

Fast 24: Prophets and Messengers — their submission to God (1)

- The Quran tells us in connection with various prophets, including the Holy Prophet Muhammad, that they “submitted” to God (2:131–133, 5:44, 40:66). Sometimes just “submitting” is mentioned and it is often translated as “being a Muslim”. From this it is often said that all prophets before the Prophet Muhammad were also “Muslims”.
- It is quite obvious that, before the time of the Prophet Muhammad, no one could have been a Muslim in the sense in which people became Muslims after he started preaching Islam. For example, after fasting in Ramadan was instituted it became obligatory on every Muslim. But this happened only after the Holy Prophet migrated to Madinah. Before that his followers did not fast in Ramadan, nor could any prophet before him have fasted in Ramadan. However, earlier prophets and their followers did fast in their own ways. That was their submission to God, to follow what God had revealed to them.
- Another point is that the names of various religions indicate what sets them apart from others and makes them different from others. For example, the name Christianity indicates the teachings of Jesus Christ which **distinguish it** from other religions. The names Hinduism or Buddhism apply to those teachings that **set these faiths apart** from others. But if we seek a name for the basic teachings **which all religions have in common**, then the Quran says that that name is Islam, meaning submission to the revealed will of God.
- So when it is said that the all prophets before the Prophet Muhammad were “Muslims” or that they followed “Islam” it means that if we extract the fundamentals which are common between their teachings, then these would be the same as the basic principles taught by the Prophet Muhammad. It was to indicate this that the religion of the Prophet Muhammad was named Islam, and it was not named after him.
- Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*) is a figure common to the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions. The Quran says of him and his descendants:

“When his Lord said to him, **Submit**, he said: **I submit myself** to the Lord of the worlds. And the same did Abraham command his sons, and (so did) Jacob: My sons, surely Allah has chosen for you (this) religion, so do not die except as **submitting ones**. Or were you witnesses when death visited Jacob,

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
 ﴿١٣١﴾ وَوَصَّى بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ ط يَبْنِي إِنَّ
 اللَّهَ اصْطَفَى لَكُمْ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ
 مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾ أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ

when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We shall serve your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, one God only, **and to Him do we submit.**” (2:131–133)

الْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن بَعْدِي ۗ
 قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَ
 إِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا ۗ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

The words placed in bold above are related to the words *islām* and *muslim*, and give rise to the name of our religion.

- Before proceeding further, we note that “submission” to God doesn’t mean giving up our thinking and our feelings, and obeying instructions like a robot or an automaton. When preaching to his people, Abraham told them that God is the one:

“Who created me, then He shows me the way, and Who gives me to eat and to drink, and when I am sick, He heals me, and Who will cause me to die, then give me life, and Who, I hope, will forgive me my mistakes on the day of Judgment. My Lord, grant me wisdom, and join me with the righteous, and ordain for me a goodly mention in later generations, and make me from among the heirs of the Garden of bliss, and forgive my sire, surely he is in error, and do not disgrace me on the day when they are raised — the day when wealth will not avail, nor sons, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart.” (26:78–89)

الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ ﴿٢٧﴾ وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ ﴿٢٨﴾ وَالَّذِي يُسَيِّئَنِي ثُمَّ يُغْفِرُنِي ﴿٢٩﴾ وَالَّذِي أَطْمَعُ أَن يَغْفِرَ لِي خَطِيئَتِي يَوْمَ الدِّينِ ﴿٣٠﴾ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ وَاجْعَلْ لِي لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ فِي الْآخِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَاجْعَلْنِي مِن وَرَثَةِ الْجَنَّةِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَاعْفُرْ لِأَبِي إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٣٤﴾ وَلَا تُخْزِنِي يَوْمَ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا اللَّهُ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ ﴿٣٦﴾

(The words “forgive my sire” refer to an elder of Abraham, called Āzar, who opposed his teachings.)

Abraham strikes positive notes about God. He doesn’t say God makes him hungry and thirsty, but that God gives him to eat and to drink. He doesn’t say God makes him ill, but that God heals him when he is ill. In death he sees the rising to life.

Abraham is conscious of making human error and hopes for forgiveness. He asks for forgiveness for his bitter enemy. He asks to be granted wisdom, in other words, knowledge which improves his insight and intellect, and by means of which he can benefit others.

Lastly, he says that the one saved by God on the Day of Judgment is he who comes to God on that day “with a sound heart” — a heart that is content and fulfilled, and a mind that is satisfied intellectually.