

Establishing a *Hanif* Nation: Prophet Abraham's Mission and Struggles, Part I¹

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Abstract: Prophet Abraham is recognized as the patriarch of the three Abrahamic religions, as well as the prophet and messenger of God, and leader to all the nations of the world in Islam. This part of this series offers an account of Prophet Abraham's early life, specifically about his youth, his search for the truth, and his family and community. This article further explores Prophet Abraham's patience with his father, his uprising, his biological parents, and his deep insight. Despite the ongoing oppression towards him from his idolatrous father and idol-worshipping community, as well as the additional trials he faced, Prophet Abraham's unwavering faith earned himself the title of being one of the five Prophets of Determination.

Prophet Abraham's Early Life and His Monotheistic Movement²

The start of Abraham's retreat from his tribe

He said, - O' Abraham! Are you renouncing my gods?

If you do not relinquish, I will stone you.

¹ From *The Thematic Commentary of the Qur'an Based on al-Mizan: The 18th Booklet*

² Source: The Qur'anic verses in the text and the historical discussion. al-Mizan Qur'anic commentary, vol. 14, p. 19.

Then you should keep away from me for a while!

Abraham said,

- Peace be to you! I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you.

Indeed He is gracious to me.

I dissociate myself from you and whatever you invoke besides Allah.

I will supplicate my Lord.

Hopefully, supplicating my Lord will not be fruitless!

When he had left them

and the idols they worshipped instead of Allah,

We gave him Isaac and Jacob,

and each We made a prophet.

And We gave them out of Our mercy,

and conferred on them a worthy and lofty repute³

The above verses refer to the ending part of Abraham's call and debate with his father, Azar, who threatened to kill Abraham in the worst manner: stoning him to death, as this is how the rejected ones were tortured during that time.

³ The Qur'an 19: 46-50

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ أَنْتَ عَنِ اللَّهِ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهَ لِأَرْجَمَتِكَ وَالْهَيْزَلِي مَلِيًّا، قَالَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيًّا، وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَكَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَادْعُوا رَبِّي عَسَىٰ أَلَّا أَكُونَ بِدُعَاءِ رَبِّي شَفِيًّا، فَلَمَّا اعْتَرَاهُمْ وَ مَا يُعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَ كُلًّا جَعَلْنَا نَبِيًّا، وَ وَهَبْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِنَا وَ جَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ عَلِيًّا

In return for his father's threat, Abraham said "Salam" (*Peace be to you*) to him as a sign of benevolence and security. He also promised to seek God's forgiveness for his father. In response to his demand, "*Keep away from me for a [long] while!*", Abraham replied: "*I dissociate myself from you and whatever you invoke besides Allah!*"⁴

As for why Abraham said "Salam," *Salam* is the habit and attribute of great people; he returned his father's ignorance by saying "Salam" to him. Azar had threatened to stone Abraham to death and banish him for his true word, and Abraham promised him security, health, and benevolence in return. This is the very Qur'anic guideline, "*And when they come upon vain talk, pass by nobly.*"⁵ Elsewhere, God said in the Qur'an: "*And when the ignorant address them, say, 'Peace!'*"⁶

As why did Abraham say, "*I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you!*", although his father was a polytheist? Because at that moment Abraham was not sure about Azar's disbelief and whether he was a friend of Satan. Azar's heart was replete with disbelief and denial of—and rebellion against—the truth. He considered it probable that his father was an oppressed and deprived ignorant unable to find the truth; and if only he knew the truth, and would follow it, Divine mercy might cover him. As he deemed this possible, he wanted to arouse his feelings through this promise, and he did not consider God's forgiveness as definitely including him and talked of it using "*hopefully*" and "*may*".

⁴ The Qur'an 60:4.

⁵ The Qur'an 25: 72. إذا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا

⁶ The Qur'an 25: 63. إذا خاطبهم الجاهلون قالوا سلاما

Elsewhere in the Qur'an, Abraham—after promising to seek God's forgiveness for his father—added that he could not avail him anything against Allah.⁷

In the chapter al-Tawbah, God also said,

Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfil a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most plaintive and forbearing.⁸

In the verse, *"I dissociate myself from you and whatever you invoke besides Allah...,"*⁹ Abraham promised to keep away from polytheists and their idols to invoke God sincerely and in seclusion so that his prayer might be granted.

The reason why he expressed hope was that prayer, invocation, and the like do not make anything incumbent on God, rather if God grants us reward in return, it is salvation achieved by His grace. (The criterion is the end of affairs. And nobody except God knows about the unseen and the end of affairs, so the believer is always in a state between fear and hope.)

When he had left them and the idols they worshipped instead of Allah, We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each We made a prophet!¹⁰

⁷ The Qur'an 60: 4.

⁸ The Qur'an 9: 114. *وَمَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَن مَّوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَّهَا إِثْمًا فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ*

حَلِيمٌ
⁹ The Qur'an 16: 48. *وَأَعْتَبْكُمْ وَ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ*

¹⁰ The Qur'an 19: 49. *فَلَمَّا اعْتَرَاهُمُ وَ مَا يُعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَ يَعْقُوبَ وَ كَلَّا جَعَلْنَا نَبِيًّا*

Considering this verse, one can see that God—instead of referring to Abraham’s two sons, Ishaq and Isma’il—mentioned his grandson, Ya‘qub, because He wanted to refer to the chain of prophethood as placed in Bani-Isra’il. In other words, many descendants of Ya‘qub became prophets, and the sentence “*and each We made a prophet*” confirms this.

In the end, God said, “*And We gave them out of Our mercy, and conferred on them a worthy and lofty repute!*”¹¹

Abraham’s seeking forgiveness for his father¹²

In the above verse, God pointed out that after it had turned out that polytheists would be the dwellers of Hell, the Prophet and the believers should not seek God’s forgiveness for them even if they were their relatives:

*Abraham’s pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfil a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most plaintive and forbearing!*¹³

The reason why it is not permissible to seek God’s forgiveness for polytheists is that it is a futile act, as a believer’s humbleness prevents him from playing with God’s grandeur and doing anything useless.

It is meaningless to seek God’s forgiveness for the one who does not believe in Divine mercy and forgiveness and does not acknowledge

¹¹ The Qur’an 19: 50. وَهَبْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِنَا وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ عَلِيًّا

¹² Source: The Qur’anic verses no. 113-144 of chapter al-Tawbah “*Abraham’s pleading forgiveness for his father was only to...*”¹² Al-Mizan, vol. 18, p. 338.

¹³ The Qur’an 9: 114. وَ مَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَنْ مَوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَّهَا إِثْمًا فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ حَلِيمٌ

servitude to God. Such a request for intercession is to ridicule God's divinity and servitude to Him. By virtue of man's innate disposition, it is an inappropriate and impermissible act referred to in the Qur'an as "not being entitled to do so".

The purpose of Abraham's uprising and his proof¹⁴

In verses 74-83 of the chapter al-An'am, God referred to the proof He granted to Prophet Abraham with which to debate with polytheists and invite them to the monotheistic religion that God had directed him to.

After these verses, God stated that the prophets are guided, and their hearts are cleansed of polytheism. Among all prophets, He brought up Prophet Noah, who had lived before Abraham and sixteen other prophets, all of whom were Abraham's descendants.

These verses, in fact, expressed the highest rank and the perfect manifestation of faith and necessity of maintaining the "religion based on origination of Allah", disseminating monotheism, and cleansing oneself of polytheism and idolatry

This is the very sacred goal for which Abraham rose against the polytheists. Those days when people forgot monotheism—that which Prophet Noah and the prophets after him taught—and the world were under the control of idolatry, Abraham communicated with them to reveal the existing situation.

These verses with proofs on the "religion based on origination of Allah" are to give Prophet Muhammad more insights into the proofs God had

¹⁴ Source: Qur'anic verse no. 74-83 of the chapter al-An'am, "When Abraham said to Azar, his father,... Al-Mizan, vol. 13, p.245.

taught to Prophet Abraham, as mentioned in this chapter and before these verses. On forty occasions, He said, “Say so ... argue so ...”. More than twenty instances of such sentences can also be found before these verses. God told Prophet Muhammad that when you face your tribe and prove monotheism and negate polytheism which We have inculcated in you, you should remember the reasons Abraham gave his father and his tribe. Consider the proofs that We taught him and through which We showed him the dominion of the heavens and the earth. Abraham debated with his tribe through the knowledge and wisdom We granted him, and not through unreal thoughts limited to imagination and tainted with affectation and self-dependence, all of which are contrary to man’s pure and God-given disposition.

“... This was Our argument that We gave to Abraham...”¹⁵

(A detailed account of the verses and Prophet Abraham’s proofs will be addressed below).

The meaning of Abraham’s primeval thoughts¹⁶

To accurately read the content of narrations, one must consider the content of the narrations, hold a truth-seeking impulse without being affected by the debates of Qur’anic commentators, and have a pure mind emptied of illusory contradictions and of mixing Qur’anic commentaries with contents of hadith, history book, the Torah, and the Israiliyyat. It was Abraham’s common sense, pure innate disposition, and initial perceptions of his wisdom that were manifested in these words:

¹⁵ The Qur’an 6: 83, *و تِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ*

¹⁶ Source: The verse no. 79 of chapter al-An’am “Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a Hanif, and I am not one of the polytheists.” al-Mizan, vol. 13, p.246.

...Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude.

*When night darkened over him, he saw a star
and said, 'This is my Lord!'*

But when it set,

He said, 'I do not like those who set.'

Then, when he saw the moon rising,

he said, 'This is my Lord!'

But when it set,

He said, 'Had my Lord not guided me,

I would surely have been among the astray lot.'

Then, when he saw the sun rising,

He said, 'This is my Lord! This is bigger!'

But when it set, he said,

O my people, indeed I disown what you take as [His] partners.'

Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth,

as a Hanif, and I am not one of the polytheists.¹⁷

¹⁷ The Qur'an 6: 75-79. وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ؛ فَلَمَّا جَزَّ عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَى كَوْكَبًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَا أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ فَلَمَّا رَأَى الْقَمَرَ بَارِعًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَئِن لَّمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ فَلَمَّا رَأَى الشَّمْسَ بَارِعَةً قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي هَذَا أَكْبَرُ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

In short, if one ponders on these verses fairly, he will no doubt consider Abraham's words with his tribe like the words of a hypothetical primitive man who has spent his life in a tunnel or a cave.

Abraham was a man who has associated with the one who provides him with scanty food just to keep him alive and a garment to protect him from the heat and the cold. A man who has never entered vast cities and has never come across their thoughts and ideas and contradictory religions and denominations. Now he happens to visit a vast land and a large society, and he sees what he has never seen.

Abraham witnessed the hustle and bustle of the city life, active and inactive people, employers and employees, servants and lords, bosses and subordinates, and non-worshippers and worshippers of their gods. Meanwhile, he suddenly sees the sky, and his astonishment doubles as he sees heavenly bodies. Deeply amazed, he inevitably asks about each to know their purposes, like a child who sees the expansive sky and its shining stars and asks his mother in fascination: "What are these shining bodies?" "They're beautiful!" "Who hung them to the sky?" "Who makes them glow all night?" "Who made these lights?"

He asks about the small and large ones, and the features of each. The only difference is that a hypothetical person would first ask about the nature of things closer to his knowledge accumulated during his seclusion. Because his then knowledge was not that of the perception (he did not see or hear anything), and the first thing he asks about is the principal cause of the universe. Yes, in general, mankind tries to know the

unknown through the known. In other words, he uses his basic knowledge and science to discover the nature of the unknown.

For example, when nomadic children come across something new, they first ask about it in a way most familiar to them. In other words, they first ask questions such as: “What is the nature of this?” “Who has made it?” “What is it used for?” “What is it made for?”

The intended hypothetical man is almost a primeval man, and his innate disposition is still pure and cleansed of contamination. As he has come into contact merely with the simplest facilities, his mind is empty of various memories and thoughts that preoccupy the civilized and urban man. Civilized people are so busy with this world and with so unfocused thoughts that they may not experience peace of mind even for a few moments.

There are numerous events occurring in the sky and on the earth around the primitive man without his knowing their natural causes. Thus, his mind is more prepared to think about supernatural causes. If the urban man were free from enumerating natural causes, he would notice the supernatural causes as well. Hence, if the primitive man finds urban people worship a supernatural source, he will take notice of it sooner than others.

Therefore, religiousness and attention to an effort put in the religious ceremonies as well as theological discussions can be found more in Asia than Europe. In Asia, such issues are appreciated more in small towns and villages than in large cities, clearly because the larger a society and the more comfortable the life there, the more material needs and jobs it has. Likewise, the more preoccupied people, the less the spirituality. In

short, their hearts have less capacity to heed to the starting and ending points of mankind.

Abraham as a hypothetical, primitive man¹⁸

If we examine the life story of Abraham in the verses under discussion as well as the verses of chapters Maryam, Anbiya, and Saffat, we can see that in his debate with his father and tribe he was in a state like that of the hypothetical primitive man because Abraham asked: “What are these stone and wood sculptures to which you are submissive to?”

And like a person who had not seen or experienced anything about belief and disbelief, he asked: “What do you do in front of the stars, the sun, and the moon? Why?”

He also asked his father and tribe: “What are these sculptures to which you are submissive to?”

He also asked, “*What is it that you are worshipping?*”¹⁹

In response, they said, “*We worship idols, and we will go on clinging to them [will keep worshipping them]*”²⁰

He asked again, “*Do they hear you when you call them? Or do they bring you any benefit, or cause you any harm?*”²¹

They answered, “*No, rather we found our fathers acting likewise.*”²²

¹⁸ Source: Qur’anic verse no. 74 of the chapter al-An’am, “*When Abraham said to Azar, his father...*” Al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 248.

¹⁹ The Qur’an 26: 70. مَا تَعْبُدُونَ

²⁰ The Qur’an 26: 71. قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ أَصْنَامًا فَنَنْظِلُ لَهَا عَاقِبِينَ

²¹ The Qur’an 26: 72-73. قَالَ هَلْ يَسْمَعُونَكُمْ إِذْ تَدْعُونَ - أَوْ يَنْفَعُونَكُمْ أَوْ يُضُرُّونَ

²² The Qur’an 26: 74. قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ

This tone of speaking is of the one who has seen neither an idol nor an idolater so far, while he has been raised in the cradle of idolatry and polytheism, i.e., Babylon, Chaldea.

Abraham's purpose of such interpretations was not to humiliate the idols because he was too polite to do so. Abraham was the one who had not spoken but politely to his father, Azar. Even when Azar banished him and told him he would stone Abraham to death, he said in response: *"Peace be to you! I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you. Indeed He is gracious to me."*²³

Looking at this verse on the character and manners of Abraham, it is doubtful that someone like him humiliated Azar's gods to the point where it provoked Azar's partiality and bias for idols, especially knowing that God calls Abraham "the *Hanif* nation."²⁴ In this religion, Abraham was forbidden from insulting the polytheists' gods because such behaviour might make the polytheists oppose him the same way.

After the debate with his father and tribe about idols, Abraham started to worship their lords, that is, "the stars, the sun, and the moon". He pointed to a star, saying, *"This is my Lord!"*²⁵

Also, when he saw the moon rising, he said, *"This is my Lord!"*²⁶ And then when the sun rose, he said, *"This is my Lord! This is bigger!"*²⁷

Here, it is clear Abraham had not seen the stars, the moon, and the sun before. His interpretation of the sun is of the one who seems not to know

²³ The Qur'an 19: 47. سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيظًا

²⁴ The Qur'an 16: 120. أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا

²⁵ The Qur'an 6: 76. هَذَا رَبِّي

²⁶ The Qur'an 6: 77. هَذَا رَبِّي

²⁷ The Qur'an 6: 78. هَذَا رَبِّي هَذَا أَكْبَرُ

what they are. He only knows that people are submissive to these heavenly bodies and make them offerings.

It is like seeing a figure from a distance and knowing this is a human being, but not knowing whether it is the figure of a male or a female, and asking somebody, “Who is this?” and he introduces that man or woman to you. However, if you do not know whether it is a figure of a human being, an animal, or an inanimate thing, you ask, “What is it?” because you do not know about it anything except that it is a thing. Thus, in response to you, it is said, “It is Zayd, or a woman, or a wooden stick.” In fact, you are ignorant, and in your question—among all features of that figure including whether it is human, male or female—you mention the issue you have knowledge of. However, as the respondent has enough knowledge, he observes the reality.

Thus, the surface meaning of what he said, “*This is my Lord!*” and “*This is my Lord! This is bigger!*” was that he had no knowledge about the sun except that it was larger than the stars. In other words, on the surface, his words indicated he had no knowledge about whether the sun was a material mass or a shining plate which managed earth’s creatures through its light and apparently created day and night through its rotation, or whether the moon and the stars all rose at night and then set. All in all, his words indicated his ignorance of the matter.

Abraham, before entering the polytheist society²⁸

Upon looking at verses no. 74-83 of the chapter *al-An‘am* and all verses relating to Abraham’s debate on monotheism with his father and the rest of the tribe, it can be concluded that he had lived far from his father and

²⁸ Source: The Qur’anic verse no. 74 of the chapter al-An‘am, “*When Abraham said to Azar, his father...*” al-Mizan, vol.13, p.252.

tribe before. Hence, he was not familiar with what people usually knew about beings and common traditions.

Early in his maturity, he left his place and joined his father. It was then that he saw the idols for the first time and asked his father, “What are these?” Receiving the answer, he started to debate with his father to taint the divinity of idols.

After persuading his father, he went to his tribe and attempted to convince them. Then he began to worship the lords of idols, which were the stars, the sun, and the moon. Once he witnessed them set one by one, he invalidated their divinity. To prove his sincere monotheism, he said:

*Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a Hanif, and I am not one of the polytheists.*²⁹

According to the evidence presented below, this debate took him two days and one night.

The initial insight granted to Abraham³⁰

Abraham himself knew that there was a Creator for the heavens and the earth, Allah, the Almighty, Who had no associate. However, in his debate, he sought an answer the question: “Among God’s creatures, is there anything considered the lord of people, including that of Abraham himself?”

For example, is there is the sun, the moon, or something else which is the associate with God in managing the universe? Or whether all universe

²⁹The Qur’an 6: 79. *إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ خَبِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ*

³⁰ Source: The Qur’anic verses no. 74-83 of the chapter al-An’am, “*When Abraham said to Azar, his father.....*” al-Mizan, vol.13, p.252.

affairs are only under the control of God, the Almighty, and there is no god but Him?

Of course, God helped him in all these steps and kept his heartfelt belief in Him firm through showing him the dominion of the heavens and the earth. Abraham was so realistic that no matter what he saw, he first noticed how it was attributed to God before perceiving it and its effects. First, he observed God's creation and management in everything and then noticed it:

*Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth,*³¹

And also:

*Certainly We had given Abraham his rectitude before, and We knew him*³²

Abraham himself told his father:

*Indeed a knowledge has already come to me which has not come to you. So follow me that I may guide you to a right path*³³

An investigation into Abraham's biological parents³⁴

From the Qur'anic verses on Abraham's life story, it can be inferred that his first encounter with his tribe, he came across a man called Azar and referred to as his father in the Qur'an. Abraham persisted a lot in making him to give up his idols and follow Abraham in monotheism. In return,

³¹ The Qur'an 6: 75. *وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونُ مِنَ الْمُوَفِّينَ*

³² The Qur'an 21: 51. *وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ نُشْرَهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِعَالَمِينَ*

³³ The Qur'an 19: 43. *يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا*

³⁴ Source: The Qur'anic verse no. 74 of the chapter al-An'am, "When Abraham said to Azar, his father,... al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 284.

Azar rejected Abraham, with Abraham having to keep away from him forever!

This can be found out after pondering on the verses of the chapter Maryam:

And mention in the Book Abraham. Indeed he was a truthful one, a prophet.

When he said to his father, 'Father!

Why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, and is of no avail to you in any way?

Father! Indeed a knowledge has already come to me which has not come to you. So follow me that I may guide you to a right path.³⁵

His father said in response,

Abraham! Are you renouncing my gods?

If you do not relinquish, I will stone you. Keep away from me for a long while.³⁶

Here Abraham said "Salam" to him and promised to ask for God's forgiveness for him so that he might convert to the Divine religion and attain forgiveness. The Qur'an also narrated how Abraham kept his promise to ask for God's forgiveness for his father in the chapter *al-Shu'ara*, where Abraham said:

³⁵ The Qur'an 19: 41-43. *وَ اذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ اِبْرَاهِيمَ اِنَّهٗ كَانَ صَدِيقًا نَّيِّبًا؛ اِذْ قَالَ لِاَبِيهِ يَا اَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لَا يَبْصُرُ وَلَا يَسْمَعُ وَلَا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ شَيْئًا؛ يَا اَبَتِ اِنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي اَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا*

³⁶ The Qur'an 19: 46. *قَالَ اَرَاغِبُ اَنْتَ عَنْ الْهَيْي يَا اِبْرَاهِيمُ لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهَ لِارْحَمَتِكَ وَ الْخَيْرِ نِي مَلِيًّا.*

My Lord! Grant me [unerring] judgement, and unite me with the Righteous.

*Confer on me a worthy repute among the posterity,
and make me one of the heirs to the paradise of bliss.*

Forgive my father, for he is one of those who are astray.³⁷

(He said this prayer after his father's death or upon leaving him).
In its ending part, he said,

*Do not disgrace me on the day that they will be resurrected,
the day when neither wealth nor children will avail,
except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart,³⁸*

From this ending part, it can be concluded that this was not a serious prayer, rather he only wanted to fulfil his promise to the father, for on the one hand, he said:

Forgive my father, for he is one of those who are astray.

On the other hand, he said,

*The Day of judgement is the day when neither wealth nor
children will avail,
except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart.*

The Qur'an referred to this point explicitly in the chapter *al-Tawbah*:

*The Prophet and the faithful may not plead for the
forgiveness of the polytheists, even if they should be*

³⁷ The Qur'an 26: 83-86. رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ، وَاجْعَلْ لِي لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ فِي الْآخِرِينَ- وَاجْعَلْنِي مِنْ وَرَثَةِ جَنَّةِ النَّعِيمِ، وَاعْفُزْ لِأَبِي إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ
³⁸ The Qur'an 26: 87-89. وَإِلَّا مِنْ أُمَّةٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِعَذَابِنَا يَوْمَ يُنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا نَبْتُونَ- إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ.

[their] relatives, after it has become clear to them that they will be the inmates of hell.³⁹

Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfil a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most plaintive and forbearing.⁴⁰

Both his praying for—and dissociating from—his father occurred early in his life before his migration to Jerusalem. Then Abraham decided to travel to the Holy Land and asked God to grant him offspring. The story of his having children can be found in chapters *Maryam* and *al-Anbiya*:

So when he had left them and what they worshipped besides Allah, We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each We made a prophet.⁴¹

Abraham's biological parents

In his very old age, after he had migrated to the Holy Land, God granted him a child – Isma'il. Abraham and he took Isma'il to Mecca, built that city as well as the Ka'bah there. There, he said a prayer which reveals the facts about his real father:

Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and all the faithful, on the day when the reckoning is held.⁴²

³⁹ The Qur'an 9: 113. مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُوا لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَلَوْ كَانُوا أُولِي قُرْبَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُمْ أَصْحَابُ

الْجَحِيمِ
⁴⁰ The Qur'an 9: 113. مَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَنْ مَوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَّهَا إِتَاءَ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ

حَلِيمٌ
⁴¹ The Qur'an 19: 49. فَلَمَّا جَعَلْنَا نَبِيًّا

⁴² The Qur'an 14: 41. رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّْ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْحِسَابُ

The term “*my parents*” in this prayer refers only to his biological parents; the word “*father*” can refer to somebody other than the biological father such as grandfather, parental uncle, and so forth, just as the word “father” is references this way in the verse 133 of the chapter *al-Baqarah*.

His “father,” who was prayed for here, is somebody other than the one in the verses in the previous section, called “Azar.”

We saw above that Abraham abandoned and dissociated from Azar as he discovered he was God’s enemy. Therefore, Azar was not his biological father for whom he sought God’s forgiveness in his old age.

Azar was not Abraham’s biological father, so he was called “father” because of his position.

Abraham’s biological father according to narrations, was “Tarukh” in which the Torah confirmed this as well.