

The Metaphor of the SUN and the MOON in Christianity and Islam

Qur'an Ash-Shams, 91 v 1-2

“By the **SUN** and his (glorious) splendour;”
“By the **MOON** as she follows him (the Sun);”

1. Firstly, while the sun metaphorically connotes biblical truth, reality and manifestation (Mat. 5: 45; 13: 43; 17: 2; Luk. 1: 78; Rev. 1:16;10:1; 2:1), the Moon connotes Islamic faith and orthodoxy. The Qur'an states that the moon follows the sun. **(Qur'an Ash-Shams, 2) On the basis of this analogy, the fact that the MOON has no light of its own but reflects the light of the SUN (Qur'an Ash-Shams, 1-2) suggests that the Qur'an reflects the light of the preceding revelations namely Taurat, Injeel and Zabur as contained in the Bible.**
2. **Secondly, while the SUN projects the whole light, the MOON reflects specific light.** And by this analogy therefore, while the biblical revelation as contained in the '*Taurat, Injeel and Zabur*' projects the whole truth of biblical revelation and Abrahamic mystery; the Qur'an reflects specific truth of a narrative of faith encounter between Hagar and the biblical God of Abraham whom she had personally experienced (Gen. 16: 8-13; 21:14-20). This truth as contained in her religious experiences was passed on to her progeny through Ishmael. (Gen.16: 15; 17:3-14; 17:18 and 20)
3. Thirdly, while Isaac and his descendants are destined to be the agents of God's work; Ishmael and his descendants are destined to be unique recipients of God's work. In other words, while Isaac receives the blessing of the covenant; Ishmael receives the promise of a blessing. (Gen. 17:19-20)
3. Fourthly, while the dark face of the Moon needs the bright sunlight of the SUN to shine, Islam needs the radiant light of the gospel 'Let there be light...' (Gen. 1. 2) through the re-interpretation of the Qur'an with the biblical key.
4. Fifthly, while it feels too cold on the moon for human existence and thus heat of the sun is required to balance up the equation, Islam needs the warmth of the bloodshed on the cross of Calvary to quench its thirst and deepest yearning for justice and equality.

In this connection therefore, Islam can be viewed as a fulfillment of God's promises for 1. Ishmael, 2. Arabs in particular and 3. Muslim peoples in general (Gen. 21: 13). Moreover, the Quran can equally be seen as a revelation destined for the pagan Arabs who are the descents of Ishmael as well as a witness to the messiahship of Jesus for the Jews of Mecca and Medina. However, it should be noted that the Qur'an, by the gracious providence of God, contains quite a number of Messianic verses that can serve as **contact points between Islam and Christianity.**

Recognition of 'Truth' in the other

Pascal Bazzell calls for the recognition of God at work in other religions and cultures when he writes,

“Jalal-ad Din Muhammad Rumi, a thirteenth-century Sufi scholar, wrote: "The truth was a mirror in the hands of God. It fell, and broke into pieces. Everybody took a piece of it, and they looked at it and thought they had the truth." Reflecting on this poem, I asked myself how church history with its missionary expansions would have developed if it had been shaped by Paul's statement that we as believers now see in a mirror obscurely (1 Cor 13:12). Although we have received the fullness of God's truth through Jesus Christ, we recognize that we fail to comprehend the whole. Although God gives the truth generously to the receiver, it does not imply that the completeness of truth is not undivided. For the Giver—in this case God—is always bigger than his revelations.' Rumi's statement recognizes that there are truths that expand beyond a contextual understanding and its social position. Furthermore, Rumi ascertains that others also possess God's truths, meaning that they were intended to comprehend specific truths.”

‘Truth’ Encounter in the Narrative of the Biblical Hagar - Biblical Source

According to the narrative in Genesis 16, Hagar was an Egyptian woman servant who worked in the house of Abraham and Sarah who presented her view to the Abraham that since they advanced so much in age and it appeared that they would have no children of their own that Abraham could sleep with Hagar as a wife (Gen. 16: 3) in the hope that, as the Bible reported ‘perhaps I can build a family through her’ (Gen. 16: 2). Then Abraham agreed and Hagar became pregnant with Ishmael.

However, Sarai became jealous of Hagar, as the mother of Abraham’s only son child and heir, and mistreated Hagar (Gen. 16.6) to the point that Hagar finally fled into the dessert. In the desert, (the angel of) God found Hagar near a spring of water and appeared to her. In these early accounts in genesis, ‘the angel of God’ is an indirect, respectful way of referring to God’s own self. God said, Hagar, servant of Sarai where have you come from, and where are going? ‘I am running away from my mistress Sarai,’ she answered. God tells Hagar to return and submit to Sarai for God intends that Hagar will also be the mother of descendants too numerous to count. God also told Hagar she would give birth to a child and should name child Ishmael which means God hears.

On seeing Ishmael playing with Isaac Sarah once again became jealous and said to Abraham: ‘Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman’s son will never share in inheritance with my son Isaac’ (Gen. 21. 9) The bible says that Abraham was upset because of his love for Ishmael, but God told Abraham to send Hagar away, promising him that both Isaac and Ishmael would be the fathers of great nations (Gen. 21. 12-13). God’s promise must have reassured Abraham as it guaranteed the survival of Ishmael.

So Abraham gave Hagar and Ishmael some food and watered sent them off to the south into the desert. The biblical narratives continue: when the water in the skin was gone, she placed the boy under a bush. Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, and thought ‘I cannot watch the boy die’ and as she sat there, she began to sob. God heard the boy crying, and [the angel of] God called Hagar from heaven and said to her, ‘What is the matter,

Hagar? Do not be afraid. God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation' then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink, and God was with the boy as he grew up. (Gen. 21.15-20)

Some Parallels

While Adam listened to the voice of his wife, Eve (Gen.3: 17), Abraham listened to the voice of his wife, Sarah. (Gen.16: 2) While Eve took a **fruit** and gave to her husband, Adam (Gen.3: 6); Sarah took a **wife** and gave to her husband, Abraham. (Gen.16: 3)

Historical Hagar - Islamic Source

Against the background of the above biblical accounts there are important points of similarity with the narrative of Hagar in the Muslim sources. For instance, in Al-Bukhari authentic collections, Ibn Abbas narrates,

“When Abraham had differences with his wife because of her jealousy of Hagar, he led the two of them away through the desert until they reached the region of Mecca (also called Baca as in Psalm 84: 6) He gave them a full water-skin and left them under a tree and returned home. Hagar called out: ‘Abraham, to whom are you leaving us?’ He replied, ‘I leave you in the care of God.’ Hagar answered. ‘I am satisfied to be with God.’

However, in another tradition also related by Ibn Al-Abbas, the story is even more poignant:

“In those days there was nobody in Mecca, nor was there any water. So he made them sit down and placed near them a leather bag with some dates and small water-skin containing water, and set out homeward. Ishmael’s mother followed him saying ‘Abraham! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no one whose company we may enjoy, and there is nothing[to eat or drink]?’ she repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him, “Has God ordered you to do this?” He said “Yes”, she said, “Then God will not neglect us”.

Later when the water given to Hagar was gone she ran looking for help climbing the hills of ‘Safa’ and then that of ‘Marwa’ going back and forth, each time stopping at the valley in-between to check Ishmael. When he was about to die and she could not bear to watch him die she wept bitterly she went back to ‘Safa’ once again to look for help. At that point, she heard a voice from heaven and she cried out the more, ‘Help us if you can!’ Then Gabriel struck the earth and water gushed out and the mother and the child were both saved.

Later some people passing by found them and accommodated them. Ishmael grew up and got married to one of the women of that tribe. Abraham had visited them much later and found Ishmael mending arrows near the well of Zamzam (as mentioned in Genesis 21: 19). He told Ishmael God has ordered him to build a house for Allah and that Ishmael should help him to build the ‘Ka’aba’. They prayed ‘O lord! Accept [this service] from us. Truly, you are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing (Qur’an 2: 127)

To this day the Muslims while performing the rites of 'Hajj' do perform 'sa'y', running between 'Safa' and 'Marwa' to re-enact the distress of their ancestress Hagar, they take water from the same well of Zamzam in commemoration of how God saved Ishmael from the staggering death!

On two occasions God reached down to save the life of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 21. This reveals God's love, care and compassion towards Hagar and her son. In Gen. 16: 9, the word 'submit' in Arabic is *tasleem*, a root word 'SLM' from which Islam was derived. Hagar encountered God and had experienced his love, mercy and compassion in a personal way. She surrendered, in response of His sublime divine qualities and submitted unconditionally, to the perfect will of God, his purpose and plan for her life through *tasleem*, an act of faith which she passed on to her progeny. At the climax of the story, Hagar, who felt that God had understood her misery found comfort and courage in His concern for her plight. She spoke to God boldly and gave Him a new brand name an evidence of personal encounter. 'She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are EL ROY: the God who sees me." She said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." (Gen. 16. 13) Indeed, God is honoured through 'tasleem' which is an act of devotion and obedience to the Lord, Almighty.

Michael (2005:99-105) writes,

"...It is Hagar who gives God this name...What does God see? God sees Hagar's distress, come to her aid; shows compassion treats her with kindness and saves her. In God's encounter with Hagar in the desert we see for the first time that God is a God who has special care for those who suffer.

Ishmael was blessed and had many children, who became known as the Ishmaelites (Arabs), the people of the desert. Isaac's heirs went on to become the Israelites. So, ever since, the Ishmaelites and the Israelites have fought and loved like brothers.

God intends in the last days that they should love and inherit together as joint-heirs of God's grace. It will happen through Abraham.

Yahya Abu Ishaq writes,

"Ishmael had suffered rejection but was accepted by God. He would have suffered thirst to death in the scorching and burning desert. But by God's grace and miraculous intervention of providing zamzam water, God spared and 'rescued' him from death. In this way, Abraham thus received Isma'il back from death by a sort of 'miraculous resurrection'."

"The same was true of Ishaq. He too was spared and rescued from death through the knife because God provided a ram caught in a thicket. Thus in a similar way, Abraham also received Ishaq back from death by a sort of 'miraculous resurrection.'"

Michael (2005:99-105) observes,

"I believe that Hagar is a key religious figure and that mediation on her story can enrich the understanding of Jews, Christians and Muslims concerning the nature of

the God whom we worship and what it means to do God's will in contemporary societies. The image of Hagar and her child in the desert is part of today's reality. The low-born, hard-working domestic laborer, used and misused and cast out by her employers the single mother abandoned by the father of her child, the foreigner and refugee far from her native land, desperately trying to survive, frantic in her maternal concern for the safety of her child-this Hagar I have met many times."

Did Islam begin with Muhammad?

The answer is short and simple 'No'. Islam began with Abraham and the Qur'an confirms him the first Muslim who surrendered to the will of God and started a journey of faith unto Allah. All the prophets had shared in the faith of Abraham and were all Muslims because they have followed suit the footsteps of Abraham.

Moreover, the Qur'an declared Abraham:

As a man of an incredible faith in monotheistic God
As a bosom friend of God *Khalil-Allah*
As a blessing & father to many nations Muslim nation inclusive
To have received covenant of blessing (salvation)
To have been shown by God the secret of the Kingdom of heaven and God's plan of salvation.
To have been commanded by God to sacrifice his son but which son had Abraham actually sacrificed?

In Genesis 22 it's Isaac. But according to 1.5 billion Muslims it was Ishmael. Interestingly, the Qur'anic text (37:100-113) does not mention the name of the son whom Abraham had actually sacrificed! However, Muhammad Ibn Jarir At-Tabari (d. 921 A. D.), one of the great Qur'an commentators, supports Isaac not Ishmael.

However, in principle and in practice, both Isaac and Ishmael were sacrificed according to what was obtainable in the Jewish Mosaic law of sin offering. In the Jewish tradition or Law of sin offering, two goats would be provided. One would be killed through the knife and the other would be sent away to wander in the desert. The Bible affirms,

"Then he is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities and rebellious acts of the Israelites in regard to all their sins. He is to put them on the goat's head and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man appointed for the task." (Lev. 16: 21)

In the case of Isaac, according to the bible, Abraham responded in faith but eventually in his infinite mercy God provided a replacement and substitution for the sacrifice of Isaac (by knife and blood). The Qur'an reveals,

"And we ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice and we left (this blessings) for him among generations." (Qur'an 37: 107-108)

Yahya Abu Ishaq continues,

“While in the case of Ishmael, he was sent to wander in the wilderness thereby fulfilling the other of the twofold requirements of the mosaic law of total offering the sacrifice of Ishmael (burning by fire).”

“In a similar way, Jesus Christ of Nazareth was also the son of Abraham by genealogy and in Him both Ishmael and Isaac can be united as co-heirs.”

“Jesus who was called, in the Bible, ‘the Lamb of God’ suffered in all reality both the sacrifice of Ishmael and Isaac. He offered by true *tasleem* a total burnt offering for the redemption of mankind.”

“Jesus had suffered the rejection which Ishmael and Hagar experienced in the fires of the desert. On the Cross He cried out: ‘I thirst’. But unlike Ishmael God did not spare Him. No water was given to Him. Instead He was given vinegar to drink to intensify His suffering and anguish.”

“Then on the Cross He suffered the same rejection that Isaac and Abraham had experienced. As the spear was thrust into His side by the Roman soldier He cried out: ‘My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me’. Unlike Isaac, on the Cross God did not provide a substitute lamb sacrifice. Unlike Isaac, Jesus was not spared from the mortal wound of ‘the knife’ which in his case was the spear of the Roman soldier. Blood and water flowed out of the knife-wound showing that His blood had coagulated and that He had physically and truly died. Unlike Ishmael and Isaac Jesus went through a twofold ‘real death’”.

“The first was the physical death on the Cross. But the second was the spiritual death. Jesus went through the fires of Hell and of Gehenna. He tasted both physical and then spiritual death for us”.

“He fulfilled the two aspects of the Jewish total sacrifice of the burnt offering which had been indicated by both the sacrifice of Isaac (knife and blood) and the sacrifice of Ishmael (burning by fire).”

“But just as Abraham’s two sons were restored to Abraham by resurrection so was Jesus restored to God by physical and spiritual resurrection.

“He tasted both deaths for us and came back from those deaths in order that we might be spared.”

“Abraham was the first man ever to demonstrate and live out pure Islam (**Qur’an Al-An’am, 78**; Qur’an 16:120). He did this by calling people to turn from idolatry in order to worship the One and Only True and Living God, He also practised what he preached by offering his two sons to God in total submission. Abraham was truly a great prophet. Abraham is the Father and it is his example we are to follow. ”

“Abraham is the Father of Jesus Christ and in Jesus’ example of true Islam both sons of Abraham are united in Jesus before God. Both are the heirs of God. ”

Islam is neither an Enemy nor a Global Threat but a Development Partner

Late Giulio Basetti-Sani, an O.F.M Franciscan who spent so many years investigating, learning and interacting with the Qur'an and the Muslim peoples admits,

“My hatred for Islam came out of an unloving heart and an ignorance of many other factors. These were the results I arrived at in 1941, when my sole purpose in studying Islam was to disprove it, to destroy an enemy. It was an enemy because I could not understand it and, hence, was unable to love it. This was the result of my study of Marracci...”

“The incapacity to comprehend Islam is a heritage of most Christians. It goes back, in part, to their childhood study of history. It is not easy to free ourselves from the tangle of prejudices which envelopes our minds and of which we are not even conscious”.
(George 2000, 10)

Though there are fundamental differences between Christianity and Islam which have often been placed in opposition against one another. The Crusades are just one example of a multitude of such conflicts. Yet, there are multitudes of ways by which the two communities of faith can cooperate; partner and work together for sustain peace and development.

Since life on earth is not possible without both Sun and Moon. Could it be that Islam arose at a time when Monotheism had almost disappeared from the earth and the worship of one God was kept alive and in fact spread throughout the earth by Islam? Islam has a message and that message is that the prophets have spoken, there is only one God, the church (at that time) was failing to present the messiah in all his brightness because they were divided amongst themselves, each sect claiming to be the true followers of Christ, each one having the true gospel and each one is the right interpretation of the Bible. There is a cry to care for orphans and widows, to live a simple lifestyle and live in brotherhood with other believers.

Yet a small study of the Qur'an reveals that its sources are from the Old Testament and other texts available at the time, all in an Arab format. Islam is an Arab equivalent or version of Judaism.

Thus, both Islam and Christianity need each other. What good could take place if Muslims and Christians actually appreciated one another and worked closely with each other to solve global issues?

A fine sentiment but how could such a thing come about? Is there a common bond between each other? The Messiah Himself is the one most honoured, respected, followed and it could be that if He is obeyed if there was a serious attempt to act as cousin brothers.

As the Earth, the human dwelling, needs both the sun and the moon for life sustenance so also both Christians and Muslims need the corporation of each other to live in Milky Way together in peace and harmony for sustainable development, sincere devotion and true worship of the almighty God, the creator of the universe and the Sustainer of the Solar System.

Though Abraham was a bond of unity whose unique role and person as ‘father in faith’ for the three monotheistic communities of faith which include the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims, Hagar is a historical and religious figure so peculiar to the Muslims who remember her as a symbol of hope in God's Salvation. She is the ancestral mother of all the Arabs and all Muslims as well. Her faith, humility, loyalty and submission to the will of God as in the

biblical account ‘go back and submit to your mistress Sarai’ [Gen. 16: 6] ‘typifies’ an indirect biblical witnessing to her progeny to the truth bearer [through *tasleem*] in the lineage of Sarah who would later come as al-*Masih* or the Messiah)

Today in our own space and time, like in the days of Hagar, we can hear the same voice asking us to ‘go back and submit to the **‘Truth bearer’**. through genuine and true, ‘tasleem’ in the lineage of Sarah who has come to save the world! (Jn. 3: 16)

The Need for Truth Bearer-Saviour before the Judgement Day

Qur’an The MOON, 1

“The Hour (of Judgment) is nigh, and the **MOON** is cleft asunder.”

Qur’an The Resurrection, 7-10

“At length, when the sight is dazed,”

“And the **MOON** is buried in darkness.”

“And the **SUN** and **MOON** are joined together,”

“That Day will Man say: “**Where is the refuge?**”

The Qur’an reveals that none can save (be a Saviour) or intercede (be an Intercessor) except the **Truth bearer**.

“And those whom they invoke beside God have no power of intercession except he who bears witness to the **Truth**.” (Qur’an 43: 86)

The bible affirms,

“You have sent to John (the Baptist) and he has borne witness to the Truth...Yet I do not receive testimony from man but I say these things that you may be saved (John 5: 33-34)

The Qur’an also concurs,

“And the Angels called to (Zechariah) as he stood praying in the actuary God gives you glad tidings of (a son whose name is) Yahya (John) who comes to bear witness to a Word (Jesus) from God, lordly, chaste and prophet of the righteous. (Qur’an 3: 39)

Jesus himself declares,

“I am the **Truth** the Life and the Way (the Straight Way) No one comes to the father but by me (because by me everyone come to being and through me all return to the Father)

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believe in me shall never thirst...but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain water springing up into eternal life (Jn, 6: 23, 14: 14)

“Your God said it is easy for me...that we make him a **revelation** for mankind and a **mercy** from Us, and it is a thing ordained (Qur’an 19: 21)

“You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life and these are which testify of Me (John 5: 39)

“And this is **life eternal**, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent.” (Jn.17:3)

The Qur’an reveals that Jesus is the sign for the coming of the hour. He is also the **Straight Path**. He says, “**Follow Me**”,

“And he [Jesus] shall be a knowing sign for the coming of the hour [Day of Resurrection], have no doubt about it, and **follow Me, this is the Straight Path**. (Qur’an 43: 61)

Jesus himself affirms that he is the **Resurrection**,

“... I am the **resurrection**, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” (Jn. 11: 25)

“That is Jesus the Son of Mary a statement of **Truth** about which they (unbelievers) dispute in vain (Qur’an 19: 24)

Hadith maintains that the door for repentance remains open and is still in effect. However, once a man dies in sin, there is no chance for repentance after death. Thus, a word of warning to all, and those that are sincerely wrong should repent from all their perverted ways, turn and submit to God in sincere repentance before the Judgment Day.

The Qur’an further warns,

“Lo! That wherewith you are **threatened** is indeed **true**, And lo! **The judgment will indeed befall.**” (Qur’an 51: 5-6)

“Do they just wait for the final fulfilment of the event? On the day the event is finally fulfilled those who disregarded the **Truth** before will say the apostles of our Lord did indeed bring the truth. Have we no intercessor now to intercede on our behalf? ” (Qur’an 7: 53)

“And let not Satan hinder you (from the right religion). Verily he (the Satan) is a plain enemy to you” (Qur’an 43: 62)

Abraham realized the magnitude of the impending danger ahead on the Judgement Day since it only takes righteousness to please God and there is none who is righteous. He then turned to God in prayer and repentance. And because he trusted God he received an answer.

“O our Lord! Cover me (my sins) with your forgiveness.” (Qur’an 14: 41).

David writes about this encounter between Abraham and God saying,

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity. ” (Qur’an 32: 1)

This covering and forgiveness of sins by God expresses his unfailing love, infinite mercy and unending compassion for Abraham and his family.

Peter writes,

“Love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 32: 1)

Jesus himself says,

“Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (Jn. 15: 13)

The Bible declares,

“For since by man came death [through the First Adam], by man came also the resurrection [through the Last Adam] of the dead.” (1cor. 15: 21)

Jesus sweet smelling sacrifice has opened a way for any person that believes to be part of Abraham’s family in the Second Creation which God has promised.

The Qur’an reveals,

“That He (God) has promised a second creation.” (Qur’an 53: 47)

“It is He who brings the process of creation (in the first Adam) and repeats it again (in Jesus, the Second Adam)...” (Qur’an 10:4)

The Bible affirms,

“And so it is written, “the first man Adam became a living being”: the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.” (1Corinthians 15: 45)

Jesus gently calls,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give rest.” (Mat. 11: 28)

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Rev. 3: 20)

Would you like to be part of the family of Abraham which God has promised to bring about through Jesus Christ? God had blessed Abraham and made him a blessing to mankind. Would you like to partake of this Abrahamic blessing?

Then, call upon the name of Jesus. The Qur'an affirms that Jesus ever lives bodily with God more than 2, 000 years since his ascension into Heaven! (Qur'an 4: 159)

It does not cost you anything, but it rather pays, to call upon the Word by which God almighty created you (Jn. 1: 1) and through which He sustains you to this very day by His grace, mercy and Power!

Just say, Lord I need your help! Save me! For He sees, hears and accepts you just as you are (a Muslim) and right where you are (in the Mosque!)

Haidar Abu Ishaq