

Abrahamic Hanifi in the Holy Qur'an: A Common Ground for Mutual Religious Understanding¹

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ABSTRACT: The Qur'an presents Prophet Abraham as a model and obedient prophet. He is known as the father of prophets and other prophets follow his way. This paper sheds light on Abrahamic Hanifi and studies the presentation and significance of this concept in the Holy Qur'an. A record of the main Qur'anic verses on the topic is provided. The most important finding is that Abrahamic Hanifi in the Qur'an is presented as Prophet Abraham's religion that Prophet Muhammad, Muslims and mankind were asked to follow. The paper concludes that Abrahamic Hanifi in the Qur'an is meant to show the straight path to God that would unite human beings.

KEYWORDS: Abraham, Abraham's religion, Abrahamic Hanifi, prophets' stories, religious understanding, the Qur'an.

I. Introduction

The Qur'an presents the issue of prophecy as one of the pillars of faith, and identifies the goals of the mission of prophets as the communication of religion to the people and an invitation to worship God alone with no partner. The Qur'an also shows that prophets are role models for people, as in the following verse: {(O Muhammad!) Those (i.e. Prophets) are the ones Allah (i.e. God) guided to the right way. Follow, then, their way, and say: 'I ask of you no reward (for carrying on this mission); it is merely an admonition to all mankind'.} (Qur'an 6:90)

(أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهِدَاهُمْ أَقْتَدَهُمْ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ)
(سورة الأنعام: 90)

Moreover, the Qur'an presents the stories of prophets from Adam peace be upon him (PBUH) until Muhammad (PBUH) and called people to draw lessons from their stories. This is declared in the following verse: {There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding. Never was the Qur'an a narration invented, but a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of all things and guidance and mercy for a people who believe.} (Qur'an 12:111)

(لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۗ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَٰكِن تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى
وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ)
(سورة يوسف: 111)

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One of the prophets given the most attention in the Qur'an is Prophet Abraham² (or Ibrahim) (PBUH). The Qur'an introduces him as the father of prophets and of all nations. This is mentioned in the following verse: {He has chosen you for His service and has not laid on you any hardship in your religion. Therefore, be steadfast in the religion of your father Abraham.} (Qur'an 22:78)

هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ ۗ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
(سورة الحج: 78)

The main objective of this paper is to shed light on Abrahamic Hanifi in the Holy Qur'an. In this piece of research, Abrahamic Hanifi refers to what is called in the Qur'an *Millat Ibrahim* 'ملة إبراهيم'. As for the research questions that guided this study, they can be listed as follows:

- What does Abrahamic Hanifi refer to in the Qur'an?
- What are its characteristics?
- Why is it important in Islam?

To answer these questions, the methodology used in this study is based on the survey of the main verses of the Holy Qur'an that are related to Abrahamic Hanifi in order to reveal its meaning, importance and main characteristics.

The paper consists of three sections. Section one presents a background to the study. Section two addresses the personality of Prophet Abraham in the Qur'an. Finally, section three introduces the concept of Abrahamic Hanifi and its characteristics in the Qur'an and examines its importance.

II. Background

II.a. Aims of Prophets' Stories in the Qur'an

The Qur'an stories, in general, and the Qur'an stories of prophets, in particular, do not aim to provide the history of nations or people; nor do they aim to explain certain historical events. In fact, stories of prophets are presented in the Qur'an in relation to one big and important event, namely the mission of Prophet Muhammad.

Therefore, among the primary purposes of prophets' stories, the Qur'an mentions consoling Prophet Muhammad and teaching believers important lessons about prophets and about the people to whom they were sent. This is stated in the following verse: {And all that We relate to you (O Muhammad) of the news of the Messengers is in order that We may make strong and firm your heart thereby. And in this (Chapter of the Qur'an) has come to you the truth, as well as an admonition and a reminder for the believers.} (Qur'an 11: 120)

وَكُلًّا نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَجَاءَكَ فِي هَذِهِ الْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
(سورة هود: 120)

As a matter of fact, Prophet Muhammad and his companions faced persecution and both mental and physical torture by their people. In order to console the Prophet and his companions and strengthen their faith, stories of past prophets and believers, who faced similar circumstances, were reported. The ultimate purpose is to stress an important lesson, namely that in the end, truth always overcomes falsehood.

2 Abraham is called Ibrahim by Muslims. The name which is used in this paper is Abraham.

II.b. Some Features of Prophets' Stories in the Qur'an

Stories of prophets in the Holy Qur'an are characterized by a number of features. In this sub-section, focus will be put on four features, namely their divine source, absence of fiction and imagination, focus on key parts of prophets' stories not their biography and repetition.

1) The Divine Source of Prophets' Stories

In the Qur'an, the source of stories of prophets that have been revealed to Prophet Muhammad is God. He mentioned this reality in the following verse: {That [the story of Noah] is from the news of the unseen which We reveal to you, [O Muhammad]. You knew it not, neither you nor your people, before this} (Qur'an 11:49)

(تِلْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ مَا كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُهَا أَنْتَ وَلَا قَوْمُكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ هَذَا
(سورة هود: 94))

Accordingly, there is no contribution of Prophet Muhammad in stories of prophets in the Qur'an. This concerns both the content of these stories and the method in which they were revealed.

2) Absence of fiction and imagination in Prophets' Stories

Unlike the stories recorded by men, which use imagination and fiction, stories of prophets recorded in the Qur'an are true and correspond to what actually took place historically. This fact is mentioned in the following Verse of the Qur'an: {Verily! This is the true narrative about the story (of Jesus).} (Qur'an 3: 62)

(إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ
(سورة آل عمران: 62))

Thus, this verse draws to the fact that what God tells of prophets' stories is not a story that mixes fact with fiction. Rather, they are stories that follow what already happened.

3) Focus on Key Parts of Prophets' Stories not their biography

The Qur'an does not provide a complete biography of prophets, but rather focuses on key parts of their stories. Two facts justify this idea. First, facts and incidents are not presented in their order of occurrence. Second, stories of prophets are not mentioned in their entirety, except the story of Prophet Joseph³ (PBUH) which is presented as an entire story⁴. For the rest of stories, only the part of the story which contains important lessons and morals is mentioned. Furthermore, God reveals only that part of a story that relates to a Messenger's duty to convey his Message. Thus, stories of prophets in the Qur'an are not intended to present their biographies. They are intended to give important lessons and morals. In this case, it is the context of a set of verses which requires which part of the story to be mentioned.

4) Repetition of Prophets' Stories

One of the main features of stories of prophets in the Qur'an is repetition. In particular, various stories are repeated in more than one part of the Qur'an. However, this repetition comes each time in a new style and formulation. In the culture of the Arabs among whom the Qur'an was revealed, repetition is a sign of great importance. If one repeats something over and over again,

3 In the Qur'an, Prophet Joseph is referred to as Yusuf.

4 The story of Joseph is the only story in the Qur'an which is presented in a successive and complete way in one chapter. In addition, it's mentioned once in chapter 12, and it's not repeated.

it is important and meaningful. Therefore, repetition is used in the Qur'an as a valuable tool to stress the important lessons and morals in stories of prophets (See Al Dosary for more details).

III. The Personality of Prophet Abraham in the Qur'an

The Qur'an puts a great emphasis on Abraham's personality. In fact, a number of verses praise his personality and present him as a model for all believers. This section introduces the main characteristics of Abraham's personality as reported in the Qur'an.

Abraham was born in the land of the Chaldeans, also known as Babylonia. At that time some people worshipped idols of stone and wood; others worshipped the planets, stars, sun and moon; still others worshipped their kings and rulers (Ibn Kathir, 2006). In the Qur'an, Abraham is presented as a strict monotheist who stood against all kinds of polytheism. He is among those to whom the religion was prescribed after Noah, but before Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them all). The Qur'an describes Abraham as "a man of truth, a prophet": {And mention in the Book [the story of] Abraham. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet} (Qur'an 19: 41)

(وَأَذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا)
(سورة مريم: 41)

Moreover, the Qur'an calls Abraham "intimate friend of God": {And Allah⁵ (i.e. God) took Abraham as an intimate friend.} (Qur'an 4: 125)

(وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا)
(سورة النساء: 125)

In addition, the Qur'an identifies Abraham as a leader for mankind: {And [mention, O Muhammad], when Abraham was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them. [Allah] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people." [Abraham] said, "And of my descendants?" [Allah] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers.} (Qur'an 2: 124)

(وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنْتَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ)
(سورة البقرة: 124)

Among the main characteristics of his personality is spiritual understanding and wisdom. From an early age, God guided him to full maturity and enlightened his heart and mind, as it is stated in the following verse: {And We had certainly given Abraham his sound judgement before, and We were of him well-Knowing.} (Qur'an 21: 51)

(وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ رُشْدَهُ مِن قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهِ عَالِمِينَ)
(سورة الأنبياء: 51)

Another crucial feature of his personality is his struggle against idolatry. A number of verses narrate his debate with his people in an attempt to reveal the truth. For instance, God states the following:

{And We had certainly given Abraham his sound judgement before, and We were of him well-Knowing. When he said to his father and his people, "What are these statues to which you are devoted?" They said, "We found our fathers worshippers of them." He said, "You were certainly, you and your fathers, in manifest error." They said, "Have you come to us with truth, or are

5 Allah is the Arabic language word referring to God.

you of those who jest?" He said, "[No], rather, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth who created them, and I, to that, am of those who testify." (Qur'an 21: 51-56)

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ رُشْدَهُ مِن قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهِ عَالِمِينَ (51) إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا هَذِهِ الشَّمَائِلُ الَّتِي أَنْتُمْ لَهَا عَاكِفُونَ (52) قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا لَهَا عَابِدِينَ (53) قَالَ لَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (54) قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا بِالْحَقِّ أَمْ أَنْتَ مِنَ اللَّاعِبِينَ (55) قَالَ بَلْ رُبُّكُمْ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الَّذِي فَطَرَهُنَّ وَأَنَا عَلَىٰ ذَلِكُمْ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ (56) (سورة الأنبياء: 51-56)

In other verses, God mentions the following:

{And recite to them the news of Abraham, when he said to his father and his people, "What do you worship?" They said, "We worship idols and remain to them devoted." He said, "Do they hear you when you supplicate? Or do they benefit you, or do they harm?" They said, "But we found our fathers doing thus." He said, "Then do you see what you have been worshipping, You and your ancient forefathers? Indeed, they are enemies to me, except the Lord of the worlds, Who created me, and He guides me. And it is He who feeds me and gives me drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me. And who will cause me to die and then bring me to life. And who I aspire that He will forgive me my sin on the Day of Recompense." [And he said], "My Lord, grant me authority and join me with the righteous. And grant me a reputation of honor among later generations. And place me among the inheritors of the Garden of Pleasure. And forgive my father. Indeed, he has been of those astray. And do not disgrace me on the Day they are [all] resurrected – The Day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children, but only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart."} (Qur'an 26: 69-89)

(وَأْتَلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (69) إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (70) قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ أَصْنَامًا فَنَنْظِلُ لَهَا عَاكِفِينَ (71) قَالَ هَلْ يَسْمَعُونَكُم إِذْ تَدْعُونَ (72) أَوْ يَنْفَعُونَكُمْ أَوْ يَضُرُّونَ (73) قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ (74) قَالَ أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْبُدُونَ (75) أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ الْأَقْدَمُونَ (76) فَإِنَّهُمْ عَدُوٌّ لِي إِلَّا رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ (77) الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ (78) وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ (79) وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ (80) وَالَّذِي يُمِيتُنِي ثُمَّ يُحْيِينِ (81) وَالَّذِي أَطْمَعُ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ لِي خَطِيئَتِي يَوْمَ الدِّينِ (82) رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ (83) وَاجْعَلْ لِي لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (84) وَاجْعَلْ لِي مِنْ وَرَثَةِ جَنَّةِ النَّعِيمِ (85) وَاعْفُرْ لِأَبِي إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الضَّالِّينَ (86) وَلَا تُخْزِنِي يَوْمَ يُبْعَثُونَ (87) يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ (88) إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ (89) (سورة الشعراء: 69-89)

The most powerful thing about Abraham in the foregoing presentation is his firm statement: "Then do you see what you have been worshipping, You and your ancient forefathers? Indeed, they are enemies to me, except the Lord of the worlds". This shows that Abraham had a strong ability to face his father, his people, and their idols. He made it clear to his people that he did not fear them or their idols.

Besides this, Abraham in the Qur'an is shown as a personality with a strong desire to seek truth and knowledge. This is clear in the following verse:

{And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." [Allah] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied." [Allah] said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them – they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is All Mighty and All Wise."} (Qur'an 2: 260)

(وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ قَالَ أُولِمُ تُوْمِنُ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِيَنَّكَ سَعْيًا وَاعْلَمِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ (سورة البقرة: 260)

This verse reports that one day Abraham begged God to show him how He brought the dead back to life. God commanded Abraham to take four birds, cut them up and mix their body parts, divide them into four portions and place them on top of four different hills, then call

back the birds in God's name. Abraham did as he was told. Immediately the mixed parts of the birds separated to join their original bodies in different places and the birds flew back to Abraham. It is clear then that Prophet Abraham sought knowledge of life after death. Although he believed in life after death, he wanted to strengthen his belief by watching the experience (For more details, see Al-Aqqad, 2013).

To sum up, the Qur'an presents Abraham as a personality who identified a path of reform and a religious and moral mission to himself. He struggled to fulfill his mission with patience and endurance, which ultimately enabled him to become a "human model".

IV. Abrahamic Hanifi in the Qu'ran

Many verses of the Qur'an refer to Abrahamic Hanifi⁶ and call people to follow it. In this section, the main verses that refer to Abrahamic Hanifi will be presented and discussed, and an attempt will be made to shed light on its meaning, main characteristics, and importance.

God says in the Qur'an: {Say, "Allah has told the truth. So follow the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth; and he was not of the polytheists."} (Qur'an 3: 95)

قُلْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ ۖ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
(سورة آل عمران: 95)

In this verse, there is a call for Prophet Muhammad and the believers to follow the religion of Abraham. Note that the translation provided for the Arabic phrase *Millat Ibrahim* ملة إبراهيم is "the religion of Abraham". This agrees with Muslim scholars views that *Millat Ibrahim* (i.e. Abrahamic Hanifi) in the Qur'an refers to his religion or his way of worshipping God (see, for instance, Achaarawi, 1996 and Shalabi, 1982). Other scholars, such as Ibn Katheer, define it as the true religion of God (see Ibn Katheer, 2006).

Another verse states the following: {And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend.} (Qur'an 4: 125)

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۗ وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا
(سورة النساء: 125)

In this verse, Abrahamic Hanifi is described as the best religion. In particular, the person with the best religion is described as having three characteristics, namely true commitment to God, good deeds, and following Abraham's religion.

Moreover, God says in the Qur'an: {Say, "Indeed, my Lord has guided me to a straight path - a correct religion - the way of Abraham, inclining toward truth. And he was not among those who associated others with Allah."} (Qur'an 6: 161)

قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قَبِيماً مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
(سورة الأنعام: 161)

In this verse, Prophet Muhammad was ordered to tell the people that God had guided him to a straight path and a correct religion, namely the way of Abraham. It is clear in this verse that Abrahamic Hanifi refers to a straight path and a correct religion. It should be noted that the Arabic phrase *Millat Ibrahim* 'ملة إبراهيم' is translated in this verse as the way of Abraham.

6 It is referred to as *Millat Ibrahim* in Arabic language.

Along the same lines, the following verses state:

{Indeed, Abraham was a [comprehensive] leader, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining toward truth, and he was not of those who associate others with Allah. [He was] grateful for His favours. Allah chose him and guided him to a straight path. And We gave him good in this world, and indeed, in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous. Then We revealed to you, [O Muhammad], to follow the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth; and he was not of those who associate with Allah.} (Qur'an 16 : 120-123)

(إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ، شَاكِرًا لِّأَنْعَمِهِ اجْتَبَاهُ وَهَدَاهُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ، وَأَتَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ، ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ) (سورة النحل: 120-123)

The same command is repeated to Prophet Muhammad, namely to follow the religion of Abraham. The latter is again described as a straight path.

Therefore, Abrahamic Hanifi in the Qur'an refers to "the religion of Abraham" or "Abraham's way of worshipping God". With respect to its characteristics, the Qur'an specifies three main characteristics, namely a straight path, a correct religion, and the best religion, as mentioned in the following verses:

- {Say, "Indeed, my Lord has guided me to a straight path - a correct religion - the way of Abraham, inclining toward truth. And he was not among those who associated others with Allah."} (Qur'an 6: 161)
- {And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend.}

(Qur'an 4: 125)

The questions that arise now are the following: what is the religion of Abraham? And why is Abrahamic Hanifi given significant importance in the Qur'an?

The Qur'an reports that people argued over which religion Prophet Abraham followed. Jews regarded him as a Jewish prophet and claimed to follow his path. Christians, on the other hand, considered him a Jewish prophet, but claimed that he followed Prophet Jesus (PBUH), who came after him. However, the Qur'an states the following:

{O People of the Scripture, why do you argue about Abraham while the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Then will you not reason? Here you are - those who have argued about that of which you have [some] knowledge, but why do you argue about that of which you have no knowledge? And Allah knows, while you know not. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the polytheists.} (Qur'an 3: 65-67)

(يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنزِلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ، هَذَا أَنْتُمْ هُوَ لَمْ يَحْجَجْتُمْ فِيهَا لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِيمَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ، مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ) (سورة آل عمران: 65-67)

According to these verses, Abraham was not a Jew because Judaism came after him and he was not Christian because Christianity came after him. Instead, he was *hanifi*; that is, inclining toward truth, and Muslim, that is, submitting to God. It is noteworthy here that the word Muslim comes from the Arabic language and that it means a person who submits to God. Thus, Prophet Abraham is described as Muslim to signal his true faith and submission to one and only one God.

It can be understood that the religion of Abraham is the true submission to the one true God and directing one's whole being and one's action to God alone with no partner. God declares that this is the message that all prophets called for. The Qur'an states:

{Say, [O believers], “We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.”} (Qur’an 2: 136)

﴿قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾
(سورة البقرة: 136)

These verses present a general call from God, Lord of the people, to all people to believe in Him and His prophets, and to submit to Him. There is no distinction between prophets as they all carried out the same mission and followed the same path, namely the path of their father Abraham: {And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Abraham.} (Qur’an 22: 78)

﴿وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ مَّمْلَةٌ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ﴾
(سورة الحج: 78)

Abrahamic Hanifi is given great importance in Islam. This is why Prophet Muhammad and his followers were asked to conform to it: {So follow the religion of Abraham} (Qur’an 3: 95). Moreover, the Qur’an mentions:

{And who would be averse to the religion of Abraham except one who makes a fool of himself. And We had chosen him in this world, and indeed he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous. When his Lord said to him, “Submit”, he said “I have submitted [in Islam] to the Lord of the worlds.” And Abraham instructed his sons [to do the same] and [so did] Jacob, [saying], “O my sons, indeed Allah has chosen for you this religion, so do not die except while you are Muslims.”} (Qur’an 2: 130-132)

﴿وَمَنْ يَرْغَبْ عَن مِّلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِلَّا مَن سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَقَدِ اصْطَفَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ، إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ لَقَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ، وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبَ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمْ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ.﴾
(سورة البقرة: 130-132)

In these verses, the Qur’an declares that whoever turns away from Abrahamic Hanifi (i.e. the religion of Abraham) is foolish and ignorant. In addition, the verses inform that Abraham recommended his sons to follow it and Jacob (PBUH) after him did so with his sons.

The importance given to Abrahamic Hanifi in the Qur’an, as illustrated by the Qur’anic verses, is surely related to Prophet Abraham’s true faith in God, his profound love for Him, his submission to all of His commands, as well as his good values. The verses of the Qur’an narrate the following:

{And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], “Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing. Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You. And show us our rites and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.”} (Qur’an 2: 127-128)

﴿وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ، رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةٌ مُّسْلِمَةٌ لَّكَ وَارِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾
(سورة البقرة: 127-128)

Additionally, the importance of Abrahamic Hanifi or the religion of Abraham stems from the fact that it unites divine religions as they were all based on Prophet Abraham’s religion, as the

Qur'an mentions. Accordingly, given the fact that divine religions share the belief in and submission to the one God, it can be stressed that members of these divine religions have inherited from Prophet Abraham common values that could serve as a common ground for mutual religious understanding. In this paper, monotheism values inherited from Prophet Abraham represent a common ground for mutual religious understanding between divine religions.

V. Conclusion

The aim of the present paper has been to discuss Abrahamic Hanifi in the Qur'an. Emphasis has been put on its meaning, characteristics and importance. With respect to its meaning, it has been shown that it refers to "the religion of Abraham" or "Abraham's way of worshipping God". As for its characteristics, the Qur'an specifies three main ones, namely a straight path, a correct religion, and the best religion. Related to its importance, it has been shown that Abrahamic Hanifi is given great importance in the Qur'an due to Abraham's true faith in God, his deep love for Him, his submission to all of His commands, as well as his good values. Its importance also lies in the fact that it is the origin of divine religions. It has been concluded that Abrahamic Hanifi or Abraham's religion could serve as a common ground for mutual religious understanding among members of divine religions who share monotheism values inherited from Prophet Abraham.

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