

Reflections on the Isrā' and Mi'rāj

What follows is a summary of two lectures delivered by Sayyidī al-Ḥabīb `Umar bin Hafīz (may Allāh preserve him and benefit us by him) on the the Isrā' (Night Journey) and Mi'rāj (Ascension). There are some additions for extra clarity.

We are approaching the night on which the Islamic world traditionally celebrates the Isrā' (Night Journey) and Mi'rāj (Ascension) of our Prophet, the Chosen One (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). The Isrā' and Mi'rāj was a great sign and an immense miracle which Allah gave to the Master of the people of the heavens and the earth, to demonstrate his superiority over mankind, jinn-kind, angels and the whole of creation. There are great lessons in the events that took place and a means of increasing in belief and certitude. The scholars say that the best night in relation to the Ummah as a whole was the night on which the Prophet was born, whereas the best night in relation to the Prophet himself was the night of the Isrā' and Mi'rāj.

Prior to this night the Prophet had displayed great patience in the face of hardship and it is one of Allah's wisdoms that He bestows His gifts accompanied with hardships. Allah says: ***They encountered suffering and adversity and were shaken such that the Messenger and those of faith who were with him said: "When will Allah's assistance come?" Truly Allah's assistance is always near.***¹ At the end of his life, the Messenger of Allah said that the worst treatment that he received from the disbelievers was the violent rejection that he received from the people of al-Ṭā'if. Most of the scholars of the Sīrah say that the Isrā' and Mi'rāj took place shortly after this, a year prior to the Hijrah on the 27th night of the month of Rajab.²

The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) saw some of the events of the Isrā' and Mi'rāj in his dreams as a preparation for them before the events actually occurred. Some people claim that all the events of the Isrā' and Mi'rāj took place in a dream state but this is not the case: the Prophet experienced them with his body and soul. Had the Isrā' been merely something the Prophet experienced in his dream, the disbelievers of Quraysh would not have had difficulty accepting it. They would not have asked: "How can you have travelled to Jerusalem last night and be with us in Makkah this morning?"

Allāh says: ***Transcendent is the One Who caused His slave to travel by night from al-Masjid al-Ḥarām to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā.***³ Allāh tends to express His transcendence before mentioning a great affair which is beyond what people are accustomed to.

When Allāh wished to speak to Sayyidunā Mūsā, He told him to wait thirty days and then a further ten days: ***We appointed for Musa thirty nights and we completed (the period) with ten more.***⁴ Allāh, however, did not tell His Beloved to wait. Rather His order came suddenly, without any warning. The Prophet's chest was split open and his heart was washed and filled with knowledge and forbearance. The Burāq was then brought to him. Allāh could have caused him to travel without the

¹ Al-Baqarah, 2:214

² In the Islamic calendar the night precedes the day, so what is meant is the night before the 27th day

³ Al-Isrā' 17:1

⁴ Al-A'rāf, 7:142

Burāq, but it was a means of honouring and ennobling him. Jibrīl said to the Burāq after some initial obstinacy: “Are you not ashamed, O Burāq? By Allāh, no one more noble in the sight of Allāh has ever ridden you!”

The Prophet stopped in a number of places on the Isrā’ to emphasise the importance of visiting the places in which Allah bestowed His bounties upon His pious slaves. He was ordered to seek to draw close to Allah by praying near the tree where Allah spoke to Mūsā, by praying at Mount Tūr, where Allah gave revelation to Mūsā, and at Bayt Laḥm, where Īsā was born. The whole earth was made a place of prayer and prostration for the Prophet so what was the significance of him praying in those places if it was not seeking blessings (*tabarruk*) and spiritual assistance from them? It is also narrated in Saḥīḥ Muslim that he visited the grave of Mūsā and witnessed him praying in his grave.

While on his journey, someone called him on his right side but he did not respond. Jibrīl informed him that this was the caller of the Jews, and had he responded, his Ummah would have followed the way of the Jews. Then someone called him on his left side and once again he did not respond. Jibrīl informed him that this was the caller of the Christians, and had he responded, his Ummah would have followed the way of the Christians. Thus, in spite of all the efforts of the Christians to convert people to Christianity, the Ummah remains in Allāh’s care and protection.

He was called a third time, and once again he did not respond. Jibrīl informed him that it was the *dunyā* or the material world calling him, and had he responded, his Ummah would have chosen this life over the next. The *dunyā* then appeared to him in the form of an old woman. Jibrīl informed him that all that remained of the life of this world before the Day of Judgement is like the time this old woman had left to live. We witness all the wars and struggles that take place and in reality this life is like an old woman on the verge of death and ahead of us is the next life! May Allāh give us the best of endings! Due to the Prophet’s refusal to respond to the callings of the *dunyā*, there remain to this day people who know its worthlessness.

The Messenger of Allāh (may Allāh bless him and grant him peace) led the Prophets in prayer in al-Masjid al-Aqṣā. Jibrīl informed him that the soul of every prophet sent by Allāh from the time of Ādam to the time of Īsā was brought to pray behind him so that they would come to know the station of their master, Muḥammad.

The Prophet then ascended from heaven to heaven. The angels in the heavens had been informed that he would come and it was their opportunity to be honoured by meeting him just as his Companions had that honour on the earth. In the Prophet’s meeting with his father Ādam and the other Prophets in the various heavens there is a lesson. In spite of the Prophet’s superiority over them, he was still ordered to greet them. There was no-one less in need of anyone else than him but he met them and displayed great etiquette and manifested his slave-hood to his Lord.

Among the things he witnessed was those who turned down freshly cooked meat and chose to eat putrid rotting meat. He was told that this was like those who leave that which is lawful and choose that which is unlawful. He saw people’s heads being smashed with rocks. As soon as their heads were smashed they would be restored and then smashed again and so on. He was told these were the people who were too lazy to pray the obligatory prayer.

When Allāh spoke to him, He said: “I have taken you as My beloved and I have expanded your heart and raised high the esteem in which you are held so that whenever I am mentioned you are mentioned with Me. I made your nation the best of nations and I made them the last and the first on the Day of Judgement. I made you the first prophet to be created and the last to be sent.” Allāh thus spoke gently to His Beloved and reminded him of His blessings upon him. He said things to Him which only He knows.

He made fifty prayers compulsory on his nation. This was eventually reduced to five with the reward of fifty. Are those who are unable to perform the five not ashamed of their Lord? What would they have done if it was fifty prayers they had to perform? Allāh made five prayers compulsory upon His slaves, in which there is the opportunity to converse with Allāh and draw close to Him. “The closest the slave is to his Lord is when he is in prostration.”

He remained firm while witnessing all the things that he witnessed: ***His vision did not stray, nor did it go wrong⁵; His heart did not lie about what it saw, for truly did he see, of the signs of his Lord, the greatest.⁶***

All of this took place in a few instants. So little time had elapsed that the place where he had been sleeping was still warm. All of these are amazing examples of divine power. We are so accustomed to the pattern of cause and effect and the laws of creation that we tend to forget the presence of divine power in everything. In reality the things which we regard to be normal are miraculous – our sitting and standing, our eating and drinking. Allah says: ***Do you see the water which you drink? Did you bring it down from the clouds or did We?***

May Allah bestow prayers upon the one who made this awesome journey and may He resurrect us with him. Make us among those who are truthful in their following of him. Do not deprive us of the vision of him in this life, the Barzakh and the next life. Allow us to see the face of the one whom You allowed to see Your countenance so that we are ready to see Your countenance in the abode of Your pleasure.

⁵ *Al-Najm*, 53:17-18

⁶ *Al-Najm*, 53:11