

Ibrahim (Abraham, pbuh), Part 2

Last week, we reflected on how Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him (pbuh), devised a plan to demonstrate to his people that the idols they worshiped were lifeless stones, incapable of benefiting others or even themselves.

Ibrahim (pbuh) was a profound thinker, deeply concerned with the purpose of life and the true meaning behind human existence. He was a seeker of truth, striving to understand the identity of the One true Creator and our responsibilities toward Him. He not only thought, but also put many of his findings to the test. The Qur'an beautifully describes his character: **"Indeed, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a [comprehensive] leader, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining toward truth [a monotheist], and he was not of those who associate others with Allah [polytheists]."** [Qur'an 16:120] And again, **"And mention in the Book [the story of] Ibrahim (Abraham). Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet."** [Qur'an 19:41].

The Qur'an also alludes to the fact that because Ibrahim (pbuh) sincerely sought the truth, Allah [Allah is the name of God in Arabic and Aramaic,] guided him and did not leave him to wander alone. Instead, Allah granted him signs and deep insight. The Qur'an affirms by saying, **"And We had certainly given Ibrahim (Abraham) his sound judgment before, and We were of him well-Knowing."** [Qur'an 21:51] And again: **"And**

thus did We show Ibrahim (Abraham) the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]." [Qur'an 6:75]

So what was Ibrahim's plan? As mentioned last week, he entered the temple where his people kept their statues and idols and shattered all of them, except for the largest one. Then, in a striking gesture, he placed the axe on the shoulder of the biggest idol, leaving behind a powerful message for his people to reflect upon.

When Ibrahim's people returned from their celebration and went to their idols' house, they were shocked to see all their "gods" shattered into fragments, except the largest one. What is the most logical thing they should do in such a case? Naturally, they should turn to the largest one and ask it who did this to your friends? The irony is: they did not! They asked themselves in shock, **"They said, 'Who has done this to our gods? Indeed, he is of the wrongdoers.'"** [Qur'an 21:59]. Almost immediately, they began speaking among themselves: **"They said, 'We heard a young man mention them, who is called Ibrahim (Abraham).'"** [Qur'an 21:60]. A typical reaction! It is human nature that when confronted or cornered, we instinctively search for a scapegoat, someone to blame, rather than engaging our reasoning.

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) became the ideal scapegoat before anyone



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dared to ask the most obvious and rational questions: How could the idols not defend themselves? How could the largest one, likely even bigger than the worshipers, not protect the others? Was it truly responsible for their destruction? Of course not—it cannot speak, move, or act. So, how could it possibly be holding the axe? The culprit must have been a human being. A simple, compelling logic, yet so easily ignored.

The Qur'an continues: **"They said, 'Then bring him before the eyes of the people that they may testify.'"** [Qur'an 21:61]. Here, we witness how a judicial process can be manipulated in the service of falsehood, ignorance, and the defense of the status quo. They pressed on: **"They said, 'Have you done this to our gods, O Ibrahim (Abraham)?"** [Qur'an 21:62].

Ibrahim (pbuh) responded with a stunningly simple and logically brilliant reply:

"He said, 'Rather, this, the largest of them, did it, so ask them, if they should [be able to] speak.'" [Qur'an 21:63].

Notably, the Qur'an refers to Ibrahim's people collectively as "they", while consistently referring to Ibrahim individually as

"he". This subtle yet powerful linguistic distinction highlights that Ibrahim stood alone, physically, intellectually, and spiritually, in confronting his entire community. He risked everything, including his life, to expose the falsehood of idol worship.

But what truly provoked their anger was not the destruction of stone figures, it was Ibrahim's bold challenge to their way of life. His defiance threatened the foundations of their society, their economy, their traditions, and even his own family's interests. Changing the status quo meant confronting uncomfortable truths, something few are ever willing to do.

What's Ibrahim's people's reaction? The Qur'an says, **"So they returned to [blaming] themselves and said [to each other], 'Indeed, you are the wrongdoers.'"** [Qur'an 21:64]. They gave a remarkable answer. An answer that makes one think, who are those people? They said, **"Then they turned to themselves, [saying], 'You have already known that these do not speak!'"** [Qur'an 21:65]. Ibrahim (pbuh) took the chance, talking to their hearts and reasons at the same time, **"He said, 'Then do you worship instead of Allah that which does not benefit you at all or harm you?' Uff to you and to what you worship instead of Allah. Then will you not use reason?"** [Qur'an 21:66-67]. Uff is the shortest word in the Arabic language to express frustration. Ibrahim (pbuh) was frustrated with their igno-

rance and laziness.

When confronted with undeniable truth and clear evidence, human nature often reveals its darker inclinations. History is filled with examples of how those in power, when faced with uncomfortable realities, choose to attack the messengers rather than grapple with the message itself.

"They said, 'Burn him and support your gods – if you are to act.'" [Qur'an 21:68]. This verse powerfully captures the hostile response to Prophet Ibrahim's (pbuh) courageous stand. Rather than reflect on the logical argument he presented, his people resorted to violence, a tactic sadly repeated throughout human history. When truth threatens established norms, destruction is often chosen over reason.

Truth flourishes through free expression. When societies (or countries) restrict opinion and suppress diverse viewpoints, they set themselves on a path toward authoritarianism. Such repression does not merely silence individuals — it cripples collective intellectual progress, stifles innovation, and impedes genuine societal development.

Communities that reject critical thinking and the freedom to question are destined to fall into cycles of systemic oppression. Recovering from such suppression is neither quick nor easy; it often requires generations of sustained effort to revive a society's spirit. I have personally witnessed this pattern in different contexts. The si-

lencing of voices, whether subtle or overt, leaves deep and lasting wounds on individuals and entire communities.

The situation for Ibrahim (pbuh) escalated drastically. No longer content with verbal confrontation, his people sentenced him to be burned alive. They chose a site outside the city, declared a public date for the execution, and began collectively gathering wood, dry sticks and timber, to fuel the fire. It was not just a punishment; it was a public spectacle, a warning to others not to challenge the status quo.

The designated day has come, and they brought Ibrahim (pbuh) to face his destiny. To be burnt to death. Allah the Almighty was witnessing everything. Allah, the All-Powerful, All-Hearing, and All-Knowing, was there for his servant and messenger. Ibrahim (pbuh) was not alone.

Ibrahim is now covered with wood and dry sticks, and his people brought the torch to light the fire. The fire was lit, and Ibrahim (pbuh) saw the fire burning. What a moment that only those with the strongest of faith and who have the divine support can bear. Then, in no time, the divine command had descended, **"Allah said, 'O fire, be cool and safe upon Ibrahim (Abraham). And they intended for him harm, but We made them the greatest losers.'"** [Qur'an 21:69-70].

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