

Lailat-ul-Mi'raj

SYED ASHRAF ALI

THE Holy Quran states: "Glory to Allah Who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, Whose precincts We did bless, -- in order that We might show Him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things)."

-Sura Bani Israil-1
The journey mentioned above is generally supposed to refer to the Glorious Ascension (Mi'raj) of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), testifying so eloquently to the divine eminence which He (peace be upon him) was to achieve and to the unsurpassable greatness to which Islam was to rise.

It was on a Monday on the 27th of Rajab (though other dates, e.g 17th of Baitul Mukaddas, are also given), one year and five months before the emigration to the holy Madinah that the holy Prophet (pbuh), the Ashraf among the Ashraful Makhluqat, was first transported through a unique Night Journey from the Holy Makkah to the seat of the earliest revelations in Jerusalem, and then taken through the seven Heavens, even to the Sublime Throne, and blessed with the unique opportunity to meet the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Rabbul Alamin.

On that auspicious Night of Ascension the Apostle of Allah (pbuh), was at Makkah in the house of his cousin Hazrat Ummahani, sister of Hazrat Ali Murtaza (R.A). Having said his night prayers the holy Prophet (pbuh) was asleep with closed eyes but a wakeful Qalb. It was the angel Gabriel (Hazrat Jibrayeel Alaihessalam) who roused him from sleep and said: "Allah Tala Jalalahoo sends you greetings and He invites you, and I have come to take you to Him. Allah desires to show the Wonders and to dignify you in a manner as He has not done with anybody else before. No one ever heard this nor could anybody ever conceive of it in his mind."

Accompanied by Gabriel, the holy Prophet (pbuh) went to the Holy Ka'aba, performed the circuit of Ka'aba (Tawaf) seven times and sat for a while in the Hatim of Ka'aba. Mounted on Borak, the holy Prophet (pbuh) was then carried to Masjid-ul-Aqsa (Baitul Mukaddas) in Jerusalem. (It is sometimes claimed that on his way to Baitul Mukaddas, he alighted at Madinah and Mount Sinai, and offered prayers at these places).

At Masjid-ul-Aqsa, a huge gathering of angels received the holy Prophet (pbuh) with the ovation: "Salam be on you, O the First (Ha Awwalo), Salam be on you, O the Last (Ya Akhiro), Salam be on you, O the Saviour (Ya Hashiro)." The Apostle of Allah (pbuh) objected that the terms were applicable to Allah alone. But the angels explained that the holy Prophet (pbuh) was the first because Benign Providence created his Noor before anything else was created, he was the Last because he had come to the world as the last Prophet, he was the Saviour because only his intercession (Shafaait) as the Saviour of sinners would be accepted by the Almighty on the Day of Judgement.

The holy Prophet (pbuh) then led a two rakat prayer in Masjid-ul-Aqsa in which all the one lac and twenty-four thousand prophets participated -- a unique gathering indeed!

The Apostle of Allah (pbuh) then set out for the Heavens which has so clearly been testified to in Sura Talak: "It is Allah who has created the Seven Heavens and as many Earths." (65:12)

As the holy Prophet (pbuh) passed through various Heavens, he met a good number of Prophets and were also shown "Allah's Signs" in various shapes and forms.

Nabi Karim Sallallahu Alaihe Wa Sallam met Prophet Adam in the first Heaven, Prophets Isa and Yahya in the second Heaven, Prophets Yusuf, Dawood and Sulaiman in the third, Prophet Musa, Bibi Mariam and Asiya in the fourth, Prophets Ibrahim, Ismail, Yaqub and Loot in the fifth, Prophets Nooh and Idris in the sixth and Prophet Ibrahim (peace be on all the prophets) once again in the seventh Heaven. It is claimed that beside other innumerable signs of Allah, the holy Prophet (pbuh) had also the unique privilege to see with his own eyes Bahrun Naqam, the Great Sea the waves of which wrought the deluge inundating the whole world at the time of Prophet Nooh Alaihissallam. He also had the proud and unique distinction of seeing during his lifetime Hazrat Azrail Alaihissallam (in the fourth Heaven), Hazrat Michayeel (AS) with the Great Scale (Mizan) and Bahre Akhzar (in the sixth heaven) and Hazrat Israfil (AS)

with his Great Horn (Soor) (in the seventh Heaven).

In the seventh Heaven, the holy Prophet (pbuh) went to the mosque Baitul Ma'moor and led a two rakat prayer in which participated all the angels of the seven Heavens. Baitul Ma'moor has been mentioned in the Holy Quran in Sura Toor, and it is claimed that all the angels of the seven Heavens congregate on Fridays in this mosque to offer Jum'u'a prayers.

As the holy Prophet (pbuh) advanced further, he reached Sidratul Muntaha, the glorious Lote-tree which has been specifically mentioned in the Holy Quran. Sura Najm states:

"Near Sidratul-Muntaha beyond which none may pass: near it is the Garden of Abode (Mawa). Behold, the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable). (His) Sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong! For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest." (53: 15-18)

It is indeed remarkable that even at this stage where the spiritual knowledge of man could reach no higher, the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) remained unperturbed. The Sufis interpret the Lote-tree in Islam to be what the Burning Bush in the valley of Tuwa was to Moses. Only, in the case of Moses it was but a prefigurement of the divine effulgence on this earth: in the case of Muhammad (peace be upon him) it was the divine glory in Heaven itself.

"Glory to Allah Who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, Whose precincts We did bless, -- in order that We might show Him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things)."

-Sura Bani Israil-1

and it was "shrouded in mystery unspeakable." This was indeed "The Greatest of the Signs of the Lord."

Rasulullah (pbuh) advanced further and reached Hijabe Zarbaft where Jibrayeel Alaihissallam informed him that he was unable to proceed any further. According to Tafsir Ruhooh Bayan, how-ever, Hazrat Jibrayeel halted at Sidratul Muntaha.

The Apostle of Allah (pbuh) then passed through many a screen of Noor and Zulomat and ultimately passed across Arsh and reached, in the light of Sura Najm, "the highest part of the horizon." "Then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer." (53:7-9)

"Two bow-shots (counting 100 to 150 yards to a bow shot)" says Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his world-renowned Commentary on the Holy Quran, "would be a clearly visible distance. But Sufi Mysticism would interpret "two drawn bows with their chords touching," making a complete circle of union."

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had indeed seen the Greatest Signs of Allah. According to Tirmidhi, the holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "I saw my Rab with my eyes and Qalb." According to the Mishkat, the Apostle of Allah (pbuh) said: "I saw my Rab in His best appearance. I was ended with knowledge of whatever is in the Heavens and on the Earths."

The holy Prophet (pbuh) then visited Jannat (the Paradise) and Jahannam (the Hell) and returned to Makkah. Opinion, however differs whether the return journey was also on the Borak.

In the following morning the holy Prophet (pbuh) described his Glorious Journey to Hazrat Ummahani (R.A). He went to the Mosque and told those whom he met there of his Journey to Jerusalem. When informed of it Abu Jehl not only disbelieved it but taunted and jeered at the holy Prophet (pbuh).

His enemies were immediately triumphant, for they now felt they had an irrefutable cause for mockery. In the words of Martin Lings, "Every child of Quraysh knew that a caravan takes a month to go from Makkah to Syria and a month to return. And now Muhammad claimed to have gone there and back in one night. A group of men went to Abu Bakr and said: "What thinkest thou now of thy friend? He telleth us he went last night to Jerusalem and prayed there and then returned to Makkah." "If so he saith," said Abu Bakr, "then it is true. And where is the wonder of it? He telleth me that tidings come to him from Heaven during in one hour of the day or night, and I know him to be speaking the truth. And that is beyond what ye cavil at."

The holy Prophet (pbuh) described the Mi'raj in detail to Abu Bakr (RA) and said: "O Abu Bakr, you believe in every detail of my narration." Without the slightest hesitation Abu Bakr (RA) affirmed: "Hazrat, I do believe. If Allah can send Jibrayeel thousand of times to Earth, He can also take you to the Heavens."

It was for this unshakable faith that Abu Bakr (RA) earned the epithet as -- Siddiq, which means 'the great witness of truth' or 'the great confirmer of the truth.'

The Holy Quran testifies: "One who (Prophet) brings the truth and he who believes therein, is he who fears Allah." The Holy Quran further states: "Who is more sinful than he who utters a lie concerning Allah and denies the Truth when it comes unto him?"

Some of those who had found the story incredible began to have second thoughts, for the holy Prophet (pbuh) described the caravans he had undertaken on the way home and said where they were and about when they might be expected to arrive in Makkah; and each arrived as predicted, and the details were as he had described. To those in the Mosque he spoke only of his Journey to Jerusalem, but when he was alone with Abu Bakr (RA) and others of his companions he told them of his Ascent through the Seven Heavens, telling them a part of what he had seen, with more to be recounted

later over the years, often in answer to questions."

The Glorious Incident occasioned heat and debate amongst people holding that it was a Vision or a Spiritual Dream or that the soul (Rooh) went on the journey but the body lay on the bed. But the holy Prophet's (pbuh) best companions and most of the Muslims during his period believed earnestly that the Glorious Ascension to the Heavens was definitely in person and not a Vision. The detailed description of Mi'raj testifying to the physical flight of the Apostle of Allah (pbuh) had been narrated by at least twenty-six Sahabis and Sahabiyas including great personalities like Hazrats Abu Bakr Siddique, Umar Faruq, Ali-al-Murtaza, Abdullah Ibn Abbas, Kulsam bint Rasululllah, Belal Habshi and Abu Zar Gifari (peace be on them). In fact, the majority of commentators take the Glorious Night Journey literally but some of them allow that there were also other occasions on which Spiritual Journey or Vision occurred. Even on the conclusion of a miraculous bodily Journey, which is certainly possible if and when the Almighty desires, it is conceded by some that the body was transformed into a spiritual fineness.

Of those who believed in the Spiritual Ascension were Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqua and Mu'awiah (RA). The opponents claim that according to Hazrat Ayesha Shiddiqua (RA) the sacred body of the holy Prophet did not disappear on the auspicious Night of Ascension. Hazrat Mua'wiah opined that it was a dream. But eminent commentators point out that Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqua (RA) was of tender age at the time which made it difficult for her to grasp or conceive of the uncommon incident, and that Hazrat Mu'awiah did not accept the faith of Islam at the time of holy Mi'raj. It is also to be noted that Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqua (RA) and Hazrat Mua'wiah (RA) expressed their own views and interpretations but they did not cite any saying of the holy Prophet (pbuh) in support of their views. What is more, had it been a vision of a journey in dream only, it would not be opposed or refuted so vehemently by the non-believers. The consensus of the non-believers that such an incident could not happen in reality testifies to the fact that the holy Prophet (pbuh) did not describe it as a mere Vision or a Journey in dream.

Even according to the report of Sharik, the angel came to the holy Prophet (pbuh) "on another night when his heart saw (things) and his eyes slept but his heart did not sleep ... and he awoke and he was in the Sacred Mosque (Bukhari, Kitab-ul-Taahid)." In another report the Apostle of Allah (pbuh) was "in a state between that of one sleeping and one awake." None of these reports claims that the holy

Prophet was totally asleep or in a dream. Besides, the word abd (servant) occurring in the Holy Quran in the passage from Sura Bani Israil referred to above confirms the view accepted by the majority that the holy Prophet (pbuh) undertook the Journey in person with his soul. Had it been a Journey of Soul only, instead of the word abd the Almighty would have perhaps used expressions like be roohe abdih (soul of His servant). The Arabic word abd definitely signifies a person with a soul.

Lastly, the Apostle of Allah (pbuh) said two-rakat Namaz in Baitul Mukaddas and Vitr prayers near Arsh in the Seventh Heaven. Those who support Physical Ascension very rightly claim that Salat in normal form cannot but be said by a human being in person.

The holy Prophet (pbuh) completed the entire Journey, comprising the unique Audience with the Creator, Visits to the Heavens and Hells, offering of Salat at various places on Earth and in the Heavens, brief discussions with numerous Prophets, in an incredibly short period. No wonder, the astounding feat surprised many in both the Medieval and Modern Ages.

The miraculous Journey of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) may sound incredible to an ordinary person shrouded in ignorance about the latest developments in the realm of science, but not to a person who is acquainted with the Theory of Relativity or the modern concept of Space and Time wherein the time does not remain constant but varies with the velocity of the object concerned. The holy Prophet (pbuh) performed the Mi'raj mounted on the Buraq, and the very word Buraq emanates from Barqun, which means electricity. This implies that the holy Prophet (pbuh) might have travelled as fast as the electricity (or even faster than that, for Allah can do and undo anything and everything). Modern science claims that light, radio waves and various forms of electro-magnetic radiation have the fastest velocity in the universe which is denoted by 'c' and equals 186282 miles per second. Modern science also claims that if a person manages to travel at this fantastic velocity, his 'time' will vary enormously in comparison with the passage of time on Earth. No wonder the holy Prophet (pbuh), mounted on the 'Buraq' and endowed with the Divine Blessing of Rabbul Alameen, could so easily perform so many acts in so short a period.

The dispute regarding the holy Prophet's Glorious Ascension in person originates mainly on the material conception of the impossibility of such a journey with the physical body, totally forgetting the fact that there is nothing impossible for the Almighty, that He can do and undo anything and everything. He desires, that He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it, 'Be,' and it is." (Sura Al-i-Imran, Verse 47).

And if Prophet Abraham (AS) could remain unhurt in the midst of the burning flame kindled by Namrood, if Prophet Jonas (AS) can survive inside the stomach of a whale for several days, if the stick of Prophet Moses (AS) could turn into a huge and fearful snake, if a huge deluge at the time of Prophet Nooh (AS) could inundate the whole world, if Prophets Adam and Eve (AS) could be created without a father almost out of nothing, if Gabriel could come to the world thousands of times, why should it be impossible for the holy Prophet (pbuh) to Ascend to the Heavens in person to meet his Creator?

The Night of Ascension Lailat-ul-Mi'raj or Lailat-ul-Isra'a indeed occupies a very important place in the chequered history of Islam. It was on this Glorious Night of Ascension that Prayers were instituted when the holy Prophet ascended to the Heavens. Divine injunctions were conveyed to the believers through the holy Prophet (pbuh): "Tell my servants who believe to establish prayers." Those who hymn the praise of the Giver and Sustainer of life realise that it was no mere coincidence that prayers were established when the Apostle of Allah was nearest to Rabbul Alameen. The tradition of the Ascension reports that during this Glorious Night five prayers were enjoined and that these five prayers equaled fifty in worth and reward. These obligatory prayers, which have to be performed at fixed times five times everyday, form one of the pillars of Islam. No wonder, the final words of the holy Prophet (pbuh) uttered during his last hours on this earth were: "Keep Prayers, keep Prayers. You will ever keep your solidarity so long as you pray. Keep Prayers, Keep Prayers."

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We don't need another failed war on drugs

RON CHEPESIUK

THIS past September 6, a local anti tobacco group organized a protest march in Dhaka to demand the enactment of a tobacco control law it says will save millions of lives from smoking-related diseases. March organizers charged that the deluding publicity of the tobacco companies had increased the health risks of millions of smokers in the Third World and predicted that if this publicity was left unchallenged, an epidemic of smoking-related diseases might break out in the country.

No one can seriously challenge the assertion that multinational tobacco companies have targeted the Third World countries as markets for their products. They need to find new markets because Western countries are clamping down hard on tobacco smoking. It's generally agreed, too, that advertising or the deluding publicity of tobacco companies should be carefully monitored and regulated to protect minors and to insure that the tobacco companies aren't lying to the public about its products.

But once again it appears that the global community is embarking on a global crusade to stamp out sin and protect people from themselves. In the past three decades, a global anti-tobacco movement has gained momentum, and its progress resembles that of two other public health crusades-- alcohol prohibition and the War on Drugs--both of which have been abject failures.

This public health crusade has targeted tobacco and it is creeping towards prohibition. Smokers in many countries have been forced out of public accommodation and into the streets under laws that don't even provide people the option of choosing to enter a smoke-filled room. Anti-smoking groups have even begun demanding that smoking be banned in public. In Holland, Amsterdam's famous marijuana houses must now renovate or close to comply with new Dutch anti-smoking legislation. Meanwhile, cash-strapped governments are slapping high taxes on tobacco.

And now powerful public health officials in the U.S. are talking openly about prohibition as an option in the campaign against tobacco. This past June, for the first time, the U.S. Surgeon General went on record supporting a total ban on tobacco products. In testifying before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee investigating smokeless tobacco and other so called reduced risk tobacco products, Surgeon General Richard Carmona said, I would support banning or abolishing tobacco products. If Congress were to choose to go that way, that would be up to them. But I see no need for any tobacco products in society.

As history shows, when Uncle Sam goes into moralistic mode and embarks on a mission to save humanity from itself, other countries usually follow. The War on Drugs is the classic example. After its acquisition of the Philippines in 1898, the U.S. became the leader of a worldwide anti-opium movement that eventually encompassed a host of other mind numbing and altering drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana and LSD. With the U.S. in the lead, countries passed more and more laws in the belief that legislation could eventually eliminate drug use, while embarking on an aggressive campaign to wipe out supply.

Still, more than a century later, what have we got to show for it? More than one hundred countries are now involved in the manufacture, sale and distribution of illegal drugs. International drug trafficking has become a \$500 million a year illicit enterprise, second only in size to arms trafficking.

We in Bangladesh are seeing the effects of the War on Drugs. As the war spreads, Bangladesh is being

lesson of economics when it comes to trying to control drug and alcohol use. Putting tobacco prohibition in place will create an unsatisfied consumer demand that will bring a new type of supplier to the market: organized crime syndicates. Large-scale cigarette, cigar and smokeless tobacco smuggling syndicates will appear. Black markets will develop. The profits would be astronomical and most likely far bigger than those

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drawn tighter into the net of international drug trafficking. Reports indicate that Bangladesh is not only being used as a transit route for international drug trafficking, but it's also becoming a lucrative market for the consumption of drugs. Heroin and phensids are pouring into Bangladesh through its northern border and are now being distributed in other parts of the country. Designer drugs like ecstasy and speed are available in certain well-to-do areas of Dhaka. What is happening to Bangladesh is being replicated in many other developing countries and illustrates the absolute failure of the global approach to drug policy after a century of prohibition.

Moreover, the U.S., and many other countries for that matter, never did learn anything from Uncle Sam's movement to ban alcohol. In 1917, the U.S. government passed the 18th amendment to the U.S. constitution (ratified in 1919), and the total prohibition of the manufacture and sale of beverages exceeding .5 percent alcohol content went into effect in 1920. Interestingly, during the 1920s, when alcohol prohibition was in force, many states enacted tobacco prohibition laws.

But little did the amendment's proponents and supporters realize that their moralistic intentions would lead to the emergence of organized crime on a prodigious scale and to the accumulation of huge illegal profits that would spur the growth of criminal activity.

It's true organized crime existed in the United States before prohibition, but as one scholar explained; all the living pre-prohibition mobsters, extortionists, racketeers and criminals would have remained in the lower depths without the passage of the 18th Amendment. Prohibition not only gave them opportunity, it gave them respectability and legitimacy. Prohibition not only provided a means of making vast sums of money, it created a need for organization, cooperation and syndication.

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Drug and alcohol prohibition are classic textbook examples of Economics 101 in action. When you have strong consumer demand for a product, legal or otherwise, there will always be a supplier willing to do anything, including breaking the law, to get it to the market. It has always amazed me how conservatives who preach about the virtues of the free market and how government should stay out of it tend to forget the basic

and freedom as a necessary sacrifice society has to make to combat powerful and well-financed drug trafficking groups. The costs of financing this new drug war would skyrocket, and so would the casualties.

The World Health Organization has suggested that to cut demand developing countries like Bangladesh should slap higher taxes on tobacco products. This is nonsense. This would just increase the danger to public health while spurring the growth of the illicit tobacco trade, encourage criminal activity, foster corruption and create a flourishing black market for

cheaper cigarettes to satisfy consumer demand. Don't get me wrong. I agree that tobacco products pose serious dangers to public health. I agree, too, that we need to blunt the subtle but misleading propaganda that the giant multinational tobacco companies spew. But we need to look for ways to the reduce demand for tobacco products without increasing the crime rate, corrupting public institutions and infringing upon personal freedoms. In short, we need to control tobacco use, not embark on a futile, moralistic and self-defeating campaign to stamp it out.

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History After Remand

After every regime change panegyrist demand For reconstruction history should be sent on remand. The prosecution is not sure, but history is arrested on suspicion On serious allegations for violation of the Constitution. On prosecution's demand History was sent to remand (With a torture warrant For cleansing of the devious and the errant) History had to face in derogation Of its rights an awful interrogation. It had to make a confession Of half truths, lies and total deception.

After every regime change All matters Cleo has to rearrange. History has to bend. History has to mend. The past it does amend.

Since the days of Herodotus Verdict of history is continuously being reviewed for us. Reading new history Cleo smiles a whimsical smile A Mona Lisa smile. With her knitted brows what is that she ponders? Is Mona Lisa the cousin sister of Sphinx, she wonders!

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