

Good News

...And give good news to those who do good (to others) - HQ22:37

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The Significance Underlying the *Mi'raj* (Ascension) of the Prophet Muhammad (s¹)

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In exploring what the Prophet Muhammad (s) experienced on the night famously known as his *Mi'raj*, we need to approach the subject with reference to the Holy Quran first before examining authentic *hadith* (reports of the Prophet) of the event.

First we have to bear in mind that the Holy Quran does not read like a novel with a consequential narrative about events. Nor is it a history book or a book of biographical accounts of personalities. So we will not find a chapter or a section of a chapter that gives the full details of the entire event of the *Mi'raj* of Muhammad (s) as it occurred on that blessed night. What we do find are references of the most important aspects pertaining to the *Mi'raj* in two Makkan chapters namely chapter

17, The Children of Israel, and chapter 53, The Star. From verses in these two chapters we will gain a very good insight on what the Prophet experienced on that majestic night of *Mi'raj* that will set us on a sure and firm footing on how to interpret the narrative that we come across in *hadith*.

Before we go into the specifics of the *Mi'raj*, we must bear in mind that this event took place in the early days of Islam when Muslims were severely persecuted. The *Mi'raj* was therefore an injection of great hope and a prophetic assurance of the eventual success of Muhammad's divinely ordained mission to bring to perfection the Universal Divine Code of Peace (Islam²) in the world.

1. THE HOLY QURAN

Chapter 17:1, the Children of Israel:

Glory to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque (*Masjid ul Haram*) to the Remote Mosque (*Masjid ul Aqsa*),

¹ *Sallal lahu alyhi wassalaam* - Peace and Blessings of God be Upon Him

² From *salm* which means Peace, the Faith of all Messengers of God since the beginning of time

whose precincts We blessed, that
We might show him of Our signs!
Surely He is the Hearing, the
Seeing.

Despite differences of opinion of what happened that night, most scholars agree that this verse refers to the *Mi'raj* or the Ascension of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). However, reference to Masjidul Aqsa (the Remote Mosque) in Jerusalem, here, is something to ponder about because there was no Masjidul Aqsa as we know it today at the time of this revelation. There was only a rock where the second Caliph, Hazrat Umar, built a small mosque nearby for about three thousand worshippers several years after the death of the Holy Prophet. The Mosque was rebuilt and expanded by the Umayyad caliph Abd al Malik and finished by his son al Walid in 705 A.D. However, it is the opinion of the majority of scholars that this was the spot from where the Holy Prophet ascended into heaven.

Mention of Masjid ul Aqsa which did not exist at the time, thus points to a prophecy of the spread of Islam to that region i.e. Jerusalem, the territory that was famous for many prophets including Jesus the last prophet from the Israelite dispensation. We also learn from reports in *hadith* that this was the spot where the Holy Prophet saw himself leading the

prayers of all previous prophets that had passed on. So the connection between Masjid ul Haram in Makka and the remote mosque in Jerusalem is an indication that the prophetic advent of Muhammad (s) an offspring of the prophet Ishmael, the son of the prophet Abraham was an extension of the prophetic dispensation of the 'House of Abraham' and not separate and apart from it. Although hard for the Jews and Christians to accept, the great world Prophet alluded to in their scriptures was chosen by Almighty God from among the Arabs, an illiterate (*ummi*) people from a remote corner of the Arabian Desert.

Muhammad's mission was to bring Faith to perfection and invite all communities including those from among the House of Israel to Islam, the original faith of all the prophets. All of this was clearly shown to the Prophet on the night of *Mi'raj* when he was down and out with only a few followers. The Holy Quran makes it clear that the event took place...

'that We might show him of Our signs!' - 17:1

The question is how were these 'signs' shown to the Prophet? The Holy Quran answers this question in the same chapter:

And We made not **the vision (ru'ya)** which We **showed thee** but a trial for men -17:60

Ru'ya is a vision or a true dream which a person can experience when still wide awake or in a state of sleep. These visions or dreams can happen with such clarity that they are often mistaken for a physical reality. Whilst ordinary people can sporadically experience such visions or dreams, the prophets were gifted with these experiences on a regular basis. The Holy Quran itself mentions the true dreams of even unbelievers such as the king and fellow prisoners in the story of the prophet Joseph (chapter 12). The lean and fat cows that appeared in the dream of the king, and the birds that ate from the head of a fellow prisoner as depicted in his dream were all so real, but after the dreams these images were gone. But no one doubted the dreams which came true according to the interpretations put on them by the prophet Joseph. So the **ru'yah**, vision that was shown to the Prophet Muhammad (s) on the night of his *mi'raj*, was of such a real nature that many mistakenly took it to be a physical experience. In fact the doubtful Arabs mocked the Prophet and accused him of fabricating tales. So further on in the same chapter 17 we find evidence of this mockery and his response to it:

And they say: We will by no means believe in thee, till thou cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us, - 17:90

Or thou have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which thou cause rivers to flow forth abundantly, -17:91

Or thou cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces, as thou thinkest, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us), - 17:92

Or thou have a house of gold, or thou **ascend** into heaven. And we will not believe in thy **ascending** till thou bring down to us a book we can read...

(NOTE: The Prophet is then commanded by Almighty God to respond to them as follows)

'... **Say:** Glory to my Lord! am I aught but a **mortal messenger?**' – 17:93

The words 'mortal messenger' negate any physical ascension by the Prophet (s).

Chapter 53, The Star:

This chapter makes it even clearer that the entire experience of the Prophet Muhammad on the night of *Mi'raj* was indeed a very deep spiritual experience, unfathomable to the mind of the ordinary man. The Holy Quran refers to this as follows:

'**And he is in the highest part of the horizon.**' – 53:7

By the highest part of the horizon means there will not be a place on earth where Muhammad's teachings will not reach. Eventually Islam and Islamic principles will prevail over most other teachings, philosophies and religions. Already most Western nations have adopted Islamic principles as contained in the Holy Quran without even being aware of it; for example laws relating to freedom of religion, divorce laws, laws pertaining to self-defence, economics, and democratic governance.

The Holy Quran continues:

Then he drew near, drew nearer yet, - 53:8

So he was the measure of two bows or closer still. – 53:9

So He revealed to His servant what He revealed. – 53:10

The heart was not untrue in seeing what he saw – 53:11

Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw? – 53:12

And certainly he saw Him in another descent, - 53:13

It is clear from these verses that the Prophet (s) had experienced something very special. It was no doubt of the highest spiritual order possible for a human being. The fact that the Holy Quran talks about the **heart** and not the 'eyes'

that saw tells us again that it was a deep spiritual experience that the Prophet (s) underwent. The heart is the 'third eye' or 'sixth sense' of the soul, with which we see **visions and dreams**. We know we cannot see God with the physical eyes. When Moses asked to see God the mountain trembled. So by '**he saw Him**', the Holy Quran is telling us that the Prophet experienced the presence of Allah by palpably witnessing of His most wonderful signs that transcends the limits of this physical creation on that majestic night of the *Mi'raj*.

The next verse makes it clear that this majesty of the Almighty was shown to him in a space open only to those who are able to reach the highest spiritual rank from amongst His servants:

At the farthest lote-tree (*sidratil muntaha*) – 53:14

Sidra, in Arabia, is the description of a lote-tree where people stop to rest in its shade. It is also a place where communities traditionally gather to set up a new order and select their leaders. In a parable, it is also referred to as a tree of shade in paradise elsewhere in the Holy Quran.

Here, however, it is used, metaphorically, for that space where the Prophet (s) was given Divine favours and donned the crown of the Universal Spiritual Leader of a new World Order of Peace (Islam), the religion of all the

Messengers of God. To qualify for this noble task, he was given insight into the deepest secrets of the Divine Being and the Creation. This deep, endless knowledge is referred to above in the Holy Quran as *muntaha* – i.e. knowledge that stretches far beyond the limitations of science and the intellect of the ordinary human mind and transcends the threshold set by the Divine where even the angels cannot go. Thus the Holy Quran concludes the subject:

Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord -53:18

2. THE HADITH ACCOUNT OF THE MI'RAJ:

In what state was the Prophet (s) when the *Mi'raj* occurred?

... I was in a state of between that of one sleeping and one awake –
(Bukhari 59:6)

In another *Hadith* it is stated:

And such are the Prophets **their eyes sleep but their hearts do not sleep**, then *Jibreel* accompanied him and carried him to heaven. –
(B. 61:24)...

and in yet another *Hadith* it is recorded:

And he awoke and he was in the Sacred Mosque. – (B. 98:37)

These *hadith* indicate that the prophet was experiencing a vision (*ru'ya*) as stipulated in the Holy Quran whilst half awake or asleep and thus the entire experience cannot be taken literally and has to be interpreted on the same lines as the Prophet Joseph did (see chapter 12 of the Holy Quran).

In brief the gist of the Prophet's experience as described by him in Bukhari runs as follows:

I was asleep in *Hateem* (the Ka'bah) when the roof of the house opened and Gabriel descended in the company of a few other angels. First of all they led me to *Zam Zam* (a fountain in Mecca) and opened my chest there, took out my heart and washed it with the water of *Zam Zam*. Thereafter a tray full of *Imaan* (belief) and wisdom was brought and Gabriel took *Imaan and* wisdom from the tray and placed it in my chest and closed it. After that an animal called, *Buraaq* was brought. It ran at great speed so that each of its steps was touching the horizon. Riding on this, *Buraaq*, we first came to Masjid al-Aqsa and offered two *raka'at* (postures) of prayers and thereafter we set out on a journey

through the skies to heaven in the company of Gabriel. We met Adam on the first sky. There I was shown two rivers and on my asking, Gabriel told me that these were Euphrates and Nile. We met Prophet Joseph on the second, Idrees on the third and John and Jesus on the fourth, Haroon on the fifth, Moses on the sixth and Abraham on the seventh sky. Then we passed through the garden where I saw a river on which palaces having domes of pearls and grounds of musk were built; then we reached a place where the sound of the pen of the Creator could be heard and from there we proceeded to *Sadratul Muntaha* (the regions of knowledge which go beyond normal human comprehension) and then Allah drew nearer to me so that the distance was reduced to the extent of two ends of a bow, even lesser. Then I was given three gifts (1) the last verses of *Surah Baqarah* (chapter 2, the Cow) (2) good news of Allah's Mercy and that Allah will forgive all except those who set up equals with him, and (3) saying of prayers fifty times a day was enjoined.

I met Moses on my way back ...

Then follows the dialogue between Moses and the Holy Prophet and the ultimate reduction of the prayer times to five. On his way back he returned to Masjid al-Aqsa where all the prophets of the past had assembled and followed him in prayer. He finally awoke in the vicinity of the Masjidul Haram in Mecca.

To make any sense of this narration we need to give plausible interpretations of the allegory, symbolism, metaphors that we come across in the narrative. Therefore:

1. Gabriel's opening the Prophet's chest, washing his heart and placing 'faith' and 'wisdom' in it, is an indication that the Holy Prophet's heart had been cleansed of all low forms of wickedness, corruption, superstitions, prejudices, and narrow-mindedness. He was then gifted with divine wisdom and unbending faith, characteristics he portrayed throughout his lifetime.
2. The Holy Prophet's travelling on the speedy, winged white horse named *buraq* is an indication that his mission will spread with great speed, and history bears testimony that Islam, against overwhelming odds, spread far and wide in a very short time in comparison with other Abrahamic faiths. Despite the obvious phase of moral and

spiritual decay most present-day Muslim nations are experiencing, Islam is still the fastest growing religion in the world. It is thus interesting to note that the word *buraq* comes from the root word *barq* which means ‘lightning’ or simply an ‘electronic’ wave. The Arabs did not know what an electronic wave was and measured speed by instruments such as speedy horses. Today we know that electronic waves are responsible for the transmission of messages, images and sounds across the world in split seconds. By these electrons taking the shape of a horse ridden by the Holy Prophet in his *Mi'raj* means that he will teach humanity how to bring their animal passions under control so that their mastery over the forces of nature will become a useful tool in the advancement of civilization and not a destructive force. Today, man's enormous technological strides have brought with it many benefits as well as much misery caused by his unbridled lust for power. This seems to be the order of the day as foreseen by the Prophet and thus beckoned the pressing need for a practical, moral code driven by rationality and not

blind dogma that would ensure world peace prevails. And this was the mission of the prophet Muhammad (s) and his righteous followers, which was vividly shown to him on the night of the *Mi'raj* at a time in his life when everything seemed hopeless.

3. Rising to the skies through different heavenly dimensions and meeting the prophets of the past, each at a different stage of an ongoing spiritual journey, and leading them in prayer, indicates the prophet's role as the seal of a chain of prophets and the one to bring the Divine Plan of Peace, which started with the prophet Adam, to perfection.
4. By showing the Nile and Euphrates to the Holy Prophet it was prophesied that Islam will become acceptable to the peoples of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Jerusalem in the near future. And this is exactly what happened after the defeat of the powerful Byzantine forces that threatened to annihilate the Muslims by military force.
5. When Moses was shown to the Holy Prophet in a weeping condition, complaining about the moral decline of his followers steeped in materialism and

neglecting their prayers substituting it with superficial rituals, there is a warning for the Muslim nation not to go the same route; or it could have served as a prophesy of a similar fate befalling the Muslims who had turned to materialism and plunged into a state of religious apathy.

6. The Holy Prophet's 'hearing the pen of the Creator' near the farthest lote-tree is a prophecy of the spread of the knowledge and learning that the revelation of the Holy Quran and the scripting of a new World Order known as Islam, will bring. The pen and the pursuit of knowledge features prominently in the teachings of Islam from the very beginning. The first revelation to the Prophet was:

Read in the name of thy
Lord Who creates –
Creates man from a clot,
Read and Thy Lord is most
Generous,
Who taught by the **pen** –
96:1-4

This revelation created a thirst for knowledge in the hearts of the Muslims at a time when Europe was wallowing in what historians refer to as the Dark Ages. This renewed thirst for knowledge

eventually triggered the Renaissance in Europe. By using the symbolism of a tree is very appropriate because the teachings of Islam on various aspects of life, physical, moral and spiritual, are intertwined with each other in a very orderly manner just as the roots, branches, and leaves of a tree are related to each other.

7. Shedding of the light and bringing the garden of the heavens nearer to the Holy Prophet is an indication of God's mercy on the Prophet and a promise that the period of hardships was to come to an end soon.
8. The three gifts received by the Holy Prophet also have a great significance:
- a. **PRAYER:** The daily prayers have been called the *Mi'raj* of the Believer because through prayer one draws closer to God. Predominant features of the Muslim prayer is the prostration which generates a feeling of utmost humility and closeness to the Creator.
 - b. **MERCY and FORGIVENESS:** The Divine promise of mercy

and forgiveness to all except those who set up equals with God is in fact the cornerstone of the Islamic doctrine of the 'Unity of God'. The wisdom of this unity of God is now dawning on many Christian thinkers of the West as well.

c. THE LAST VERSES OF SURAH BAQARAH, CHAPTER 2, THE COW:

The last verse of this section of the Holy Quran contains the following prayer:

'Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. For it, is that which it earns (of good), and against it that which it works (of evil). Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us! And grant us protection! And have mercy on us! Thou art our Patron, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people.' – 2:286

In this section of the Holy Quran it is hinted that the triumph of the Muslims would not be due to political supremacy but in the excellence and breadth of its universal principles of peace, freedom and justice for all that are appealing to all humankind.

Thus the narrative of the 'Mi'raj' of the Prophet (s) with the use of parables and metaphor carries a great message of hope for suffering humanity. Hardly a few years had passed after the *Mi'raj* before the prophecies and promises contained in it started coming true, one after the other, and the opponents of Islam, in spite of all the might at their command, were startled and defeated at the hands of a few humble helpless sufferers.

Thus the promise of Almighty God was fulfilled.



We strongly condemn all acts of aggression and terror including all violations of basic human rights specifically those carried out in the name of Religion or State!

The Good News

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