

Ibrahim (alayhis salam) and the Great Fire

Ibrahim Reasons with his Father

The struggle between Ibrahim and his people continued. But the most amazed and furious was his father, for as it is well known, he not only worshipped idols but made them and sold them as well. Ibrahim felt that it was his duty as a good son to advise his father against this evil so that he could be saved from Allah's punishment.

Being a wise son, he did not make his father feel foolish, nor did he openly laugh at his conduct. He told him that he loved him, thereby hoping to generate fatherly love. Then he gently asked him why he worshipped lifeless idols who could not hear, see or protect him. Before his father could become angry he quickly added:

"O my beloved father! There has come to me of knowledge that has not come to you. So follow me. I will guide you to a Straight Path.

O my father! Worship not Shaytan. Indeed Shaytan has been a rebel against the Most Beneficent (Allah).

O my father! I fear that a punishment from the Most Beneficent (Allah) overtake you if you become a companion of Shaytan (in the Hellfire)."

He (the Azar) said: "Do you reject my gods, O Ibrahim? If you don't stop this, I will indeed stone you. So get away from me before I punish you!"

Ibrahim said: "Peace be on you! I will ask forgiveness of my Lord for you. Indeed He is Ever Gracious to me. And I shall turn away from you and from those whom you invoke besides Allah." (19:43)

Ibrahim Breaks the Idols

Ibrahim left his father's house and abandoned his people and what they worshipped. He tried his best to explain to them that what they were doing was wrong and evil but they just would not understand. This left Ibrahim no choice but to devise a plan. He decided to do something about their state of disbelief, but did not reveal it. He knew that there was going to be a great celebration on the bank of the river which would be attended by all the people.

Ibrahim waited until the city was empty, and then came out cautiously, going straight to the temple. The streets leading to it were empty and the temple itself was deserted for the priests had also gone to the festival outside the city.

Ibrahim went there carrying a sharp axe. He looked at the stone and wood statues of the gods and at the food laid in front of them as offerings. He approached one of the statues and asked: "The food in front of you is getting cold. Why don't you eat?" the statue kept silent and dumb. Ibrahim asked all the other statues around him:

"Will you not eat of the offering before you?" (37:91)

He was mocking them for he knew they would not eat. He once again asked then:

"What is the matter with you that you do not speak?" (37:92)

He then raised his axe and started smashing the false gods worshipped by the people. He destroyed them all except one on whose neck he hung the axe. After this his anger subsides and he felt at peace. He left the temple. He had fulfilled his vow to show his people a practical proof of their foolishness in worshipping something other than Allah.

The Idolaters Question Ibrahim

When the people returned, they were shocked to see their gods smashed to pieces, lying scattered all over the temple. They began to guess who had done that to their idols and immediately Ibrahim's name came to their minds.

They said:

"Who has done this to our gods? He must indeed be one of the wrongdoers."

They said:

"We heard a young man talking against them who is called Ibrahim."

They said: "Then bring him before the people, that they may testify against him."

They said: "Are you the one who has done this to our gods, O Ibrahim?"

Ibrahim said: "Rather, this one, the biggest of them did it, ask them, if they can speak!"

So they turned to themselves in shame and thought: "Truly we are the *Zalimun* (polytheists, and wrongdoers)."

Then they turned to Ibrahim in anger saying: "Indeed you know well that these idols don't speak?"

Ibrahim said: "Why do you then worship besides Allah, things that can neither profit you nor harm you? Have you then no sense?" (21:59-67)

Furious, they demanded that Ibrahim be arrested and tried. Ibrahim did not fight back. This was exactly what he had been waiting for, so that he could show them in public how foolish their beliefs really were.

At the trial they asked him if he was responsible for breaking the idols. Smiling, he told them to ask the biggest idol which was still not broken. He told them that he must be the one who did it since he had the axe hanging around its neck!

They replied that he knew well that the idol could not speak or move which gave Ibrahim the chance to prove the foolishness of worshipping these lifeless objects.

They then realized the senselessness of their beliefs; however, their arrogance would not allow them to admit their foolishness. All they could do was to use their power, like bullies, to punish Abraham. They kept him in chains and planned their revenge.

The Idolaters Try to Burn Ibrahim

Anger was burning in their hearts. They decided to throw Ibrahim into the biggest fire they could build. All the people were ordered to gather wood as a service to their gods. For several days they collected fuel. They dug a deep pit, filled it with firewood and ignited it. They brought a catapult with which to throw Ibrahim into the fire. Ibrahim was put on the catapult, his hands and feet were tied. The fire was ready with its flame reaching the sky. The people stood away from the pit because of the great heat. Then the chief priest gave his order to cast Ibrahim into the fire.

The angel Jibreel (alayhis salam) came near Ibrahim and asked him: "O Ibrahim do you wish for anything?" Ibrahim replied: "Nothing from you." (My Allah is enough for me. I need no one but Him.)

The catapult was shot and Ibrahim was cast into the fire. But his descent into the blaze was as descent on steps in a cool garden. The flames were still there, but they did not burn for Allah had issued His command:

"O fire! Be cool and safe for Ibrahim." (21:69)

The fire submitted to the will of Allah, becoming cool and safe for Ibrahim. It only burned his ropes that he was tied in, and he sat in the midst of the fire as if he were sitting in a garden. He glorified and praised Allah the Almighty, with a heart that contained only his love for Allah. There was not any vacant space therein for fear, awe, or worry. It was filled with love only.

Fear and awe were dead, and the fire was turned into coolness, making the air pleasant. Those who love Allah as Ibrahim do did not fear.

The Faith of the Believers

The idol-worshippers, the chiefs, and the priests sat watching the fire from a distance. It was burning their faces and nearly suffocating them. It kept burning for such a long time that the disbelievers thought it would never be extinguished. When it did burn out, they were greatly amazed to find Ibrahim (alayhis salam) coming out of the pit untouched by the fire. Their faces were black from the smoke, but his face was bright with the light and grace of Allah. The raging fire had become cool for Ibrahim and had only charred the ropes which held him. He walked out of the fire as if he were walking out of a garden. Cries of astonishment were heard from the disbelievers.

"They wanted to harm him, but We made them the worst losers. (21:70)

This miracle shamed the idol-worshippers, but it did not cool the flame of anger in their hearts. However after his event, many of the people followed Ibrahim (alayhis salam), although some kept their belief a secret for fear of harm or death at the hands of the rulers.