

'Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) in Islam: Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael

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The deepest truths and insights which lie at the heart of each major religious tradition are, oftentimes, represented by means of myth and symbol which are able to inform, form and transform the inner and outer lives of millions of human beings through the ages. By commemorating such myth and symbol we not only celebrate the pivotal role they have played in our lives, as individuals or communities, in the past, but also reflect on ways in which they may be relevant to our lives in the present and the future. Today, as we meet in honor of the remembrance of what we consider to be of central import and significance in our religious traditions, I would like to focus on the 'Eid al-Adha, the Festival or Fest of Sacrifice, which is associated in the Islamic tradition with the story of Abraham as an emblem of the unity of all those who believe in the One God.

'Eid al-Adha is also called 'Eid al-qurban, 'Eid al-nahr or 'Eid al-kabir. In India it is commonly referred to as Bakar or Bakra 'Eid and in Turkey as Buyuk-Bairam or Qurban-Bairam.' 'Eid al-Adha is a festival which lasts for three days known as the "aiyam al-tashrik". It is celebrated on the 10th day of the Dhu'l-Hijja which is the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. On this day the pilgrims offer a sacrifice in the valley of Mina as the final rite of the Hajj which is one of the five pillars of faith for Muslims. The custom of offering a sacrifice on this day is followed not only by pilgrims but by all Muslims who regard it as sunnah

or practical tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. This sunnah is regarded as obligatory on every free Muslim who has the means to buy a sacrificial animal. Amongst the animals sacrificed are sheep, goats, camels and cattle. The sacrificial animals should be of a fixed age and be free from certain physical defects (e.g. lame, one-eyed, etc.) The period of the sacrifice begins with the "salat al-'Eid" and ends with sunset on the third of the three aiyam al-tashrik.²

For those offering the sacrifice, the following practices are recommended:

1. The "tasmia" or the saying of the "Bismillah" ("I begin in the name of Allah, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate.")
2. The "salat 'ala 'l-nabi" or the blessing on the Prophet.
3. The turning toward the "Qibla" in Mecca.
4. The three-fold "Takbir" ("Allah-O-Akbar") before and after the "tasmia".
5. A prayer that Allah accept the sacrifice.³

If the sacrifice is made voluntarily as is generally the case, the person(s) offering the sacrifice may keep a portion (a third) of the sacrificed animal and give the rest away. However, if the sacrifice is made on account of a vow or a pledge ("nadr") all of it must be given away.⁴

The "salat al-'Eid" which is the festival of public prayer of the whole community is considered a sunnah. It consists only of two "rak'as" and contains several takbirs more than the ordinary salat. After it a "khutba" (sermon) in two parts is held. It has no "adhan" (call to prayer) and no "ikama" (second call to prayer)⁵. The only summons to it is the words "al-salat jami'at an". It should be celebrated, if possible, in the open air on the "musalla" (place where the salat is performed on certain occasions).⁶ The time for the performance is between sunrise and the moment when the sun has reached its zenith.⁷

The 'Eid al-Adha is the culmination of Hajj which comprises a number of rituals associated with the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), Hagar (Hajira) and Ishmael (Isma'il) who stand, according to the Islamic tradition, at the start of the new civilization in which Islam was to be born.

The founding of Mecca which enshrines the Ka'ba and is the birthplace of Islam is traced back in the Islamic tradition to Hagar who was left in an uninhabited place along with her infant son Ishmael. The story of what happened to Hagar has been graphically narrated in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the most authoritative Hadith-collection in Sunni Islam. The story of Hagar, not mentioned in the Qur'an, is given in considerable detail in *Sahih al-Bukhari* in a number of overlapping traditions in Book LV: *The Anbiya (Prophets)*, Chapter 9., Hadith number 583 mentions many significant features of the Hagar-Story as Muslims know it. Its earlier part (which refers to the death of "Ishmael's mother") reads as follows:

Narrated Ibn 'Abbas: "The first lady to use a girdle was the mother of Ishmael. She used a girdle so that she might hide her tracks from Sarah." Abraham brought her and her son Ishmael while she was suckling him, to a place near the Ka'ba under a tree on the spot of Zam-zam, at the highest place in the mosque. During

those days there was nobody in Mecca, nor was there any water. So he made them sit over there and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates, and a small water-skin containing some water, and set out homeward. Ishmael's mother followed him saying, 'O Abraham! 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)?' She repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him, 'Has Allah ordered you to do so?' He said, 'Yes!' She said, 'Then He will not neglect us," and returned while Abraham proceeded onwards, and on reaching Thaniya where they could not see him, he faced the Ka'ba, and raising both hands, invoked Allah saying the following prayers: 'O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring dwell in a valley without cultivation, by Your Sacred House (Ka'ba at Mecca) in order, O our Lord, that they may offer prayer perfectly. So fill some hearts among men with love towards them, and (O Allah) provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks.' (Surah 14: *Ibrahim*: 37) Ishmael's mother went on suckling Ishmael and drinking from the water (she had). When the water in the water-skin had all been used up, she became thirsty and her child also became thirsty. She started looking at (Ishmael) tossing in agony: she left him, for she could not endure looking at him, and found that the mountain of Safa was the nearest mountain to her on that land. She stood on it and started looking at the valley keenly so that she might see somebody, but she could not see anybody. Then she descended from the Safa and when she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and trouble, till she crossed the valley and reached the Marwa mountain where she stood and started looking, expecting to see somebody but she could not see anybody. She repeated that (running between Safa and Marwa) seven times."

The Prophet said, "This is the source of the tradition of the walking of people between them (i.e., Safa and Marwa). When she reached the Marwa (for the last time) she heard a voice and she asked herself to be quiet and listened attentively. She heard the voice again and said, 'O, (whoever you may be!) You have made me hear your voice; have you got something to help me?' And behold! She saw an angel at the place of Zam-zam, digging the earth with his heel (or his wing), till water flowed from that place. She started to make something like a basin around it, using her hands in this way, and started filling her water-skin with water with her hands, and the water was flowing out after she had scooped some of it." The Prophet added, "May Allah bestow Mercy on Ishmael's mother! Had she let the Zam-zam (flow without trying to control it) (or had she not scooped from that water) (to fill her water-skin), Zam-zam would have been a stream flowing on the surface of the earth." The Prophet further added, "Then she drank (water) and suckled her child. The angel said to her, '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.' The house (i.e., Ka'ba) 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 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. So they all came (towards the water)." The Prophet added, "Ishmael's mother was sitting near the water. They asked her, 'Do you allow us to stay with you?' She replied, 'Yes, but you will have no right to possess the water.' They agreed to do that." The Prophet further said, "Ishmael's mother was pleased with the whole sit-

uation as she used to love to enjoy the company of people. So, they settled there, and later on they sent for their families who came and settled with them so that some families became permanent residents there. The child (i.e., Ishmael) grew up and learnt Arabic from them and (his virtues) caused them to love and admire him as he grew up, and when he reached the age of puberty they made him marry a woman from amongst them. After Ishmael's mother had died, Abraham came after Ishmael's marriage in order to see his family that he had left before, but he did not find Ishmael there. . ."

Although it may be inferred from the *hadith* cited above that Sarah did not look kindly upon Hagar who was fearful of her, it is clear from the text that Abraham's decision to leave Hagar and Ishmael in the desert (believed by Muslims to be in the vicinity of Mecca) was not based upon his desire to appease his first wife. Abraham, while not disclosing to Hagar why he is leaving her and her infant son in the wilderness, does respond in the affirmative to her question whether God had commanded him to do so. Abraham's prayer, said when he is out of Hagar's sight, shows that he believes that in order to fulfil the prophetic mission of building the Sacred House of God (which Muslims believe to be the first House of God at Mecca) it was necessary to leave a part of his family in the uninhabited, uncultivated land. His prayer further indicates his faith that this uninhabited, uncultivated land will become populated and fruitful and that God will ensure that those whom he is leaving behind will find sustenance and love in their new environment.

While the Biblical narrative of *Genesis*, Chapter 21, 8-14, tends to leave readers with the impression that Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away in order to placate the jealous wrath of Sarah and had nothing more, henceforward, to do with them, the story as told in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* shows that Abraham had a continuing relationship with that part of his family. Muslims believe that Abraham returned periodically to visit Hagar and Ishmael. In the *hadith* cited earlier, mention is made of a visit to Ishmael's family after the death of "Ishmael's mother."¹⁰ That not only Hagar but also Sarah accepted what Abraham believed to be God's plan for his offspring is brought out in *Hadith* Number 584¹¹ which is a variant of *Hadith* Number 583. In this *hadith* it is stated that each time Abraham thought of visiting Ishmael, he informed Sarah of his intentions.

The figure of Hagar which emerges from the traditions narrated in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* is that of a woman of exceptional faith, love, fortitude, resolution and strength of character. Once she hears from Abraham that it is God's command that she and her infant son should be left in the desert, she shows no hesitation whatever in accepting her extremely difficult situation. She does not wail or rage or beg Abraham not to abandon her and Ishmael. Instead, surrendering spontaneously and totally to what she believes to be God's will, she says that she is "satisfied to be with Allah" who will never neglect her. She lets Abraham go, without any words of recrimination or sorrow, and returns to her infant son. With a small supply of food and water, her major concern is to increase her milkflow so that she can feed her child adequately. Once out of water she

knows that both their lives are imperilled. Unable to endure the sight of her baby son writhing in agony due to dehydration, she undertakes a massive search for help. Running frantically between Safa and Marwa she searches desperately for some sign of hope. Her refusal to give up, to keep running and looking and praying for help demonstrates her determination to fight for her beloved child's life to the last drop of her own strength. Finally, her faith and effort are rewarded and Archangel Gabriel appears to guide her to the spring Zam-zam (whose waters are believed by Muslims to have medicinal or miraculous powers) Through Zam-zam, Hagar is able not only to save her own and Ishmael's life, but also to attract the people of the tribe of Jurhum into becoming her companions and partners in creating a prosperous settlement.¹² She raises her son to become a God-conscious man, loved and admired for his many qualities, who becomes his father Abraham's chosen partner in building the first House of God in Mecca.

While Abraham is viewed by the Islamic tradition as the first "Muslim" or true believer in God, Hagar is viewed as the pioneer woman who led the way to the establishment of a new civilization. She is seen not only as "Ishmael's mother" but also as the mother of all Arabs and of those who later became the followers of the Prophet Muhammad, a descendant of the Prophet Ishmael. Hagar, a black slave-girl, rose from the lowest of positions to the highest place of honor in the Islamic tradition. (Here, it may be noted that in Muslim societies it is the mother who is the most highly revered member of the family since, following one — of the most popular traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims widely believe that Paradise lies under the feet of the mother). The dramatic story of her life shows that color or class are not a deterrent to any person — man or woman — who has faith in God and is resolutely righteous in action. Hagar, in the Islamic tradition, does not see herself as a victim of Abraham, Sarah, or a patriarchal, class-and-race-conscious culture. She is a victor who, with the help of God and her own initiative, is able to transform a wilderness into the cradle of a new world dedicated to the fulfillment of God's purpose on earth. Each year as millions of Muslim pilgrims run or walk between the points which symbolize Safa and Marwa they pay homage to Hagar who has become an indestructible emblem not only of a mother's love for her offspring but of a true believer's faith in the saving power of God. Hagar's shadow looms large over the valley where she once stood alone and her spirit is as inextricably embodied in the Ka'ba as that of her husband Abraham and her son Ishmael.

Finally, Hagar is associated, in the Islamic tradition, with the idea of "Hijrah", or going into exile for the sake of God. While in the Jewish tradition the idea of the diaspora, or the dispersion of the Jewish people in alien lands, inspires feelings of sorrow and nostalgia for a return to homeland and community, according to the Qur'an, the state of "Hijrah" is a blessed one. It is when one is in the wilderness, without the protection of any familiar framework or faces, that one's faith in God and oneself is put to a real test. Those who are willing to confront the challenge of "Hijrah", to leave their place of origin or

sojourn in order to live in accordance with the will and pleasure of God, gain merit in the sight of God, as is indicated by many passages in the Qur'an.¹³

The Prophet Muhammad becomes an exemplar of "Hijrah" as he left his birthplace Mecca and chose to live in another city so that he could further his prophetic mission of establishing an Islamic society. In doing so he followed in the footsteps of his mother, Hagar, who generations earlier, had chosen to dwell in the desert to which God had directed her, making a home and community out of an unknown land and people. She demonstrated by her faith and actions that for a believer all of God's earth is a sanctified place, that loyalty to God supersedes attachment to terrestrial bonds, be they of place or persons.

Today, not only Muslim daughters of Hagar, but all women who are oppressed by systems of thought or structures based upon ideas of gender, class or race inequality, are called upon to be like her. They must have the faith and courage to venture out of the security of the known into the insecurity of the unknown, and to carve out, with their own hands, a new world from which the injustices and inequities which separate men from women, class from class, and race from race, have been eliminated.

While Hagar's story is recounted in the Hadith literature, the symbolic significance of Abraham is underscored in a number of Qur'anic passages. It is important to understand how special Abraham is to Muslims. Not only is he the Prophet most often mentioned in the Qur'an after the prophet Muhammad, but he is also the one who broke away from polytheism to become the first "Muslim". The Qur'an repeatedly describes Abraham as "hanif" or one who turns away from all that is not-God to submit to God's law and order.¹⁴ The Islamic tradition sees Abraham as a unifying figure whom all three Abrahamic traditions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - can look back to and claim as their own. The prominence given to Abraham by the Qur'an and by the Islamic tradition is evident throughout the most significant as well as the most spectacular social ritual of the Muslim world: the "Hajj" or pilgrimage. The Qur'an portrays Abraham and his son Ishmael as builders of the Ka'ba and states that God had commanded Abraham to proclaim the first pilgrimage (Surah 21; *Al-Hajj*: 26-29). During the "Hajj", all pilgrims pray at the Station ("Maqam") of Abraham. Then there is commemoration and ritual enactment of the frantic search for water by Hagar as she ran seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa. The appearance of the Zam Zam - to whose waters medicinal powers are attributed - is associated with the infant Ishmael beating the earth with his legs. The stoning of the devil and the sacrifice ceremony at the end of the "Hajj" is also associated with Abraham.

According to the Qur'an,¹⁵ Abraham was one of God's chosen ones and blest both in this world and Hereafter:

2¹⁰ And who turns away
From the religion of Abraham
But such as debase their souls
With folly? Him We chose
And rendered pure in this world;

And he will be in the Hereafter
 In the ranks of the Righteous.
 16¹²⁰ Abraham was indeed a model,
 Devoutly obedient to God,
 (And) "hanif", and he
 Joined not gods with God:
 121 He showed his gratitude
 For the favors of God,
 Who chose him, and guided him
 To a Straight Way
 122 And We gave him good
 In this world, and he will be,
 In the Hereafter, in the ranks
 Of the Righteous.
 29²⁷ And We have (Abraham)
 Isaac and Jacob, and ordained
 Among his progeny Prophethood
 And Revelation, and We
 Granted him his reward
 In this life; and he was
 In the Hereafter (of the company)
 Of the Righteous.

The Qur'an refers to Abraham as the friend of God:

4¹²⁵ Who can be better
 In religion than one
 Who submits his whole self
 To God, does good,
 And follows the way
 Of Abraham the "hanif"?
 For God did take
 Abraham for a friend.

Surah 37: *As-Saffat*: 83-4 point out that Abraham approached God with a heart and mind in total accord with the Will of the Creator and that God recognized and rewarded the faith of Abraham:

21⁵¹ We bestowed aforetime
 On Abraham his rectitude
 Of conduct, and well were We
 Acquainted with him.
 38⁴⁵ And commemorate Our Servants
 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 Possessors of Power and Vision.
 46 Verily We did choose them
 For a special (purpose)-
 Proclaiming the Message
 Of the Hereafter.
 47 They were, in Our sight,
 Truly, of the company
 Of the Elect and the Good.

In his poetry, Muhammad Iqbal - modern Islam's most outstanding poet philosopher, frequently pictures Abraham as an iconoclast who is shown breaking his father's idols. To Iqbal it is necessary to negate all that is not - God (signified by the "la" in the "la ilaha illa Allah": "There is no God but God" in the Islamic Shahadah or Confession of Faith) before God's existence can be affirmed. Iqbal's motif captures the spirit of the Qur'anic epithet "hanif" which refers not only to a belief in the One God but also a complete refusal to associate anything or anyone with God. Abraham is "hanif" precisely because he upheld the Oneness and Allness of God in the face of all opposition and obstacles:

2¹¹⁵ They say, Become Jews
Or Christians if ye would be guided
(To salvation)" Say thou:
"Nay! (I would rather) the Religion
Of Abraham the 'hanif'
And he joined not gods with God."

3⁹⁵ Say: God speaketh
The Truth: follow
The religion of Abraham,
The "hanif" in faith; he
Was not of the Pagans.

6¹⁶¹ Say: Verily, my Lord
Hath guided me to
A way that is straight, -
A religion of right, -
The path (trod) by Abraham
The "hanif"
And he (certainly)
Joined not gods with God.

16¹²¹ So We have taught thee
The inspired (message),
Follow the ways of Abraham
The "hanif" and he
Joined not gods with God.

From the afore-cited Qur'anic passages it becomes evident that the prominence given to Abraham by the Islamic tradition is grounded in the very Revelation upon which Islam is founded. But though the Qur'an stresses the point that Abraham was "neither a Jew nor a Christian" (thus a symbol of unity rather than division), it also repeats with force and clarity that Islam is a confirmation and a continuation of the message given by God to all the Prophets before the time of Muhammad, for instance,

2¹⁷⁶ Say ye: We believe
In God, and the revelation
Given to us, and to Abraham,
Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob

And the Tribes, and that given
 To (all) Prophets from their Lord:
 We make no difference
 Between one and another of them
 And we bow to God (in Islam)

3¹ It is He Who sent down
 To thee (step by step),
 In truth, the Book.
 Confirming what went before it;
 And he sent down Law
 (Of Moses) and the Gospel
 (Of Jesus) before this,
 As a guide to mankind,
 And He sent down the Criterion
 (Of judgment between right and wrong)

3⁴ Say: We believe
 In God, and in what
 Has been revealed to us
 And what was revealed
 To Abraham, Isma'il,
 Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes
 And in (theBooks)
 Given to Moses, Jesus,
 And the Prophets,
 From their Lord:
 We make no distinction
 Between one and another
 Among them, and to God to
 Bow our will (in Islam).

4^{1st} We have sent thee
 Inspiration as we have sent it
 To Noah and the Messengers
 After him: We sent
 Inspiration to Abraham,
 Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob
 And the Tribes, to Jesus,
 Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon,
 And to David We gave
 The Psalms.

42¹¹ The same religion has He
 Established for you as that
 Which He enjoined on Noah -
 That which We have sent
 By inspiration to thee -
 And that which We enjoined
 On Abraham, Moses and Jesus:
 Namely, that ye should remain
 Steadfast in Religion, and make
 No divisions therein:

To those who worship
 Other things than God,
 Hard is the (way)
 To which thou callest them

In view of the linkage between Islam and the Hebrew Prophets, it is hardly surprising that the early Muslims prayed facing Jerusalem, the 'holy' city revered by both Jews and Christians. The Hijrah (migration) of the Prophet and the Muslims occurred in 622 A.D. and was followed by years of conflict and bitterness between Muslims and Jews in Medina. In 624 A.D., a Qur'anic revelation decreed that the direction of prayer be changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. A number of non-Muslim writers explain this change by saying that it was due to the growing tension between the Jews of Medina and Muhammad or that it was motivated by a desire to break away from the religious tie with the Jewish-Christian heritage and establish a national state. These explanations offend Muslims mainly because the underlying implication is that the Qur'an is not the Word of God but the work of Muhammad who at different times issued statements designed to meet different political needs or expediencies. From an Islamic standpoint any suggestion that Muhammad manipulated the Revelation in any way is tantamount to casting doubt upon the authenticity of the Islamic religious tradition in toto.

If one looks at the question of the change in Qibla from the point of view of a Muslim who accepts that the directive came not from Muhammad but from God, how is one to understand the reasons for and meaning of this change? An examination of the relevant Qur'anic passage is all-important and provides many significant insights:

- 21⁴² The Fools among the people
 Will say: "What hath turned
 Them from the Qibla to which
 They were used?" Say:
 To God belong both East and West:
 He guideth whom He will
 To a Way that is straight.
- 143 Thus have We made of you
 An Ummat justly balanced,
 That ye might be witnesses
 Over the nations,
 And the Apostle a witness
 Over yourselves;
 And We appointed the Qibla
 To which thou wast used,
 Only to test those who followed
 The Apostle from those
 Who would turn on their heels
 (From the Faith). Indeed it was
 (A change) momentous, except
 To those guided by God.
 And never would God

- Make your faith of no effect.
 For God is to all people
 Most surely full of kindness,
 Most Merciful.
- 144 We see the turning
 Of thy face (for guidance)
 To the heavens: now
 Shall We turn thee
 To a Qibla that shall
 Please thee. Turn then
 Thy face in the direction
 Of the sacred Mosque:
 Wherever ye are, turn
 Your faces in that direction.
 The People of the Book
 Know well that that is
 The truth from their Lord.
 Nor is God unmindful
 Of what they do.
- 145 Even if thou went to bring
 To the people of the Book
 All the Signs (together),
 They would not follow
 Thy Qibla; nor art thou
 Going to follow their Qibla;
 Nor indeed will they follow
 Each other's Qibla. If thou
 After the knowledge hath reached thee,
 Wert to follow their (vain)
 Desires, - then wert thou
 Indeed (clearly) in the wrong.
- 146 The people of the Book
 Know this as they know
 Their own sons; but some
 Of them conceal the truth
 Which they themselves know.
- 147 The Truth is from thy Lord;
 So be not at all in doubt.
- 148 To each is a goal
 To which God turns him;
 Then strive together (as in a race)
 Towards all that is good.
 Wheresoever ye are,
 God will bring you
 Together. For God
 Hath power over all things.
- 149 From whencesoever
 Thou startest forth, turn
 Thy face in the direction
 Of the Sacred Mosque;
 That is indeed the truth

From thy Lord. and God
Is not unmindful
Of what ye do.

150 So from whencesoever
Thou startest forth, turn
Thy face in the direction
Of the Sacred Mosque;
And wheresoever ye are,
Turn your face thither:
That there is no ground
Of dispute against you
Among the people,
Except those of them that are
Bent on wickedness; so fear
Them not, but fear Me;
And that I may complete
My favours on you, and ye
my (consent to) be guided;

151 A similar (favour)
Have ye already received
In that We have sent
Among you an Apostle
Of your own, rehearsing to you
Our Signs, and sanctifying
You, and instructing you
In Scripture and Wisdom,
And in new Knowledge.

As pointed out earlier, "Qibla" may be understood as the direction in which Muslims turn their faces when they pray and in this sense the afore-mentioned Qur'anic passage decrees a change in Qibla commanding Muslims to turn in the direction of the Sacred Mosque when they pray. But "Qibla" also represents the focal point of the aspirations and ideals of the Islamic community and in this sense there was no change in Qibla, as pointed out by a contemporary Muslim scholar, since the House of God built by Abraham who founded the "Din" of Islam was, from the first, the intended center and unifying symbol of the Muslim ummah.

An idea that finds frequent expression in the Qur'an is that God will test the faith of all who profess to believe in God; for instance, Surah 21: *Al-Anbiya'*: 35, points out:

And We test you
By evil and by good
By way of trial.

It is of significance to note that according to the Qur'an, God designated the Ka'ba at Mecca as the Qibla in order to "test those who followed the Apostle." The Qur'an recognizes that this "change" would cause all "except . . . those

guided by God" to turn their backs on the Islamic faith even though the appointment of the Qibla at the Ka'ba is a "favor" done to Muslims by God since that was the "Qibla to which thou wast used."

The question arises: why should the change in the direction for prayer be so "momentous" and why should it be regarded as a test of faith? It is hardly likely that Jerusalem was so important to the early Muslims that the instituting of the Qibla at the Ka'ba (which had been sacred to the Arabs since antiquity) would bring about a serious moral dilemma, nor does it seem probable that the problem of the coexistence of Muslims and Jews in Medina would have been much affected, either positively or negatively, by the change in the Muslim's Qibla. In my judgment, what the Qur'anic passage about the Qibla is pointing at is that the Muslim ummah has come - both historically and spiritually - to the end of one phase of development and is about to enter a new one, and that in order to enter the new phase an act of faith, of accepting the Will of God, is required, and this is where the test lies. (It is also of interest to observe here that at the time when the Ka'ba at Mecca was appointed the Qibla, it was in the possession of the pagan Quraish who were determined to wipe out Islam. It took an act of faith to believe that the Ka'ba would be purged of its profanities and delivered into the hands of Muslims to be re-sanctified by them).

From the beginning, Islam had been proud of its Abrahamic heritage and the early Muslims had turned their faces towards Jerusalem as they prayed in order to affirm their linkage with the People of the Book, just as the early Christians had insisted upon their connection with Israel. However, with the establishment of the first Islamic Society in Medina came the time and the necessity to stress not only the link of Islam with Abraham and Jerusalem but the link of Abraham to all humanity. Jerusalem - the Qibla of the People of the Book - had become associated with the exclusivism characteristic of many Jews and Christians. The former regarded themselves as the Chosen People, while the latter also made special claims to salvation through their belief in Jesus Christ. By turning the attention of the Muslim ummah from Jerusalem to the Qibla in Mecca, the Qur'an was, in fact, bringing about a profound change in perspective. The conflict underlying the need for this change was not localized antagonism between Muslims and Jews in Medina - as is frequently suggested by non-Muslim writers - but a much wider opposition between the principles of exclusivism and universalism.

Anyone who has read the Qur'an without bias is aware that Islam is truly universal in its ideals. In this context it is interesting to note that whilst the Old Testament frequently talks of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Qur'an never does. It describes Islam as the "Din" of Abraham and the other Prophets but does not describe God as the God of Abraham or the God of Muhammad. In Surah Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, God is described as "Rabb al-'alamin" - God of all the peoples and universes. The Qur'an testifies that the message it contains is meant for all creatures, for instance:

- 25¹ Blessed is He Who
Sent down the Criterion (Qur'an)
To His Servant, that it
May be an admonition
To all creatures.
- 36⁶⁹ This is no less than
A Message to (all)
The Worlds.
 ⁷⁰ That it may give admonition
 To any (who are) alive,
 And that the charge
 May be proved against those
 Who reject (Truth).
- 38⁸⁷ This is no less than
A Message to (all)
The Worlds.
- 81²⁷ Verily this is no less
Than a Message
To (all) the Worlds:
 ²⁸ (With profit) to whoever
 Among you wills
 To go straight.

The non-exclusive spirit of Islam also comes through the oft-repeated teaching of the Qur'an contained in verses such as the following:

- 2⁶² Those who believe (in the Qur'an)
And those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Christians and the Sabians.
And who believe in God
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness,
Shall have their reward
With their Lord; on them
Shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.
- 2¹¹¹ And they say: "None
Shall enter Paradise unless
He be a Jew or a Christian."
Those are their (vain) desires.
Say: Produce your proof
If ye are truthful.
- 11² Nay, - whoever submits
His whole self to God
And is a doer of good, -
He will get his reward
With his Lord;
On such shall be no fear,
Nor shall they grieve.

- 2²⁶ And God careth for all
And He knoweth all things.
- 2²⁸ And fear the Day
When ye shall be
Brought back to God
Then shall every soul
Be paid what it earned,
And none shall be
Dealt with unjustly.
- 4⁹ Unto all (in Faith)
Hath God promised good.
- 5²² (Both) the Jews and the Christians
Say "We are Sons
Of God, and His beloved."
Say, Why then doth he
Punish you for your sins?
Nay, ye are but men, -
Of the men He hath created:
He forgiveth whom He pleaseth,
And to God belongeth
The dominion of heavens
And the earth, and all
That is between:
And unto Him
Is the final goal (of all).
- 5²⁷ Those who believe (in the Qur'an)
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Sabians and the Christians, -
Any who believe in God
And the Last Day
And work righteousness,
On them shall be no fear,
Nor shall they grieve.
- 16⁷⁸ One day We shall raise
From all peoples a witness.

To Muslims, Abraham is an embodiment of the universalism implicit in Islam and it is the Abrahamic spirit which enables Muslims to become "witnesses for humanity"

- 22⁷⁸ And strive in his Cause
As ye ought to strive,
(With sincerity and under discipline).
He has chosen you, and has
Imposed no difficulties on you
In religion; it is the cult of your father Abraham.
It is he who named
You Muslims, both before
And in this (Revelation);

That the Apostle may be
 A witness for you, and ye
 Be witnesses for mankind.

It is of importance to note that the Qur'anic verses which refer to the Ka'ba (which Abraham built) relate the Ka'ba to all humanity and not to any specific group of people:

- 2¹²⁵ Remember We made the house
 A place of Assembly for men
 And a place of safety;
 And take ye the Station
 Of Abraham as a place
 Of prayer; and We covenanted
 With Abraham and Isma'il,
 That they should sanctify
 My House for those who
 Compass it round, or use it
 As a retreat, or bow, or
 Prostrate themselves (therein
 In prayer)
- 3⁹⁶ The first house (of worship)
 Appointed for men
 Was that at Bakka:
 Full of blessing
 And of guidance
 For all kinds of beings.
- 97 In it are Signs
 Manifest; (for example),
 The Station of Abraham;
 Whoever enters it
 Attains security;
 Pilgrimage thereto is a duty
 Men owe to God -
 Those who can afford
 The journey; but if any
 Deny faith, God stands not
 In need of any of His creatures.
- 5¹⁰⁰ God made the Ka'ba,
 The Sacred House, an asylum
 Of security for men, as
 Also the Sacred Months,
 The animals of offerings,
 And the garlands that mark them:
 That ye may know
 That God hath knowledge
 Of what is in the heavens
 And on earth and that God
 Is well acquainted
 With all things.

In my judgment, on the basis of the above-mentioned verses, a clear case can be made out for making Mecca an open city. I would like to ask the government of Saudi Arabia how access to Mecca can be denied to non-Muslims in view of the unambiguous Qur'anic statements asserting that the Ka'ba is a sanctuary for all humankind.

Having reflected upon the significance of Hagar and Abraham in the Islamic tradition, it is important to say a few words about the "sacrifice" of their son Ishmael. Here it is of interest to note that while in the Jewish and Christian traditions the son Abraham was about to sacrifice was Isaac, in the Islamic tradition it was Ishmael. From the perspective of the latter, since the son whom God commanded Abraham to sacrifice was his "only" son, the son in question had to be Ishmael who was Abraham's first son. The former traditions have ignored Ishmael in favor of Isaac because they do not accord to Hagar the same status of being Abraham's "wife" as they do to Sarah. The Islamic tradition does not, however, distinguish between the status of Hagar and Sarah, or Ishmael and Isaac.

The Qur'anic narrative which begins with a reference to the time when Abraham prayed for a son, reads as follows:

- 37^w (Abraham prayed)
 "O my Lord! grant me
 A righteous (son)!"
- 101 So We gave him
 The good news
 Of a boy ready
 To suffer and forbear.
- 102 Then, when (the son)
 Reached (the age of)
 (Serious) work with him,
 He said: "O my son!
 I see in vision
 That I offer thee in sacrifice:
 Now see what is
 Thy view!" (The son) said:
 "O my father! Do
 As thou art commanded:
 Thou will find me,
 If Allah so wills one
 Practicing patience and constancy!"
- 103 So when they had both
 Submitted their wills (to Allah),
 And he had laid him
 Prostrate on his forehead
 (For sacrifice),
- 104 We called out to him,
 "O Abraham!

- 105 Thou hast already fulfilled
Thy vision!" - thus indeed
Do we reward
Those who do right.
- 106 For this was obviously
A trial -
- 107 And We ransomed him
With a momentous sacrifice
- 108 And We left (this blessing)
For him among generations
(To come) in later times.
- 109 "Peace and salutation
To Abraham!"
- 110 Thus indeed do We reward
Those who do right
- 111 For he was one
Of Our believing Servants.

It is of interest to note that in the above-cited narrative the "son" is not named. However, unlike Isaac in the Biblical narrative, the son in this story does know that God had commanded his father to sacrifice him. The Qur'anic narrative, therefore, lacks the suspense of disclosure found in the Biblical story. What this narrative stresses is the obedience to God of both Abraham and Ishmael who symbolize what it means to be "Muslim". While Abraham and Ishmael do not show the slightest hesitation in accepting God's command, God also does not show any hesitation in offering immediate ransom for the son. Thus, while the story illustrates the faith of Abraham and Ishmael, it also shows the mercy and compassion of God toward those who remain steadfast in their resolve to live and die in accordance with the will and pleasure of God. That one cannot enter Paradise without being tested is clearly stated in the Qur'an which also points out that, oftentimes, what we have - particularly our children and material possessions - distract us from our highest goals. The test put to Abraham and Ishmael was the most difficult kind imaginable. That they came through it shows that it is possible for "Muslims" to overcome the bondage of attachment to all that is not-God.

Abraham's struggle against various forms of idolatry in his quest for the Ultimate are highlighted in the Qur'an. This struggle ranges from rejection of natural phenomena such as the stars, moon and sun¹⁶ as God, to his dissociation from his idol-worshipping father once he realized that his father was an enemy of God.¹⁷ The challenge of idolatry did not exist only at the time of Abraham. Idolatry exists today in subtler forms which pervade virtually every aspect of the consciousness of contemporary humanity. The struggle of Abraham, first to

find God, and then to remain faithful to God, in the face of powerful material distractions and obstructions as well as natural affections and inclinations, is, thus, profoundly relevant to us.

The story of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael which is commemorated and celebrated by Muslims on the occasion of 'Eid al'Adha remains an undying source of strength and courage, hope and faith, not only for Muslims but also for Jews, Christians and others who can understand its symbolism and what it can mean for those who consider themselves seekers and servants of God.

Notes

1. Gibb, H.A.R. and Kramers, J.H. (Editors), *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1953, p. 156.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Sometimes this term is used to mean "sajdah" or the act of prostration in prayer, and sometimes it is applied to the middle part of the whole salat. To say that salat consists of so many "rak'as" means "that the introductory rites which precede the first 'kira'a' and those which follow the second 'sujud' need occur only once in the salat in question, while, on the other hand, the ceremonies in between are repeated so many times." (*Ibid.* p. 494)
6. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 416-417.
8. *Ibid.* p. 156.
9. Khan, Muhammad Muhsin, translation of *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Lahore, Kazi Publications, 1983, Volume IV, pp. 372-376. A partial reference to the story is made in the preceding hadith (Number 582) which reads:
 Narrated Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet said, "May Allah bestow His Mercy on the mother of Ishmael! Had she not hastened (to fill her water-skin with water from the Zam-zam well), Zam-zam would have been a stream flowing on the surface of the earth." Ibn 'Abbas further added, "(The Prophet) Abraham brought Ishmael and his mother (to Mecca) and she was suckling Ishmael, and she had a water-skin with her." (p. 372)
10. The fact that Hagar is referred to as "Ishmael's mother" or as "the mother of Ishmael" should not be interpreted to mean that Hagar's identity as a person/woman is being subsumed in her identity as a mother, or that she is seen as nothing more than the mother of a son. In Arab culture, it is customary to refer not only to women but also to men as being "mother" or "father" of "so-and-so". No gender-discrimination is, thus, implied by this form of address.
11. This hadith reads as follows:
 Narrated Ibn 'Abbas: "When Abraham had differences with his wife (because of her jealousy of Hagar, Ishmael's mother), he took Ishmael and his mother and went away. They had a water-skin with them containing some water, Ishmael's mother used to drink water from the water-skin so that her milk would increase for her child. When Abraham reached Mecca, he made her sit under a tree and afterwards returned home. Ishmael's mother followed him, and when they reached Kada' she called him from behind, 'O Abraham! To whom are you leaving us?' He replied '(I am leaving you) to Allah's (Care)!' She said, 'I am satisfied to be with Allah.' She returned to her place and started drinking water from the water-skin, and her milk

increased for her child. When the water had all been used up, she said to herself, 'I'd better go and look so that I may see somebody.' She ascended the Safa mountain and looked, hoping to see somebody, but in vain. When she came down to the valley, she ran till she reached the Marwa mountain. She ran to and fro (between the two mountains) many times. Then she said to herself, 'I'd better go and see the state of the child,' she went and found it in a state of one on the point of dying. She could not endure to watch it dying and said (to herself), 'If I go and look, I may find somebody,' She went and ascended the Safa mountain and looked for a long while but could not find anybody. Thus she completed seven rounds (of running) between Safa and Marwa. Again she said (to herself), 'I'd better go and see the state of the child.' But suddenly she heard a voice, and she said to that strange voice, 'Help us if you can offer any help.' Lo! It was Gabriel (who made the voice). Gabriel hit the earth with his heel like this (Ibn 'Abbas hit the earth with his heel to illustrate it), and so the water gushed out. Ishmael's mother was astonished and started digging. (Abu Al-Qasim i.e., the Prophet, said, 'If she had left the water, i.e., flow naturally without her intervention, it would have been flowing on the surface of the earth') Ishmael's mother started drinking from the water and her milk increased for her child. Afterwards some people of the tribe of Jurhum, while passing through the bottom of the valley, saw some birds, and that astonished them, and they said, 'Birds can only be found at a place where there is water.' They sent a messenger who searched the place and found the water, and returned to inform them about it. Then they all went to her and said, 'O Ishmael's mother! Will you allow us to be with you (or dwell with you?)' (And thus they stayed there.) Later on her boy reached the age of puberty and married a lady from them. Then an idea occurred to Abraham which he disclosed to his wife (Sarah), I want to call on my dependents I left (at Mecca). When he went there, he greeted (Ishmael's wife) and said, 'Where is Ishmael?' She replied, 'He has gone out hunting.' Abraham said (to her), 'When he comes, tell him to change the threshold of his gate.' When he came, she told him the same whereupon Ishmael said to her, 'You are the threshold, so go to your family (i.e., you are divorced).

(*Translator's footnote reads: "This very stone is still preserved in the Sacred Mosque in Mecca and is situated between the Ka'ba and Zam-zam, and one can see the footmarks of Abraham over it.")

12. In this context, the following observation taken from *Tafsiru'l Baizawi*, p. 424, quoted by T.P. Hughes in *A Dictionary of Islam*, Lahore: Premier Book House originally printed in 1885, is interesting: "When the tribe of Jurhum saw that there was water in that place, they said to Hagar, 'If you will share with us the water of this spring, we will share with you the milk of our herds', and from that time Mekkah became a place of importance." (p. 154)
13. As, for instance, Surah 4: *An-Nisa'*: 95, 97-100, and Surah 16: *An-Nahl*., 41.
14. Parwez, G.A. *Lughat-ul-Qur'an*, Idara Tulu'-e-Islam, Lahore, 1960, Volume II, pp. 556-557.
15. All the translations of the Qur'anic passages cited below are taken from *The Holy Qur'an*, Translation and Commentary by 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, Amanat Corporation, Brentwood, Maryland, 1989.
16. For instance, see *The Qur'an*, Surah 6: *Al-An'am*: 75-82, Surah 21: *Al-Anbia'*: 51-70.
17. For instance, see *The Qur'an*, Surah 6: *Al-An'am*: 74, Surah 9: *At-Taubah*: 114, Surah 19: *Maryam*: 42-47.