



“ASCENSION [MIRAJ] OF THE HOLY PROPHET (PBUH)”

Syed Nasir Ahmad

Glory to him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Mosque, whose precincts We blessed, that We might show him of our signs! Surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (The Holy Quran, 17:1)

By the star when it sets! Your companion errs not, nor does he deviate. Nor does he speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed - One Mighty in power has taught him, The Lord of Strength. So he attained to perfection, And he is in the highest part of the horizon. Then he drew near, drew nearer yet, So he was the measure of two bows or closer still. So He revealed to His servant what He revealed. The heart was not untrue in seeing what he saw. Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw? And certainly he saw Him in another descent, At the farthest lote-tree. Near it is the Garden of Abode. When that which covers covered the lote-tree; The eye turned not aside, nor did it exceed the limit. Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord. (The Holy Quran, 53:1-18)

I have just read to you the English translation of verses from the chapters The Israelites and The Star, relating to the spiritual experience of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, also known as the Mi'raj or Ascension. The words the heart was not untrue in seeing what he saw. Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw are quite significant and are a clear indication that the Ascension of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, was spiritual.

Keeping aside the issue of whether the Ascension was with the body or in spirit, it is more important to consider and evaluate the grand objectives attached to it. It mainly manifests the height of spiritual eminence to which the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was raised, a position not attained by any prophet in the past and never to be attained by anyone in the future till the end of this world. It is not only a manifestation of the extreme love and close relationship of Almighty Allah for our beloved Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, but it also raised him to the highest pinnacle of eminence and honour which could possibly be imagined by the human mind.

During this Grand Journey, the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, visited the seven heavens and then had an audience with Almighty Allah, where even Angel Gabriel dared not step in. This was in a way a most gracious gesture on the part of Almighty Allah, showing His love and affection in such magnanimity to the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, granting him a position unique among the comity of prophets.

The most important point in this journey was the Holy Prophet's, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, close contact with the Divine Being and having direct conversation with Him. The question may arise whether a human being can see Almighty Allah with his physical eyes. Here I want to refer to the conversation that took place between Prophet Moses, may peace be on him, and Almighty Allah, when Prophet Moses insisted on seeing Him. Verse 142 of the chapter The Elevated Places, records the conversation in the following words:

And when Moses came at our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said: My Lord, show me Thyself so that I may look at Thee. He said: Thou canst not see Me; but look at the mountain; if it remains firm in its

place, then wilt thou see Me. So when his Lord manifested His glory to the mountain, he made it crumble and Moses fell down in a swoon. Then when he recovered, he said: Glory be to Thee! I turn to Thee, and I am the first of the believers.

Evidently the human eye cannot bear even one glimpse of the Divine Glory. How was it possible for the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, to witness the full glory of the Almighty Allah on that Grand Journey? Here I want to sight an example. The human eye cannot see the sun with its brilliance and burning light. If it is reflected through a mirror, then the naked eye can see it. So in cases where the human eye cannot see a thing directly, it can see it through a medium that can show it in a reflective manner. In the case of seeing Almighty Allah and His Glory, kashaf (vision) serves as a medium through which a man can see Him with his spiritual eye. That is why in verse 60 of the chapter The Israelites, Allah says regarding the Ascension:

And We made not the vision which We showed thee but a trial for men.

The state of dream that is a common experience, is quite different from that of a kashaf. In a dream one acts and feels just as one does in the physical world, but he experiences it while asleep. In kashaf one has the same experience while he is awake. In both cases the nature of the experience is spiritual. In a state of kashaf, one sees divine manifestation and things relating to the other world with one's spiritual sight - a faculty granted by Allah to prophets and saints.

The Companions (rta) believed him and asked details about the Mosque. At that moment, the whole of the Aqsa Mosque was shown to the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, in a vision and he answered the questions to the satisfaction of the opponents. The unbelievers thought that the Holy Prophet, peace be on him, was replying from his memory, but, in fact, the whole of the Aqsa Mosque was before him in a state of kashaf. Modern technology can easily explain this phenomenon.

Discoveries in modern science have entirely changed our concept of nature and how it works. Here I refer to an interesting book entitled *Honest to God* written by an enlightened Christian priest. He had requested his Christian audience to take note of modern discoveries and to view certain terms and terminology of religion in a new perspective. New discoveries of science have entirely changed its concept. Now heaven is not what we see above and where we believe God sits and issues orders to the angels and where hell and paradise are situated. Above us is just a vacuum in between different planets in the solar system that has no end. That is why the late President of Russia, Mr. Khrushchev, on firing the first space shuttle, Sputnik, into space, sarcastically said that there was no god in the heaven. It is not surprising that the Quran has used the word *samawaat* that means many heavens, and not one heaven. So, the religion of Islam has no fear from new scientific discoveries.

Last year, Ferozsons, a well known publisher of Lahore, Pakistan, published a book entitled *Quran and Insaan*. The author of the book has compiled verses of the Quran in such a beautiful way that one gets a complete Quranic view of a particular subject. In his Introduction, the author, Safder Hassan Siddique, made the following comments about the Urdu translation of the Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali:

"Translation of the Quranic verses has been taken from the translation of the Holy Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali, because it is, to a large extent, literal and not an interpretation. For this reason, it expresses the Divine Will in a far better way in the Urdu language." (p. 41)

While commenting on verse 1 of chapter 17, The Israelites, in relation to the Mi'raj, the author has made the following comments:

"Ascension of the Holy Prophet was not with his body but his soul. The Ascension took place while his heart was awake. Man's material body is finite but his soul is infinite." (p. 135)

Next I want to quote what The Urdu Encyclopaedia of Islam, published by the University of Punjab, Lahore, says on Mi'raj. Bear in mind that it is based on what the Encyclopaedia of Islam, published by the University of Punjab, Lahore, says on Mi'raj. It should be borne in mind that it is based on the Encyclopaedia of Islam, published from Leiden, Holland.

"Araja is the root word of Mi'raj. Its literal meaning is ladder and in terminology it means height and spiritual perfection. In particular, this word applies to attaining nearness to Allah.... The chapter of the Quran, The Israelites, starts with the words Glory to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Mosque.... It relates the heavenly journey of the Holy Prophet. This verse has been interpreted in different ways, but this heavenly journey has been regarded as mere ru'ya or vision.... The term applies to the event of the Mi'raj that took place immediately after the cessation of extreme social boycott by the Quraish and the ending of three years confinement of the Holy Prophet and his devoted followers to Abu Talib.... Syed Sulaiman Nadvi has concluded from verse 17 of the chapter The Israelites, that it referred to the command to migrate (to Medina) or the prophecy regarding it.... Regarding the seeing of Allah, Abu Zarr relates on the authority of the Holy Prophet: 'He, Allah, is the Light, how can I see Him?' Hazrat Aisha, wife of the Holy Prophet, has also inferred from the Holy Quran that human eye cannot see the Benign God.... Reference to the obligatory prayers in connection with the Mi'raj is of utmost importance. That is why in some of the traditions, prayer has been regarded as the Mi'raj of believers.... We also find the additional words in the narration of Malik ibn Sa'sa that at the time of setting off (on a journey), he, the Holy Prophet, was in a state between sleep and wakefulness and he was lying in the Holy Ka'bah.... Some of the Arabic books regarding Mi'raj were translated into Latin during the thirteenth century of the Christian era. The Italian poet, Dante, based his well known poem, The Divine Comedy, on ideas borrowed from these books and described his visit to Paradise and hell.... Whatever fanciful accounts have been stated by non-Muslim writers about Mi'raj are conspicuous by their ridiculous superficiality. They have greatly exaggerated the different versions found in Islamic traditions about the details of the event and in their own way have regarded it as scholarly criticism but which can only be regarded as prejudicial."

Let me make it clear at this point that the Ahmadiyya interpretation always gives utmost importance to the Holy Quran. Then comes Bukhari if it supports the Quran, and then Muslim and then other books of Hadith.

You have already seen in the quotation from the Urdu Encyclopaedia of Islam that the Holy Quran regards the heavenly journey of Mi'raj as having taken place in the state of ru'ya or vision. Bukhari states that the Angel Gabriel came on another night when the heart of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, saw and his eyes slept but his heart did not sleep. Such are the prophets, their eyes sleep, but their hearts do not sleep. Gabriel accompanied him and carried him to heaven (Bukhari, 61:24). The concluding words of another hadith that speaks of the Mi'raj are: And he (the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) awoke and he was in the Sacred Mosque (Bukhari, 98:37). In still another hadith, the words describing the condition in which the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was at the time of ascension are : While I was in a state between that of one sleeping and one awake (Bukhari, 59:6).

Maulana Muhammad Ali was right when he said the following about the significance of Mi'raj:

"It is quite true that the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was not asleep but was in a state of vision when Mi'raj took place. The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was actually carried to the Holy Presence and he was shown great wonders, but it was with the spiritual eye that he saw those wonders, not in body and with the physical eye, for things spiritual can only be seen with the spiritual eye. In fact, the vision had an important significance. He saw it at a time when his condition was, to human seeming, of utmost helplessness, and he was shown a great future ahead of him. But his opponents, as usual, did not believe in such visions and laughed at him."

Similarly, another Ahmadi scholar and commentator of the Quran, the late Dr. Basharat Ahmad, has given a beautiful explanation of various scenes shown in that wonderful vision with reference to authentic books on interpretation of dreams.

For instance, when one sees in a vision that he is riding a burraq, it means that he will attain great honour. He will acquire honour during the journey. He will return to the place from which he left with honour. So, it referred to the migration of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, from Mecca to Madina. It also meant that to whichever place he goes, he will be greatly honoured and he will return to it with even greater honour. So it happened with the conquest of Mecca.

Brothers and Sisters, Mi'raj or Ascension of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, must be interpreted as referring to the eminence which the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was to achieve and to the greatness to which Islam was to reach. It is a matter of the greatest honour that we are the followers of that greatest of prophets of Allah, Hazrat Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

On this auspicious and blessed day we all should pray to Allah that He may enable us to act upon the sunnah of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, in building our character, in being just and equitable in our conduct and behaviour with others, in fulfilling our obligations and in safeguarding the rights of others.

May Allah grant us His blessings and forgiveness for enriching our lives here on earth and in the hereafter.

Amen.