

Abraham's argument with the materialistic king of his time

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 16 July 2021

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكََ إِذْ قَالَ لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٥٨﴾

“Have you not thought of him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because Allah had given him kingdom? When Abraham said, My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die, he said: I give life and cause death. Abraham said: Surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the East, so you make it rise from the West (if you can). Thus he who disbelieved was baffled. And Allah does not guide the unjust people.” — ch. 2, v. 258

In this month of the Islamic calendar, the great Pilgrimage to Makkah takes place and we remember the prophet Abraham (Ibrahim, *alai-his-salam*) as he rebuilt the Kabah and instituted the pilgrimage. *Eid-ul-Adha* also takes place, when all Muslims commemorate Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael in response to what he thought was the command of God. We recall that he was a man of great and deep faith in the One God. But the various mentions of him in the Quran show that he was also a man of argument and reasoning. The above is one such incident. The Quran also relates his arguments with his people (21:52–67), with his father (19:42–49), and within himself (6:76–79), about the oneness of God. Here he is arguing about the existence and power of God with the king of his time whose name was Nimrod.

Abraham, like other prophets, arose with the message that it is guidance and revelation from God which gives human beings true life, showing them how to live and behave as human beings should, as befits human dignity. Without that guidance, they are as good as lifeless. Accordingly, the Quran says to Muslims: “O you who believe, respond to Allah and His Messenger, when he calls you to **that which gives**

you life” (8:24). Abraham said to the king: “My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die.” But the king only believes in material things and in his power and rule over them. The only life and death he recognises is the material life and death of this world which he claims to have under his control. So, in reply to Abraham, the king says: “I give life and cause death.”

Throughout history, many tyrants and dictators have come and gone who thought that people’s lives and death were in their control. Whoever they wished to kill, he was put to death, and whoever they wished to let live, he lived. Not only actual life and death, but metaphorically also, whoever they wished they appointed to a high official position, and whoever they wished they reduced from fame to obscurity. In Pakistan in the 1970s the Prime Minister Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto went even further and thought that spiritual life and death were in his gift: whoever he wished he could declare as Muslim and whoever he wished he could declare as non-Muslim and *kafir*. Apparently he had control of the next world as well!

The modern materialism of today also thinks that it controls life and death. Powerful nations believe that they have the power to allow to live only those whom they wish, and to bring death upon those whom they wish. Modern science also strives to have that power, both for giving life, for example by saving the lives of those who are dying of illnesses, and for killing millions of people by means of the most destructive weapons. This is the kingdom (*mulk*), or power and control, mentioned in this verse. Those who possess such a kingdom come to believe either that God doesn’t exist or that He is under their control. What need or role is there for God, when I have all power and control, say such people. As the verse says, this king “argued about his Lord because Allah had given him kingdom” . In the example I gave of Mr Z.A. Bhutto, his idea was: My National Assembly will argue about God, whether He should have the power to decide who is a Muslim or we should have that power.

Abraham replies by asking the king if he has control over the movement of the sun: “Surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the East, so you make it rise from the West (if you can).” Is the king able to reverse and overturn the law of God which

governs the rising and setting of the sun? By asking this, what Abraham points out is that the **system** of life and death on earth depends on the sun. The king actually knew that. The ancients were well aware of the life-giving role of the sun. That's why they worshipped it, and the king himself belonged to a religion of sun-worship. Abraham's reply means that the king does not control the operation of nature which is the real cause of bringing about life and death. Just by holding some people's lives in your hands, you don't acquire control over the **system** of life and death on earth.

The light and heat of the sun are the source of all life on earth. Plant, animal and human life only exists because of the sun. It creates our weather. Ancient people knew of the importance of the sun in sowing and harvesting of crops. Around the end of December, in many ancient civilizations, celebrations were held because the day stopped getting any shorter and started getting longer. So Abraham is saying to the king: if you control life and death, then show us that you can control the sun and change its movement, and bring back out when it is setting in the west. The king was perplexed by Abraham's reply and had no answer to it. The king was claiming to be able to give life and bring about death while he himself recognised that life depended on the sun, which he cannot control.

Abraham's reply indicates that there is a far more fundamental system in nature working behind what man controls. Humans foolishly think that by their power they have control over the world, but this control is very superficial, narrow and limited. Behind it, in the background, is a much bigger system over which man has no control.

Abraham may also be indicating to the king that his kingdom and rule are subject to rise and fall too, just like the sun. That is a law of human history. His kingdom rose like the sun and attained height, but when God would bring about its decline the king would not be able to reverse that decline *any more than* he can stop the sun from setting and make it rise from the west when it is setting in the west. Therefore the king's claim that "I give life and cause death" has no permanent value in comparison with God's power, Who gave life to the king and his rule, and will bring them to death. Reverting to the example of Mr Z.A. Bhutto, in 1974 he was at the height of his

power and possessed unchallenged authority when his government declared that Ahmadis were non-Muslim, that they have no spiritual life and are now dead in religious terms. But when his own decline came just two years later, he could not make the setting sun of his fortune to rise.

It is important to remember that prophets not only teach that God has control of physical life on earth but in fact God sends them with the means of giving spiritual life to people. Those who do not accept them remain dead. This is how *it is Allah* Who gives life and causes death. So when Abraham said to the king, “My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die”, he meant it primarily in the spiritual sense. The king, being a worldly person, took it in the physical sense of life and death, and Abraham defeated him even on that material score.

When the Quran gives narratives and stories relating to events of the past, it means that similar happenings will take place in the future. Abraham’s argument with his king was replayed in the time of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the argument between him and the modern materialistic Western world. In his time, in the late 1800s, Western countries had recently acquired dominance over the whole world. But, unlike previous empires, this was not only rule over other countries through military and political might. There was another kingdom they had acquired and were continuing to acquire more and more: the kingdom of human knowledge, science and technology. With their control over the material world and over nature, they argued about the existence and the power of God. As the verse says: “Have you not thought of him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, *because Allah had given him kingdom?*” Man had come to think that he was all-powerful over life and death because of all his inventions. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad presented to the modern world the message of Islam, that real life is the spiritual life in human beings which brings about moral reform, and that spiritual life can only be awakened by revelation from God. Spiritual awakening cannot be brought about merely by human efforts. No intellectual or philosopher can, by his thought, produce a philosophy which will generate spiritual life. No government or worldly authority, by means of its power, can bring about moral reform. It can only be done by the spiritual power contained in

the word of God. That is the meaning of the statement “My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die”, which is what Abraham said to the king.

But modern civilization was saying: “I give life and cause death”. Man’s control over nature by means of the knowledge and the inventions of the West had created the impression in many minds that man had now acquired the powers of God. The reply given to this by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the same as Abraham’s reply in this verse: “Surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the East, so you make it rise from the West (if you can)”. What he told the world was that the sun of spiritual guidance, revealing deep religious truths, had risen in the east. Note that the Holy Prophet Muhammad is called a light-giving sun in the Quran. And the challenge put forward by Hazrat Mirza is: Can Western materialistic philosophies and sciences, by means of human exertions and endeavour, create such spiritual knowledge and guidance that was taught by Divine revelation to the Holy Prophet? God made the sun of religious truths to rise in the east, can you by your humanly developed knowledge make *such a sun* rise in the West? No, *you* cannot, but God can bring that light to the West. And that is the message with which Hazrat Mirza arose: that spiritual enlightenment cannot come to the West by means of its own philosophies based on materialism and pure reason, or by its physical sciences; it will come when the revelation of God in Islam reaches the West. He wrote:

“In reality, the Western countries have, up to this time, shown very little aptitude for religious truths, as if spiritual wisdom had in its entirety been granted to Asia, and material wisdom to Europe and America ... now Almighty God intends to cast on them the look of mercy.” (*Izalah Auham*, p. 516)

May Allah save us from thinking like that king, who was deluded by his power into believing that he had absolute power over everything! May Allah grant us to present His message along the lines of How Abraham presented it! *Ameen!*

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكُمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-