

Ismail and the Great Sacrifice

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The Young Man Who Offered His Life In The Path Of Truth

The brave soldier of monotheism had finished his fight with the idol-worshippers of Babel. Thereafter when the residents of the town knew well that he was the messenger of God and the only aim of his mission was to make people aware of God and the realization of His Radiance (Noor) and when the influence of Nimrod ended in Babel, he took his wife, Sarah with him and, bidding farewell to Babel went towards Syria. After concluding a long journey he stayed at Harran.

The residents of this place were worshipping the sun, moon and stars. Ibrahim (a.s) staged grand discussions with people here also and drew the attention of people towards the true God Who is the Lord Creator of the earth, the skies and everything else in the cosmos. He established and proved that the sun, the moon and the stars fade away after shining for a while and hence they cannot be gods. God, the creator and the protector of the universe remains ever-present and He can be the only one who created the skies, stars and the earth and who is managing all of them under His own administration.

Here also a group of intelligent and wise people accepted the words of Ibrahim (a.s) and took to the path of truth while another group rose up in protest. Ibrahim (a.s) thought that it was not wise, at that time, to take further risks and proceeded towards Palestine and settled there. He stayed there for quite a long time. When a severe drought occurred there, he entered Egypt passing through the desert of Sinai. At first, the king of Egypt showed enmity towards him. But thereafter, he was gifted a big herd of sheep and the king also gave him from his harem an honorable lady named Hajrah so that she may live with Sarah and help her in the household work.

Ibrahim (a.s) spent a large part of his life in Egypt. Rise in the number of his sheep made him wealthy. When the people of Palestine had passed out from famine and forgotten his efforts, Ibrahim (a.s) went back to live there. He established a traveler guesthouse where people could lodge and board. Travelers from Jordan, Lebanon and Syria used to stay there and benefit from the said facilities.

When, even after a long married life, Sarah could not bear a child, she proposed to Ibrahim (a.s) that he should marry her companion Hajrah telling him that God-willing he may get children through her (Hajrah) whereby the progeny of Prophet Hud (a.s) may continue on the earth.

Since this step of Sarah was an instance of sacrifice and selflessness, God Almighty considered it worthy of respect.

In short, Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) married Hajrah and she bore a son for him who was named Ismail (a.s). When Sarah saw that now the progeny of Hud would continue through Hajrah she became worried and restless to an unbearable extent. So she told Ibrahim (a.s) to take away the newborn child and its mother (Hajrah) to a faraway place from where she might not hear anything at all about them. God Almighty ordered Ibrahim (a.s) to fulfill the demand of Sarah and to leave the child and mother in a far off place and then return to Palestine.

Ibrahim (a.s) carried out the divine command. He left Ismail and Hajrah in Hijaz (now called Mecca) praying to God:

O our Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, our Lord! That they may keep up prayer; therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful:[1]

Now also see the miracle of destiny. This event gained such a high regard in human history that its sounds still ring in human ears throughout the world though centuries have passed away. Hajrah and Ismail (a.s) made their residence at the place, which is now known as Mecca near the Sanctified Mosque (Masjidul Haram). In those olden days, it was a barren stony area, which used to hot up so much as to change the color of human face. There was no water all around and hence it was without human habitation. But history gives witness that a spring of water had gushed out from the spot where Ismail (a.s) had rubbed his tiny heels when thirsty. Thereafter, by and by, people of the Jurham tribe began to come and settle there and kind Arab women treated Hajrah and her child Ismail (a.s) with much respect and served them affectionately.

Days continued to pass away until Ismail (a.s) became a youth. One day when Ibrahim (a.s) got fed up with his people's disobedience and came towards Hijaz, he found that everything had changed over there. The lonely place had turned well inhabited and a big spring of fresh water was flowing profusely where there was no drop of water when he had left his wife and son there years ago. God commanded Ibrahim (a.s) to reconstruct His House (Baitullaah) which was founded by Adam (a.s) and which was later destroyed in the flood of Noah (a.s).

Accordingly, Ismail (a.s) fetched stones from Mt. Zee Tuwa to Ibrahim (a.s) who was raising the walls of the Ka'ba. The House was thus reconstructed. Now it was the duty of Ibrahim (a.s) to call all the servants of God (every human being) to visit this House of God. In this way, this building has continued to be till today the center of worshipping only one God. Not only this, it also is one of the most ancient monuments of human civilization and culture. It is its first

milestone. Human history will forever remember how an old father had, with the assistance of his youthful son, built a House, which made Mecca an honored place in the precious land of Hijaz.[2]

In the meanwhile, one night Ibrahim (a.s) saw in his dream that he was sacrificing his son in the path of God; that he had cut off the head of his son Ismail. As dreams of prophets carry revelations from God, next morning, Ibrahim (a.s) described his dream to his son Ismail (a.s).

The Merciful God has mentioned this in Quran as follows:

So We gave him the good news of a boy, possessing forbearance.[3]

When Ismail (a.s) became a major and youthful he (Ibrahim) said:
O my son! Surely I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; consider then what you see.[4]

Almighty God had intended to test Ibrahim and his youthful son Ismail (a.s) and to examine and measure the faith of an old father and also to see to what extent a youthful son remains steadfast on the true path so that the whole world may also know how powerful are their intentions and how solid are the faiths of the divine messengers and heavenly guides.

Ismail said: O my father! Do what you are commanded; if Allah please, you will find me of the patient ones.[5]

When Ibrahim (a.s) carried out Almighty God's command and arranged for the slaughter, Ismail (a.s) said:

"O my dear father! Please while slaughtering me, tie me tightly with a rope so that I may not be able to move my hands and legs at the time of slaughtering so that it may not weaken your intention. Please also cut away my clothes so that they may not redden with my blood, which my dear mother may see. Sharpen the knife well so that my neck may be severed swiftly and I may submit my life to God. I say this because death of a youthful son is very painful to the father."

When Ibrahim (a.s) saw that his son was so much obedient to God and so ready to sacrifice his life willingly he said, "O my son! You have proved yourself to be my best partner in carrying out God's command." [6]

Thereafter he embraced his son very lovingly and affectionately and kissed his head and face.

Tears rolled out from eyes of both of them.

History was presenting a very painful scene. There was a distance of two farsangs (about 12 Kms) between the plains of Mina and the House of God (Ka'ba). Atmosphere was calm, quiet and serene. There was a sharp knife in the hand of a weak and aged father. God had commanded him to slaughter his son with his own hands. Both father and son were absolutely

and faithfully ready to obey divine orders. Ibrahim, the Friend of God, was an affectionate father and hence his heart was full of love for his son, especially a son who had been the center of his hopes and aspirations throughout his life.

But God commanded Ibrahim (a.s) to sacrifice his son in His path. Now Ibrahim was a messenger of God who could not budge at all from his duty because he knew well the strategy behind God's command and was fully convinced that God is the best well-wisher of His servants. So he encouraged himself and was ready to cut off his son's head.

Ismail (a.s) said, "O father! Place my face on the ground and blindfold yourself so that paternal love may not come in the way of obedience to God." He did accordingly and everything came to an end within moments. But at that time the conveyor of revelation announced from Mina saying:

O Ibrahim You 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 upon Ibrahim. Thus do We reward the doers of good. Surely he was one of Our believing servants.[7]

"Now slaughter this sheep instead of Ismail so that this ritual may last till the Day of Judgment."

Ibrahim returned to the town, gathered the people and informed them that God Almighty thus tried him and his son. Then both the father and the son expressed their profound pleasure and happiness over their success. God Almighty rewarded both of them greatly and it became a ritual to slaughter animals at Mina during every Hajj. This continues in Islam and every year Muslims all over the world and pilgrims of Hajj renew this sacrifice. It became a duty of the Muslims of the entire world to remember forever the faithfulness and devotional sacrifice of Ibrahim (a.s) and the exemplary selflessness and self-sacrifice shown by Ismail (a.s) in his youth. Muslims have to remember this great sacrifice through animal sacrifice in every part of the world, and to celebrate feast (Eid) of happiness.

References

[1] Surah Ibrahim 14:37

[2] Refer verses 125-131 of Surah Baqarah

[3] Surah Saffat 37:101

[4] Ibid 102

[5] Ibid 101

[6] Majmaul Bayan, Tabarsi

