

Abraham Across Scriptures: An Intertextual Study of His Character in the Tanakh, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an

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Introduction

The figure of Abraham is not unfamiliar to many and holds profound significance especially within the major faith communities of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, Abraham is more than just a historical figure; he is someone that is widely revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Across these three faiths, he is seen as a man of strong faith, deep trust in God, and a heart full of obedience. While the stories of Abraham in the Tanakh, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an are told in different ways, they all highlight similar values and virtues. Although religions may differ in terms of theological beliefs, doctrine, and practice, the story of Abraham highlights how different faiths are often connected by the same values.

This message is particularly relevant in Singapore, a nation built on pluralism — the existence of different types of people, who have different beliefs and opinions, within the same society (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). In a multireligious country like Singapore, where social and religious harmony is built upon mutual understanding and respect, such shared values are essential. Hence, this article aims to explore Abraham's character through a comparative textual analysis of the Tanakh, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an. It will examine how he is portrayed in each scripture, the moral lessons that we can learn from his story, and how these shared values can help us grow in respect and understanding for one another in a plural society like Singapore.

Abraham's Character Across Scriptures: A Comparative Overview

The Tanakh's Abraham

In Judaism, Abraham is known as the first Jew. He is the father of Jewish people, not only in the genealogical sense, but also as the founder of Judaism (Levenson, 2012, p.3). Additionally, he is also the first person to reject any other Gods except for the one God (Kaczorowska, 2021, p. 1361). Abraham's significance to the Jews is clearly evident by the numerous references in the Tanakh.

The story of Abraham in the Tanakh portrays the trials that he faced during his lifetime. There were a total of ten trials that he faced, although what is considered as his trials and the order of these trials differ in the Jewish tradition (Kaczorowska, 2021, p. 1361). One view found that the trials began in Genesis 12:1: "The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (New International Version). In this verse, the Tanakh mentioned that God called upon Abraham to leave Haran and set forth to Canaan with Sarah and Lot. However, others viewed that Abraham had passed two previous tests before he was called to leave Haran. Despite the differences, it was agreed upon almost unanimously that the final trial was the *Akedah*, in which Abraham was tasked with the sacrifice of his own son, Isaac.

Interestingly, these trials are not meant to be perceived separately. Instead, these trials were all determined by God to shape Abraham's moral and spiritual development (Kaczorowska, 2021). The trials all show that Abraham was an obedient servant to God who did as he was commanded. He was also patient while facing these trials, no matter how emotionally and spiritually challenging these trials were. He placed absolute trust in God, no matter what was asked of him. In fact, his characteristics were mentioned in Jubilee 17:18: "In everything through which he tested him he was found faithful. He himself did not grow impatient, nor was he slow to act; for he was faithful and one who loved the Lord."

Although Abraham's obedience to God is evident, it does not mean that he was afraid of speaking his mind while talking to Him. In fact, he still upheld what he believed was right and voiced out his thoughts, even to God. This could be seen in one particular incident when it was revealed to Abraham that God would destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah due to the sins of their people. Here, Abraham questioned God's justice as there might have been 50 righteous people among the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who did not deserve to be destroyed along with the sinners. God agreed not to destroy the cities if 50 righteous people could be found there. Abraham then asked God if he would destroy those cities even though 45 righteous people could be found in them and God said that He would not. Afterwards, Abraham continued to bargain with God and reduced the number to 40 and then to 30, 20, and eventually 10 (Genesis 18:20-33). While it ultimately turned out that there were less than 10 righteous people in the cities and both cities were destroyed as per God's declaration, this incident shows Abraham's character as someone courageous with a firm sense of justice. He valued justice greatly to the point that he would bargain for it with God, of all beings.

From all these stories of Abraham in the Tanakh, it is apparent that Abraham has brilliant characteristics and values, such as obedience, patience, and a firm sense of justice. These characteristics certainly show Abraham's greatness and why he is highly regarded among the Jews.

The Christian Bible's Abraham

Meanwhile, in Christianity, Abraham is also a highly regarded figure whose story is narrated in both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. In the Old Testament, the story of Abraham is mostly mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Meanwhile, the New Testament highlights Abraham's faith as a model for all believers. The name Abraham is referenced frequently across both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Adams & Domoney-Lyttle, 2019).

Abraham is often regarded as the father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles alike (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7). Honoured with the title “Friend of God” which reflects his close relationship with God, Abraham embodied righteousness due to his unwavering belief in God (James 2:23). In Christianity, Abraham’s story is significant in understanding God’s plan for salvation.

According to Nagel (1969), God made four promises to Abraham. Firstly, God promised to make him a great nation. Secondly, God promised to make Abraham’s name a distinguished one. Thirdly, God promised to bless him and bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. Finally, God promised that all families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham responded with unwavering faith and trust in God’s promise (Genesis 15:6). He believed in God’s promises even if it might seem humanly impossible. For instance, he trusted God’s command to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as he believed that God would raise his son from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19). His faith was genuine as proven during the time when he obeyed God’s order to leave his homeland even though he did not know where he was going (Hebrews 11:8).

Abraham’s portrayal in the Christian Bible is not only defined by his relationship with God. He showed genuine care and compassion for people around him, as seen in his acts of hospitality. Abraham warmly welcomed strangers who turned out to be angels, highlighting the importance of kindness and openness (Hebrews 13:2). His faith in God was notably demonstrated through actions.

Within the Christian Bible, Abraham is portrayed as a foundational figure of faith. Through numerous trials, he constantly showed a steadfast trust in God and remarkable patience. In his life, he demonstrated core Christian doctrines, such as justification by faith, the universality of salvation and the nature of true belief. His virtues such as his hospitality, perseverance, and unwavering trust present a profound model for all who seek to live sincerely with faith while facing life’s adversity.

The Qur’an’s Ibrāhīm

Abraham, or known in Islam as Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him), holds an exceptional position among Muslims. The Qur’an mentions the name Ibrāhīm a total of 69 times (Mannan & Farhana, 2025). His name is invoked by Muslims every day in their obligatory prayer, showcasing his esteemed position and timeless relevance in Islam (Blackhirst, 2014). Similar to Christianity, Ibrāhīm was honoured with the title of the Friend of Allah in Islam (*khalīlullāh*), a title granted exclusively to him, as mentioned in the Qur’an:

وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا

“Allah chose Abraham as a close friend.” (The Qur’an, 4:125, Quran.com)

As a prophet, Ibrāhīm is part of a distinguished group of messengers in Islam known as the *'Ulū al-'Azm*, a title given to only a select few of the prophets who have endured immense trials in their life yet held steadfast to their faith in their mission and submission to God (Ibn Kathīr, 2000). His perseverance and unwavering resolve in his mission of universal magnitude were reflected in several defining moments in his life as narrated in the Qur'an.

Similar to the trials of Abraham according to the Tanakh, in Islam, Prophet Ibrāhīm also faced a series of trials. These trials were a test from God; a test of his devotion and submission to God. Ibrāhīm was chosen as Father of the Prophets not by arbitrary selection but through rigorous tests and challenges as mentioned in the Qur'an:

وَإِذْ أَبْلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ فَقَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

“Remember when Abraham was tested by his Lord with certain commandments, which he fulfilled. Allah said, “I will certainly make you into a role model for the people.”

Abraham asked, “What about my offspring?” Allah replied, “My covenant is not extended to the wrongdoers.” (The Qur'an, 2:124, Quran.com)

Therefore, it is evident that Ibrāhīm was made Imam only after passing the various tests, proving that his status as Father of the Prophets was granted to him due to his merit and complete devotion to God. The trials of Prophet Ibrāhīm mentioned in the Qur'an were designed to prove his absolute devotion and submission to God. While upholding the monotheism of God in the time of idolatry and statue-worshipping, Ibrāhīm had to confront his father and his community, which led him to being thrown into the fire. He was further tested through migration, leaving his wife and infant son in Mecca and finally with the command to sacrifice his own son.

Prophet Ibrāhīm is a living model of ethical struggle and unwavering spiritual conviction. He courageously stood for the truth in his mission to uphold monotheism, challenging false systems and inherited traditions rooted in blind following. As narrated in the Qur'an, Ibrāhīm questioned his society who were worshipping idols, calling them to reflect on their beliefs rather than blindly following their ancestors:

مَا هَذِهِ التَّمَاثِيلُ الَّتِي أَنْتُمْ لَهَا عَاكِفُونَ

“Remember when he questioned his father and his people, “What are these statues to which you are so devoted?” (The Qur'an, 21:52, Quran.com)

The life of Ibrāhīm is full of trials and immense hardship. Yet, in each instance, he demonstrated unwavering submission and obedience to Allah. One of the most profound examples is found in *Sūrah As-Ṣaffāt* where Allah commanded Ibrāhīm to sacrifice his beloved son, Ismā'īl (Ibn Kathīr, 2000). Although the Qur'an does not explicitly mention

Ismā‘īl as the son to be sacrificed, the majority of classical interpreters (*mufasssīrūn*) have interpreted him as the son mentioned. Ibrāhīm submitted to the command of Allah and was prepared to fulfil it without hesitation. His response and dedication reflected not only obedience to Allah but also deep sincerity, as he prioritised the command of God over his personal emotions.

Ibrāhīm’s obedience embodied *tawakkul*, which means trust in God in its highest form. He had faith that Allah’s wisdom is beyond human understanding. When Ibrāhīm was cast into the fire by his people for rejecting idol worship, it was this trust that saved him. Facing a situation that seemed impossible to survive, Ibrāhīm confidently declared that Allah alone is sufficient for him. Thus, Allah made the fire cool and safe for him, protecting him from harm (The Qur’an, 21:69).

Even though Ibrāhīm was deeply committed to his mission of monotheism, he still spoke to people of other religions with respect. He exemplified patience and compassion. When his own father opposed his belief, he did not respond in anger. Instead, he replied with gentleness and patience (The Qur’an, 19:43). Despite being rejected by his own father and society, he still remained patient and respectful. He embodied patience and good conduct even in disagreement, showcasing him as a model of piety and moral sincerity. In confronting his father about polytheism, his father responded to him with hostility and threats. However, Ibrāhīm still addressed his father with immense gentleness and respect while staying true to his mission of monotheism. The conversation between Ibrāhīm and his hostile father illustrates his exemplary piousness and righteousness as highlighted in the Qur’an:

وَأَذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۖ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لَا يَسْمَعُ وَلَا يُبْصِرُ وَلَا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ شَيْئًا

“And mention in the Book O Prophet, the story of Abraham. He was surely a man of truth and a prophet. Remember when he said to his father, “O dear father! Why do you worship what can neither hear nor see, nor benefit you at all?” (The Qur’an, 19:41-42, Quran.com)

The story of Ibrāhīm in the Qur’an portrays him not just as a man of belief, but as someone who lived and suffered for it, highlighting his commitment to *tawhīd* (monotheism). It is clear that the portrayal of Ibrāhīm in the Qur’an demonstrates that true devotion to God involves both conviction and character. Belief without courage and compassion is incomplete and only through moral strength and sincere conduct will faith be truly manifested. His story in the Qur’an encourages Muslims to uphold the truth with wisdom, humility, and perseverance in the face of adversity. He is not merely an ancestral figure but he is a model for spiritual resilience and ethical action in all aspects of life.

Shared Moral Values: Foundations for Unity

The stories of Abraham are numerous throughout the three scriptures. Similarities of Abraham can clearly be seen in the Tanakh, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an. Among these similarities are Abraham's high status in all three Abrahamic religions, his obedience to God, and his unwavering belief in monotheism. All three scriptures revealed the various trials he faced and his steadfastness while going through these trials.

Besides that, there are several moral values that are shared across all three faiths. These values are perseverance, hospitality, and righteousness. Firstly, throughout his life, Abraham embodied the idea that faith requires perseverance and trust, even when faced with trials and seemingly impossible situations. Abraham's perseverance is depicted in Judaism through his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as commanded by God. This was mentioned in Genesis 22:2: "Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you'" (New International Version). Meanwhile, in Christianity, Abraham's perseverance highlights how he patiently waited for a long time for the birth of his son, Isaac, as mentioned in Hebrews 6:15: "And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised" (New International Version). Similarly in Islam, the Qur'an also recounts how Abraham was raised in a society that worshipped idols and faced opposition from his community, including his own father, for his monotheistic beliefs (Shaikh, 2025):

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ عَازَرَ اتَّخِذْ أَصْنَامًا ءَالِهَةً إِنِّي أَرَاكَ وَقَوْمَكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

"And remember when Abraham said to his father, Âzar, "Do you take idols as gods? It is clear to me that you and your people are entirely misguided." (The Qur'an, 6:74, Quran.com)

Despite the opposition from the people close to him, Abraham still held on to his faith. Therefore, it is clear that Abraham's perseverance, shared across the three religions, serves as a moral exemplar in the journey of faith.

Secondly, Abraham demonstrated genuine hospitality in all three scriptures. He eagerly welcomed strangers, ran to greet them, and offered food, water, and rest, as described in Genesis 18:2–5: "Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say" (New International Version). His swift and sincere response to the unknown men reflects his strong commitment to hospitality. This value is also emphasised in Hebrews

13:2 (New International Version): “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” This verse references Abraham’s encounter with the angels, reminding believers to show hospitality to strangers. Similarly, the Qur’an also describes the story of Abraham serving the best food to his guests, who turned out to be angels sent to deliver good news to him and his wife, Sarah:

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ قَوْمٌ مُنْكَرُونَ فَرَأَى إِلَى أَهْلِهِ فَجَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ سَمِينٍ

“Has the story of Abraham’s honoured guests reached you, O Prophet? Remember when they entered his presence and greeted him with, “Peace!” He replied, “Peace be upon you!” Then he said to himself, “These people must be strangers!” Then he slipped off to his family and brought a fat roasted calf.” (The Qur’an, 51:24-26, Quran.com)

Thus, we can see that Abraham’s actions consistently highlight hospitality as a key virtue in the Tanakh, the Christian Bible, and the Qur’an.

Lastly, the value that is apparent throughout the three scriptures is righteousness. Abraham is credited to be a righteous person by God in Genesis 15:6 (New International Version): “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” This verse shows that he did not have righteousness on his own but was given the status ‘righteousness’ from God because of his faith (Dennis, 2022). This is further highlighted in Romans 4:22 (New International Version): “This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”” From this verse, Paul used Abraham’s example to show that righteousness comes through faith, reflecting that believers are considered righteous because of their faith, not because of their own merit (BibleHub, n.d.). Additionally, the Qur’an also recounts Abraham’s righteousness, giving him the nickname ‘*ḥanīf*’, which means ‘upright’:

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Indeed, Abraham was a model of excellence: devoted to Allah, ‘perfectly’ upright—not a polytheist.” (The Qur’an, 16:120, Quran.com)

In this verse, Abraham is recognised for being a pure monotheist who rejected idolatry and for his willingness to submit to God’s commands. It portrays Abraham as the model of righteousness through faith and devotion.

These three shared moral values help to unite the people of Abrahamic faiths. They serve as common ground in which individuals of each religion from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam can explore one another’s belief and discuss possible differences in interpretations as a means to gain knowledge and foster understanding among them.

No.	Key Attributes	Torah	Bible	Qur'an
1.	Perseverance under Trials	Genesis 22:2	Hebrews 6:15	Qur'an 6:74
2.	Hospitality to Strangers	Genesis 18:2-5	Hebrews 13:2	Qur'an 51:24-26
3.	Righteousness/Upright before God	Genesis 15:6	Romans 4:22	Qur'an 16:120

Table Summary of Abraham's Key Attributes

Reframing Abraham's Role: A Universal Source of Shared Values

The story of Abraham provides humanity with one of the most significant moral blueprints, with its roots in the three major Abrahamic faiths. In our increasingly plural societies, where multiple religions coexist, the shared values of Abraham transcends its religious origin. Instead, it provides a framework for a single, unified humanity. Therefore, a harmonious multireligious society is achieved not through forced uniformity, but through a shared commitment to the universal values exemplified by Abraham.

True interfaith involves both personal virtues and institutional frameworks. Abraham's shared values, such as his hospitality to strangers, his perseverance, and righteousness serve as a moral compass for each and every individual. By embodying these virtues, it creates a diverse yet united world that prioritises fundamental human values above religious differences. It creates a space where every religion can find room to thrive. The Qur'an states:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

“O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware.” (The Qur'an, 49:13, Quran.com)

Humanity is created to coexist despite their differences and to understand one another. By understanding each other and embracing diversity, humanity can foster collaborative goodness and live peacefully together.

The ongoing Israel-Gaza issue provides a tragic example of a moral crisis happening in the real world. It is a failure to uphold the basic moral values of Abraham. Despite a common Abrahamic heritage, the catastrophic loss of life and the collapse of a country represents the abandonment of the shared values of the figure that unites them.

This humanitarian crisis represents a profound moral crisis. In a land that is central to the three Abrahamic faiths, the virtues of justice and righteousness have been lost to violence. This is not a political failure, neither is it the fault of religion. It is a failure of humanity, a failure to recognise the sanctity of life and to treat each other with human dignity and respect.

For the world to truly be at peace and harmonious, it must be derived from ethical human beings. By choosing to emulate Abraham's virtues, it is the first step towards a common good. That is what interfaith truly is, looking at these foundational values that unite us all and committing to the common good. Hence, in a world where the failure of humanity prevails and material gains are prioritised, bettering the world begins with the betterment of self through these foundational shared values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Abraham stands as a powerful unifying figure across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While each faith presents its own distinct version of his story, all three religions honour his unwavering faith, trust in God, and patience through the immense trials that he faced. Recognising the shared values across these three religions, such as perseverance, hospitality, and righteousness foster a sense of common ground and mutual understanding, especially in a plural society like Singapore.

Additionally, the story of Abraham provides humanity an important moral guide, with its roots in the three major Abrahamic faiths. In a diverse and plural society like Singapore, where multiple religions coexist, the shared values of Abraham go beyond religion and offer a foundation for a united humanity. His story reminds us that virtues, such as faith, patience, and righteousness are not merely religious ideals but also universal human values that can guide us in building compassion, justice, and respect for one another. Although his life was full of trials and tribulation, he never wavered, holding steadfast to his mission. He offers a model of perseverance and resilience for humanity. We can emulate Abraham's spirit of resilience as we face our own personal challenges in life. His story sets an example of trusting the process, being patient when enduring difficulties in life and showing resilience to move forward no matter the challenge. In this day and age where humanity faces numerous crises, it is important to practise the virtue of perseverance and resilience in order to tackle the issues.

Abraham's story provides a meaningful starting point for peaceful and respectful interfaith conversations. Humanity should actively engage in dialogues across faiths to strengthen the social and religious harmony that defines our nation. His legacy reminds us that although our religious paths may differ, they often rest upon the same foundational principles. By embracing this shared moral heritage, we can forge deeper bonds and work together towards a more united, inclusive, and cohesive society.

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About Harmony Centre Singapore

The Harmony Centre was officially opened by Singapore's then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 7 October 2006. The Centre is an initiative by The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) to promote better understanding of Muslim life and culture as a response to the post-September 11 era. It addresses queries and misconceptions about Islam and the Singaporean Muslim community.

In partnership with Singapore's Ministry of Education, the Centre has become a learning hub under the national education scheme, welcoming over 76,000 visitors to date. It serves as a meeting point for various faith communities, fostering dialogue and understanding through diverse educational programmes. Notable initiatives include Faith in the Heartlands (F.A.I.T.H), the Building Bridges Series, as well as the Abdul Aleem Siddiqui Memorial Lectures. The Centre also facilitates discussions between youth and faith leaders on religious and contemporary issues, nurturing cross-community friendships and cultivating appreciation for diverse beliefs and practices.

The Centre's efforts are particularly significant in Singapore's multi-religious context, where it plays a crucial role in maintaining social harmony. By providing a platform for open dialogue and education, this approach aligns with Singapore's commitment to religious harmony, making the Harmony Centre a vital institution in the nation's ongoing efforts to maintain social cohesion in an increasingly complex global environment. It has also been consulted globally on its interfaith model and shares its experiences regularly to international visitors. The Centre's philosophy is rooted in the belief that there is a positive role of religion in societies, and that faith can contribute to human flourishing.