

Shab-e-Miraj

SYED ASHRAF ALI

It will perhaps be no exaggeration to say that Lailat-ul-Miraj is the most momentous occasion in the annals of not only the entire human race but of all creations. It was on this glorious Night of Ascension that a creation was permitted to cross for the first time the "Ultimate Boundary," symbolically represented by a Lote-tree named Sidratul Muntaha, beyond which none, not even the archangel Jibrail (AS) favoured by or "brought near" Allah (mukarrabun), had ever been allowed to pass. It was on this auspicious night that the Creator, in His infinite mercy, enabled a creation to reach, through a long journey immeasurable by mortal reckoning, the "Sublime Throne", achieve the closest proximity to Him, and "see of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest" in full bloom.

The Holy Quran testifies: "Glory to God Who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred 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." (Chapter XVII, Verse 1).

The Journey mentioned above refers to the Glorious Ascension (Mi'raj) of the holy Prophet (pbuh), testifying so eloquently to the divine eminence which he was to achieve and to the unsurpassable greatness to which Islam was to rise.

It was a Monday on the 27 of Rajab, one year and five months before the Emigration (Hijrat) to the holy Medina that the holy Prophet (pbuh) was first transported through a unique Journey from the holy Makkah to the seat of the earlier revelations in Jerusalem, and then taken through the Seven Heavens, and blessed with the unique opportunity to meet the Most Gracious and Most Merciful Rabbul Alameen.

On that sacred Night of Ascension, Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) was at Makkah in the house of his cousin Ummahani (RA), sister of Hazrat Ali Murtaza (RA). Having said his night prayers the holy Prophet (pbuh) was asleep with "closed eyes but a wakeful Kalb". It was Jibrail (AS) who roused him from 'sleep' and said, "Allah sends you greetings and 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."

Accompanied by Jibrail (AS), the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) went to the holy Ka'ba, performed the circumambulation of Ka'ba (Tawaf) seven times, and sat for a while at the Hatim of the Holy House. Mounted on the Buraq, he then set forth toward the Great Unknown. He was first carried to Masjid-ul-Aqsa in Jerusalem.

After leading a two-rakat prayer at Baitul-Mukaddas in which all the one lac and twenty-four thousand Prophets participated, the Apostle of Allah set out for the Seven Heavens so clearly mentioned in the Sura Talaq: "It is Allah Who created the Seven Heavens and as many Earths."

As he passed through various Heavens, he had the unique privilege to see Allah's "Signs" in various shapes and forms. It is claimed that he saw with his own eyes Bahrun Naqam, the Great Sea the waves of which wrought Great Deluge inundating the whole world of the Prophet Noah (pbuh). He also had the unique distinction of seeing during his lifetime Hazrat Azrail (AS) in the fourth Heaven, Hazrat Michayeel (AS) with the Great Scale (Mizan)

in the sixth Heaven, and Hazrat Israfil (AS) with his Great Horn (Soor) in the seventh Heaven.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also met a good number of his predecessors during his Journey through the Heavens. He met Prophet Adam (AS) in the first Heaven, Prophets Isa and Yahya in the second, Yusuf, Dawood and Sulaiman in the third, Musa, Marium and Asiya in the fourth, Ibrahim, Ismail, Yaquub and Lut in the fifth, Noah and Idris in the sixth, and the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be on all the Prophets) once again in the seventh Heaven.

In the seventh Heaven the holy Prophet (pbuh) again led a two-rakat prayer at the Baitul Mamur mosque in which all the angels of the seventh Heaven participated. As he advanced further, he reached Sidratul Muntaha, the Lote-tree, which has been specifically mentioned in the Holy Quran:

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"Near Sidratul Muntaha beyond which none may pass: Near it is Garden of 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." (Chapter LIII, Verses 16-18).

The holy Prophet (pbuh) advanced further and reached Hijabe Zarbaft where Jibrail informed him that he (Jibrail) was unable to proceed any further. According to the Tafsir Ruhul Bayan, however, Jibrail (AS) halted at Sidratul Muntaha.

What followed indeed is unique in the annals of creation. For the first time since the birth of the universe was a creation allowed to proceed beyond Sidratul Muntaha and approach the "Sublime Arsh". The holy Prophet (pbuh) passed through many a screen of Noor and Zulomat and ultimately reached, in the words of the Holy Quran, "the highest part of the horizon". Then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of two bow-lengths or (even) nearer." (Chapter LIII, Verses 7-8).

Two bow-shots (counting 100 to 150 yards to a bow-shot) would be a clearly visible distance. But Sufi mysticism would interpret: "two drawn bows, with their chords touching", making a complete

circle of union.

Muhammad (pbuh), the Last and the Greatest of all the Prophets, had indeed seen the Greatest Signs of Allah. According to Tirmizi, the holy Prophet said: "I saw my Rab with my eyes and Kalb". The Miskat also testifies: "I saw my Rab in His best appearance ... I was endowed with knowledge of whatever is in the Heavens and on the Earths." And the Holy Quran further adds: "The (Prophet's) heart in no way falsified that which he saw." The renowned exegetist Abdullah Yusuf Ali points out that the "heart" in Arabic includes the faculty of intelligence as well as the faculty of feeling. The impression conveyed was pure truth; there was no illusion in it."

The holy Prophet (pbuh) then visited Jannat (the Paradise) and Jahannam (the Hell) and returned to Makkah.

It may be mentioned in this connection that it was during this nocturnal journey on the Lailat-ul-Mi'raj that Allah had imposed upon the holy Prophet (pbuh) 50 salats a day as obligatory prayers for the faithful. On the Prophet Musa's (pbuh) advice, Muhammad (pbuh) asked several times for an alleviation and each time Allah, in His infinite Mercy, granted it. But when Musa (pbuh) said five salats are still too many, the holy Prophet (pbuh) refused to ask for less. In response to Musa's (AS) request, Muhammad (pbuh) replied very politely, "I have asked my Lord till I am ashamed, but now I am satisfied and I submit" (Bukhari and Muslim). These obligatory prayers, to be performed five times a day, form one of the pillars of Islam. And the five prayers so enjoined equals fifty in worth and reward. The holy Prophet (pbuh) testifies: "I went back to Him (Allah) and He said, 'They are five and at the same time fifty. What has been said is not changed with Me'" (Bukhari and Muslim).

The astounding feat surprised many. The non-Muslims refused to accept it. Even a few Muslims went to the extent of claiming that the Journey was performed through a Vision. The holy Prophet (pbuh) himself silenced the Quraish who were questioning him about his night journey. Jabir told that he heard God's Messenger say, "When Quraish accused me of falsehood I stood up in al-Hijr, then God made Jerusalem clear to me, and I informed them of its distinguishing marks while I was looking at it." (Bukhari and Muslim).

And the handful of Muslims who unfortunately doubt the physical ascension of the holy Prophet (pbuh) perhaps forget that Allah can do and undo anything and everything. Nothing is impossible on His part. "He is the Best of the planners and when He hath decreed a Plan, He but saith to it, 'Be' and it is" (Chapter III, Verse 47).

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SHIFTING IMAGES

Duped by deals!



MILIA ALI

LAST year I changed my internet, cable and phone provider. I was perfectly satisfied with the service I was getting but, believe it or not, I got tempted by an "offer." The offer was too good to pass -- or so I thought! The deal I fell for was advertised as: Triple play with 250 TV

channels, 25/25 Mbps Internet connection, and unlimited calling within the US and Canada.... all for \$99.99. I could even get a free DVR box for one year!

The euphoria lasted until the first bill arrived. I was surprised to see that it was more than \$99.99 -- I had overlooked the "including taxes & fees," written in fine print! This year I wanted to return the DVR (which I no longer wanted), but was advised that I would have to dismantle it, return it to the service provider, get a new cable box and install it myself. If not, I would have to pay for the installation. Or, I could keep the box and pay an additional charge each month. I was also sternly reminded that I was bound by a two-year contract and could not change

Why blame the corporations for duping us? After all, companies work on the bottom line principle of maximising sales. It's us, consumers, who tend to be gullible and fall into the trap.

my provider without a hefty penalty. Suddenly the freebie had evaporated! Net result: I am currently paying much more for the services I was previously getting for much less!

Yes, one of the hazards of modern day living is that we fall prey to attractive and glossy ad gimmicks, which succeed in convincing us that there are virtually "free deals" available for grabs. Advertising has developed into such an art form that ordinary objects are made to appear extraordinary. But then the human capacity to be duped by well-articulated gibberish also seems infinite! Remember the magical cereal which you can "eat all you want" and yet lose weight? It certainly didn't work for me! Or, the dress that makes you look two sizes slimmer? Buy it and try it on (I did) -- and you will want to smash the mirror in disbelief!

Women are special targets for advertisers. We are overwhelmed with commercials for tummy tuck, eyelid surgery, liposuction and everything that will enable the fair sex to recapture their sweet teens. But, men too are not immune from the advertising blitz. Turbo-charged cars are on offer (at "unprecedented" low interest, easy installments) to "conquer wilderness" and drive at supersonic speed. The most macho TV ads pertain to performance enhancing drugs that unabashedly promise a "blissful love life," while serious risk warnings like heart attack and stroke are mumbled at triple the normal speed and low sound decibels, to make them almost incomprehensible!

To be honest, I find promotions about medicines and medical procedures particularly unsavoury, even unethical. Recently, I saw a commercial for a drug for preventing and treating osteoporosis. Here was this grandma (presumably on the wonder drug), merrily playing football with her grandkids. In the midst of this vigorous activity and loud and racy music track, we were informed that a doctor should be consulted in case of adverse side effects like ulcers and digestive disorders!

But why blame the corporations for duping us? After all, companies work on the bottom line principle of maximising sales. It's us, consumers, who tend to be gullible and fall into the trap. Recently, my travel agent in Dhaka convinced me to take a budget airline to Singapore. The sales pitch included the entire range of luring arguments -- cheap fair, excellent service, early morning arrival etc. Finally, the deal was clinched when he said: "Madam, why pay more, when you can get better service on a budget flight?" Unfortunately, it turned out to be a nightmarish experience. First, I discovered that we were not allowed any check-in baggage (the e-ticket did not clearly explain the baggage allowance policy) without additional payment. On arrival at Singapore we were asked to deplane in pouring rain with no cover or protection. When I needed to change the date of my return flight, I was informed that there was zero flexibility in terms of changes. I had to buy a new ticket and ended up paying more than I would have for a regular airline!

The reason I am sharing this personal story is because I want to make a public confession. I have vowed that I will not jump into any deal without reading the fine print. Neither will I succumb to the temptation of acquiring "free goods." I could put the onus on the companies and advertisers, based on the biblical command: "Thou shalt not tempt." But since I have no control over others, I will henceforth operate on the principle: "Thou shalt not be tempted!"

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

Eurozone must act quickly to halt financial crisis

EDITORIAL DESK: The Yomiuri Shimbun

THE Spanish economy, the fourth largest in the eurozone, has deteriorated because of a business slump that followed the collapse of a property bubble. This forced the country to seek a financial bailout.

Spain is the fourth eurozone nation following Greece, Ireland and Portugal to seek financial help since the European sovereign debt crisis began in 2009.

If the Spanish crisis spreads, it may trigger further chaos in world stock markets, including those in United States, Europe and Japan, and the yen will continue strengthening against the euro. These developments will deal a serious blow to the world economy.

The debt crisis has repeatedly affected Europe because of its failure to take prompt action. The current crisis must be contained quickly.

Seventeen eurozone countries have agreed to lend up to 100 billion euros (about US\$125 billion) to Spanish banks, which are beset by huge bad debts. Loans from the European Financial Stability Facility, among other entities, will be used to help recapitalize struggling Spanish banks to halt credit uncertainty.

Preemptive measure

Bankia S.A., a major Spanish bank mired in a management crisis, had asked the Spanish government to bail it out by injecting public funds. But the

government, already struggling to fix its fiscal mess, could not afford to provide funds.

Realising the Spanish government would not be able to rescue Bankia and other Spanish banks by itself, the 17-member eurozone decided to provide financial aid as a preemptive measure. We consider this decision reasonable.

Greece, which triggered the European debt crisis, will hold another election Sunday. If an

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antiausterity leftist party joins a new government after the election, it cannot be ruled out that Greece will break away from the eurozone. This would inevitably cause turmoil.

Ahead of the Greek election, the eurozone joined hands to address the Spanish crisis to prevent it from disrupting financial markets.

Outlook uncertain

However, uncertain prospects lie ahead.

The eurozone has agreed on a broad framework of bailout plans for Spain but concrete details and the exact amount of rescue loans have been left pending. Besides working out concrete measures quickly and implementing them promptly, the eurozone also must tackle the realignment of financial institutions.

While it still grapples with the bursting of the property bubble, Spain is expected to record minus economic growth this year and next. The amount of Spanish banks' nonperforming loans is expected to balloon further due to the protracted business slump. It remains to be seen whether the size of the eurozone's financial assistance will be adequate for dealing with the Spanish crisis.

Assistance to Spain will be limited to the banking sector. Therefore, the country probably will not be asked by the eurozone to work out additional fiscal reconstruction measures.

But fiscal rehabilitation and economic growth are both indispensable for economic rejuvenation. Spain faces a tough challenge.

The European financial crisis will be a major item on the agenda of a summit meeting of the Group of 20 economies to be held in Mexico next week. Pressure is expected to mount on Germany and France, among other countries, to display leadership and unity to end the crisis.

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