶ and an imam (that is leader) for mankind⁷. He was not of the idolaters⁸. The Qur'an declares that Ibrahim was not a Jew, nor a Christian; but he was an upright man (hanif), a muslim who had

¹ And most surely Ibrahim followed his (Nuh) way (es-Saffat 37/83).

² When he came to his Lord with a free heart (es-Saffat 37/84).

³ es-Sura, 42/ 13.

⁴ en-Nisa, 4/125; et-Tevbe, 9/114.

⁵ And when Ibrahim said to his father Azer: do you take idols for gods? Surely I see you and your people in manifest error (el-En'am 6/74).

⁶ And mention Ibrahim in the Book (fi'l-Kitab) surely he was a truthful man (siddik) a prophet (Meryem 19/41).

⁷ And when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said; surely I will make you an imam of men (el-Bakara 2/ 124).

⁸ Then we revealed to you follow the faith of Ibrahim, the upright one (hanif), and he was not of the idolaters(en-Nahl (The Bee) 16/123).

surrendered himself to God⁹. He is said in this particular occasion to be ‘hanif’, a monotheistic believer, or a pure (true) muslim.

We have in the case of Ibrahim the mentioning of the word covenant “mithaq”¹⁰. But Ibrahim is not the only one to be associated with a solemn covenant with God. In the same verse, we find that this is also the case of Muhammed, Nuh, Musa and Isa.

Most surely the nearest people to Ibrahim are those who follow him and Mohammed and who believe in him. And so, it is repeated: “So follow the religion of Ibrahim, the upright (hanif)”¹¹

IBRAHIM’S STRUGGLE AGAINST IDOLATRY

In many suras we have a description of his reaction when faced by the cultic offerings of idol, by his father and his tribe. He preaches monotheism to his father and his people¹² by using philosophical arguments such as: “How can one worship the stars, the moon and the sun, when they all appear and disappear?”¹³

According to the Qur’anic text “their idols are given a rough time and Ibrahim exalts the blessings of the Lord of the worlds who directs him, feeds him and forgives him, just as he makes him live, die and rise again, for he is the master of the eschatological times”¹⁴. But the response of his fellow was to “kill him or burn

⁹ And they say: Be Jews or Christians, you will be on the right course. Say Nay! (we follow) the religion of Ibrahim. The hanif. And He was not one of the polytheists (el-Bakara, 2/135); Nay! Do you say that Ibrahim and Ismail and Yaquob and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: are you better knowing or Allah? And who is more unjust than he who conceals a testimony that he has from Allah? And Allah is not at all heedless of what you do. (el-Bakara 2/140); Ibrahim was not a Jew, nor a Christian, but he was an upright man, a muslim. (Al-i Imran, 3/67).

¹⁰ el-Ahzab, 33/7.

¹¹ Al-i Imran, 3/68.

¹² When he said to his father and his people: What is it that you worship? A lie-gods besides Allah do you desire? (es-Saffat 37/85-86).

¹³ el-En’am, 6/74-87.

¹⁴ And recite to them the story of Ibrahim. When he said to his father and his people: What do you worship? They said: We worship idols, so we shall be their votaries. He said: Do

him". (The statues were broken except for the largest one that Ibrahim accuses of having and when his tribesmen asked 'who had done this', He (Ibrahim) ordered them to ask the remaining idol, thus proving that idols "speak not" and "cannot profit you at all, nor harm you"). The Qur'an then mentions the attempt of his kin (tribesmen) to cast him into the flame, at a furnace. But Allah saves him from the fire, placing him into "coolness and peace" (berden ve selamen), and then punishes those who were setting traps for him in this way¹⁵.

they hear you when you call? Or do they profit you or cause you harm? They said: Nay, we found our fathers doing so. He said: have you then considered what you have been worshipping? You and your ancient sires. Surely they are enemies to me, but not (so) the Lord of the worlds, Who created me, the he has shown me the way: And he Who gives me to eat and gives me to drink: And when I am sick, the He restores me to health; And He who will cause me to die, then give me life. And who, I hope, will forgive me my mistakes on the day of judgement. My Lord: grand me wisdom, and join me with the good. And ordain for me a goodly mention among posterity. And make me of the heirs of the garden of bliss; And forgive my father, for surely he is of those who have gone astray. And disgrace me not on the day when they are raised. The day on which property will not avail, nor sons. Except him who comes to Allah with a heart free. And the garden shall be brought near for those who guard. And the hell shall be made manifest to the erring ones. And it shall be said to them: Where are those that you used to worship. Besides Allah? Can they help you or yet help themselves? So they shall be thrown down into it, they and the erring ones, And the hasts of the Shaitan, all. They shall say while they contend therein. By Allah ! We were certainly in manifest error. When we made you equal to the Lord of the worlds.. And none but the guilty led us astray. So we have no intercessors.. Nor a true friend. But if we could but once return, we would be of the believers. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them don't believe, And most surely your Lord is the mighty, the Merciful (es-Şuara 26/69-104).

¹⁵ Then he turned aside to their gods secretly and said: what! do you not eat? What is the matter with you that you don't speak? Then he turned against them secretly, smiting them with a right hand. So they (people) advanced towards him, hastening. Said he : what! Do you worship what you hew out? And Allah has created you and what you make. They said: build for him a furnace, then cast him into the burning fire, And they desired a war against him, but We brought them low. And he said: surely I fly to my Lord; He will guide me. (es-Saffat 37/ 91-99);

41. And mention Ibrahim in the Book; surely He was a truthfull man a prophet. 42. When He said to his father; o my father! Why do you worship, neither hears, nor sees, nor does it avail you in the least. 43. O my father! Truly the knowledge has come to me which has

 GOOD TIDINGS ABOUT HIS SON ISHAQ AND IBRAHIM'S GUESTS

The Qur'anic passage which talks about guests –that is angels–were sent- to Ibrahim who announce the birth of a child possessing knowledge (that angels are before sent unto the folk of Lot to save them from the sinful city. Finally a divine punishment a showering of “stones of heated clay” fell on the city (hijara min

not come to you, therefore follow me, I will guide for you on a right path. 44. O my father! Serve not to Shaitan, surely the Saitan is disobedient to the Beneficent God. 45. O my father! Surely I fear that a punishment from the Beneficent God should afflict you so that you should be a friend of the Shaitan. 46. He said: Do you dislike my gods, o Ibrahim? If you don't desist I will certainly revile you, and leave me for a time. 47. He said: Peace be on you, I will pray to my Lord to forgive you, surely He is ever Affectionate to me. 48. And I will withdraw from you and what you call on besides Allah, and I will call upon my Lord; maybe I shall not remain unblessed in calling upon my Lord. 49: So when he withdraw from them and what they worshipped besides Allah, We gave to him Ishaq and Yaqoub, and each one of them We made a prophet. 50. And We granted to them of our mercy, and we left behind them a truthfull mention of eminence for them (Meryem 19/41-50); 51. And certainly we gave to Ibrahim his rectitude before, and we know him fully well. 52. When he said to his father and his people : What are these images to whose worship you cleave? 53. They said: We found our fathers worshipping them. 54. He said: Certainly you have been, both you and your fathers in manifest error. 55. They said: Have you brought to us the truth, or are you one of the triflers? 56. He said: May! Your lord is the lord of the heavens and the earth, who brought them into existence, and I am of those who bear witness to this. 57. And by Allah! I will certainly do something against your idols after you go away, turning back. 58. So he broke them into peaces except the chief of them, that happily they may return to it. 59. They said: Who has done this to our gods? Most surely he is one of the unjust. 60. They said we heard a youth called ibrahim speak of them. 61. Said they: then bring him before the eyes of the people, perhaps they may bear witness. 62. They said: have you done this to our gods , o Ibrahim? 63. He said: surely has done it the chief of them is this, therefore ask them, if they can speak. 64. Then they turned to themselves and said: surely you yourselves are unjust. 65. Then they were made to hang down their heads: certainly you know that they do not speak. 66. He said: what! do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you? 67. Fie on you and on what you serve besides Allah what! do you not then understand? 68. They said: burn him and help your gods if you are going to do. 69. We said: o fire! Be a comfort and peace to Ibrahim. 70. And they desired a war on him, but we maid them the greatest losers. (el-Enbiya 21/ 51-72).

sijjil))¹⁶. And the passage points out that his wife had laughed even before she is given the good tidings of birth of Isaac, although the woman's objections are reported later on¹⁷. God gave him (ibrahim) Isaac and Jacob, both of them being prophets. And, God bestowed on Ibrahim, Isaac and Jacob and established the prophethood among his seed.¹⁸ Further on there is a brief passage thus formulated: "And make mention of Our bondsmen, Ibrahim, Isaac and Yacob, men of parts and vision. Lo! We purified them with a pure thought, remembrance of the Home. Lo! In our Sight they are verily of the elect (mustafawna) the excellent"¹⁹

¹⁶ And inform them of the guests of Ibrahim. When they entered upon him, they said, peace. He said: Surely we are afraid of you. They said: Be not afraid, surely we give you the good news of a boy, possessing knowledge. He said: Do you give me good news when old age has come upon me? Of what then do you give me good news? They said: We give you good news with truth, therefore be not of the despairing. He said: And who despairs of the mercy of his lord but the erring ones? He said: What is your business then, o messengers? They said: Surely we are sent towards a quilty people. Except Lut's followers: We will most surely deliver them all, Except his wife; we ordained that she shall surely be of those who remain behind. (el-Hicr 15/51-60). ; 112. And We gave him the good news of Ishaq, a prophet among the good ones.113. And We showered Our blessings on him and on Ishaq, and of their offspring are the doers of good, and (also) those who are clearly unjust to their own souls. (es-Saffat 37/ 112-113).

¹⁷ 69. And certainly our messengers came to Ibrahim with good news. They said: Peace, peace, said he, and he maid no delay in bringing a roasted calf. 70. But when he saw that their hands werw not extended towards it, he deemed them strange and conceived fear of them. They said: fear not, surely we are sent to Lut's people. 71. And his wife was standing, so he laughed, then we gave her the good news of Ishaq and after Ishaq a son's son Yaqoub. 72. She said: o wonder! Shall I bear a son when I am an extremely old woman and this my husband an extremely old man? Most surely this is a wonderfull thing. 73. They said: do you wonder at Allah's bidding? The mercy of Allah and His blessings are on you, o people of the house, surely He is Praised, Glorius. 74. So when fear had gone away from Ibrahim and good news come to him, he began to pleased with Us for Lut's people. 75. Most surely Ibrahim was forbearing, tender heated, oft-returning (to Allah). 76. O Ibrahim! Leave off this, surely the decree of your Lord has come to pass, and surely there must come to them a chastisement that cannot be averted (Hud 11/69-76).

¹⁸ el-Enbiya 21/ 72-73.

¹⁹ es-Sad 38/45-47.

SACRIFICE of ISMAIL

The Qur'an depicts Ismail as truthful in his promise and an apostle prophet.²⁰

The Qur'an mentions the offering of the son, solicited by God, and then substituted for by a 'tremendous victim' (dhabh azim): Ibrahim had asked for a 'gentle son' (ghulam halim) and the latter had turned out to be as patient and submissive. In conclusion, it is said: "peace be unto Ibrahim" (salam ala Ibrahim)²¹. (The Qur'anic text does not give the name of the child who was to be sacrificed. But Muslims believe the person that was to be slaughtered was Ismail. Because in the following verses of the same chapter, there is a reference to the good news of Isaac. Thus Ishaq couldn't be slaughtered before the good news of his birth was announced. Besides Ibrahim fulfilled his prophetic vision of sacrificing his son in Makka. And the son who was present with him was Ismail. Accordingly Ismail is the one who was to be sacrificed.)

PRAYERS OF IBRAHIM AND BUILDING OF KABA

In the Quran Ibrahim is exalted as a founder of the house²² (that is Kaba) which is at the center of the pilgrimage rituals (hac).

God makes the house (beytu'l-Mekka) a refuge for mankind and a sanctuary, saying: "Take as your place of worship the place where Ibrahim stood (to pray).

²⁰ 54. And mention to Ismail in the Book, surely He was truthfull in his promise, and He was an apostle, a prophet. 55. And He enjoined on his family prayer and almsgiving and was one in whom his Lord was well pleased. (Meryem 19/54-55)

²¹ My Lord! grant me of the doers of good deeds. So We gave him the good news of a boy, possessing forbearance. And when he attained to working with him, he said: O my son! Surely I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you: consider then what you see. He said: O my father! do what you are commanded ; if Allah please, you will find me of the patient ones. So when they both submitted and he threw him down upon his forehead. And we called out to him saying: o Ibrahim! Yiu have indeed shown the truth of the vision; surely thus do We reward the doers of good. Most surely this is a manifest trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice. And We perpetuated (praise) to him among the later generations. Peace be on Ibrahim. Thus do We reward the doers of good. Surely he was one of Our believing servants. (es- Saffat 37/ 100-111).

²² el-Hac 22/26-31 which is at the center of the pilgrimage rituals (hac).

Purify my house for those who go around and those who bow down and prostrate themselves in worship". Ibrahim and Ismail raise the foundations of the House and pray to God to bless it. "Our Lord! And make us submissive unto You (muslimeyn) and of our seed a nation submissive unto you (umme muslime), and show us our ways of worship, and relent toward us... and raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite unto them Your revelations, and shall instruct them in the Book (Kitab) and in Wisdom and shall make them grow... when his Lord said to him: 'be a muslim' (means someone who submit to God) he said: I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds. He has submitted to God's orders and has ordered his children to do the same.²³

There is an another account where Ibrahim prays: " My Lord! Make safe this territory, and preserve me and my sons from serving idols. Our Lord! surely they have led many men astray, then whoever disobeys me, Thou surely art Forgiving, Merciful. Our Lord! I have settled some of my posterity in an uncultivable valley near unto Your Holy House (inde Beytike'l-Muharrem), Our Lord! That they may establish proper worship. Therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits.. and ends his prayer this way : Forgive me and my parents and believers on the day when the account is cast²⁴,"

While the Qur'an refers to Ibrahim and Ismail in Mecca it provides no explanation as to how they arrived there (from Syria to the Hicaz). So many versions of the transfer are found in the sources. But the Ali and the Mucahid versions appear to be quite careful.

According to these versions, Ibrahim proceeds to Mecca because God commanded him to establish the site of the Kaba. He brings Hagar and Ismail along, but no mention is made of any conflict with Sarah. When they arrived in Mecca see something like a white cloud with a head in the floating over the site of the Kaba. This cloud tells Ibrahim to build exactly on its shadow or measurement. After building House, He leaves and Hagar and Ismail follow Him. When Hagar asks to

²³ el-Bakara, 2/124-140.

whom is entrusting them, Ibrahim replies: "To God". Hagar is satisfied, but Ismail soon becomes thirsty, so she runs from Safa to Marwa seven times looking for help. She can not bear to see the death of her child, but she nonetheless returns to Ismail, who is scratching up the ground with his heel. She finds the angel Gabriel there. Then the boy scratches the ground with his finger, and the water of Zamzam flows out.

CONCLUSION

The personality of Ibrahim in the Quran is very rich and complex and its different dimensions have been focused on by different tendencies within the Islamic tradition.

After these passages we can say that Islam is the way of Ibrahim, and Ibrahim is the prophet of Islam. Therefore all Muslims after Muhammed are followers of the way of Ibrahim. This way is declared in the Qur'an as a way of utter dedication to the one true God and of directing one's whole being and one's action to God alone. The Holy Qur'an declares: "There is a goodly pattern for you in Abraham (Ibrahim) and those with him"²⁴. Muslims pray to God in the direction of the Kaba that was built by Ibrahim with the help of his son Ismail. Today Muslims still pray in the direction of the house of God that Ibrahim himself prayed in. Thus "salat" a daily prayer, which is the very pillar of Islam, is an Ibrahimic practice. The ritual of the Hajj culminates in the ritual sacrifice of a sheep in memory of Ibrahim's act of obedience, a response to God's testing him by requiring him to sacrifice his own son. All the Muslims share in this ritual. When they stand on Mount Arafat, they stand where he stood. When they run between al-Safa and al-Marwa they run where his wife Hajar ran.

There is *Ibrahim of faith* whom we have touched upon. We must note however that Ibrahim's utter faith in Allah had high cost for him because it led to his rejection by his community including his father. Ibrahim didn't give into the

²⁴ Ibrahim 14/35-41.

²⁵ el-Mumtehine 60/4.

pressure of his father and his community but abandoned them and directed himself to God alone.

Second, there is *Ibrahim of sacrifice*, the Ibrahim that was willing to obey God even when the sacrifice of his very son was involved.

Third, there is *Ibrahim of prayer* who had enough trust in God's compassion and responsiveness to prayer that he left his own family in God's hands. The prayers of Ibrahim are still prayed by muslims and they are amongst the beautiful prayers in the Quran.

Fourth there is *Ibrahim of ever-growing faith* who asks to see God in order for his heart to be soothed. When a Muslim sees that Ibrahim himself thought that his faith was in need of further growth and strengthening, he takes heart at his own feelings of deficiency in faith.

Fifth there is *Ibrahim of inquiry*. This has been the favorite of the theologians and philosophers of Islam who trace Ibrahim's trajectory from the observation and contemplation of the passing nature of the sun and planets to the knowledge of the existence of God as an indication of the legitimacy of theological and philosophical inquiry.