

'Id-ul-Adha khutba at Lahore Ahmadiyya London Centre, Friday, 1st September 2017

by Dr Zahid Aziz

The Holy Quran says:

وَإِذْ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۗ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۗ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

“And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain commands he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make you a leader of people. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the wrongdoers, said He.” — 2:124

This is the first mention of Abraham in the Quran. The testing of Abraham by Allah with certain commands no doubts includes his dream in which he saw that he was sacrificing his son Ismail (known in the Bible as Ishmael). The festival we are commemorating today — 'Id-ul-Adha — marks the event of the readiness of Abraham even to sacrifice his son Ishmael when Abraham thought that he had been commanded by God to sacrifice him. Muslims everywhere, as a memorial of this great event, sacrifice an animal, whose meat they consume and give in charity. The physical slaughter is exactly the same as the daily slaughtering of the same animals by most nations on earth to provide food for people. From that point of view, the sacrifice of 'Id-ul-Adha is not a different or an unusual kind of act. But it has a spiritual significance for the person making the sacrifice, as we will see later. This special 'Id-ul-Adha prayer too, which we have just prayed, is held by Muslims everywhere and takes place as the Pilgrimage to Makkah is going on.

That Pilgrimage was itself instituted by Abraham, who is said to have re-built the Ka'bah in Makkah, the House which is the focus of the Pilgrimage. In this connection, the Quran goes on to say after the verse quoted above:

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَشَابَهُ لِّلنَّاسِ وَآمِنًا ۗ وَاتَّخِذُوا مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلِّينَ ۗ وَعَهْدِنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ إِسْمَاعِيلَ أَن طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿١٢٥﴾

“And when We made the House a resort for people and a (place of) security, and (saying): Take the Place of Abraham for a place of prayer. And We commanded Abraham and Ishmael, saying: Purify My House for those who visit (it) and those who abide (in it) for devotion and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves.” (2:125)

And it is also stated two verses later: “And when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House...” (2:127)

Elsewhere the Quran says:

وَأَذِّنْ لِلْبُرْهِيمِ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ
السُّجُودِ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَى كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

“And when We pointed to Abraham the place of the House, saying: Do not set up any partner with Me, and purify My House for those who make circuits and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim to mankind the Pilgrimage: they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path.” (22:26–27)

All this shows that Abraham established the Pilgrimage at the Ka'bah, a building which he re-built with his son Ismail. The command “proclaim to mankind the Pilgrimage” was given by Allah to Abraham and repeated to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. If the Holy Prophet Muhammad had been a self-seeking person, and wanting to project his own name and fame, he would have constructed some memorial to his own achievements and required Muslims to visit and honour that. Towards the end of his life, he possessed all the resources to do so, and tens of thousands of devoted followers to venerate him. But he was concerned only with the glory of God, and therefore, under God's guidance, he honoured the services of those earlier prophets who had sacrificed everything to proclaim the glory of God.

According to Islam, and the traditions of the Arabs before the coming of Islam, Abraham travelled down to the Ka'bah at Makkah in Arabia, a building which already existed but had become derelict by his time, and he settled his wife Hagar and baby son Ishmael there. In the Quran, he is represented as saying the following prayers:

“And when Abraham said: My Lord, make this city secure, and save me and my sons from worshipping idols. My Lord, surely they [i.e., worshipping of idols] have led many people astray. ... Our Lord, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Your Sacred House, our Lord, that they may keep up prayer; so make the hearts of some people yearn towards them, and provide them with fruits; perhaps they may be grateful. ... Praise be to Allah, Who has given me, in old age, Ishmael and Isaac! Surely my Lord is the Hearer of prayer.” (14:35–37, 39–41)

But what did the later descendants of Abraham do? The descendants of Ismail, that is, the Arabs who were guardians of the Ka'bah, made it into a shrine of idol-worship, superstition and ignorance. That was the situation when the Holy Prophet rose among them.

The other descendants and followers of Abraham, through Isaac, were the Jews and the Christians. In their history many prophets had appeared, from Isaac, Jacob, Joseph to Moses, David, Solomon and lastly Jesus, and they possessed scriptures. Yet, by the time the Holy Prophet appeared, they were divided into two religions with fundamentally opposite beliefs.

The Jews believed in literal adherence to the religious law of Moses as the means of salvation, and they had gone too far in the direction of a mechanical and bodily observance of religion, while ignoring its spirit. People with that attitude pay no attention to removing the flaws in their morals and behaviour, or refraining from their bad desires, because they believe that they have done all that the religion requires of them to be saved. The Christians, on the other hand, considered it unnecessary to observe the religious law in its outward form at all, and coined the belief that Jesus had relieved them of that burden because he had died for the sins of mankind. Such people who think that belief is enough, cease to use the tools that God has provided for man's spiritual progress, prayer, fasting etc.

It was the mission of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to re-establish the original religion of Abraham and to bring to fulfilment the prayers of Abraham for his descendants and followers. The Quran says:

“Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), one who submitted to God; and he was not of those who set up partners (with Allah).” (3:67)

“Then We revealed to you (O Prophet): Follow the faith of Abraham, the upright one; and he was not from among the idolaters.” (16: 123)

To his Arab fellow-countrymen, the Holy Prophet Muhammad told that Abraham, far from being an idol-worshipper, argued openly and strongly with his nation against idol-worship. As to Jews and Christians, the Quran reminded them of the obvious fact that Abraham, appearing long before Moses and Jesus, neither followed the detailed religious law of Moses, nor believed like Christians in Jesus as saviour and son of God. Yet, despite this, according to the Bible, God told Abraham:

“I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” — Genesis, 15:1

“By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore.” — Genesis, 22:16–17

Abraham attained this high status without indulging in the rituals which the Jews regard as essential and without believing in the doctrines that the Christians regard as essential. Islam invites Jews and Christians to look at the origin of their own faiths, and to realize that those original, simple principles of faith, as seen in the life of Abraham in their own traditions, are the core and crux of religion, and they are ones that Islam is re-establishing.

Religion is not merely the performance of rituals mechanically and in minute detail, but it is to remember that the purpose of any such rules is that you may thereby attain nearness to God and show love for God. When Abraham agreed to sacrifice his son, he was not following some set rule of his religion as Jews did (or as Muslims do), such as prayer at certain times, fasting in certain days. He had to think and make a decision in a situation which he was suddenly faced with, as to what God wanted him to do, and he preferred to go

ahead with the sacrifice. Abraham was a man of great and deep faith, but unlike the Christian belief in Jesus dying for people's sins, he knew that faith could not save him unless he put it into action.

It must also be remembered here that Islam is not only pointing out the errors of the Jews and the Christians, but presenting a lesson to Muslims also, that they should avoid the errors of these earlier people.

Turning now to Abraham's act of sacrifice, according to the Quran it was after much prayer that Abraham had a child, a son, and that too in old age. His prayer was: "My Lord, grant me a doer of good deeds" (37:100), and this contains a lesson for us as well. But he was then commanded to settle the infant and his mother in the wilderness of Arabia, which he immediately did. When Ismail reached his early teens, Abraham saw in a dream that he was sacrificing him (37:102). His attachment to his son was not only of love, but the son was of economic value as well. He could work and Abraham was old. Human sacrifice, particularly of the first-born son, was a practice prevailing among many nations, even in Britain and northern Europe, although there was no such teaching from God, and in fact in some places in the world it continued till modern times. Abraham thought that he too was being directed by God to sacrifice Ismail. The same verse of the Quran relates that Abraham first asked for Ismail's opinion: "What is your view?" This was not going to be a forced sacrifice, and even though Abraham thought it was a command from God, he still asked his teenage son's opinion. There is a great lesson for present day Muslims in this. Ismail replied that he should do as he was commanded. The Quran then says that "when they *both* submitted" (37:103), Abraham tried to perform the sacrifice but God stopped him and said: "You have already fulfilled the vision" (37:104–105). He had already done the real sacrifice required by settling his son in the desert. To mark this event, God then instituted the practice of the sacrifice of an animal, which takes place annually at the time of the Pilgrimage to Makkah.

The purpose of the sacrifice of the animal is clearly stated in the Quran:

"Not their flesh, nor their blood reaches Allah. What reaches Him is your righteousness." (22:37)

Nations all over the world believed that a sacrifice of something pure and valuable offered to a god, in the form of a human, or animal or food, was a gift or bribe which made that god happy with you. Even the aroma and flavour from a burnt offering was believed to go up to a god in heaven. The Quran contradicts such ideas here. Nothing of the physical sacrifice reaches God. Through making that sacrifice you make a vow that, when required, you will sacrifice what is valuable and dear to you for a higher purpose. When you carry out such a real sacrifice then your righteousness reaches Allah.

Let us pledge ourselves to making that real sacrifice, and pray that like Abraham, Hagar and Ismail, we maintain the houses of Allah that we have inherited from our forefathers and attract people to come to them and learn about Islam. Ameen.

'Id Mubarak to you all!

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by Dr Zahid Aziz

(As *'Id-ul-Adha* was on a Friday, the following *khutba* was delivered for the *Jumu'ah* prayer.)

The well-known prayer taught to Muslims, known in Urdu and Persian as the *Darood*, and in Arabic as *Salat-un-Nabi*, is as follows:

“O Allah, exalt Muhammad and the true followers of Muhammad as You exalted Abraham and the true followers of Abraham, You are the Praised, the Magnified. O Allah, bless Muhammad and the true followers of Muhammad as You blessed Abraham and the true followers of Abraham, You are the Praised, the Magnified.”

How did Allah exalt and bless Abraham? The Bible mentions the promises of exaltation and blessing given by God to Abraham and his progeny:

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you ... and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.” (Genesis, 12:2–3)

“I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore ... and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves.” (Genesis, 22:17–18)

As I said in the Eid *khutbah*, by the time the Holy Prophet Muhammad appeared, the descendants and followers of Abraham, that is the Arabs, Jews and Christians, had deviated greatly from Abraham’s teachings. In particular they had gone far away from his teaching that God is One, and had taken as gods or given God’s attributes to: idols of stone and heavenly bodies, or their priests and religious leaders, or a prophet like Jesus; and they had also taken their own desires for god, as the Quran says (25:43 and 45:23).

That is why God then raised the Holy Prophet Muhammad, from the descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, in order to revive the beliefs taught by Abraham. These are: belief in One God, sacrificing your lower desires in order to reach God, and leading a righteous life.

According to the Quran, when Abraham asked God if this promise made to him applied also to his descendants, God replied: “My covenant does not include the wrongdoers” (2:124). Again, the Quran tells us that Abraham prayed to God, saying:

“So whoever follows me, he is surely of me; and whoever disobeys me, You surely are Forgiving, Merciful.” (14:36)

What Muslims are praying for in the *Darood* is that may Allah make the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his followers the heirs to the promises given to Abraham about him and his

followers. Namely, that Muslims, with the Prophet Muhammad at their head, become a great nation, blessed by God, and indeed that “all the nations of the earth” come to regard Islam and Muslims as a source of blessing for the world.

But we must beware that merely by copying Abraham’s example of sacrifice in a symbolic way, or by just going to the Hajj to the place that Abraham is associated with and performing the outward rites, we do not become his heirs and heirs to the promised blessings. To be Abraham’s real heirs, so as to be worthy of inheriting the promised blessings, we have to make sacrifices of our own desires, just as Abraham did, which needs to be done from time to time in order to attain a higher goal.

There are also three unique points of the *Darood* as a prayer of a religion. Firstly, Muslims pray *for* the Prophet Muhammad, whereas usually in religions the followers pray *to* the founder of their faith. Secondly, we say the same prayer for ourselves as for the Holy Prophet, that may Allah exalt and bless “Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad”. And that is a tremendous privilege, that the Holy Prophet asked us to pray for ourselves in the same words as for him. Thirdly, it shows so much humility that we ask for the same exaltation and blessings as already promised to Abraham’s followers and descendants. Despite Islam teaching us great new truths and principles unknown to earlier religions, we do not brag and boast, but ask for the same success which had been promised by God to Jews and Christians if they were to remain true to Abraham’s teachings.

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