

THE STORY OF PROPHET ISHAMEL

THE BIRTH OF PROPHET ISHMAEL (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ)

Prophet Ibrahim (عليه السلام) and his wife Sarah, who was unable to have children for many years, yearned for a child to alleviate their loneliness and carry forth the family legacy. In her devotion to her husband,

Sarah proposed that her handmaid Hagar marry Ibrahim (عليه السلام) in the hopes of fulfilling this longing.

This union soon blessed them with their first son, Ishmael (عليه السلام). Ishmael, like his father, was appointed by Allah (سبحانه وَتَعَالَى) to serve as a noble Prophet.

PROPHET IBRAHIM (عليه السلام) DEPARTURE

One day, Prophet Ibrahim (عليه السلام) asked Hagar to prepare herself and their son Ishmael (عليه السلام) for a long journey. Hagar was not given any particulars of the journey; nevertheless, she listened to her husband. The family traveled long through diverse landscapes, including cultivated land, deserts, and mountains, until they reached a barren valley in the Arabic Peninsula. There, under a lone tree, they had stopped. The area showed no signs of human life, cultivation, or water sources .

After helping Hagar dismount with their still-nursing baby, **Prophet Ibrahim (لام عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام)** handed her a leather pouch of dates and a small water skin. He then mounted his steed to set off on his return journey.

Perplexed by Prophet Ibrahim's (عليه السلام) sudden departure, Hagar ran after him, seeking an explanation.

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She called out,

“O Ibrahim! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything (to enjoy)?”

Receiving no response from Ibrahim (عليه السلام), Hagar repeated her question several times. It then dawned on her that he was quiet as he was honoring a command from the Almighty.

Has Allah ordered you to do so?”

She asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Then He will not neglect us,” she observed with confidence.

Hagar then returned to the shade of the tree, watching Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) proceed homebound.

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Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ), with a heavy heart and concern for leaving his family in such a barren land, raised his hands in prayer:

“Our Lord! I have made some of my offspring settle in a barren valley near Your Sacred House! Our Lord! I did so that they may establish Prayer. So make the hearts of people affectionately inclined to them, and provide them with fruits for their sustenance that they may give thanks. Our Lord! Surely You know all that we conceal and all that we reveal, and nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah.”

— (Surah Ibrahim, ayat 37-38)

THE MIRACLE OF ZAMZAM

Hagar continued to nurse her child and rationed the dates and water left by Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) . **However, the provisions left quickly ran out, leaving both of them hungry in the middle of a barren desert valley.**

Distressed by the sight of her baby tossing and turning due to thirst and hunger, Hagar sought help. **She left Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) to climb the nearest mountain, As-Safa.**

Finding neither help nor water at the top, she descended Mount Safa, and then climbed up another nearby mountain called Marwa. Still, she saw nothing in sight but sand. Out of desperation, she ran back and forth, **climbing between the two mountains a total of seven times** before hearing a voice. She then quieted down, waiting patiently for the voice to call out again.

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She then heard the voice again but was unable to make any sense of it, Hagar called out, yelling:

“O, (whoever you may be)! You have made me hear your voice; have you got something to help me?”

To Hagar's astonishment, **she spotted an angel at the site of Zamzam, he was digging with his heel (or wing) till water miraculously began to flow.**

Overwhelmed with relief, she ran to the watering hole fashioned a basin-like structure around it, and proceeded to fill her water skin.

Still, the water kept gushing out. Hagar quenched her thirst and nursed her baby.

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The angel then said to Hagar:

“Don’t be afraid of being neglected, for this is the House of Allah, which will be built by this boy and his father, and Allah never neglects His people.”

In the hadith recounted by Ibn Abbas, as recorded in Sahih Bukhari 3362 and 3364, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

“May Allah bestow mercy on Ishmael’s mother! Had she let the Zamzam (flow without trying to control it) (or had she not scooped from that water) (to fill her water-skin), Zamzam would have been a stream flowing on the surface of the earth.”

Note

This watering hole is known as the Zamzam, and the practice of running between the two mountains is the ritual of Sa’ee that Muslims observe during pilgrimage.

THE TRIBE OF JURHUM SETTLES IN THE VALLEY

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Prophet ﷺ then continues telling,

“The House (i.e., Kaaba) at that time was on a high place resembling a hillock, and when torrents came, they flowed to its right and left. She lived in that way till some people from the tribe of Jurhum or a family from Jurhum passed by her and her child, as they (i.e., the Jurhum people) were coming through the way of Kada’.

They landed in the lower part of Mecca where they saw a bird that had the habit of flying around water and not leaving it.

They said,

“This bird must be flying around water, though we know that there is no water in this valley.”

They sent one or two messengers who discovered the source of water and returned to inform them of the water. So, they all came (towards the water).”

When they arrived, they discovered Hagar and Ishmael (عليه‌السلام) seated beside the watering hole.

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They were respectful and asked her:
“Do you allow us to stay with you?”

“Yes, but you will have no right to possess the water,”
she replied.

They readily agreed and settled with Hagar and Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ), sharing their land and the watering hole.

The people of the Jurhum tribe then sent for their families, who arrived and later became permanent residents of Makkah.

Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) grew up among the tribe of Jurhum and learned Arabic from them. He was adored by the tribe for his remarkable character and virtues. When he reached the age of maturity, he (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) married a woman from amongst them. The hadith briefly mentions the passing of Sarah, but neither the Qur'an nor Hadith records any details of this event.

THE SACRED SACRIFICE

One day, Prophet Ibrahim (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) visited Ishmael (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) in Makkah. At this age Ishmael had matured enough to work alongside his father.

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During this visit, Ibrahim revealed the contents of a recurring dream he had been having, saying,

“My son, I see in my dream that I am slaughtering you. So consider (and tell me) what you think.”

— (Surah As-Saffat, ayah 102)

Ishmael (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) replied:

“O my father! Do that which you are commanded, Insha' Allah (if Allah wills), you shall find me of As-Sabirin (the patient ones, etc.)”

— (Surah As-Saffat, ayah 102)

This was a very difficult test sent from Allah (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى).

Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) was in his old age, praying diligently for his firstborn, and Allah (وَتَعَالَى سُبْحَانُهُ) granted him his heart's desire. He loved his son, but he had to submit to Allah's will. It was the utmost test of complete faith and submission to Allah (سُبْحَانُهُ وَتَعَالَى) that any person could be subjected to.

This was his one and only son, and his willingness and preparation to take his life was the test. Ishmael's calm demeanor and cooperation are equally deserving of praise and study.

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As described in Surah As-Saffat, ayah 103:

“...they had both submitted their wills (to Allah),”

Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) asked Ishmael to travel with him to Mount Arafat to perform the sacrifice. According to certain historical and exegetical sources, it tells us that **Shaitan had tried to seduce Prophet Ibrahim (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ)** on three separate occasions **Jamarat-al-Ula, Jamarat-al-Wusta, and Jamarat-al-Kubra.**

With each encounter, Shaitan's efforts to sway Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) intensified.

However, he avoided these temptations, pelting Shaitan with seven pebbles at each location, driving him away.

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The Tafseer, Maariful Qur'an, narrates the conversation between Prophet Ibrahim (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) and his son, as follows:

“My dear father, tie me down well enough so that my body may not toss and turn too much; and also keep your dress protected, lest the drops of my blood spoil it which might reduce my reward with Allah, and moreover, if my mother were to see this blood, she will be virtually smitten with sorrow.

And sharpen your knife, and run it fast over my throat, so that my last breath comes easy on me, for death is hard; and when you return to my mother, pay my respects to her and should you wish to take my shirt to her, you are welcome to do so, may be it would give her the comfort she needs.”

Hearing these words coming from the lips of the only son a father has, who can imagine what would have been going on in his heart.

But, here was Sayyidna Ibrahim (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) Like a mountain of fortitude, he says to his son,

“Son, what a good helper you are for me in this task assigned by Allah.”

Saying this, he kissed his son and, with wet eyes, he tied him.

The ayah of the Qur'an then continues,

"and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice)"

— (Surah As-Saffat, ayah 103).

There are several reasons for having him lay his head in prostration for sacrifice.

For one, it could be seen as a symbolic gesture that further exemplifies their complete submission to the will of Allah (سُبْحَنَهُ وَتَعَالَى).

Secondly, it helped Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) avoid having to look into his son's eyes, a sight likely to stir up feelings of compassion and love while also fearing to disobey Allah's (سُبْحَنَهُ وَتَعَالَى) command.

So, Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) and his son chose to position the knife to come up from beneath him to somewhat ease an impossible task.

As Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) brought the knife to his son's neck, a divine intervention occurred. Miraculously, Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) was replaced by a ram.

Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ), following through with his act of devotion, slaughtered the ram instead. Overwhelmed with relief and gratitude, he found Ishmael safe and unharmed at a distance.

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He then heard a voice:

“*O Ibrahim, you have indeed fulfilled your dream. Thus do We reward the good-doers.*”

(Surah As-Saffat, ayat 104-105)

Allah (سُبْحَنَهُ وَتَعَالَى) continues by saying:

“*This was indeed a plain trial. And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice (i.e., a ram), and We preserved for him a good name among posterity. Peace be upon Ibrahim. Thus do We reward the good-doers. Surely, he was one of Our believing servants.*” (Surah As-Saffat, ayat 106-111)

Note

Following Prophet Ibrahim's mighty sacrifice, the practice of slaughtering an animal is regarded as an essential act for Hajj pilgrims that marks the completion of their pilgrimage. Similarly, stoning the Jamaraat is one of the obligatory rituals of Hajj.

WIVES OF ISHMAEL (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ)

After the death of Hagar, Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) arrived in Makkah to visit his son Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) and his family. When he arrived at Ishmael's home, he met his son's wife. When he inquired into the whereabouts of Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ), she replied that her husband had gone in search of livelihood

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Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) then asked her about their living conditions.

“We are living in misery; we are living in hardship and destitution,” she complained.

Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) replied:

“When your husband returns, convey my salutations to him and tell him to change the threshold of the gate (of his house).”

When Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) returned, he felt something unusual, so he asked his wife if anyone visited her.

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“Yes” she replied. “an old man of so-and-so description came and asked me about you, and I informed him, and he asked about our state of living, and I told him that we were living in a hardship and poverty.”

“Did he give you any piece of advice?” Ishmael (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) asked

“Yes, he told me to convey his salutation to you and to tell you to change the threshold of your gate,” she said.

Ishmael realized it was his father and understood the encoded message; he said,

“It was my father, and you are the threshold of the gate. He has ordered me to divorce you. So, go back to your family.”

So, Ishmael divorced her and married another woman from amongst them (i.e., Jurhum).

After some time, Prophet Ibrahim (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ) traveled to Makkah to visit his son once again but did not find him.

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So he called on his wife and asked her about Ishmael (عليه السلام).

“*He has gone in search of our livelihood,*”

she replied.

“*How are you getting on,*” **he asked.**

“*We are prosperous and well off (we have everything in abundance),*”
she said, thanking Allah (سبحانه وَتَعَالَى).

“*What kind of food do you eat?*” **he asked.**

“*Meat,*” **she replied.**

“*What do you drink?*” **he asked**

“*Water,*” **she replied.**

“*O Allah! bless their meat and water,*”
Prophet Ibrahim (عليه السلام) prayed to Allah (أَللّٰهُ وَتَعَالٰى سُبْحٰنَهُ)

Then, Prophet Ibrahim (السلام عليه) instructed his wife:

“*When your husband comes, give my regards to him and tell him that he should keep firm the threshold of his gate.*”

When Ishmael (السلام عليه) returned, he asked his wife if anyone called on her.

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“*Yes*” **she replied.**

“*A good-looking old man came to me.*”

Praising the old man, she added:

“*He asked about you, and I informed him that we were in a good condition.*”

“*Did he give you any piece of advice?*” **Ishmael (السلام عليه) asked.**

“*Yes, he told me to give his regards to you and ordered that you should keep firm the threshold of your gate,*” **she said.**

“*It was my father, and you are the threshold of the gate. He has ordered me to keep you with me,*” **Ishmael (عليه السلام) noted.**

BUILDING THE KAABA

Ibn Abbas continues in the hadith to mention how, one day, Ibrahim (السلام عليه) visited Ishmael (السلام عليه) in Makkah again. When he arrived, he saw Ishmael (السلام عليه) seated under a tree by the Zamzam, sharpening his arrows.

Recognizing his father, Ishmael (السلام عليه) promptly stood and greeted him warmly. Ibrahim (السلام عليه) then informed his son of a noble task that Allah (وتعالى سُبْحَنُهُ) had entrusted to him.

Ibrahim (السلام عليه) said:

"O Ishmael ! Allah has given me an order."

His son replied:

"Do what your Lord has ordered you to do."

"Will you help me?"

Ibrahim (السلام عليه) asked.

"I will help you,"

affirmed Ishmael.

Ibrahim (عليه السلام) said while pointing to a hillock higher than the land surrounding it:
"Allah has ordered me to build a house here."

The Prophet ﷺ added,

"Then they raised the foundations of the House (i.e. the Kaaba). Ishmael brought the stones, and Ibrahim was building, and when the walls became high, Ishmael brought this stone and put it for Ibrahim, who stood over it and carried on building; while Ishmael was handing him the stones, both of them were saying:

رَبَّنَا تَقْبَلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْسَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

Rabbanaa taqabbal minnaa innaka Antas Samee'ul Aleem

English Translation:

“Our Lord! Accept this service from us. You are indeed the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”
— (Surah Al-Baqarah, ayah 127)

The square stone with Prophet Ibrahim's footprints is famously known as **Maqām Ibrāhīm** "Station of Ibrahim," and is preserved in an enclosure close to the Kaaba.