

A M EBRAHIM

" In about 610 AD, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad (PBH) in the city of Mecca. Gabriel told the prophet (PBH) that GOD had commissioned him to be His last prophet.

(EXPLAIN THE SIGNIFICANCE - GABRIEL 11)

The revelations continued until Muhammad (PBH) died in 632 AD. These revelations constitute the Qur'an, Islam's Holy Book. The prophet (PBH) believed that he was restoring and completing the original religion of humanity i.e. Adam - Abraham - and that he stood in the line of the Biblical prophets who had also been sent by GOD to call people to submit to GOD, i.e. Noah, Moses, Jesus, etcetera. At that time people were worshiping "many gods".

If you are familiar with Jewish and Christian understanding of GOD, you may find that Islamic views are similar. Most of what Muslims say about GOD would be readily affirmed by traditional Christians and Jews.

For Muslims, like members of Judaism and Christianity, GOD is the ultimate reality. GOD depends on nothing else, but everything else depends on GOD, i.e. Allah. Yes, we believe in the Internal Unity of GOD. Not only do no other gods exist external to GOD himself, no multiplicity exists within GOD.

In the Qur'an, Allah is simply the name of GOD. In fact Allah in Arabic is a direct equivalent of the word GOD in English. When the early Christians translated the Bible they used Allah wherever GOD stood in the original Greek and Hebrew. In fact, Muslims claim that Allah is the same GOD as the GOD of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, thus affirming that Islam stands in continuity with Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe that all three religions share the same GOD and the same Scriptures, but they also believe that EACH IN TURN CLAIMS TO REFORM, PERFECT AND COMPLETE WHAT CAME BEFORE.

CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Christians and Jews think of Islam as a religion which originates later than Judaism and Christianity. Christians and Jews naturally think of Muhammad (PBH) as the founder of Islam, the same way they think of Abraham, Moses and Jesus as the founders of either Judaism or Christianity. Muslims believe that Islam is the original religion of humanity, which the prophet (PBH) was sent to restore. Islam believes, i.e. in the Qur'an, that Adam is the first person to worship Allah/GOD and that Abraham is the essential founder of the Muslim religion. The Qur'an tells the story of Abraham's rejection of other gods. Surah 6:74-79.

The throne verse is one of the most famous verses of the Qur'an. It reads:

"GOD. There is no god but Him, the living, the everlasting. Neither slumber nor sleep ever seizes Him. To Him belongs all the things in the heavens and the earth. Who may intercede with Him except with his permission? He knows what lies

before them (i.e. people) and what is after them, and they do not understand anything of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne encompasses the heavens and earth; the preserving of them does not worry Him. GOD is the all-high, the all-glorious."

In Islam, GOD is one because He is unique. GOD is "Number One" and no "Number Two" exists alongside Him. Nothing can be compared to GOD because nothing is like GOD. Nothing can be added or taken away from GOD that would make Him more perfect, wiser, more powerful, or more knowledgeable. He is perfect and the entity (living or not) has existed eternally and will continue to exist eternally.

In Islam, first and foremost, one believes in the Qur'an, but the Books of GOD also include the Mosaic Law, the Psalms of King David, and the Gospel of Jesus. Muslims believe the revealed Books are specific manifestations of the Heavenly Book - the mother of the Book. Islam believes that the Qur'an is the literal, eternal spoken word of GOD. It was brought to the prophet (PBH) by the angel

Gabriel - revealed to him. Just as GOD has always existed, so has His word, the Qur'an, always existed. The revelations to Moses, David and Jesus come from the same Heavenly Book as does the Qur'an.

The Qur'an names about twenty-eight prophets, most of whom also occur in the Bible, such as Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus. Most of the prophets bring the same message: an exhortation to justice in dealing with others and a call to return to worshipping only GOD, along with a threat of judgement on the on the day of resurrection if the warning is not ^Hneeded!!

Along with Abraham and Muhammad (PBH), Jesus is one of the most revered Islamic prophets. The Qur'an affirms His virgin birth and His relationship to His mother Mary, who is also highly respected. Islam believes that Jesus will return and there is a vacant grave in the holy city of Medina next to the grave of the prophet (PBH) which is reserved for Him. (EXPLAIN)

Jesus, for Christians, is the incarnate bodily word of GOD. For Muslims, Muhammad (PBH) is only a man. The Qur'an is the eternal word of GOD (as revealed to the prophet (PBH) by the angel Gabriel). The Qur'an is the eternal word of GOD in Islam. Muhammad (PBH) is the witness to that word, just as the Christian Bible is witness to Jesus as the Word of GOD for Christians. Thus, from a theological standpoint, the Qur'an occupies the same role in Islam that Jesus does in Christianity, and Muhammad (PBH) occupies the role in Islam that the Bible does in Christianity. Jesus, for Christians, is a divine Saviour figure. For Muslims, Muhammad (PBH) is not a saviour but a messenger.

The Qur'an reflects Moses in such a way as to emphasise the parallel roles of Muhammad (PBH) and Moses. They both share the following

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Ethical prophet, emphasising proper morals;

Exemplary prophet, who is a model to be imitated;

Law-giver;

Ritual leader;

Judge/arbitrator;

Political head of the community;

Military leader of the people of GOD;

Intercessor for the people of GOD;

One who has a unique, personal encounter or vision of GOD; and

One who provides the model for subsequent behaviour.

You cannot understand Christianity or Judaism without dealing seriously with the Bible. Likewise, you cannot understand Islam without coming to grips and spending time with the Qur'an. Most people know that the Qur'an is the Scripture of Islam. Some people even refer to the Qur'an as the "Bible of Islam". Interestingly, the word "Bible" comes from a Greek word for "book" and "the book" is a frequent designation in the Qur'an of Islam's scripture.

The scripture of a religion may be one book or many. People who study world religions point out that there are many, if not all, of the following characteristics in each scripture -

The text is of divine origin or a product of inspiration;

The text is treated as sacred, powerful and inviolable;

The text is regarded as self-authenticating;

The text is regarded as authoritative for a community, providing guidelines for worship, belief, and behaviour;

The text is closed;

The text provides an understanding and meaning of life;

The text is a sufficient basis for life;

The religion has procedures on how to study and apply the text; and

A group of people (such as ulama or religious scholars, rabbis, magii or priests) have the primary responsibility of transmitting and interpreting the text.

As you take note of what I have said, observe how many of these characteristics apply to the Qur'an.

In Islam no-one is regarded as a believer until he wishes his brothers and sisters what he wishes for himself. This is similar to the golden rule, versions of which occur in Judaism, Christianity, Confucianism^{Buddism, the Hindu religion} and most other faiths. Believers are those who avoid vain talk, who are active in charity, who faithfully observe their trusts and covenants, and who keep their prayers. (Muslims give 2% of their annual income to charity)

When the holy prophet (PBH) gave his farewell sermon, he implored the followers of Islam, along with worshipping GOD and other obligations, to observe the following -

Return any property belonging to others;

Do not hurt anyone;

Do not charge interest on money loaned to anyone;

Husbands should treat their wives well as they are partners together;

Do not make friends with people of bad character; and

Avoid adultery.

In Islam children are a joy. Children are expected to honour their parents. Fathers should love and show affection to their children. Islam assumes that mothers will show love to their children. In one famous saying, the prophet (PBH) stated:

"Paradise is at the feet of the mother".

On another occasion when he was asked: "To whom should I show kindness?", he replied: "Your mother, next your mother, next your mother, then comes your father, and then your relatives ...".

Grown children should take care of their elderly parents and show them respect. This is a requirement stipulated in the Qur'an. The extended family is responsible for the debts of a family member who has died. Infant girls are welcomed in Islam. The Qur'an condemns the practice of girls being killed. See Surah 81:8-9. The Qur'an prohibits suicide and euthanasia (Surah 4:29). Sterilisation is prohibited. One should not pray for death - GOD fixes the time of death. On the other hand, doctors are not required to use

extraordinary means to prolong life past its natural end. No-one is precluded from using medical science and treatment to cure disease.

All three religions - Islam, Judaism and Christianity - claim to worship the same GOD, even though some Christians today don't accept that the Muslim God is the same as the Christian God. When Paul, the Jew, converted to Christianity he didn't think he had changed the God he worshipped. Rather he had come to a different understanding of the God he had always worshipped. Today, when a member of the three Abrahamic religions converts and becomes a member of a different one of the three religions, she views herself as having changed her religion but not her God. In contrast, when a pagan converted to Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, the convert had changed both religion and god.

For Muslims, Abraham is neither a Christian nor a Jew. He is rather the first monotheist and thus the first Muslim in the sense of one who submits to the only GOD. For Muslims, faithful Christians and Jews are Muslims because they submit to GOD.

In the Qur'an it is said that GOD made covenants with the children of Israel (Surah 5:12), with Christians (Surah 5:14) and with Muslims (Surah 5:7). For Muslims, underlying all these covenants is an implicit covenant made in the time of Adam between GOD and all Adam's descendants (Surah 7:12). The most essential element of these covenants is the acknowledgement of one GOD. GOD is the ultimate reality, the Creator of the world, and the one who will bring the day of judgement and the resurrection.

We share the same Book, i.e. the "Mother of the Book". The revelations (Torah, Psalms, Gospel and Qur'an) which were brought by prophetic messengers are examples of this Book because their Scriptures go back to the same heavenly prototype. Muslims, Jews and Christians are all "people of the Book".

Each of the three religions believes in the second coming of a Messiah and/or Mahdi, but each regards itself as the final revelation. Islam regards itself not only as the fulfilment of Judaism

and Christianity, but also claims that Islam is the natural religion of humankind at birth, as well as the faith of Abraham.

Do you know that a ninth century historian of Mecca wrote that the Kaba contained pictures of Abraham, Jesus and perhaps Mary on a column near the entrance. It is said that the holy prophet (PBH) left these untouched when he cleansed the Kaba of its pagan idols.

About one fourth of the Qur'an is devoted to stories of persons, most of whom are Biblical prophets. In order of frequency, the most commonly mentioned Biblical prophets and characters in the Qur'an are Moses, Abraham, Noah and Adam. Multiple references are made of Jacob, David and Solomon. Mention is also made of Lot, Isaac, Ishmael and Aaron.

In the Qur'an the fullest version of the creation of the world as we know it with its residents occurs at Surah 2:30-39, 7:11-31 and 38:71-85. GOD tells his angels of his intention to create a representative on earth: this is achieved and the angels prostrate

themselves before Adam except for Iblis - the devil - who is expelled.

Mention has already been made of Abraham, Lot, Ishmael and Isaac. Surah 37:83-113 of the Qur'an tells of the sacrifice of Abraham's unnamed son. Both father and son submit to GOD. The rest of the revelation is the same as in Christianity.

The Joseph Surah (12) is the most developed narrative of any of the Bible stories in the Qur'an. The Qur'an calls this the "most beautiful of stories". In contrast to the narrative style of the Biblical version, the shorter Qur'anic version is structured around a series of dramatic dialogue scenes with a minimum of connecting narrative. Only Joseph and Jacob are explicitly named in Surah 12. The story tells of how Joseph, envied by his brothers, is sold into slavery in Egypt, where he ultimately rises to the position of chief minister of Pharaoh. In a time of famine, his brothers come to Egypt to buy grain and, after a series of encounters with Joseph, the family is reunited. I have highlighted only a few of the most important

variations of the Qur'anic story from the Biblical story. Once in Egypt, when the wife of Joseph's owner tries to seduce Joseph he is tempted but GOD prevents him from yielding. As he runs to the door, the woman tears the shirt from his back. The shirt, torn at the back, proves Joseph was fleeing from rather than attacking the woman. The wife invited the women to a banquet where, stunned by Joseph's beauty, they cut their fingers with their knives. Later in prison, Joseph preaches the message of Islam to his two cellmates. When the brothers later come to Egypt, Joseph reveals himself to the younger brother (Benjamin in Genesis) but not to the other ten brothers. When Jacob goes blind with grief over the loss of his son, Joseph sends his shirt with his brothers back to Canaan to cast over his father, Jacob, restoring Jacob's eyesight. Father and brothers come to Egypt and the family is reunited. '1

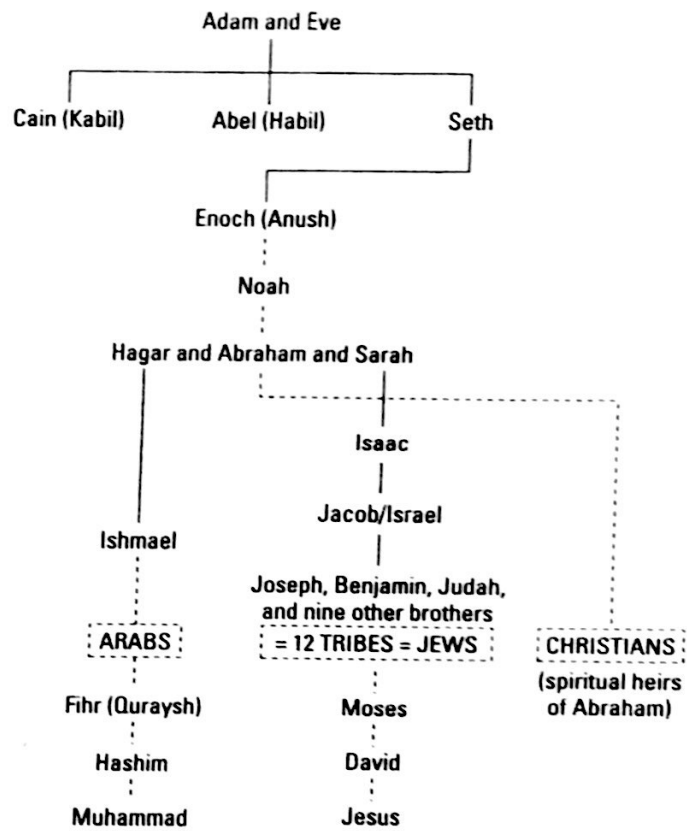


Figure 16-1:
Family tree of Abrahamic religions.