Misconception Regarding the Concept of “Abraham” found in the Semitic Religions

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Abstract: The term Misconception found in the Semitic Religions belief is the conjunction of three major religious beliefs that is Judaism, Christianity and Islam which are consider being the monotheistic in origin and the major religions of the world.

Since Judaism, Christianity and Islam have expressed their origin related to Abraham; he is considered to be the genesis of Semitic religious beliefs. Those in Semitic religions there are some common feature and customs, yet there is fallacy in belief. I take scriptural support to prove for my argument. May be my knowledge of the Torah, the Holy Bible and the Quran may not sufficient thus this article and my regimental views could be could be developed, but I could embrace my daring view on the topic and I am expressing my personal opinion on the same.

The Key words: Semitic, Abrahamic, Theophany, Talmud, Molech

Introduction:

Abraham: Through the line of Isaac and Jacob Abraham is the ancestor of Hebrews and of the Arabs through Ishmael. The ancestors of Israel are portrayed in the Bible as a nomadic or pastoral life in the Pales. The traditional approach to the patriarchal stories has led to the view that the tradition reflects a nomadic form of personal religion in which the god of the patriarchs is the patron god of the clan. He was associated with a specific person such as Abraham who experiences a theophany (visible but not in material form) and divine promise land and offspring, also in the primitive Israelite religion references to sacred trees, stones and the setting up of numerous altars. There is frequent references to El in the patriarchal stories reflect the encounter of the nomadic religion with the Canaanite religion of the land with its high god El, or the original identity of the ‘god of the fathers.’

The world Religions:

World religions can be broadly categorized into Semitic and non-Semitic religions. The term Semitic refers to the people who came from the Middle East, their languages, religion and culture. Arabs and Jews are both Semitic, Christianity and Islam are also called Semitic religions because they originated from this region and they share the monotheistic belief. They are also called Abrahamic religions, because for Jews Abraham was the first Jew, for the Christians Abraham was the great ancestor of Jesus Christ, and Islam also believes that Abraham was the first Muslim. The Abrahamic religions are also called the Prophetic religions because of their belief in the Divine guidance sent through prophets appointed by God. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are major religions of the world. They call Abraham as the father of their faith and this implies a kind of unity of brotherhood across the three faiths. Yet the three religions have different ways of interpreting the role of Abraham.

The Abrahamic sources:

The scholars have recognized that the story of Abraham is a work of a unity but it is a combines the work of many author. Julius Wellhausen reorganized three independent sources of the Pentateuch: Josephus Flavius the Jewish historian of Roman times has written for the gentile audience demonstrated Abraham in an apologetically, states that:

“Abraham was the first to reason to knowledge of God, creator of the universe, by his observations of the heavens. Abraham was however, forced to leave Babylonia because of religious persecution (see also Judith 5:8). He took with him the Babylonian sciences of astronomy and mathematics, which he taught to the Egyptians during his sojourn in their country, and this way the
knowledge of such sciences eventually came to the Greeks.”

Common origin: Abraham is shared as a point of common origin by the three monotheistic religions of the world; their shared identity is connected to the single person. These Abrahamic religions are linked together through some kind of dogmatic belief, for some writers the term implies an intimate unity, it is one and the same God who has authorized the Holy Bible and the Quran and the same eternal message is presented in both books. The three religions assume that there is only one God, who is the Creator of the universe, he is the sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent, Holy, Just and righteous God. In this context Judaism, Christianity and Islam worship the same God, the God of Abraham and Abraham has been the main origin and the starting point of the Abrahamic/Semitic religions.

Abraham in the Torah:

Genesis is the first book of Torah and also of the Holy Bible, in both the scriptures Abraham has been demonstrated as the promised and the covenantal Abraham who is the father of many nations and the first patriarch, the father of Israel and grandfather of Jacob who is the symbol of God’s benevolence towards the chosen people of God, the Israelis.

Difference in Judaism and Christianity: St. Paul, who said that Abraham could be justified by faith, says:

“That is why his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

And the Genesis says:

“And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

Thus Paul represents Abraham as the opposite to Judaism, and Gentile Christian liberated from the rabbinical imposed rules.

For the Jews Abraham’s fatherhood is through literal descent, but for the Christians they are the children of Abraham by faith. Thus St. Paul says:

“The promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all.”

Paula Frederickson says, “Christians are children of Abraham, but not from Isaac and Jacob.”

Whereas we see through the Jews’ oral tradition that is the `Talmud’, Abraham has been represented as an idol eliminator and monotheist Torah, the same story recorded in a Jewish Midrash that is the rabbinic literature which contains early interpretation and the written Torah, which tells us that Abraham’s father ‘Azar’ was the wooden idol maker. He used to send Abraham and his brothers to sell the carved idols in the market which were used by the buyer as the object of worship. As a young boy Abraham once trashed his father’s idols and he told his father a particular idol had crush and subdue the rest. To this his father replied, the idol was just a statue and how can it destroy the other idols? Thus it is very clear that Abraham’s father was not an idol worshipper, and the contention is that his father’s idols were not gods at all, but it was trade. In the Holy Bible we don’t have any legend in connection to this, it only ambiguously portrays Abraham as opposed to idol worship, and we have only the significance in Genesis 18:19 that Abraham agreed with God’s law which rejects idol worship. The book of Genesis states that:

“For I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

Thus it is clear that the Lord, who has chosen Abraham to demonstrate for generations to come how to live a right and just life, as a covenantal relationship. Abraham actually lived out this mission in a righteous way, whereas the first time we see the theme of rejection of idolatry in the Book of Genesis, is when Abraham’s grandson Jacob tells his family and all who were with him,

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3 Ibid, Genesis 15:6, pg.
4 Ibid, Roman 4:16
5 http://www.newenglishreview.org/Mark_Durie/The_Abrahamic_Fallacy/
“Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments.”

The Prophet Joshua states that Abraham was called out from an idol worshipping family and he made a break with his practice, but in the book of Joshua it is not explicitly shown that Abraham stepped down idol worship, in fact there is no reference to idol worship in the Abrahamic chronology, whereas Joshua said to all the people:

“Your fathers lived of old beyond the Eu- phra'tes, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the river and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.”

Thus there is no law that gives the system of ethical rules, or gives an account of Abraham of Genesis, other than the covenantal relationship references to Abraham’s belief and his obedience to God and all his tests, in which Abraham was successful,(Genesis 12:4, 15:6, 22). The only regulation reported for Abraham’s religion, apart from the Lord being his family’s god, was the custom of circumcising males instituted as a sign of covenant faithfulness:

“You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh and everlasting covenant.”

There is nothing explicit in the book of Genesis against idol worship, but there was the direct conflict to the idol worship of the surrounding nations. Israelites were culturally related to the surrounding Canaanites; the ancient Canaanite religion practiced child sacrifice which was offered to ‘Molech’ the God of Canaanites and Phoenicians, who appreciates the human sacrifice, and later for the practice of redeeming the first-born son. Whereas the Hebrew were set apart from the Canaanite neighbors and their God, thus the binding of Isaac and his rescue by God, Who also provided the animal for sacrifice, significantly points to the different identity of the Israelites.

In the book of prophet Jeremiah 19: 4-5 and Ezekiel 16: 20-21 we see that the Hebrews practiced child sacrifice at particular period, and this practice was continued among the Israelites right from the time of Babylonian exile and therefore the Psalmist says:

“They poured innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they became unclean by their acts, and played the harlot in their doing.”

Thus in the book of 2kings 23:13 we see that a temple was built by King Solomon to Molech, and was reformed by Josiah. In the Akedah/binding, God’s mediation was against the child-sacrifice traditions of Canaanite which was an indirect testimonial to idolatry. The Genesis account gives us some evidence of Abraham as the model for the monotheistic religions. Thus in brief, Abraham in Judaism and Christianity is the Abraham of the covenant, the father of the nation, and the first patriarch of the nation of Israel under whose guidance the Semitic faith has been spread.

A Divisive figure:

However, the Abraham episode was interpreted differently by the two Biblical faiths that is Judaism and Christianity. For the Jews he is a model of a Torah observant Jew, not so much Biblical as Talmudic; whereas the Christian perspective is based on the Pauline interpretation that ‘man is saved by faith’. Thus, Paul’s view of Abraham and Jews in general is a cause of tension. Paul extols Jewish identity, and affirms the promises of God to the Jews as incapable of being revoked (Romans 11:28-29). On the other hand he holds that the salvation by faith, and seeking to impose the Torah upon Gentile believers:

“This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned

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7 Ibid, Genesis 35: 2, pg. 31.
9 Ibid, Genesis 17:11-13, Pg. 12.
content of the story. There are indirect references in the Quran to some Biblical stories which are connected to Abraham for example Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Sura 26:160), the angel’s visit to Ibrahim with good news, and to establish the covenant (Sura 11: 69-73), the stories from Jewish tradition, Talmudic narratives of Abraham destroying his father’s idols and his argument with his family saying it was their chief who struck them, if they can speak ask them (21:58-63). There is also the incident of being thrown into a furnace and surviving through providential intervention (21:68-70). Thus throughout the Quranic Abraham has been presented as one in a long line of prophets of Islam a model of monotheistic worshipers, hostile to idol worshipers as follows:

i) It is Abraham who gave the name Muslim to the followers of Allah:

“Fight for the cause of Allah with the devotion due to Him. He has chosen you and laid on you no burdens in the observance of your faith, the faith of Ibrahim your father. He has given you the name of Muslims before and in this so that His Apostle may be witnesses for your fellow-men.”13

ii) The true religion: It is only Muhammad who taught the religion of Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus:

“He has ordained for you the faith which He enjoined on Nuh and which we have revealed to you and which we enjoined on Ibrahim, Musa and Isa, (saying): ‘Observe this faith and be not divided therein.’ Hard for the polytheists are that to which you call them, Allah chooses to Himself whom He will, and guides to Himself those that repent.”14

iii) Just as Muhammad had a book from God, also Moses received from God Torah:

“All this is written in earlier scriptures; the scripture of Ibrahim and Musa”15

iv) The first Imam and a model: Judaism called Abraham the father of the nation, for Christianity

11 Ibid, Romans 9:8, Pg 149.
14 The Quran, Surah 42:13, (Beirut: Lebanon, Dear Al-Choura , 1980), 357.
15 Ibid., 87:19,Pg 451.
he is the father of faith, and Islam calls him the first imam and the leader of mankind.

“When his Lord put Ibrahim to the proof by enjoining on him certain commandments and Ibrahim fulfilled them, He said: ‘I have appointed you a leader of mankind.’”

Likewise Abraham becomes future leader and model for Muhammad in the line of Ismail. Abraham in the Quran is supporter to Islamic doctrines such as belief in Judgment day, whereas in the Bible this belief is only introduced much later by the prophets.

“Allah has begotten a son.’ Glory be to Him. He is what the heaven and the earth contain; all things are obedient to Him. Creator of the heaven and the earth! When He decrees a thing, He need only say ‘Be,’ and it is.”

v. The hostility and hatred:

The Quranic Abraham also supports the same doctrine that Muhammad taught of hatred and enmity of the un-believers, “We are clear of you and that which you worship besides Allah. We renounce you: enmity and hate shall reign between us until you believe in Allah only; accept Ibrahim’s saying to his father:

“I shall implore Allah to forgive you, although I have no power to save you from His punishment.” Lord, in you we have put our trust; do not make us a trial for the unbeliever. Forgive us, our Lord; you are the mighty, the wise one.”

vi) The Kaaba and Ishmael Abraham’s elder son:

Another Abrahamic difference in the Quran is that Abraham and his son Ishmael built the Kaaba in Mecca and demonstrated it as a place of worship:

“And when we made the house a resort and sanctuary for mankind saying: ‘Make the place where Ibrahim stood a house of worship,  you enjoined Ibrahim and Ismail to cleanse our house for those who walk round it, who meditate in it, and who kneel and prostrate themselves.”

“And when Ibrahim and Ismail built the house and dedicated it, they said: ‘Accept this from us Lord. You are the hearing the knowing.”

To this Guillaume argues and points out:

a) We don’t have chronological evidence for the claim that Abraham and Ishmael were ever in Mecca,
b) If there has been any such tradition it should be proved and explained,
c) Name Ishmael in the Quran is borrowed from either Greek or Syriac that is from the Christian traditions,
d) whereas for centuries the name Ishmael was forgotten by the Arabs, and
e) It is incredible and beyond understanding to believe that the Kaaba has been built by Abraham and Ishmael.

The Hadiths of Muhammad refer to the binding or Akedah event, this tradition says that Abraham sacrificed his beloved son Isaac, but not Ishmael. Thus the Quran may be referring to Ishmael as the prophet of God similar to Abraham; in the same context the Bible calls them patriarchs and the Quran calls them prophets among whom the name of Ishmael could be found. Thus we have a Quranic reference where Jacob himself was called Ishmael among the fathers:

“Or were you present when death came to Yaqub? He said to his children: ‘what will you worship when I am gone?’ They replied: ‘we will worship your God and the God of your forefathers Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq: the one God. To him, we will surrender ourselves.”

Nevertheless there is reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob without the reference to Ishmael.

The religion of Abraham was it Islam:

In many places in Quran there is a repetition of the phrase Abraham’s religion:

“Say: Allah has declared the truth. Follow the faith of Ibrahim. He was an upright
man, no polytheist.” 22 Say: “People of the book, why do you deny the revelations of Allah? He bears witness to all your actions.” 23 Say: “People of the book, why do you debar believers from the path of Allah and seek to make it crooked when you know that it is straight? Allah is watching over all your actions.” 24

Muslims also are commanded to follow the religion of Abraham as the religion of Muhammad: “Then we revealed to you: Follow the faith of saintly Ibrahim: he was no polytheist.” 25

Thus according to Quran it is Islam who follows the religion of Abraham and the Muhammad’s followers have the upper side to claim and not the religion of idolaters: thus Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian.

“Ibrahim was neither Jew nor Christian. He was an upright man, one who had surrendered himself to Allah. He was no polytheist. Surely the men who are nearest to Ibrahim are those who follow him; this prophet, and the true believers. Allah is the guardian of the faithful.” 26

“Say: we believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us, and in what was revealed to Ibrahim, Ismail, Ishaq, Yaqub and the tribes; to Musa and Isa and the other prophets from their lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Allah we have surrendered ourselves.” 27

**Abraham should be accepted by all the Muslims:**

It is said that Muslims are commanded to make no discrimination: “They all believe in Allah, and his angels, his books, and his apostles; we discriminate against none of his apostles. They say we hear and obey. Grant us your forgiveness, Lords; to you we shall all return.” 28 Thus any one accepts Abraham as the prophet of Allah he also accepts Muhammad also, he who does not make any discrimination; “They shall be rewarded by Allah. He is forgiving, Merciful.” 29

**Archetype and Model:**

From the Quranic view Abraham was the archetype and the master-cope for the Muslims, he is used by the Muhammad in the Quran as a ‘stick to beat the heads of Christians and the Jews.’

**Islam is the authentic Judaic and Christian:**

According to Quran beside Abraham, Moses and Jesus also were Muslim prophets thus Islam is the true heritage of Jews and Christians, yet those Jews and Christians were converted to Islam are reverting to be faith of the patriarchs returning to the one true religion.

**Abraham is the Division in the Semitic faith:**

As a matter of fact Abraham is an intensely divisive of Semitic faith. For the Christian he is the father of faith, for the Jews he is the Torah observant father of the Jewish nation and the irrevocable covenant with the Jews, and Muslims represent as an archetypical original model.

**Origin of Abrahamic religion:**

Youakim Moubarac was a Lebanese priest following him favoured Islam as a faith of genuine revelation and Muhammad as a prophet, but more primitive stage than Christianity. Moubarac wrote his doctoral dissertation in 1951 on “Abraham dans le Coran” on the topic of Abraham in Islam. But later on he was influence on teaching of Vatican II Council’s reasoning on Islam, which has formed in the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” which considers Christianity and Islam as united by adoration of the one God.

841 The Church’s relationship with the Muslims: “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.” 30

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22 Ibid., 3:95, Pg 43.
23 Ibid., 3:98, Pg 43.
24 Ibid., 3:99, Pg 43.
27 Ibid., 2: 136, Pg 14.
28 Ibid., 2:285, Pg 34
29 Ibid 4:152, Pg70.
30 Catechism of the Catholic Church, article 841, (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India 2009), Pg 171
The Perfection in Abrahamic world:
Father Youakim Moubarac in the theme of Abrahamic faith says, that could unite the Abrahamic religions into one family and he says “promote an egalitarian Palestine in which Jews, Christians and Muslims demonstrate together its Abrahamic and ecumenical vocation.”

The middle Eastern would be perfect while promoting the following points:

i) Promotion of the Abrahamic faith as a yardstick of interreligious dialogue in the vision of peace in the middle East;

ii) Jews, Christians and Muslims should live side by side in unity and harmony;

iii) The religious leaders come out with force to destroy evil against human beings and fight for justice.

iv) Abandoning any plans of forced conversions. Till now the internal goal of Islamic terrorism is a process which is now reaching end game stage, in Iraq and also Syria.

William Rowan says on the Sharia law, “It is not as if we’re bringing in an alien and rival system.” Of its alien offensive discourse on women he says that, “sharia courts in the UK, are not for the rights of Muslim women.” However, when William learned of the underlying unity of the Abrahamic faiths, he apologized for his comments on the sharia law.

The conclusion:

Thus in the contemporary world Abrahamic faith must be used to bring peace, harmony, and co-existence. We see that there is disharmony all over the world, for centuries Christians as well as Jews have been suffering in the Middle East imposed by fraud upon the unaware West. Thus it is the dogmatic and Islamic extremist worldview of relations between faiths. Let us have constructive dialogue on what are the viewpoints of Abraham on the different faiths. We should remember that the three major monotheistic religions are based on a faith referring back to Abraham and work the three interpretations. One should take Abraham as a yardstick of peace, unity and harmony in the context of theological continuity. On the contrary we see that Abraham has become a divisive force between the Semitic faiths.

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