

CONDITION OF THE UMMAH

PART 7

ISRA AND MI'RAJ—A FORGOTTEN GIFT

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Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (Al Isra 17:1)

While he was in the higher [part of the] horizon. Then he approached and descended And was at a distance of two bow lengths or nearer. And he revealed to His Servant what he revealed. The heart did not lie [about] what it saw. So will you dispute with him over what he saw? And he certainly saw him in another descent At the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary - Near it is the Garden of Refuge - When there covered the Lote Tree that which covered [it]. The sight [of the Prophet] did not swerve, nor did it transgress [its limit]. He certainly saw of the greatest signs of his Lord. (An Najm 53:7-18)

The journey of *Isra* and *Mi'raj* was a divine gift for Prophet Mohammed SAW. It was a miraculous journey to two destinations—Jerusalem and the heavens. Lexically, *Isra* means fast-paced walking at night and refers to Prophet Muhammed SAW's first part of the journey to Jerusalem; whereas *Mi'raj* means ascension and refers to his visitation to the heavens.

Before we attempt to understand this topic, we have to go back in time and try to understand the atmosphere and situation in which this event was occurred.

During the tenth year of revelation Rasul Allah SAW faced two major personal catastrophes. First, he SAW lost his beloved wife Khadija (RA) who was a bed rock of support and strength throughout his prophet-hood. This was soon followed by the loss of his uncle Abu Talib, the tribal chief and social protector of the Prophet SAW. With their passing, Prophet SAW lost both emotional and physical protection. The best of the creation was left with no means of support at all. To make matters worse, Makkah brutality had reached its peak and almost all the companions of the Prophet SAW were being severely tortured.

At this time, with no safety in Makkah, the Prophet SAW turned to the city of Ta'if some 70 miles south-east of Makkah. Instead of heeding to his (SAW) call of Islam, the chiefs of Ta'if put the Arab hospitality to shame and pelted the Prophet SAW out of the city. Later in his life, Rasul Allah SAW described Ta'if as the toughest day of his life. At this time of total and

utter desperation, Allah SWT called his beloved Prophet SAW on a vacation—*Isra* and *Mi'raj*!

It was a journey of support and uplifting from Allah SWT for His beloved Prophet to show him who is the doer, the controller, the provider, and the one running the show. It was a consolation to the Prophet SAW and a way to express to him SAW who he is and who is with him!

The exact date, time and year of the event are unknown. Based on various reports by the companions of the Prophet SAW, the historians place the event after the tenth year of prophet-hood also known as *Aam-al-Huzn* or year of sorrow. If its timing was of significant importance for our faith, then Allah SWT would have preserved it, but since this information is neither mentioned by Allah SWT nor the Prophet SAW. Therefore, we do not need to concern ourselves with it.

WHAT KIND OF JOURNEY WAS IT?

What was the nature of this journey? Did it take place in a state of dream when the Prophet SAW was asleep or while he was awake? Did he actually undertake a journey in the physical sense or was it only his soul which traveled while his body stayed in its place?

Scholars argue that if it was a dream then there would not be anything miraculous about it. But majority of the scholars believe Rasul Allah SAW went with both his body and soul but in the end all we can say is *Allahu 'Alam*—Allah knows best.

Qadi Iyaad al Malaki, in his commentary on Sahih Muslim says:

“The majority of the pious predecessors and later jurists, scholars of Hadith and men of learning believe the *Mi'raj* to be bodily. Four reasons are given by the scholars for this conclusion:

- Firstly, the word *'Abd* in the ayah of the *Mi'raj* refers categorically to mind and soul together.
- Secondly, all the *ahadeeth* about the *Mi'raj* actually talk about the Prophet mounting the Burraq, eating, drinking, meeting past prophets, leading them in the prayer which are all physical actions. Nowhere is it mentioned that this was a dream.
- Thirdly, if it was merely a dream, which the beloved Messenger narrated to the people of Makkah, why did they deny it? Surely, don't people see many weird or wonderful dreams?
- Fourthly, how could it have been a test of people's faith if it was a mere dream?

Narrations mention that Prophet SAW's uncle Abbas (RA) looked for him that night but was unable to find him. Umm Hani (RA) and Hasan (RA) also confirm that the journey was undertaken in both body and soul.

Another point of interest and much discussion among Muslims is whether Prophet Muhammed SAW saw Allah SWT directly or from behind a veil. We cannot make any definitive claims about it, however there are *ayaat* in the Qur'an which suggest that Rasul Allah SAW had the honor of seeing Allah SWT directly, such as

The sight [of the Prophet] did not swerve, nor did it transgress [its limit]. (An Najm 53:13)

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (RA) and Abu Huraira (RA) were among some of the companions of the Prophet SAW who believed that he SAW saw Allah SWT. Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal was also of the same opinion.

Imam Mawardi stated that Allah SWT allowed Musa (AS) to talk to Him twice and He SWT allowed Muhammed SAW to see Him twice—once at the time of *Mi'raj* and once in a dream. *Allah u A'lam.*

Following *ayaat* of the Qur'an also strengthen the opinion that Prophet SAW actually beheld Allah SWT:

Did We not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast? (Ash-Sharh 94:1)

And he revealed to His Servant what he revealed. (An Najm 53:10)

If a person goes on a trip and brings you back some gifts then what is the polite thing to do? Accept the gifts and be grateful or insist on getting the details of the journey? This was a journey undertaken by the Prophet SAW. We only know what he has informed us of and we have no right to speculate about the rest. Those who are exceptionally curious about the details of the journey should wait till they meet Rasul Allah SAW in *jannah InshaAllah* and ask him then. Until then let's occupy ourselves with what really matters!

WISDOM vs. DETAILS

Just like every object has an external layer and an internal core, every event or situation has outer details as well as inner wisdom. Logically speaking, what makes more sense—to get caught up with details or understand the wisdom of the situation? Journey of *Isra* and *Mi'raj* was a trial and a gift from Allah SWT. Allah SWT mentions it in the Qur'an in following words:

Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (Al Isra 17:1)

Beyond this, Allah SWT does not give us any particulars. All in all what we know about the journey including the events Prophet SAW witnessed are solely through his SAW's sayings, but even he himself did not go into the details about many of its attributes.

In brief, the journey of the Prophet SAW unfolded as follows:

Angles Jibreel AS took the Prophet SAW at night from the Ka'bah to the mosque in Jerusalem on an animal called Burraq. Burraq was an animal larger than a donkey but smaller than a mule. Its speed was such that its feet reached where its gaze fell. On reaching Jerusalem the Prophet SAW led all the previous Prophets in congregational prayers.

Jibreel AS then took him to the heavens and the Prophet SAW met several great Prophets in different heavenly spheres. Finally, he reached the highest point in the heavens and was graced with an experience of the Divine Presence. (Al-Nasa'i)

Even though the details of this journey are fascinating, the wisdom and lessons it contains overshadow the specifics.

VIRTUES OF THE PROPHET (SAW)

One of the most important knowledge this journey teaches us is the status of Rasul Allah SAW in the eyes of Allah SWT. If we desire Allah SWT's love and acceptance, then there is no shorter route to it than through the love and obedience of Rasul Allah SAW. The journey of *Isra* and *Mi'raj* was a special gift and a miracle from Allah SWT for His beloved Prophet SAW.

Some of the honors that Allah SWT granted the Prophet SAW on this journey are as mentioned below:

- Rasul Allah SAW had the honor of seeing Allah SWT.
- He SAW led all the prophets in congregational prayer in Jerusalem. Through this act, Allah SWT made him the leader of all the previous prophets.
- Rasul Allah SAW saw Angel Jibreel in his true form.
- Rasul Allah SAW went beyond *Sidrat-ul-Muntaha*, a place above the heavens beyond which no one has ever gone.
- Allah SWT favored Rasul Allah SAW above all other creations and granted him many special gifts as we can see from the following narration.

On the night of meeting his Lord, the Prophet SAW said:

“You have taken to Yourself Ibrahim as a friend, and You have given him an immense kingdom. You have spoken to Musa directly, and have given Dawud an immense kingdom and softened iron and subjected the mountains to him. You have given Sulayman an immense kingdom, and subjected the jinn and men and devils to him, as well as the winds, and You have given him a kingdom the like no one may have after him. You have taught `Isa the Torah and the Evangel, and made him heal

those born blind and the lepers, and raise up the dead with Your permission, and You have protected him and his mother from the cursed devil so that the devil had no path by which to harm them!

Allah said: "And I have taken you to Myself as My beloved." The narrator said: It is written in the Torah: *habibullah* "Allah's Beloved." Allah continued:

- And I have sent you for all people without exception, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner;
 - and I have expanded your breast for you
 - and relieved you of your burden
 - and exalted your name;
 - and I am not mentioned except you are mentioned with Me;
 - and I have made your Community the best Community ever brought out for the benefit of mankind;
 - and I have made your Community a mean and a middle;
 - and I have made your Community in truth the first and the last of all Communities;
 - and I have made public address (*al-khutba*) impermissible for your Community unless they first witness that you are My servant and Messenger; and I have placed certain people in your Community with Evangels for hearts (i.e. repositories of Allah's Book);
 - and I have made you the first Prophet created and the last one sent and the first one heard in My court;
 - and I have given you Seven of the Oft-Repeated which I gave to no other Prophet before you (i.e. Surat al-Fatiha);
 - and I have given you the last verses of Surat al-Baqara which constitute a treasure from under My Throne which I gave to no other Prophet before you;
 - and I have given you the Kawthar; and I have given you eight arrows (i.e. shares in good fortune): Islam, Emigration (*hijra*), Jihad, Charity (*sadaqa*), Fasting Ramadan, Ordering Good, and Forbidding Evil;
 - and the day I created the heavens and the earth I made obligatory upon you and upon your Community fifty prayers: therefore establish them, you and your Community."
- Rasul Allah SAW witnessed the realities of belief. He SAW saw the angels, the hereafter, heaven and hell—sights that no human before him SAW had ever seen.
 - Rasul Allah SAW received divine gifts for his *ummah*.

Unfortunately, today we have forgotten who our Prophet SAW is, what he SAW has done for us, and what status he SAW holds in the kingdom of Allah SWT. If we only knew to its full extent, we would not tire from sending prayers on him SAW day and night, and would follow his noble footsteps.

DIVINE GIFTS SENT DOWN THROUGH MI'RAJ

One of the direct results of this journey on the Prophet SAW was the development of unshakable trust and patience. After witnessing the strength and the ability of His Lord, how could he not trust and exercise patience? Sure the situation in Makkah was unbearable but didn't other believers before him face similar hardships and succeeded through perseverance? Hadn't Allah SWT already shown him the success of the believers as well as the fate of the disbelievers in the next life? How could he be in any other state besides being grateful? Prophet SAW also infused this spirit of patience and hope among his companions who were living under extremely difficult circumstances.

While *Isra* and *Mi'raj* was a special journey for the Prophet SAW, Allah SWT did not neglect his *ummah* and sent many blessings for us through him SAW.

SALAH

Salah was a divine gift given to this *ummah* from above the seventh heaven.

Ibn Hazm and Anas bin Malik state the Prophet SAW said,

"Allah enjoined fifty Salat (prayers) on me. When I returned with this order of Allah, I passed by Musa who asked me, 'What has Allah enjoined on your followers?'

I replied, 'He has enjoined fifty Salat (prayers) on them.'

On that Musa said to me, 'Go back to your Lord (and appeal for reduction), for your followers will not be able to bear it.'

So, I returned to my Lord and asked for some reduction, and He reduced it to half.

When I passed by Musa again and informed him about it, he once more said to me, 'Go back to your Lord, for your followers will not be able to bear it.'

So, I returned to my Lord similarly as before, and half of it was reduced.

I again passed by Musa and he said to me, 'Go back to your Lord, for your followers will not be able to bear it.'

I again returned to my Lord and He said, 'These are five (Salat-prayers) and they are all (equal to) fifty (in reward), for My Word does not change.'

I returned to Musa, he again told me to return to my Lord (for further reduction) but I said to him 'I feel shy of asking my Lord now.' (Bukhari)

Salah is the most intimate form of worship and the means of strengthening the relationship between a slave and His Master. It is also the means of prevention and purification from sins.

Allah SWT said:

Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do. (Ankabut 29:45)

Messenger of Allah SAW said, "The five daily Salat (prayers) are like a great river running by your door in which you take a bath five times a day." (Muslim)

Is there anything more important than to make each meeting between us and Allah a special event?

If we are wise, we should work on our prayers and try to perfect them as much as we can. The more we are in the *akhirah* environment, the more our hearts will have Allah SWT and the more our prayers will improve. The requirement of *salah* is *'uboodiyya*—complete submission to Allah SWT and purity from any form of *shirk*.

How can we have accepted salah when we are drowning in shirk?

Shirk is a major sin of such magnitude that Allah SWT has promised that it won't be forgiven. We can hope to receive Allah SWT's forgiveness from every other major sin except for this one. Linguistically speaking, *shirk* means to have a deity besides Allah SWT. This deity can take many forms—belief, love, fear, gratitude, belonging, hope of support and aid, mental or emotional reliance etc. All Muslims should invest some time in an in-depth study of this topic as it can lead to permanent destruction in the afterlife.

None of the Muslims will admit to committing *shirk* but the reality of their lives suggest otherwise. I once heard a scholar say that if you bring a statue to the Muslims today and ask them to prostrate to it they will say, 'Never! We will never believe in a statue!' He said, 'slice that statue in thin slices and call them dollars...the talk will change. The same statue will become the protector, insurer, provider, sustainer, and support; the one we love the most, whose loss we fear, and the one who is able to get us all things.'

What it really means is that our belief, faith and hopes heavily rely on our money. We trust in it, rely on it, feel secure of our future when we have it. Our money gives us a sense of security, assurance and insurance. We believe that it will take care of us in the future and will make us happy. In reality, all these feelings are supposed to be for Allah SWT only. This is why the reality of the matter is usually the opposite; the more people accumulate, the more they are unhappy. They worry about their money; they worry about protecting it, investing it, and saving it. All this worry generates misery, uncertainty and anxiety. This is

why when people lose their money, they lose their happiness, hopes and dreams because their feelings were misplaced to begin with.

When we have less money, we worry. When we have more, we are content and worry free.

If this is not shirk, then what is?

In fact, this is not even a minor form of *shirk*, it is a major *shirk*!

Anything that takes precedence in our lives above Allah SWT becomes a form of *shirk*. Loving someone too much to the point we are preoccupied with them more than Allah SWT is a form of *shirk*. Just like that fearing someone, something or a condition more than Allah is also *shirk*!

Allah SWT is *Ad-Daar* and *An-Nafi'*—the one who causes calamities and the one who lifts them up.

If after this we worry about condition then who do we really believe in?

When a condition comes, it is for Allah SWT to check our heart and see where it will go. Will it be occupied with the condition or will it be busy with asking Allah for support to deal with the condition.

This is the greatest lesson we can learn from this journey—*'uboodiyya*.

FINAL VERSES OF SURAH AL-BAQARAH

"To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Whether you show what is within yourselves or conceal it, Allah will bring you to account for it. Then He will forgive whom He wills and punish whom He wills, and Allah is over all things competent.

The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], "We make no distinction between any of His messengers." And they say, "We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination."

Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned. "Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us. You are our protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people." (Al Baqarah 2: 284—286).

These verses illustrate the dominion of Allah SWT over all things as well as attest to His mercy. They give us courage that our souls will not be charged beyond our capabilities.

Therefore, trials and difficulties are not meant to hurt us, instead to make us stronger believers.

The verses end with a beautiful supplication and a reminder that we are weak and will always be in need of Allah SWT's forgiveness and assistance.

FORGIVENESS

Allah SWT promised to forgive the sins of believers, even if they are major sins, as long as they do not commit *shirk*. The promise of forgiveness is directly dependent on purity of faith or complete slavery.

THE GREATEST LESSON—'UBOODIYYA

Allah SWT started Surah Isra with the following words

Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (Al Isra 17:1)

Allah SWT started the verse by praising Himself with the word '*subhan*', the one who is free from any and all forms of imperfection. This Perfect Deity invited his servant on a miraculous journey. Allah SWT could have called Rasul Allah SAW by any of his titles or names but He SWT chose to call him a servant since servitude or slavery is the highest level a believer can attain in this world. Allah SWT ended the verse with reminding us of His qualities of 'hearing' and 'seeing'.

The message is clear and simple:

Be a slave to me and I will watch over all your affairs!

If I am truly a slave I will be content with whatever my Master does. If He gives me, *alhamdulillah*, if He takes from me, *alhamdulillah*. This is the reality of the claim that we make during each *salah*:

It is You we worship and You we ask for help. (Al Fatihah 1:5)

The purpose of any condition, trial or difficulty is for Allah SWT to check what is in our heart. Allah SWT wants to see where our hearts will be, whether we will be occupied with the condition or will we be busy asking Allah SWT for support to deal with the condition.

This is precisely the reason why Rasul Allah SAW went for *Isra* and *Mi'raj*! A lesson for him and his *ummah* that they should never go anywhere else looking for answers, except to Allah SWT!

What is it that we do nowadays? In time of need, we go everywhere and ask everyone instead of turning to Allah SWT.

Allah SWT is showing us many different signs all around us. He SWT shows that he can take all our money and destroy all we have in no time and yet we are continuously absorbed in accumulating more? We are worried about all the things that will never benefit us and the ONLY ONE who can benefit us is nowhere in our scheme of things. It is as if Allah SWT is no longer the beneficent, instead money is the beneficent, *astaghfirullah*.

If we truly believe that Allah SWT is the beneficent it will not bother us whether the wealth increases or decreases or whether we lose our job, spouse, children, and social status. If our foundation of slavery is solid, then nothing can shake us up.

Allah SWT knows we are weak, that we have temptations and desires, that we forget and slip, He knows it all. He has already promised to forgive our shortcomings; all He wants from us is to believe in Him and above all only seek His support. He wants our hearts to genuinely belong to Him alone.

Today we perform all the outwardly rituals but sadly our hearts do not belong to Him SWT. The greatest gift of *'uboodiyya* granted to this *ummah* has become its greatest challenge!

WE ALL NEED ISRA AND MI'RAJ

The Muslim *Ummah* is going through severe trials and tribulations. Still, we are not facing even a fraction of the difficulties that the Prophet SAW and his companions faced in Makkah at the time *Isra* and *Mi'raj* took place.

It was a journey of surrender, awe, hope, mercy and belief! It came at a time when the Prophet SAW had nothing left and all his means were severed. It was a gift to the slave who refused to turn to anyone except to his Lord SWT.

Today we all need *Isra* and *Mi'raj*; a spiritual journey back to our Lord. We need to cut off our hearts from all external support and rely only on our Lord—the doer and controller of all things! The one who can transport His Prophet in one night from Makkah to Jerusalem and to the heavens and back, can He not take care of our wants and needs? Who else can be a better caretaker than the one who created us? But why would He take care of us if we believe in everyone and everything else more than Him SWT?

If we celebrate Isra and Mi'raj but do not honor the gifts Allah SWT gave us then what is the value?

If we do not have a spiritual journey between us and Allah—our very own Isra and Mi'raj, then what is the point of its celebration?

What would we gain from it?

We are worrying about the tree not bearing fruit while the roots are diseased! We are occupied with the rituals of Islam which are the fruits while our hearts are ill. We need to reconnect ourselves to the Qur'an as it was revealed and let it heal our hearts.

A FEW ADVICES

- Spend at least an hour every night between you and Allah SWT.
 - Read Qur'an.
 - Read the sayings of the Prophet SAW (*ahadeeth*).
 - Remember Allah SWT in abundance (*dhikr*).
 - Remember His names.
 - Read books on *iman* and *yaqeen* especially Invocation of God and Men and Universe by Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya. Read them repeatedly until the message inculcates in your heart and then live the message to the maximum of your ability.
- Read all the *surahs* of the Qur'an that start with the names of the Prophets and Messengers. They were all revealed in the duration of a year during the hardest time in Prophet SAW's life when all the means were cut off from him.
- Read Surah Al-An'am over and over again. We cannot be real believers unless we understand this *surah*. It was revealed in Makkah during the early years of prophethood and contains all the pillars of faith. It provides clear understanding of the message and reinvigorates the belief.
- Make a spiritual *Isra* and *Mi'raj* to Allah SWT and learn to rely on Him SWT in all your affairs.
- Ask Allah SWT for *tawfeeq* (ability) to live and die in the state of slavery to Him.

Remember, Allah SWT is one and His *sunnah* is one which never changes. Slavery is the way to success according to Him SWT. If we try to find a way other than the way of Allah SWT, we will never succeed. May Allah SWT give us true belief, reliance, comprehension, wisdom, light and good ending. May Allah SWT allow us to truly celebrate and live the miraculous journey of our Prophet SAW through our actions, manners, and belief. *Ameen*.