Spiritual Migration

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Al-Islam.org

Article

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Those who live opulent lifestyles feel the urge to constantly update their cars, ensuring that they always have the latest model of BMW or Mercedes in their driveway. While we indulge in such obsessive devotions of the flesh, we must also realize that we must also increase and strengthen our connectivity with God – and that too, in "new" and "innovative" ways!

"He (Abraham) said: 'Indeed I am going toward my Lord, who will guide me.'" **(*37:99*)**

"Say (O' Abraham): Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the worlds; No associate has He; and this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit." **(*6:162-163*)**

The late Martin Luther King has said: "I submit to you that if a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, then he isn't fit to live."

As we continue in our journey through the narratives of the Noble Qur'an and the men and women that Allah has given us as role-models, we come to the life of one of the world's most famous prophets. He is a man who is revered by at least half of the population on Earth and whose daily remembrance is an obligation upon every Muslim – especially during the pilgrimage to Mecca. He is none other than Prophet Ibrahim, also known as Abraham (peace be upon him).

This Prophet is unique within the Qur'anic narrative in that he has a chapter named after him (chapter 14), and we know more about him through the verses of the Qur'an than we know about almost any other prophet or spiritually enlightened individual.

The Qur'an offers us Prophet Abraham's biography as a child growing up in Iraq, and then as a young adult in what is today's occupied-Palestine. We follow him in his trek to present-day Saudi Arabia with his son Ishmael and wife Hagar. The post-Meccan events and his death are not discussed in the Qur'an, and thus the Qur'anic narrative of Abraham ends with his rebuilding of the Ka'ba with his son.

Each of these three stages of his life presents us with important lessons to better understand his message and mission in life, and for us to be able to follow in the footsteps of the one referred to as the 'Friend of Allah' (Khaleelul-Lah).

One of the realities of the Qur'an and its address towards those who claim "Islam" is the fact that we need to be constantly upgrading and strengthening our connectivity with the Almighty through various

means.

Today in the 21st century, in this age of technology and advancement, people find it to be a “natural progression” to go from one version of an OS to another on their home computer – spending hundreds of dollars and countless hours backing up and installing the new software. We always look for the fastest Internet connection at home and on the road; we constantly “need” to upgrade our SmartPhone to the latest model which we are told will offer us the “ultimate mobile experience” with live video conferencing, the ability to download killer apps and carry our entire collection of (halal) MP3 files with us wherever we go. Those who live opulent lifestyles feel the urge to constantly update their cars, ensuring that they always have the latest model of BMW or Mercedes in their driveway. While we indulge in such obsessive devotions of the flesh, we must also realize that we must also increase and strengthen our connectivity with God – and that too, in “new” and “innovative” ways!

In this regard, we have the tradition from the Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) has said, “*Renew your seeking of repentance* (*to God*) *and enliven your worship*.”

This tradition and its commentary by the scholars of Islam explain that when it comes to our daily acts of worship – such as through prayers and supplications – we should introduce variety into our routine and seek to learn new supplications to recite in and out of the prayers. If we are habituated to a particular supplication in the month of Ramadan, we should “experiment” with ones which we have not recited before – ensuring that whatever we read comes from reliable sources of course! Engaging in our worship in this manner will help us focus on the Most High and give us a much-needed change in how we live our lives!

These words from the Master of the Believers, as well as other such traditions and verses of the Qur’an show us that we cannot remain stagnate at the level of Islam and merely being Muslims. Rather, there are higher levels to our faith and we need to work to attain them if we want to reach to a higher ground.

In fact, there is an article entitled Differences Between Islam and Iman which highlights eighteen differences which exist between “al-Islam” (mere submission) and “al-Iman” (true faith and conviction) – one should consult this piece to better understand the ranks of submission.

However, not to detract from the main theme, let us focus on Prophet Abraham and his levels of submission which took him through an extensive spiritual journey to “find” God, and to cement the foundations within himself and those around him – that too, from the most uncanny of sources.

To begin with, Prophet Abraham’s spiritual migration took him through three phases – something which we also need to work through in our lives:

1. Theological
2. Moral
3. Jurisprudential

One of the first things which the young Prophet Abraham enacted in his life – which is something that each and every one of us needs to seriously consider – is our belief system. Is it enough to simply say, "I believe"? Is it enough to go through the motions alongside those who "believe," or is our belief system something much deeper? If we were to be thrown into an ocean of those who openly and directly reject any notion of a Supreme Creator, would our faith waver or would we be able to not only tread water but also bring others to the shores of salvation?

Prophet Abraham shows us that early in his life, he was able to hang out with those who had the most incorrect of belief systems, yet he did not let them influence him; rather, he became the one exerting peer pressure:

"And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and that he might be of those who are sure. So when the night over-shadowed him, he saw a star; said he: Is this my Lord? So when it set, he said: I do not love the setting ones. Then when he saw the moon rising, he said: Is this my Lord? So when it set, he said: If my Lord had not guided me I should certainly be of the erring people. Then when he saw the sun rising, he said: Is this my Lord? Is this the greatest? So when it set, he said: O my people! surely I am clear of what you set up (***with Allah***)***. Surely I have turned myself, being upright, wholly to Him Who originated the heavens and the earth, and I am not of the polytheists. And his people disputed with him. He said: Do you dispute with me respecting Allah? And He has guided me indeed; and I do not fear in any way those that you set up with Him, unless my Lord pleases; my Lord comprehends all things in His knowledge; will you not then mind? And how should I fear what you have set up*** (***with Him***)***, while you do not fear that you have set up with Allah that for which He has not sent down to you any authority; which then of the two parties is surer of security, if you know?"*** (***6:75-81***)

Indeed, there is a need for a physical change around us in order to allow and enhance inner change. When we are determined to stop an act of transgression against God, such as listening to the impermissible forms of music, it is not enough to simply stop – rather, we must break the CDs, delete the MP3s and format the hard drive if need be.

2. At the second level of his submission, Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) realized that it was not enough, for both him and others, to have only the inner belief and conviction for true submission. He was cognizant of the fact that as long as sin and temptation surround a person, he or she may be inclined to go back to his/her old ways.

When people try to kick the nicotine habit away, one of the first things they are told is, "Avoid people and situations where you will be tempted to smoke. If you usually smoke in a certain chair, don't sit in that chair. If you usually smoke at a nightclub, avoid that nightclub for a while. Change your usual routine, so that your new routine doesn't include smoking."

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When we are determined to stop an act of transgression against God, such as listening to the impermissible forms of music, it is not enough to simply stop – rather, we must break the CDs, delete the MP3s and format the hard drive if need be. To ensure we leave no such temptations around us, we should instead replace the music tracks with recitations of the holy Quran, permissible nasheeds and Islamic lectures – a legitimate and most invaluable outlet to fill the void!

In regards to Prophet Abraham at this second stage of his submission, we are told the following in the Holy Qur'an,

"And, by Allah! I will certainly do something against your idols after you go away, turning back. So he broke them into pieces, except the chief of them, that haply they may return to it". They said: Who has done this to our gods? Most surely he is one of the unjust. They said: We heard a youth called Ibrahim speak of them. Said they: Then bring him before the eyes of the people, perhaps they may bear witness. They said: Have you done this to our gods, O Ibrahim? He said: Surely (some doer) has done it; the chief of them is this, therefore ask them, if they can speak. Then they turned to themselves and said: Surely you yourselves are the unjust; Then they were made to hang down their heads: Certainly you know that they do not speak. He said: What! do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you? Fie on you and on what you serve besides Allah; what! do you not then understand?" (***21:57-67***)

We thus see that not only did Prophet Abraham destroy the mental beliefs of polytheism and sin through logical arguments, but he also physically destroyed the idols of worship to prevent people from going back to their old ways.

3. At the third and final level of submission we see the need to engage in a physical migration – either a short-term, temporary sojourn or a long-term, even permanent, move – in order for the spiritual migration to have the degree of impact that is sought. In fact, perhaps all of the prophets and friends of God have engaged in migration (*hijrah*) from one land to another in search for the ideal place to lead a wholesome life. We see the final Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his progeny) migrate from Mecca to Medina, the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) migrate from Medina to Kufa and Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) from Medina to Karbala.

Prophet Abraham needed to take his wife, Hagar, and his new-born son, Ishmael, thousands of kilometers away to Mecca to engage in this third level of submission and to work on building of the self. His journey to Mecca was so significant that it manifests itself in the holy pilgrimage (Hajj), with many of the acts performed in it now reminding us of his spiritual and physical migration.

The Qur'an beautifully speaks about such migrations in numerous passages:

"And (as for) those who migrate in Allah's way and are then slain or die, Allah will most certainly grant them a goodly sustenance, and most surely Allah is the best Giver of sustenance." (***22:58***)

"O My servants who believe! Surely My earth is vast, therefore Me alone should you serve." (***29:56***)

In fact, migration is of such great importance in Islam that our religious scholars have written tracts on this topic, and the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani has even stated the following:

'A Muslim who is born and raised in a Muslim country where he consciously and subconsciously absorbs the laws, values and teachings of Islam, grows up into a young person who is aware of the customs of his religion, following its path and is led by its guidance. On the other hand, a Muslim who is born, and brought up in a non-Muslim country demonstrates the influence of that environment very clearly in his thoughts, ideas, behavior, values, and etiquette unless his Lord helps him. This un-Islamic influence is seen more in the second generation of those who have migrated to non-Muslim countries.

'This was the reason for Islam's view on *at-ta'arrub ba'd al-hijra* as reflected in many ahadith. *At-ta'arrub ba'd al-hijra* literally means "becoming shorn of one's percepts of faith after migrating [to the city]," and technically, it means leaving an environment where you could follow Islam and moving to a place where you may be prone to not following Islam. Such a migration is counted as one of the major sins.

'Abu Basir says that he heard Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) saying: "The major sins are seven: killing a person intentionally; associating someone or something with the Almighty Allah (shirk); wrongfully accusing a married woman of adultery; knowingly dealing in usury; running away from the battle field in jihad; *at-ta'arrub ba'd al-hijra*; causing distress to one's parents [by encroaching on their rights]; and wrongfully acquiring the property of the orphan." Then he said, "*At-ta'arrub* and *shirk* are one and the same [in severity]."

'This, however, does not mean that entering non-Muslim countries is always forbidden. Other ahadith have described for us the reward of one who visits non-Muslim lands, the reward that every Muslim longs for. Hammad al-Sindi narrates that he asked Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him), "I visit the cities of polytheism [i.e., of the polytheists]; and there are some among us who say that 'if you die over there, you will be raised [in the Hereafter] along with them.'" The Imam asked me, "O Hammad, when you are over there do you talk about our affair [i.e., our truth] and call [people] to it?" I replied, "Yes." The Imam asked me, "When you are in these cities, the cities of Islam, do you talk about our affair and call [people] to it?" I replied, "No." The Imam said, "If you die over there [in the land of the non-Muslims], you will be raised as an ummah by yourself, and there will be light in front of you!"' (For more details on this, refer to Ayatollah Sistani's book, A Code of Practice for Muslims in the West.)

Although blessed with such beautiful words from our Ahlul Bayt, many of us may find it difficult to implement the practice into our busy lives. Yet the fact remains that physical migration for the betterment of one's faith is an issue that needs contemplation and resolve, if one is ready to take the third level of submission into his or her life.

This does not necessarily mean having to leave one's comfortable life in the West to settle in some far off, distant land in the East – it could simply necessitate moving from one city in Canada to another, or from a state in the USA with a small Muslim population to one with a more thriving Muslim community and many religious centers. In fact, it could even mean moving within one's own city. Whatever the case may be, such a change is sometimes necessary as it may have a profound impact on our ability to make the spiritual migration towards the Most High.

As we strive to make our own spiritual migration, let us spend some time to delve deeper into the life of one of the greatest prophets of God, and the stages he went through in order to make the essential changes for both himself and those around him.

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