



EBRĀHĪM

EBRĀHĪM (Abraham), the name of the first patriarch of the Hebrew people.

In Judaism. In its original form, Abram, the name occurs in the Bible (Gen. 11:26; 17:5, Nehemiah 9: 7, and 1 Chron. 1: 26), as does the form Abraham. No one else bears his name, for which two meanings have been suggested: “the exalted father” and “the father of the exalted.”

The narration of the story of Ebrāhīm in the Book of Genesis is disconnected and fragmentary. We are told that he was the son of Teraḥ and the tenth generation after Noah through the line of Shem (Gen. 11:10-26). He was born in the city of Ur in Chaldea, whence he emigrated to Canaan. In Haran, before entering Canaan, the seventy-five year-old Ebrāhīm received the divine call and the promise of his offspring multiplying and constituting a great nation in the land of Canaan. Then together with his wife, Sarah, who was his paternal half-sister, and his nephew, Lot, he proceeded to Canaan, where he settled for the rest of his life (Gen. 12:1-5). Despite several divine promises of nationhood for Ebrāhīm’s descendants, he remained childless. So he took his maidservant, Hagar (Hājar), as his second wife, and from this union Ishmael (Esmā’īl) was born when Ebrāhīm was eighty-six years old (Gen. 16:1 ff.). When Ebrāhīm was 100 years old, Sarah, at the age of ninety, bore Isaac (Eshāq). Isaac’s birth, which was regarded as the fulfillment of God’s promise (Gen. 21:1-3, 5), caused disharmony in the family. As a result, Hagar and her son, Ishmael, were expelled upon Sarah’s demand (Gen. 21:22-34). Several years later Ebrāhīm was prepared to obey God’s command to sacrifice Isaac, but the sacrifice was averted at the last moment by an angel. Having passed the test of faith,



Ebrāhīm received a more emphatic divine blessing concerning his descendants' nationhood. After Sarah's death and Isaac's marriage, Ebrāhīm married his third wife, Qeturah, who bore him several children. Ebrāhīm is portrayed as the wealthy head of a large semi-nomadic family. He died at the age of 175 and was buried in the cave of Maḳpelah in the city of Ḥebbron.

Yehuda ha-Levi (d. 1141 C.E.) attributes the writing of the mystic book *Sepher Yeẓirah* (Book of Creation) to Ebrāhīm (*Kuzari* 4:25). Maimonides claims that Ebrāhīm attained the highest degree of prophecy, with the exception of Moses (*Guide* 2:45). Ebrāhīm was the first to establish by philosophical speculation the theory of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* (*ibid.* 2:13); he also was the first to be convinced of the existence of God through observing the celestial motions and the order of the universe (*ibid.* 2:19), and by reasoning (*ibid.* 1:63)

In Islam and in Tradition. Ebrāhīm was known to Moḥammad as one of the earliest prophets to profess monotheistic belief. He is venerated in the Qur'ān as the father of the Arabs and the first who professed Islam (3:110, 106). A large number of stories of the prophets in the Qur'ān are devoted to the life, deeds, and beliefs of Ebrāhīm; he is mentioned in twenty-five different suras, with information mostly based on Talmudic and midrashic legends. According to the Qur'ān, Ebrāhīm recognized Allāh as the creator of the world; Ebrāhīm is also mentioned as the idol-smasher who was miraculously saved from the furnace, and the one who accepted Allāh's command to sacrifice his son.

According to Muslim tradition, it was Esmā'īl who was prepared to be sacrificed. But Esmā'īl's name is not mentioned in the Qur'ān in connection with sacrifice, nor is it mentioned during the middle Meccan period, for example: "We [Allāh] gave him [Ebrāhīm] Isaac [Eshāq] and Jacob [Ya'qūb], and bestowed on his posterity the gift of prophecy and the book" (39: 26); "We brought her [Sarah] the good tidings of Isaac and, after Isaac, Jacob" (11:24; see also 37:112-13; 21:72). In Sura 2:121 Ebrāhīm, together with his son Esmā'īl, is building the Ka'ba and thus founding the religion of Islam. The very word "Islam" and the message it conveys is connected with the story of Ebrāhīm: for example: "When God said to him [Ebrāhīm], 'Dedicate yourself to God [*aslem*],' he said, 'I dedicate myself to the Lord of the worlds' " (2:125); "This is the religion of your father Ebrāhīm. He called you *moslemīn*" (22:77).

Ebrāhīm is called in the Qur'ān *Ḳalīl Allāh* "friend of God" (6:125; cf. Isaiah 41:8). The story of Ebrāhīm and Nimrod is taken from midrashim by the Qur'ān (2: 258) and elaborated in the *Qeşaş al-anbīā'* by Kesā'ī and Ṭā'labī. In



the Qur'ān Ebrāhīm is given the epithet of *ḥanīf* (2:135; 3:67; 4:125). Āzar, the name given to his father in the Qur'ān (6:74) is perhaps a corruption of his servant's name, Eli'ezer (Gen. 15:2). Ṭa'labī maintains that Ebrāhīm was born in Šūš (Susa, p. 74). The story of Ebrāhīm has been exhaustively studied by scholars such as Goitein, Hirschberg, Horowitz, Katsh, Sidersky, Speyer, Torrey, and Weil (see bibliography).

Ebrāhīm was also identified as Zoroaster or as one of his sons. (Concerning the connection between Zoroaster and Ebrāhīm, see *Borhān-e qāte'*, ed., Mo'īn, II, pp. 1011-12; *Loḡat-e fors*, ed. Dabīrsiāqī, p. 5; *Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, p. 92; for the reflection of Ebrāhīm's life and the events connected with him in Arabic and Persian sources as well as in Persian literature, see Mo'īn, 1947, pp. 85-101, 1959, pp. 116-128). According to Šahrestānī (p. 180), all the kings of Persia professed the religion of Ebrāhīm, i.e., Zoroaster. Most of the major Persian poets, among them Sanā'ī, Anwarī, Kāqānī, Rūmī, and Sa'dī, narrate the story of Ebrāhīm in one way or another.

In Judeo-Persian. Šāhīn is the first Judeo-Persian poet to make extensive use of themes concerning Ebrāhīm in his poetic work *Berešit-nāma* (com. in 1358 C.E.). In 1702, Benyāmīn ben Mīšā'īl Kāšānī, known as *Amīnā*, versified the story of Ebrāhīm and Isaac. There is also a short story in prose called *Sargodašt-e Ebrāhīm*, which narrates in Judeo-Persian the divine test of Isaac's sacrifice, together with other divine trials by which God tested Ebrāhīm's loyalty. The date and the authorship of this prose work are unknown (Netzer, 1973, pp. 80-81). Šāhīn's story of Ebrāhīm is the most extensive; it includes more than 2,000 couplets based on Jewish and Islamic sources. His Jewish sources are based mainly on the Book of Genesis (chaps. 11-25) and the following midrashic sources: *Bereshit Rabba*, *Sepher ha-Yashār*, *Pirqē Rabbi Eli'ezer*, *Midrash ha-Gadol*, *Midrash tanḥuma*, and others.

Šāhīn's treatment of Ebrāhīm, Hagar, and Ishmael is Islamic and is clearly a major departure from Jewish beliefs. He speaks approvingly of the water of Zamzam, Bayt-al-Ma'mūr, Marwa, and Šafā, all of which are based on Muslim traditions and are alien to Judaism.



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