

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

MESSAGE OF THE KHALIFATULLAH HAZRAT MUNIR A. AZIM (ATBA)

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On the occasion of the Miraj Shareef, the Khalifatullah made a well-rounded speech after the Salat-ul-Esha to explain concerning the Miraj and Isra. After greeting everyone with the Peace Greeting in Islam, and reciting Tashahhud, Ta'uz and Surah Al-Fatiha, here is the speech in its entirety:

MIRAJ & ISRA



Miraj and Isra are two words that are used in Islamic literature to refer to two journeys the Holy Prophet (pbuh) is said to have made, one to heaven and the other to the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

These two voyages were undertaken by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on the orders of God. Archangel Gabriel was his guide and led him to *Sma* in one and to Jerusalem in the other.

In Arabic *Sma* is used for things placed high above all other things; and in a sense it signifies the sky or the firmament.

The Miraj and the Isra occupy a considerable place in the theological discussions which closely followed the death of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) to this day. Islamic literature, as well as historical sources, tells us that each trip was accomplished in one night. Theological commentaries and discussions give many

details; but there are many ideas which the masses readily accept, and which are not supported by texts.

Some Muslims like the majority of non-Muslim historians make the mistake of thinking that Miraj and Isra are two different names for the same incident; while through the Holy Quran we learn that these are two separate incidents that took place on two separate occasions, although they have a common connection in terms of their spiritual meanings and reasons.

The Miraj is the occasion for the spiritual journey that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) made, from Mecca to Heaven where, so to speak, he presented himself to Almighty God while Isra is the journey during which the Holy Prophet (pbuh) was taken to the Sacred Temple in Jerusalem.

The Holy Qur'an mentions these journeys in two different *Surahs*, and gives indications to deduce that these two journeys were distinct from each other. Thus Surah An-Najm (first section) mentions Miraj while Isra is described in Surah Bani Isra'il / Al-Isra (first section).

Surah Najm gives some indications about Miraj but does not mention Jerusalem, while Surah Bani Isra'il does not mention the word *Sma* (which is the destination in Miraj).

If we study the Hadith carefully, We will come to the same conclusion, namely that the Miraj and the Isra refer to two separate incidents.

Bukhari, which is undoubtedly the most authentic collection, deals with these incidents in two separate chapters, thereby indicating that the compiler considered them to be distinct from each other: The Miraj speaking of the journey of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) to Heaven while Isra leading him to Jerusalem only.

Bukhari speaks of Miraj in six places and despite certain words reported carelessly, he does not mention Jerusalem while all, they are unanimous to say that its destination was the heavens.

The history books and biographies of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) lead us to the same conclusion. Ibn Hisham (*Zikrul Isra*) speaks of two incidents separately; he tells us

that in Isra, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) returned to Mecca and that the Miraj took place on another occasion. The great historian Ibn-i-Sa'ad gives us different dates for each. Other scholars are of the same opinion (*Zurqani on Isra and Khamis: Zikrul Isra wal Miraj*).

The second mistake that we make about Miraj and Isra is that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) made these two journeys with his earthly body, while the Holy Quran, the Hadiths and the history books repel with force such an idea.

About the Miraj, the Holy Quran says: **“What his heart - that of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) - perceived is absolutely true, and his mind was not mistaken in understanding what he had seen.”** (An-Najm, Ruku 1).

These words are all that is clearest to indicate that this journey was spiritual and had been made in a dream and not physically. The Hadiths also tell us that this journey was spiritual. A tradition tells us that during this journey the Holy Prophet (pbuh) was in bed and that his sleep that night was not like ordinary sleep when our senses and our perceptibility are dormant. (Bukhari, Abwab Sift-'ul Nabi).

Another tradition, which explains what we have just said, mentions that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) had this experience in a unique state where he did not sleep, and where he was not awake either; but which was in between. A third tradition reports that after this experience, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) woke up. A fourth tradition reports that Hazrat Aisha (ra) then said that if someone claimed that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) had seen God Almighty with his own eyes - with his physical eyes, would have missed the truth, and that one should not believe him [such a person].

In the biographies of the Holy Prophet (pbuh), the same point of view prevails; also Ibn Ishaq says that in the night of Miraj, the body of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) did not disappear but remained all the time in the terrestrial world.

As for Isra, it is clear that it was a dream that God showed the Holy Prophet (pbuh) for certain benefits that were to flow from it. The Holy Quran gives us three of its peculiarities, namely:

(a) that it took place at night;

- (b) the outward journey as the return took place in one night; as the word “*Lailan*” one night suggests; and
- (c) this experiment was aimed at showing the Holy Prophet (pbuh) certain signs of the Glory of God, and of how the Divine Purpose was to be accomplished.

When reflecting on these peculiarities, we are forced to conclude that this experience was spiritual, not physical.

First, a journey at that time was undertaken during the day and not in the evening. Night trips were undertaken for exceptional reasons. The fact that Isra took place overnight indicates that it was a spiritual experience.

Second, the fact that this journey was made and completed overnight, when at the time it was impossible to do it in this time given the means of transport that there was, so this journey was not a journey made physically, but spiritually by means of the senses; that of the internal perception.

And, thirdly, the purpose of the voyage being only to show signs to the Holy Prophet (pbuh), leads us to the same conclusion.

A physical journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and back in the space of one night, albeit surprising for the time [i.e. that epoch], can hardly explain a spiritual truth from which a prophet can gain some advantage. But if this experience is spiritual, and if it has enabled the prophet to glimpse the material and spiritual progress reserved for him and his disciples, then it has the character of benefiting not only the prophet, but his disciples and followers also by the fulfilment of the great prophecies that this dream entails.

As for Isra, the Holy Quran uses the word “*Roya*” which in Arabic means dream. With these preliminary remarks, which were intended to clarify, we will consider what the Holy Quran speaks of Miraj and Isra.

So it says about the Miraj: **“The Lord of power, He manifested His ascendancy over all, and He revealed His word when He was above the horizon, in the highest part. Then he drew near to God and then descended to men so that it became like a rope with two arcs, or closer. Then He revealed to His servant**

what He revealed. The heart of the prophet did not deceive him about what he saw. Will you argue about what he saw? And, of course, he also saw it a second time, near the farthest jujube tree, which is close to the eternal abode. It was at this point that what covered the jujube tree, covered it. The eye did not turn away, nor did it went astray. Surely, he saw the greatest signs of his Lord.” (Al-Najm 53 : 7-19).

The Hadiths which report these incidents are not unanimous in their explanations; the least authentic according to the reporting rule, contains useless material. Here we will give the essentials of authentic and trustworthy reports.

One night the Holy Prophet (pbuh) was lying in this part of the Ka’aba called *Hatim*; and he was drowsy [in a state of sleep] when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. The angel asked him to get up and led him to the well of the Zamzam, he opened his chest, removed his heart and washed it in pure water from the sacred spring; then he filled the heart with faith and wisdom and put it back in place. Then the angel took the Holy Prophet (pbuh) high into the heavens. The angel knocked on the door of the first heaven and a voice asked him from within: *Who is it?* Gabriel named himself and announced that he was accompanied by the Holy Prophet (pbuh). The voice asked: *Has the Holy Prophet been asked to come?* - And Gabriel replied in the affirmative. The porter opened the door and welcomed the Holy Prophet (pbuh). Upon entering the Holy Prophet found an aged and venerable figure who greeted him with the following words: *“Welcome O righteous prophet and righteous son.”*

The prophet answered his greeting. He could make out the countless shadow of souls on either side of him. Turning to his right, his face lit up with joy, and turning to his left, he became pale and seemed to be in pain. The Holy Prophet asked Gabriel who this venerable person was, and he replied that it was Adam, and that to his right there was the shadow of those of his offspring who were in heaven, and that to his left there was the shadow of those who suffered in the fires of hell.

Gabriel led the Holy Prophet higher and they reached another door which was opened to them as for the first door. On entering, the Holy Prophet saw this time two men who welcomed him with these words: *Welcome, O prophet and just brother.* The Holy Prophet saluted them and asked Gabriel who they were. He learned that they were Jesus and John the Baptist.

Gabriel led him to the fourth and fifth heavens where he met Joseph, Easdras and Aaron respectively.

In the sixth heaven he met Moses; and as he was going further up, the latter wept; and a voice asked him the cause of his sorrow. Moses replied by pointing to the Holy Prophet (pbuh): *“Lord, this young man came after me but his followers will enter Heaven in greater numbers than mine; I had never considered the possibility that someone coming after me could surpass myself.”*

After that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) went to the seventh heaven where he saw the Prophet Abraham lying against the *Bait-e-Ma’mur* (the wall of worship in the heavens of which the Sacred Ka’aba in Mecca would be one replica). The Honourable Patriarch and Prophet of Allah Abraham greeted the Holy Prophet (pbuh) just as Hazrat Adam did, also being his ancestor.

Then the Holy Prophet (pbuh) was led even higher to a point never reached by a man before. There something was heard like the creaking of innumerable feathers (noting God’s decrees).

Then the Holy Prophet (pbuh) saw before him a tree resembling a species common to many countries and bearing a kind of berries. This tree marked the border between earthly affairs and the paradise of eternal bliss. The tree bore strangely large and peculiar leaves and fruits. As the Holy Prophet (pbuh) contemplated this tree, a great indescribable light descended on him.

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) had said: Words are lacking to describe it. Four rivers flowed at the foot of the tree: the Nile, the Euphrates, and the other two, which were spiritual, flowed towards Paradise. At that time, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) saw Gabriel as he really was and noted that he had six hundred wings. There he saw a dazzling manifestation of God.

Then the Holy Prophet (pbuh) was taken to heaven and was finally admitted to an audience before Almighty God Himself. God spoke to him directly, without any intermediary. He gave him very happy news and informed him of His decree to the effect that Muslims must offer fifty *Salat* (daily prayers).

On the way back the Holy Prophet (pbuh) met Moses again and the latter asked him to inform him of the decrees he received; and when he learned of the decree of 50 *Salat* per day prescribed for the Muslims, he was startled and said that from his personal experience of the Israelites, Muslims could not fulfil this obligation and advised the Holy Prophet (pbuh) to ask for a reduction [of prayers] from God.

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) therefore returned and after supplications the number was reduced by ten: but the prophet Moses considered forty to be still a lot, and the Holy Prophet (pbuh), following his advice succeeded in obtaining a reduction up to five, a number that Moses still found exorbitant. But the Holy Prophet (pbuh) chose not to listen to him anymore, saying that he was ashamed to do so. Then a voice was heard, saying: *Prayers are five in number but they will count for fifty in Our eyes, and We will multiply their rewards tenfold.*

After that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) returned to earth, and he woke up in the same place as before in the sacred mosque.

Certain narrations speak of a mount resembling a horse called Buraq, which the Holy Prophet (pbuh) used to climb to heaven, and also two or three cups of milk or wine etc., which were offered.

But a serious study shows that these incidents are linked to Isra, and that the confusion arose from the negligence of some narrators.

ISRA

Isra means in Arabic to transport someone by night from one place to another. This spiritual journey took place during the night hence its name. The Holy Quran speaks of this incident in these words:

“Blessed is he Who transports His servant from the Majid-e-Haram (the Ka’aba in Mecca) to the Masjid Aqsa (the Sacred Temple of Jerusalem) whose surroundings We have blessed, so that he may bear witness to Our signs. He is in truth the One who sees everything, hears everything ... It was the time when We told him: O Our Messenger, your Lord has surrounded the people, and the dream that We had made for you was a test for the people.” (Bani Isra’il Ruku 1 & 6).

SUMMARY OF THE NARRATIONS CONTAINED IN THE HADITHS

One night the angel of the Lord appeared to the Holy Prophet (pbuh) holding on a leash a beautiful animal larger than a donkey and smaller than a mule; which was all white and long in body. He made the Holy Prophet (pbuh) ride him and took the road to Jerusalem. The animal's step was so sharp and long that each step seemed to touch the horizon. On reaching Jerusalem, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) went to the Temple where all the ancient prophets were gathered, of which Abraham, Moses and Jesus were the most cited. There the Holy Prophet (pbuh) led the prayers, the other prophets forming the congregation.

After the prayers Gabriel presented him with two cups, one containing milk and the other wine. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) opted for the cup of milk. Thereupon Gabriel said to him, *You have judged human nature well and you have acted accordingly. If you had taken the cup of wine, your disciples would have gone astray.*

According to other versions, it was Gabriel who came to the Holy Prophet (pbuh) holding the *Buraq* on a leash. The beast was reluctant and swerved when the Holy Prophet wanted to ride it. Thereupon Gabriel exclaimed: Keep calm *Buraq* because no one is greater than the one who is going to ride you. *Buraq* soon calmed down. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) went up, and accompanied by Gabriel he left for Jerusalem. On the way they saw an old woman who asked Gabriel who his companion was; but Gabriel ignored her and said to the Holy Prophet (pbuh): *Let us hurry, let us hurry.* They had not come a long way that a voice called: *This way, Muhammad,* but Gabriel begged the Holy Prophet (pbuh) to ignore him and to press his pace. A little further on, they met a group of men who greeted the Holy Prophet (pbuh) saying: *You who are first, you who are the last, you who are the unifier, peace be with you.*

Gabriel asked the Holy Prophet (pbuh) to return this greeting, and then they continued on their way. A little further on they met the same group of men who greeted the Holy Prophet (pbuh) as before; the Holy Prophet (pbuh) answered them and continued on his way. A little further they saw the same group of the previous scene repeated a third time. Then the Holy Prophet (pbuh) arrived in Jerusalem where Gabriel offered him three cups: one of water, the second of

wine, and the third of milk. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) took the cup of milk and refused the other two. Thereupon Gabriel said to him, *You have acted according to the true nature of man. If you had chosen wine, he [man] would have gone astray.*

Then all the prophets of the past appeared and said their prayer in congregation under the leadership of the Holy Prophet (pbuh). After the prayers, Gabriel informed the Holy Prophet (pbuh) that the old woman whom he had met on the way represented the world which had a lifespan similar to that of the old woman: the voice he had heard was that of Satan ; or that of unhealthy and harmful attractions, which had tried to tempt him out of the right path; and that the group of men they had met were the prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

After that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) returned to Mecca.

WHAT DO MIRAJ AND ISRA MEAN?

It is these incidents that have been reported in connection with Miraj and Isra. If we reflect, we cannot doubt their meanings; especially when we consider their particular characters which clearly show us that they are not of a material or physical perception nature. Belonging therefore to the domain of dreams and spiritual experiences, they aim to indicate the high rank of the Holy Prophet (pbuh), and the important position that his followers should soon occupy in human affairs. This is shown by his ascent beyond the position occupied by the other prophets in heaven, and his leading the prayers in front of them.

Another fact to note is that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) met the prophets of the past, some of whom were named. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) had ancestral links with some of them, or that Muslims would have to do with their disciples during the ascendancy of Islam, or that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) would surpass them in these characteristics for which some were known.

From an ancestral point of view the names of Hazrat Adam and Abraham were mentioned; from the point of view where Islam would have to do with their descendants the names of Moses and Jesus were mentioned, the second being the central figure of Christianity while the first had brought a good code of religious law which was to give way to Islam after having had its day; this code

and that of Islam closely resembling. The words or titles that these prophets gave to qualify the Holy Prophet (pbuh) during their meetings with him, namely, the first, the last (in terms of divine legislation - last bearer of divine law), and the unifier have a similar meaning indicating the greatness of the Holy Prophet (pbuh). Gatherer or Unifier relates to the fact that before the Holy Prophet (pbuh) prophets were sent to groups of humanity separately, the message of each not having a universal character, while Islam was addressed to all humanity, that is to say, that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) became the means to gather all men around a single centre.

Note that apart from the general interpretation that has been suggested, Miraj and Isra each have their own particular meaning. While Miraj indicates the spiritual greatness of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and how close he had come to be close to God, Isra indicates his temporal greatness and the important role that Islam would play in the near future. The destination in Miraj is *Sma*, that is, '*the firmament, the heavens and the upper regions of the sky*'; and in Isra it is a place on earth. The ascent of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) in the Miraj was effected independently of earthly means, meaning that his flight was accomplished by the grace of God alone, without any intermediary. On the other hand the voyage in the Isra was carried out on Buraq, which can mean that the temporal power was going to be established by apparently material means, the fast step of its mount indicating that these progress would be extraordinary and without equal as it was the case historically, and this must be an encouragement and lesson for all Muslims that they must once again unite and abandon the material world to move towards the worship of the One God and to fulfil His commandments to the letter to allow again the rise of Islam in the last days.

Isra took place during the night, and in figurative language, the night means distress, difficulty, misery. The message would be that seen from this angle, Islam would have to overcome insurmountable obstacles, and that it would do so quickly and occupy a supreme position. This is what happened, and *Insha-Allah*, will come again with the union of Muslims.

The fact that this trip took place in Jerusalem would mean that Islam, after a first contact with the ancient or pagan civilization of Arabia, would soon have to do with Christianity and Judaism of which this city is the centre.

Soon after the Hegira, Islam entered into conflict, both political and spiritual, with these two religions, with the Jews in Medina and with Christianity through the Eastern Roman Empire.

MIRAJ AND ISRA DATES

Historians have differing opinions about Miraj and Isra; but in general, opinion is in favour of a date close to the Hegira. Bukhari, which is the safest source, is of the same opinion (See Bad-ul-Khalq).

We can situate these two events around a year before the Hegira without raising objections, that is to say, between the 12th and 13th years of the ministry of the Holy Prophet (pbuh). There is evidence that Isra took place a little later than Miraj.

A PRAYER

May God the Almighty enlighten our hearts with knowledge from Him so that the *Ummah* finally understands the need to differentiate between these two incidents and not to tell lies about the Miraj and Isra. Let us keep in mind this Hadith of the Holy Prophet (pbuh): *“Whoever lies about me voluntarily, let him prepare his place in hell”*. (Bukhari, Muslim).

Allah has endowed us all with an iota of intelligence and more. Let's use it to find the truth and establish the truth. May this exposition on Miraj and Islam act as a light for everyone. *Ameen*.