

## *Israa' and Mi'raj: Everlasting Lessons*

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- **Israa'**: Was the prophet's trip from Makkah to al-Aqsa Masjid, Jerusalem, Palestine.
- **Mi'raj**: Was the Prophet's journey from al-Aqsa Masjid to Heavens.

There are many important and significant lessons to be learned from the Night Journey of the Prophet [*peace be upon him*] and His ascension to the Heavens. Amongst these lessons are the followings:

*The first most important lesson that we are to learn from Isra' and Mi'raj is concerning al-Aqsa Mosque.*

Al-Isra' was a land-to-land journey that Allâh Almighty caused His Prophet [*peace be upon him*] to make from Allâh's sacred House in Makkah to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Palestine. In other words, it was al-Aqsa mosque to which the journey of Israa' was reached.

Al-Mi'raj was a land-to-heaven journey from al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, Palestine, to the heavens. In other words, it was al-Aqsa mosque from which the journey of Mir'aj started. Accordingly, we should meditate;

Why was the journey of Isra' from Allah's sacred Mosque to al-Aqsa Mosque? Why did the journey of Mir'aj start from al-Aqsa Mosque? Why was al-Aqsa Mosque the main destination of both al-Isra' and al-Mir'aj? Why did the journey of Isra' and Mir'aj not take place from Allah's sacred Mosque to the heaven directly?

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*Firstly, the journey of Israa' and Mir'aj was an indication for the unity of the message of all Allah's prophets and messengers.*

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The message of all the prophets and messengers is one and the same. They urged the people of their time to obey and worship Allah alone. Whenever the teachings of a prophet were distorted by people, Allah sent another prophet to bring human beings back to the Straight Path. The chain of Prophethood began with Adam, included Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Jesus, and ended with Muhammad [*peace be upon him*], as the final messenger of Allah to mankind. The verses of the Holy Qur'an talked about Allah's Prophets as brothers. There was no division between the essential teachings of all Prophets. Islam is the same message which all the prophets and messengers of Almighty God came with.

### *The belief in the prophets of Allah*

Muslims believe in all the prophets and messengers of Almighty God, as this is one of the six pillars of faith in our religion:

*[The messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers; they all believe in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers; We make no difference between any of His messengers; and they say: We hear and obey, our Lord! grant us Your forgiveness Lord; to You we shall all return] [Q: 2:285].*

*Continuity of the Message of the Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him]:*

The message that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him] is Islam in its comprehensive, complete and final form. Islam in essence is the same message and guidance that Allah revealed to all His previous Messengers;

*[Say: We believe in Allah and that which was revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit] [Q: 3-83].*

Consequently it is a major sin in Islam to disbelieve in any of the prophets of Allah: from Adam to Muhammad [peace be upon him].

*The concept of the unity of Prophethood:*

The religion of all Allah's prophets and messengers is described as one. The message of each one of them is composed of two elements: Aqeedah and Shari'ah. With regards to Aqeedah, all Allah's prophets called people to believe in One God, Allah i.e. to devote worship sincerely to Him Alone (Monotheism). It is not logic to say that Allah sent a messenger to call people to Trinity [i.e.; to believe that Allah is the third of the three], and after a while He Himself sent another messenger to call people to monotheism [i.e.; to believe that Allah is One and Only One]. All issues of Aqeedah are issues of knowledge. They are unchangeable. Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him] said: *[The prophets are like brothers from one father; their mothers are different but their religion is one] [Bukhari, 3443].*

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With regards to laws, each of them had his own given law that was amenable and apt for a particular time and for a specific community to run their lives accordingly. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

***[To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way] [Q: 5:48].***

***Secondly, the journey of Israa' and Mir'aj was an indication for the unity of all sacred places that established on the earth.***

The first house of worship established for mankind was that at Makkah, i.e., the Holy Mosque; the Ka'bah. Allah has chosen the Holy Mosque in Makkah to be the Qiblah for the people of Adam, Nuh, and others.

Muslims believe that the Ka'aba, constructed of stone blocks, was originally built by Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmail.

Many believe it was erected on the original site of a sanctuary established by the first Prophet, Adam.

Allah says that which translates as:

***[Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Bakkah [i.e., Makkah], blessed and guidance for the worlds]. (Q: 3: 96).***

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It was *Ibrahim* and his son *Isma'il* [*peace be upon them both*] who re-built *al-Ka'bah*, Allah says that which translates as:

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*[And [mention] when Ibrahim was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Isma'il, [saying]: 'Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing]. (Q; 2:127).*

Al-Aqsa Mosque is the second mosque to be built on earth for the worship of Allah after the Ka'bah. It is reported by Al Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Dharr that he said, "*O Allah's Messenger! Which mosque was built first?*" He replied, "*The Sacred Mosque*". I asked, "*Which (was built) next?*" He replied, "*Al-Aqsa Mosque*". I asked, "*What was the period in between them?*" He replied, "*Forty (years)*", He then added, "*Wherever the time for the prayer comes upon you, perform the prayer, for all the earth is a place of worshipping for you*".

As for who built Al-Aqsa mosque, there is a disagreement among historians over that issue. Some say it was built by Adam [*peace be upon him*]. Others say it was built by Abraham [*peace be upon him*]. Ibn Taymiyah said: "The Aqsa was built at the time of Ibrahim and Sulayman extended it. Therefore, each of the three holy mosques was built by Prophets in order to pray in with their people." Apparently, it was built by Yaqub Ibn Ishaq Ibn Ibrahim [*peace be upon him*] and Allah knows Best. As for Sulaiman's [*peace be upon him*] building of the Aqsa mosque, it was only a rebuilding and rehabilitation, not laying the foundation, as there were more than forty years between Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Sulaiman [*peace be upon him*] and it is certain that Ibrahim [*peace be upon him*] built the Holy Mosque in Mekkah and there were forty years between it and Al Aqsa mosque as narrated in the sound Hadith cited above.

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In this regard, there is an important point that we are to concentrate on in discussing Isra' and Mi'raj: When Prophet Muhammad *[peace be upon him]* was in Makkah and also for about seventeen months after his Hijrah to Madinah, he and his followers used to pray towards the direction of Al-Aqsa Mosque. This was to establish in the minds of Muslims the link between the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and other Prophets of Allah *[peace be upon them all]*. When this principle was established in their minds then Allah ordered Muslims to turn to the Ka`bah and pray towards its direction.

*Thirdly, the journey of Israa' and Mir'aj was an indication for the unity of all human civilizations:*

All Divine messages aim at elevating human beings financially, scientifically, artistically, and socially as well as spiritually and morally. The Quran says,

*"We have bestowed blessings on Adam's children and guided them by land and sea. We have provided them with good and pure things and exalted them above many of our creatures." [Q: 17-70]*

In Surat Al Baqarah, Allah proclaimed a great event to the Angels saying, *[I am going to place a khalifah on the earth]]*. *[Q: 2-30]*.

So he created Adam foreknowing that he was destined to inhabit the earth. Allah imparted to Adam knowledge of all the names of all classes of beings and objects, animate and inanimate. With Adam *[peace be upon him]*, the first human civilization began. Afterwards, this civilization continued with the descent of every divine message.

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It is significant that Prophet Muhammad's mission was not like the missions of the previous prophets. Each of all the other prophets [*peace be upon them all*] was sent to his own people, while Prophet Muhammad [*peace be upon him*] was sent to all mankind [and jinn]. He [*peace be upon him*] was sent as a mercy to the worlds at all times. This was a sign of the eternity and internationality of His message [*peace be upon him*].

Thus, His birth in Makkah, in which the Holy Mosque is located, and His going to the Aqsa Mosque, the land of Prophets, from which came Prophets Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and Jesus were an indication that leadership of the world had moved to the new international message; Islam.

### *Islam, A World Civilization*

*[Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that you may be witnesses upon mankind." (Q: 2:143)]*

### *General Characteristics of Islamic Civilization*

Islam was destined to become a world religion and to create a civilization which stretched from one end of the globe to the other. Already during the early Muslim caliphates, first the Arabs, then the Persians and later the Turks set about to create classical Islamic civilization. Later, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, both Africa and India became great centers of Islamic civilization and soon thereafter Muslim kingdoms were established in the Malay-Indonesian world while Chinese Muslims flourished throughout China.

***Global religion***

Islam is a religion for all people from whatever race or background they might be. That is why Islamic civilization is based on a unity which stands completely against any racial or ethnic discrimination. Such major racial and ethnic groups as the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Africans, Indians, Chinese and Malays in addition to numerous smaller units embraced Islam and contributed to the building of Islamic civilization. Moreover, Islam was not opposed to learning from the earlier civilizations and incorporating their science, learning, and culture into its own world view, as long as they did not oppose the principles of Islam. Each ethnic and racial group which embraced Islam made its contribution to the one Islamic civilization to which everyone belonged. The sense of brotherhood and sisterhood was so much emphasized that it overcame all local attachments to a particular tribe, race, or language; all of which became subservient to the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of Islam. The global civilization thus created by Islam permitted people of diverse ethnic backgrounds to work together in cultivating various arts and sciences. Although the civilization was profoundly Islamic, even non-Muslim "people of the book" participated in the intellectual activity whose fruits belonged to everyone. The scientific climate was reminiscent of the present situation in America where scientists and men and women of learning from all over the world are active in the advancement of knowledge which belongs to everyone. The global civilization created by Islam also succeeded in activating the mind and thought of the people who entered its fold. As a result of Islam, the nomadic Arabs became torch-bearers of science and learning. The Persians who had created a great civilization before the rise of Islam nevertheless produced much more science and learning in the Islamic period than before.



The same can be said of the Turks and other peoples who embraced Islam. The religion of Islam was itself responsible not only for the creation of a world civilization in which people of many different ethnic backgrounds participated, but it played a central role in developing intellectual and cultural life on a scale not seen before. For some eight hundred years Arabic remained the major intellectual and scientific language of the world. During the centuries following the rise of Islam, Muslim dynasties ruling in various parts of the Islamic world bore witness to the flowering of Islamic culture and thought. In fact this tradition of intellectual activity was eclipsed only at the beginning of modern times as a result of the weakening of faith among Muslims combined with external domination. And today this activity has begun anew in many parts of the Islamic world now that the Muslims have regained their political independence.

Allah has made the community of Prophet Muhammad [*peace be upon him*] the best community, and blessed them with the best Book, and made them the median nation in all aspects.

John Alden Williams (editor), *ISLAM*, George Braziller, New York, 1962, inside dust cover: "Islam is much more than a formal religion: it is an integral way of life. In many ways it is a more determining factor in the experience of its followers than any other world religion. The Muslim ("One who submits") lives face to face with God at all times and will introduce no separation between his life and his religion, his politics and his faith. With its strong emphasis on the brotherhood of men cooperating to fulfill the will of God, Islam has become one of the most influential religions in the world today."

Sarojini Naidu, Lectures on "The Ideals of Islam", see *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu*, Madras, 1918, p. 167: "Sense of justice is one of the most wonderful ideals of Islam, because as I

read in the Qur'an I find those dynamic principles of life, not mystic but practical ethics for the daily conduct of life suited to the whole world."

**The second most important lesson that we are to learn from Isra' and Mi'raj is concerning as-Salâh.**

It is known that Salâh was ordained on that great night. It is because of the great importance of Salâh that Allâh Almighty ordained it in heaven. He Almighty sent for His Messenger to mankind [*peace be upon him*] and caused him to go on a night journey and ascend to heaven and the Lote Tree to inform him [*peace be upon him*] of the ordinance of Salâh.

Mind that all other ordinances were decreed on the earth. This indicates how important Salâh is in Islam. It symbolizes ascension to heaven; it is the Muslim's spiritual ascension to heaven.

Thus, Salâh is the gift that the Prophet [*peace be upon him*] brought with Him from that journey to all Muslims so that they can worship Allâh Almighty through it.

Salâh had to do with Al-Aqsa Mosque. Al-Aqsa Mosque was the first *Qiblah* in Islam. If it is true that Isra' took place in the tenth year of the Prophet's mission, this would mean that the Muslims' *Qiblah* in Salâh was towards Al-Aqsa Mosque for three years before the Hijrah to Madinah and 16 months after it.

Then Almighty Allâh decreed that the *Qiblah* be changed towards the Sacred Mosque. Allâh Almighty says: [\[So turn Your face toward the Haram Mosque, and you \(O Muslims\), where so ever you may be, turn your faces when you pray toward it\]. \[Q: 2-143\]](#)

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When the *Qiblah* was changed, the Jews raised doubts about that. Allâh Almighty says: [The foolish of the people will say: What has turned them from the Qiblah which they formerly observed?] [Q: 2-142].

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The Jews spread rumours that the Muslims' Salâh [to the first *Qiblah*] was invalid and so would not be rewarded. Allâh Almighty refuted their claims as He, most High, says: [And We appointed the Qiblah which you formerly observed only that We might know him who follows the Messenger from him who turns on his heels. In truth it was a hard (test) save for those whom Allâh guided. But it was not Allâh's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allâh is full of pity, Merciful toward mankind] [Q: 2-143]. According to this verse, [your faith] refers to Salâh, as Salâh is a symbol of one's faith.

To sum up, Salâh is the spiritual means through which Muslims can ascend to their Lord. If the Prophet [*peace be upon him*] ascended to heaven (once), we, brothers and sisters, could spiritually ascend to there as much as we can through Salâh.

Allâh Almighty says in a *qudsi* [divine] hadith: [I have divided the Salâh into two halves between Me and My servant, and My servant will receive what he asks. When the servant says, 'Praise be to Allâh, the Lord of the universe,' Allâh the Most High says, 'My servant has praised Me.' And when he (the servant) says, 'The Most Compassionate, the Merciful,' Allâh the Most High says, 'My servant has lauded Me.' And when he (the servant) says, 'Master of the Day of judgment,' He Almighty remarks, 'My servant has glorified Me.' And when he (the worshiper) says, 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we ask help,' He Almighty says, 'This is between Me and My

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*servant, and My servant will receive what he asks for.' Then, when he (the worshiper) says, 'Guide us to the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not 'the path' of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray,' He (Allâh Almighty) says, 'This is for My servant, and My servant will receive what he asks for.'*