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Ishmael, Our Brother

By James B. Mayfield

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Through the cool night air and against the background of the first white streaks of dawn, the Muslim call to prayer would float melodiously into my Cairo apartment, stirring my imagination each morning I was awake. A splendid recitative, that call, voiced from a nearby mosque; full of artistic beauty and—particularly, of course, for Arab Muslims themselves—full of rich spiritual meaning.

The same call, at the same times of day, in the same magnificent Arabic, is to be heard throughout the Muslim world; from Indonesia through West China, through northern India and Pakistan and central Asia and Iran and Turkey, and to the great Arab area extending from the Persian Gulf and Iraq through the Near East and all along the southern Mediterranean to the shores of the Atlantic.

The Arab is vividly conscious of belonging to a living community spread across the globe, firmly located in both space and time. Not only does his religion place him in a geographic setting stretching from Singapore to Morocco, it places him in a historical setting back to Father Abraham through his son Ishmael, a history of religious faith and organized society of which he can be proud.

Most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are aware that animosity has existed between Arabs and Jews these many years. Few members of the Church, however, have had a personal association with an Arab. Who are they? What should be our relationship with the Arab people? Arab culture and religion deserve to be known with sympathy as one of the great civilizations of this world. For the sons of Ishmael are our brethren, too!

The Promises to Abraham

We in the Christian world are accustomed to think of Abraham's descendents in terms of Isaac, Jacob, and the Israelites. Many of us forget that through Abraham's first-born son—Ishmael, whose name is translated as "God heareth"—another great nation developed which has also influenced the course of history.

The scriptures suggest that at least one of the promises given to Abraham applies equally to both Ishmael and Isaac. Long before either Ishmael or Isaac was born the Lord promised Abraham: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing ... [to] all families of the earth" ([Gen. 12:2-3](#)). Although we accept a specific role for the House of Israel, in a general sense it is true that the descendents of both Ishmael and Isaac have been "great" in population and achievement, a blessing to mankind. The Lord gave Abraham a second promise: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. ... So shall thy seed be" ([Gen. 15:5](#)). Later, when Hagar conceived Ishmael, an angel echoed Abraham's promise: "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude" ([Gen. 16:10](#)).

It is interesting that the children of both Isaac and Ishmael have desired to apply the scripture given to Abraham:

"This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised" ([Gen. 17:10, 25](#)). Circumcision has been a custom of the Jews (Israelites) as well as of the Arabs (Ishmaelites) since that time.

God further promised Abraham: “And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, ... all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” ([Gen. 17:8](#)). Again, this promise has been fulfilled for both Ishmael and Isaac, since both Arabs and Jews have resided there. Indeed, the scriptures prophetically and accurately said, “And he [Ishmael] shall dwell in the presence of his brethren” ([Gen. 16:12](#)).

The Lord describes Ishmael's descendents, the Arabs, in these terms: “And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation” ([Gen. 16:12](#); [Gen. 17:20](#)).

According to the Koran, Abraham brought Ishmael and his mother to Arabia and settled them near what was to become the great city of Mecca. Eventually the descendents of Ishmael's twelve sons began to fill the Arabian peninsula. The Biblical account, though it differs in specifics, suggests also that Hagar and Ishmael were directed in their wanderings. Genesis recounts that an angel of the Lord comforted and preserved them, and that “God was with the lad [Ishmael].” (See [Gen. 21:14–20](#).)

We are familiar with the history of Jacob's twelve sons—the twelve tribes of Israel; but we are not equally familiar with the history of the twelve sons of Ishmael, a great and noble tradition that has created one of the truly great cultures of the world—the Islamic culture.

The Muslim's religion permeates his life from dawn to nightfall and from his inner chamber to his shop in the crowded marketplace, with a thoroughness that most Christians are often slow to understand. Many Westerners have secularized such large areas of their lives that they have forgotten what it is to live a life in which every activity is religiously oriented.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have reached a new threshold in the gospel's expansion throughout the world. As Africa and Asia become a part of our great missionary program, we need a new sensitivity to the history, cultures, and religions of these areas. We cannot be friends with a person or community if we disdain or ignore what that person or community most deeply cherishes. I strongly feel that we must appreciate the Arab's feeling for his language, his prophet, Muhammad, the religious duties of the Muslim, and the remarkable civilization Islam produced.

The Arabic Language

The Arab believes that Arabic is God's language and thus the most beautiful, rich, and logical of all tongues. I have watched crowds of thousands sit enraptured for three and four hours as a local poet recites Arabic verse and scripture far into the night. One scholar of the Arab personality describes the verbal sophistication that the Arab's love for his language has produced: “All those who have an opportunity to get acquainted with the speech patterns of Arabs, even of the illiterate majority in the villages and the nomadic tribes, are struck by the extraordinary mastery of language itself in the use of a rich vocabulary [and] ... a very large number of well-rounded and often quite complex phrases. Compared to the eloquence of the simplest illiterate Arab, the use of English by the average American appears as a series of disjointed grunts.” (Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*, New York: Scribner, 1973, p. 50.)

This language reaches its highest expression in the Koran. The Arab, reverently relating to it as the direct word of God, finds in the Koran his supreme experience of linguistic and oratorical perfection. Yet the non-Arab, even though he will be struck by much that is harmonious with his own scriptures and by the beauty of many passages, will find it difficult to read.

One reason is that Western readers expect a text to contain a meaning that is fully expressed and immediately understood. Eastern peoples, in general, love verbal symbolism that must be pondered and savored. The revealed phrase is for them an array of symbols from which more and more flashes of spiritual awareness come with each reading. The words are reference points for an inexhaustible doctrine; the implicit meaning is everything, and the obscurities of the literal meaning are so many veils masking the majesty of the content.

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Muhammad, the Arab Prophet

Muhammad was born in Mecca about A.D. 570. Orphaned early, he was brought up chiefly by an uncle, Abu Talib, who treated him kindly, but apparently could not provide much formal education. Muhammad was a capable and honorable young man, and is said to have been esteemed in the city as “The Trustworthy.” A wealthy widow, Khadija, some years older than he, entrusted him with the management of her business and afterwards married him. Their marriage was an ideally happy union. At first in the employ of his uncle, and later of Khadija, Muhammad led caravans to Syria and Yeman and accumulated considerable information about the religious beliefs and customs of Jews and Christians.

When about forty years of age, Muhammad, who had been spending much time in meditation and prayer in solitary places, claimed he experienced a vision in which, as he later explained, the angel Gabriel appeared and announced his prophetic call.

Muslims claim that like Jeremiah, Muhammad at first doubted his capacity to speak as a prophet. He confided in Khadija, who comfortingly reminded him that he had always led a virtuous life, spoken the truth, returned good for evil, and been kind to all; she assured him that the vision meant that he was to be the divinely appointed prophet of their people.

Throughout the remainder of his life, Muhammad frequently passed into trancelike states in which his utterances, accepted as divine revelations, were written down by scribes, and now constitute the Koran—the holy scriptures of Islam. The Muslim holy book is thus for them the climax of a long sequence of volumes of revelations granted to a long succession of prophets, beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad.

The holiest place in the holy city of Mecca is the Kaaba, where Muslims believe Abraham and Ishmael worshipped. In Muhammad’s day, the Kaaba contained an altar to the one true God of Abraham, but various pagan images and practices had also been added. During this pre-Islamic period, people from all over Arabia came in pilgrimages to worship them, engaging in alcoholic and sexual orgies, and occasionally, it is said, offering human sacrifice. These pagan customs permitted infanticide; gambling was rife; blood feuds and private vengeance constituted the justice of tribal ethics; there was no national unity; and the tribes were in frequent warfare. Muhammad saw his people as having rejected Abraham’s higher values. Judaism and Christianity, which Muhammad believed were corrupt and apostate forms of Abraham’s worship, neither won many converts nor made much headway in reforming and enlightening the inhabitants.

Muhammad tried to convert people from their idolatrous worship and low order of morality to the exclusive worship of the one true God (Allah) and to the higher plane of personal and social morality which He commanded. Allah, the Arabic word for God, is described in the Koran, chapter six, as the same God who appeared to the prophets of the Old and New Testaments: “And We gave him Isaac and Jacob. Each did We guide; and Noah did We guide before, and of his descendents, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. ... And Zacharias and John and Jesus and Elias. ... These are they to whom We gave the Book and authority and prophecy.” (*The Holy Quran*, trans. Maulana Muhammad Ali, Lahore Pakistan: Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Ishaat Islam, 1951, pp. 85–90.)

Muhammad struggled to teach charity as the basis of social relationships: “Every good act is charity. Your smiling in your brother’s face is charity: and exhortation addressed to your fellow-men to do virtuous deeds is equal to alms-giving. Putting a wanderer in the right path is charity; removing stones and thorns and other obstructions from the road is charity; giving water to the thirsty is charity.” “A man’s true wealth hereafter is the good he does in this world to his fellow-men. When he dies, people will ask, What property has he left behind him? But the angels, who examine him in the grave, will ask, What good deeds hast thou sent before thee?”

Like the apostle Paul, Muhammad recognized the existence of slavery, but unlike Paul, was able to do much to mitigate it. He forbade the separation of captive mothers, children, and brothers. He commended the freeing of slaves as an act of pity which God will reward. Muhammad also abolished

infanticide, made kindness to animals an integral part of his religion, insisted upon honest weights and measures, forbade the exaction of usury, and in other ways alleviated the condition of debtors. He forbade gambling and the use of intoxicating liquors; and if he did not succeed in freeing the Islamic world altogether from intemperance in either of these respects, he at least made such vices rarer than they had previously been in the Arab community.

Since many of his male followers lost their lives in defense of the faith, and a superfluity of women resulted, it is not surprising that Muhammad did not abolish polygamy and concubinage. On the other hand, he severely condemned and punished adultery and fornication. A man was limited to four wives. He must not show favoritism among his wives, either in affection or in material provision for them, nor could he marry more than he could decently support. He could not divorce them without serious reasons. Women could obtain legal separation from their husbands on grave grounds. Muhammad's laws of inheritance make definite provision for daughters, although not equally with sons. The strict seclusion of women and the requirement that they wear veils in the presence of men other than near relatives seem to be for the most part later customs of Muslims and not an integral part of the teaching of the Prophet himself. While neither Muhammad nor his followers gave women anything like full equality with men, they in most respects improved the position of women in Arabia.

Thus Muhammad, in the short span of twenty years, uplifted the life of an entire country, on every side. He not only persuaded all Arabia to worship only one God, but to apply their religion to every aspect of morality, law, and social organization. Muhammad found the Arabs debased and superstitious. He left them united in one faith, destined to become for a time the leaders of the world, not only in religion but in all forms of culture. No wonder that Muslims think that he was the last and greatest of the prophets and that his religion has a universal mission.

Although the Western world often calls the Islamic religion Muhammadism—implying a worship for Muhammad—the term *Muhammadism* in fact is offensive to a good Muslim. Muhammad was a man, as his contemporaries well knew and as he himself never ceased to emphasize.

But he was a good and an exceptional man. Tradition tells us that he was deeply religious, earnest in prayer, sharing all the hardships of his followers, and claiming no special privileges. He was kind and generous. When he committed a fault, he repented of it openly and more than made amends. He inspired the utmost love and devotion in his disciples, who were ready to give their lives in his cause. He was considerate of slaves, freed them when he could, and protected them by law. He was fond of children, who were always attracted to him. He treated all Muslims of all tribes as equal before God, with the result that Muslims claim that theirs is the most democratic of all religions.

The Islamic Religion

In Islam, the worship of God is purely spiritual, and the believer prays directly to him, without the use of images or pictures. An Imam leads the believer in prayer in a mosque, but is not a priest. Any layman is qualified to so serve, and the absence of a priestly class has ensured a simplicity of liturgy.



This quadrangular pattern contains a stylized script that reads, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Each worshipper memorizes the opening chapter of the Koran, the *Fatihah*, and recites it on many occasions and in much the same manner that many Christians may recite the Lord's prayer:

*Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!
The Compassionate, the merciful!
King on the day of reckoning!
Thee only do we worship, and to Thee do we cry for help.
Guide Thou us on the straight path,
The path of those to whom Thou hast been gracious;—
With whom Thou art not angry, and who do not go astray. Amen.*

The first duty of the Muslim is belief—belief in God, his unity, his revelations, his prophets, his books and angels, and the Last Day. The sense of God's oneness, at its purest, has emancipated the Muslim from all other fears and fostered strength of soul. Legality and communal consciousness may have their disadvantages, but they generate a dignity and loyalty that are characteristic Muslim virtues. Islam's faith in God has taught the oneness of believers; and class consciousness, though it may be economically real, is religiously repudiated. Hospitality is an identifying quality of Arab society. Attitudes of responsibility—to family, to community, to God—are a moral consequence of the recognition of God, all qualities recognizable and appreciated by the Latter-day Saint.

For the faithful Arab, Muhammad entered a world which had lost faith, and with it the secret of inward peace and outward order. In this world, waiting for the liberating voice of God, Muhammad had the eloquence, conviction, and intensity of an inspiring preacher; the courage, chivalry, and success of an admirable soldier. Superb in his gifts and character, he dominated his culture in his time. For the Muslim, history takes a critical turn because of him.

Yet was Muhammad a prophet? Did he receive revelation from God? Some would see Muhammad as a deceiver, others an apologist and copier of Jewish or Christian theology. Scholars have long debated what Arabian Jewry and Arabian Christianity in the seventh century were like and how much contact Muhammad had with them. If we examine the contents of the Koran, it would seem conclusive that Muhammad had no personal contact with the written Bible since the narratives appearing in the Koran differ considerably, suggesting oral transmission. There is almost nothing we could call a direct quotation from either Testament in the Koran.

Latter-day Saints, familiar with Joseph Smith's relation to the Book of Mormon, can appreciate the common belief of Islam that the Koran was revelation, not Muhammad's writing, a belief reinforced by the tradition that Muhammad was actually illiterate.

The Koran emphasizes the Day of Judgment when men will appear before God (Allah) and his angels. The righteous believer will be eternally rewarded in a heaven of beautiful rivers and springs, plenteous food, unfermented wine, and other delights appealing to desert dwellers, while the wicked will burn without being consumed. Thus a Muslim view of life after death parallels the traditional Christian view of hell and heaven. In the paradisiacal glory for those who have lived God's law, all struggles are over, all low passions of avarice, envy, rivalry, vanity, and vengeance vanished, every desire of the soul achieved.

I have found that western prejudices against Islam are often the result of misunderstood or inappropriate translations of sacred writings. Islam means "submission to Allah" and implies the revelation of God's will to which submission is made and by which perfect peace gained. It is not a passive state, but requires active striving after righteousness including absolutely rejecting idolatry (the worship of any gods other than Allah); actively propagating the faith when possible, obeying the Koran's injunctions regarding moral conduct, and conforming to the "five pillars of Islam":

1. Repeating and fully accepting the short Muslim creed included in the call to prayer—"There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet."
2. Prayer after ablution five times daily. The traditional Muslim literally kneels and prays whenever summoned by the muezzin (prayer caller), whether he is in his home, at work, or on the street. On Fridays (the Muslim Sabbath) at noon he should be in a mosque if possible.

3. Almsgiving. One-fortieth of a faithful Muslim's possessions is annually devoted to public charity and the support of religion.

4. A daily fast (no food or liquids) from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan, in commemoration of Muhammad's flight from Mecca to the city of Medina in A.D. 622. This rule is relaxed in the case of one who is sick or on a journey. Simple foods are to be taken in the evening and before daybreak.

5. At least one pilgrimage to Mecca. The pilgrimage brings together representatives from all parts of the Islamic world, promoting an interchange of experiences that has doubtless done much for the spiritual and cultural solidarity of Islam through the centuries.

Many Latter-day Saints are surprised that Islam considers Jesus to have been the greatest prophet of all time prior to Muhammad. The Koran says that Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Virgin Mary through the intervention of God, but that Jesus was not begotten by God. Like the Jewish community and some Christian groups, Muslims accept Christ as a great teacher, inspired by God, but not divine.

Orthodox Muslims do not believe God would suffer Christ, a blameless man, to be crucified; thus they believe that another was substituted for him, and that Jesus was taken up into heaven without tasting death. The Koran suggests that later followers of Christ, misunderstanding or perverting his teachings, afterward deified him and developed doctrines about the incarnation, the Trinity, and the Virgin Mary.

But for Latter-day Saints, the crucial question is: Was Muhammad a prophet of God? Are the teachings and revelations found in the Koran to be taken seriously? Anyone who reads through the Koran with patience and sensitivity will acknowledge its literary quality, its strong commitment to the traditions of the ancient prophets, its insistence that man will be held accountable for his deeds and must seek to establish a closer relationship with his God.

Yet is the Koran the "Word of God?" For some the Koran is but the creation of Muhammad's vivid imagination, scattered with partial truths discovered in the conversations he had with Christian and Jewish merchants of his time. Others point out that it has brought to the Arab people a high form of religious truth, which reflects God's concern and love for them and must not be disdained or rejected out of hand.

In [Alma 29:8](#) an American prophet of ancient times declared a most powerful message: "For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore, we see the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true."

A most powerful and direct explanation of this book lies in the "Statement of the First Presidency Regarding God's Love for All Mankind" issued 15 February 1978. In part, it reads: "The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammad, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals."

Many may reject some of the teachings of Muhammad because they seem so inconsistent with the fundamental teachings of the gospel. Yet there may be as much difference between what Muhammad taught in the seventh century and what the Islamic community teaches today as there is between what the apostles taught and what Christian churches teach today. The message of the Koran—that God is the creator and judge of man, that God spoke to prophets (through Mohammad's time), that we will be held accountable for what we do, and that everyone should seek to live in accordance with God's laws—clearly identifies it as a conveyer of moral truths with which we should be familiar.

Note the Muslim commitment to the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, found in the second chapter of the Koran: "We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between

any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.” (Koran 2:136.)

This all suggests that a careful reading of the Koran may in fact provide insights and clues, even specific references from their scriptures, in how best to communicate our message. An understanding of Islamic theology will provide a common language for sharing insights and spiritual values.

Arab Civilization

Westerners living in a period when their own civilization seemed, until recently, to dominate the world, do well to remember that it was not always so. If we go back a thousand years, we find Europe was politically feeble and intellectually barren. From the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, Baghdad and Cairo and Cordoba in Muslim Spain were the economic, intellectual, and cultural centers of the world. It was Arab civilization which produced that era’s science, mathematics, and poetry for mankind, whose merchants organized letters of credit from Africa to Finland and from the British Isles to Japan, and whose armies determined political events.

At a time when Europe was prosecuting its scientists, burning their works, and suppressing their new ideas, Muhammad’s writings were urging Muslims to go in “search for knowledge even in China.” The direct result of this admiration for learning was an indefatigable search for Greek, Persian, Egyptian, and Indian knowledge. Over and over again, the Koran discusses reading, writing, the pen, the book, and knowledge. The ink with which scientists wrote was considered the equivalent of the blood of “martyrs” and schools and universities were established throughout the Arab world.

Contributions to Medicine

Arab contributions to medicine and mathematics were particularly impressive. The “golden” period of Arab medicine came with the accession to power of the Abbasid dynasty in A.D. 750. During this period, the Arab sovereigns or caliphs invited to Baghdad all learned men in the expanding empire, including the physicians of Jundi-Shapor, a famed medical center in Persia.

Greek, Persian, and other authoritative medical works were rapidly translated into Arabic. During the reign of Caliph Al-Mamoun, 107 books of the Greek physician Galen alone were translated into Arabic and he sought Greek manuscripts throughout Byzantium. This great enthusiasm for Greek works has led some medical historians to conclude—mistakenly—that the Arab contribution was merely to preserve Greek medical knowledge, but the Arabs also added tremendous developments of their own.

Arab physicians possessed advanced knowledge—unknown to the Greeks—of the location and function of the eye muscles, of pupillary movements, of the difference between smallpox and measles, of the use of animal gut in suture, of the laryngeal nerve, of the preparation of mercurate ointment, of blood circulation, of mastectomy for cancer, of the use of forcepslike instruments in cases of difficult childbirth, and descriptions of over two hundred surgical instruments.

Throughout the universities of the Western world—Salerno, Cordoba, Seville, Montpellier, Paris, and many others—the Arab influence on medical science was great. Latin translations of their works up until the eighteenth century—five hundred years after the fall of the Islamic empire—provided the basis for Western Europe’s medical textbooks.

Contributions to Mathematics

We also owe much in the field of mathematics to Arab civilization. Because Caliph Al-Momoun set scholars to work translating all the great Greek texts into Arabic, the works of Ptolemy, Euclid, Aristotle, and many others were eventually circulated from Baghdad to Islamic universities as far away as Spain. Through these Arab universities in Spain, scientific knowledge was transferred to Europe during the Middle Ages.

In addition to translating Alexandrian, Greek, and Indian treatises, Arab scholars soon began their own contributions: “Arabic” numerals, the use of the decimal system in calculations, the development of

algebra, the relationship between algebra and geometry which forms the foundation for analytical geometry, advances in plane and spherical trigonometry, forerunners of logarithm tables, and specific solutions to various quadratic equations.

Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi wrote the most important mathematical work of his time, *Hisab al-Jabr w-al-Muqabalah* (Book of the Calculations of Restoration and Reduction) which gave the science of algebra (al-jabra) its name. From the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, it was the principal mathematical text of European universities.

In astronomy, the Arabs improved the Greek astrolabe and invented many remarkably accurate instruments which enabled them to study the stars and measure distances between celestial bodies. As a result of their studies, they established the fact that the earth is a sphere floating in space (almost 400 years before Columbus!). Furthermore, they performed a highly complicated operation to calculate the length of a terrestrial degree and used the result to determine very accurately the circumference and diameter of the earth.

They calculated the length of the stellar year, charted the positions and orbits of stars and planets, and studied the spots on the face of the sun; they knew by numerical calculations at what time the planet Mercury would cross the face of the sun, and they knew that the earth was considerably smaller than the sun. In addition, they corrected mistakes in Ptolemy's astronomical system and developed a navigational astrolabe.

In summary, it should be noted that no description of the medieval period in world history can ignore the many contributions that this Arab civilization has given to us in the fields of science, philosophy, literature, the humanities, architecture, and the arts. Much of what we praise and espouse in the European Renaissance was stimulated and broadened through contacts with Islamic civilization.

Understanding Islam

Ishmael has indeed become a "great nation," endowed with a sense of civilization for which all the Western world should be grateful. Yet in the final analysis, the great Arab contributions must be seen as a function of religion. Islam is postulated on a fundamental faith in God, a God who acts and who speaks to men through prophets and makes specific demands on them. On the human side, it postulates a fundamental worth in human nature, and an inescapable moral responsibility for every individual, who must give an accounting on the Day of Judgment—concepts certainly compatible with Latter-day Saint theology.

Muslims would, of course, be quick to admit their practice has fallen short of the high ideals taught by Muhammad—just as Latter-day Saints confess that we too have often failed to implement gospel principles in a consistent way.

In many ways Islam for the Muslim has the same kind of impact that the restored gospel has for the Latter-day Saint. Religious values and concepts are not just one part of reality but the very essence of reality. For the Muslim, religion determines the format of civilization. Insofar as economics, politics, and all other factors in their social life have meaning for the Muslim, it is derived from religion. Islam is the Muslim's orientation to life, the way in which he relates himself to his world.

There will be increasing contacts between Arabs and Latter-day Saints; but the growth of mutual understanding and respect will be discouragingly slow until we recognize the beauty and the religious foundation upon which Arab civilization is built, that the concepts of justice, purity, and human progress are an integral part of both Islam and the restored gospel, and that an awareness of the similarities—and not just the differences—is the key to an acceptance and appreciation of what we have to offer. The sons of Ishmael are indeed our brethren, too!

[photos] Color photography by James B. Mayfield, black and white by Spencer J. Palmer

[photo] Most Arabs share our modern culture, as this view of downtown Cairo, Egypt, looking across the

Nile River, attests.

[photo] The Fezzan area of the great Sahara Desert located in southern Libya.

[photo] A woman from Egypt's delta area.

[photo] Muslims bow in prayer inside a tent at Arafat, the Mountain of Mercy, in Saudi Arabia.

[photo] The caretaker of a Cairo funeral home rests in front of a beautiful, handmade Arab tapestry.

[photos] Top: Members of a village council in upper Egypt pose before a new mosque. Bottom: A group of workers harvest wheat in central Tunisia. Bottom inset: Egyptian girl.

Notes

James B. Mayfield, a professor of political science and currently a research consultant with the United States Agency for International Development, teaches Sunday School in the Cottonwood Fifth Ward, Salt Lake Cottonwood Stake.

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Eventually, Ishmael repented and made up with his brother Isaac, and when it came time to bury their father Abraham, Ishmael honored his brother by letting Isaac go first.²⁰ Ishmael and Isaac—Rational and Suprational. The mystics explain that the key difference between Isaac and Ishmael can be found in the debate the two had over circumcision. Our analysis of Ishmael wouldn't be complete without a few thoughts about the bromance (or plain ol' romance) between Ishmael and Queequeg. But that's our boy Ishmael. He's a bundle of contradictions and human fallibility and a testament to Melville's character-writing brilliance. Previous Next. Our forebears lived in a time of complicated family structures. It was not unheard of for a man to have several wives, each with several children. These women and children often go unnamed. Sarah and Hagar are different. He grew up with Ishmael as his playmate, his brother. With Hagar and Ishmael sent away and his mother dead, he was left alone. It's only after Sarah has been buried and a wife, Rebecca, is selected for Isaac that we see him again. Ishmael probably is a more interesting narrator because he is a loner by nature. This allows him further objectivity and a freedom of evaluation that more involvement might dissuade. Melville frequently employs biblical allusions as keys to understanding in the novel, and he does so here. The biblical Ishmael (Genesis 16:1-16; 21:10 ff.) is disinherited and dismissed from his home in favor of his half-brother Isaac.