

5 | Makkah to Jerusalem

ACCORDING TO IBN Kathir (Allah have mercy on him), twenty-five Sahabah have narrated the incident of al-Isra', with all the narrations being traced back to two Companions (who were the original sources), Abu Dharr ؓ and Malik ibn Sa'sa'ah ؓ. All the scholars of hadith have included in their collections the journey of al-Isra'. Imam al-Bukhari in his *Jami' al-sabih*, in the "Book of Tawhid" has a chapter devoted to al-Mi'raj, whilst Imam Muslim's *Jami' al-sabih* has a chapter called "Isra'" in the "Book of the Beginning of the Revelation".

As noted in the introduction, in order to understand al-Isra' and al-Mi'raj within the familiar concepts of linear time frames and three-dimensional space travel, ahadith from several sources have been collated to present this incredible journey in a coherent manner. This poses a danger on the "time/space frame" to some specific incidents along the journey. However, endnotes have been added wherever opinions differ and alternative views are held. Only a portion of ahadith is narrated with corresponding headings to help understand the linear flow of the journey. Full versions of the ahadith are referenced in Appendix 3 for anyone seeking to study them further.

Abu Dharr ؓ reports that the Messenger ﷺ said, "One night I was asleep, in the Makkan Sacred Precinct (al-Haram) near the Ka'bah when I was woken by Jibra'il. He informed me of the divine will and took me to the well of Zamzam, where upon he opened my chest and poured wisdom and faith into

it. Then he sealed it. I was then presented with the beautiful Buraq. This is an animal larger than a mule but smaller than a horse. I mounted it..."¹

Anas ؓ narrates: "The Buraq began to strut and Jibra'il said, 'Why are you doing this? By Allah, no one more honoured by Allah has ever ridden you than he.'" He said, "He (the Buraq) started to sweat..."²

The root word *Buraq* is derived either from "barq" which means light or "bariq" denoting white, both indicating purity and speed. The Buraq was used by previous Prophets ﷺ and hence we see that Allah ﷻ chose the same mode of transport for the final Prophet ﷺ rather than "whisking" him from Makkah to Madinah without any conveyance, which Allah ﷻ could have done if He so wished.

Jibra'il accompanied the Prophet ﷺ and sat in front on the Buraq and the Prophet ﷺ was behind him. They travelled on the Buraq in this manner until they reached Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem). The Buraq travelled at a tremendous speed, whereby one of its stride traversed the space in sight.

Anas Ibn Malik ؓ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "He (the Buraq) puts its hoof wherever its eyesight ends." He ﷺ said, "I rode it (and started the journey) until I arrived at Bayt al-Maqdis." He ﷺ continued, "Then I tied it to a ring that the Prophets used to tie their animals on." He ﷺ said, "Then I entered the Masjid, and I prayed two units of prayer, then I went out, so Jibra'il brought me a cup of wine and a cup of milk. I chose the milk, so Jibra'il said, 'You chose the *fitrah* (natural goodness, good instinct),' then we were raised to heaven..."³

Choice of Drink

In the above hadith it is reported that the Prophet ﷺ was offered wine and milk in Bayt al-Maqdis. However, Muslim reports on the authority of Abu Hurayrah ؓ that these drinks were offered in the heavens, near the Lote-tree of the Farthest Boundary (Sidrat

al Muntaha), and adds that the Prophet ﷺ chose milk. In *Sahih al-Bukhari* it is mentioned that the Prophet ﷺ was in front of the Oft-frequented House⁴ (Bayt al-Ma‘mur) when he was offered wine, milk and honey in separate containers.

It is possible all the narrations are authentic and correct on the basis that he ﷺ was to drink more than once on this journey. When the Prophet ﷺ took the milk, Jibra’il remarked:

“Had you taken the wine, your Ummah would have certainly gone astray...”⁵

This statement shows that the character and deeds of a leader have a direct impact on his followers.⁶

Abu Hurayrah ؓ narrates, “On the night the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was taken on the Night Journey, two cups—one containing wine and the other milk—were presented to him at Jerusalem. He looked at them and took the cup of milk. Jibra’il said, ‘Praise be to Allah who guided you to the *fitrah*; had you taken (the cup of) wine, your Ummah would have certainly gone astray.’”

[Sahih al-Bukhari]

Prayer in Masjid al-Aqsa

Anas ibn Malik narrates, “The Prophet ﷺ was offered a drink of water, milk, or wine... Then Adam ؑ and all the other Prophets ؑ were resurrected and the Messenger of Allah led them (in prayer) that night.”⁷

Ibn Kathir (Allah have mercy on him) narrates a hadith, “Then I left and it was not more than a little while when a lot of people gathered, and someone called for the prayer and the prayer was established.” He (the Prophet ﷺ) continued, “So we stood in lines waiting for someone to come and lead us, then Jibra’il took my hand and asked me to lead the prayer, and I did. After the end of the prayer

Jibra'il asked me, 'O Muhammad, do you know who prayed behind you?' I said, 'No'. He said, 'Every Prophet sent by Allah ﷻ prayed behind you.' Then Jibra'il took my hand and we ascended to heaven."

Al-Hasan ibn 'Arafah, narrates "On the way to Masjid al-Aqsa I met 'Isa... then I met Musa... then I met Ibrahim (i.e. before arriving at al-Aqsa). Then we went until we arrived at al-Aqsa Masjid, and I went down and tied the animal (i.e. the Buraq) in the ring that is in the gate of the Masjid where the Prophets used to tie (their animals).

"Then I entered the Masjid and I recognised the Prophets bowing and prostrating, then two cups were brought to me, one was honey and the other was milk, I took the milk and drank, so Jibra'il put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'By the Allah of Muhammad, you chose the *fitrah*.' Then the prayer was established and I led them (i.e. the Prophets)."

Abu Hurayrah ؓ narrates that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "I was standing in the Hijr while (the tribe of) Quraysh were asking me about my Night Journey, they asked me about things in Bayt al-Maqdis that I was not sure of, so I felt troubled more than I ever felt before." He ؓ continued, "So Allah ﷻ visualised Bayt al-Maqdis in front of me, and they didn't ask me about anything except that I answered them regarding it. I saw myself in a group of Prophets. Musa ؑ (who was amongst them) was standing in prayer; a big man with curly hair who resembled one of the (tribesmen of) Shanu'ah. 'Isa ؑ (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary) (upon whom be peace) was also standing in prayer; the closest to him in resemblance is 'Urwah ibn Mas'ud al-Thaqafi. Ibrahim (upon whom be peace) was also standing in prayer; the most closest one to resemble him is your companion (meaning himself). Then the prayer time came, and I led them (in prayer); and when I finished the prayer someone said, 'O Muhammad, this is Malik, hell's gatekeeper, so greet him.' I turned my face towards him, and he greeted me first."⁸

This hadith is clear in saying that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ led all the Prophets ﷺ in prayer. The assembly of the greatest and the congregational prayer of the best of the Creation to grace this world, led by the Greatest of the Creation ﷺ marks the end of the horizontal part of the journey.

When the Prophet ﷺ set out for the heavens, a ladder of extraordinary beauty was lowered before him. According to some narrations, one ladder was of gold and another was of silver, while another narration adds that they were also studded with pearls. As they journeyed upwards by the ladder, the Prophet ﷺ was escorted on his right and left by a procession of angels until they arrived in the heavens and the doors were opened for them.

The Significance of Praying in al-Aqsa

The fact that the Prophet ﷺ was taken to al-Aqsa prior to the Sublime Throne builds the bond between the first place of worship built on earth and the second, as the hadith below indicates:

Abu Dharr ؓ reported that he asked the Prophet ﷺ, “O Messenger of Allah, which Masjid was built first on earth?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “The Sacred Masjid of Makkah.” Abu Dharr again asked, “Which was next?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “The Al-Aqsa Masjid.” “How long was the period between them?” Abu Dharr asked. The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Forty years...”

[Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim]

The Prophet’s praying ﷺ in al-Aqsa consolidates this bond between the first two places of worship built on earth. It also provides al-Aqsa with special significance as this is the only place known to us on earth where all the Prophets of Allah prayed together at one given time led by the final Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The fact that all the Prophets ﷺ were assembled together in al-Aqsa on this special night indicates the inclusive nature of Islam attested to by the Qur’an; “Say (O Muslims!), ‘We believe in Allah and in that which has been revealed to us; in that which was revealed to Ibrahim, Isma‘il, Ishaq,

Ya'qub, and their descendents; in that which was given to Musa and 'Isa; and in that which was given to the Prophets from their Lord'; We do not make any distinction between any of them..." (2:36)

The fact that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ lead all of the other Prophets ﷺ in prayer is a clear indication of his being a leader of all the Prophets ﷺ and therefore a salient call to all humanity and the People of the Book to now come under the guidance of the final Prophet, Muhammad ﷺ.

For Muslims, the prayer by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in al-Aqsa declares the connection, firstly, between the Ka'bah and al-Aqsa, and secondly, between the Prophet ﷺ (and thereby all Muslims) and al-Aqsa. Leading the Prophets ﷺ in prayer in al-Aqsa further signifies inheriting the legacy of the other Prophets ﷺ, and the leadership of humankind.

It also transpires that Bayt al-Maqdis is the only site known to us where Allah ﷻ sent His revelations in the form of a Book to His Prophets, including Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It is in al-Aqsa that Allah ﷻ sent revelations to Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ; to Prophet Dawud ﷺ for the Zabur (Psalms); to Prophet 'Isa ﷺ for the Injil (Evangel); and to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ the following Qurani'c verse:⁹

وَسْأَلُ مَنْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنَا أَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ دُونِ الرَّحْمَنِ إِلَهًا يُعْبَدُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

And ask the Messengers whom We sent before you, did We appoint any other gods, other than the Most Compassionate (i.e. Allah), that might be worshipped?

(Al-Zukhruf 43:45)

The importance of all this for Muslims has been reflected in the reward and virtue of praying in al-Aqsa. Ibn al-Jawzi and Abu Bakr al-Wasiti (Allah have mercy on them both) stated that many scholars of Islam believe that it is not only the reward for prayers in al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa, the Noble Sanctuary) that are multiplied in comparison to prayers elsewhere, but also the rewards for all good deeds therein are multiplied. Similarly, the punishments for bad

deeds in this Holy area are also believed to be multiplied.

The psychology behind increasing the reward for virtues is clearly to imbibe within the believers love, affection and a need to incline towards these Holy sites. The increased merits of praying at al-Aqsa are a clear signal for the believers to frequent it and ensure its well-being.

A. *Virtues of praying*

Abu Darda' رضي الله عنه relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, “A prayer in Makkah is worth 100,000 times; a prayer in my Masjid (in Madinah) is worth 1,000 times; and a prayer in al-Aqsa is worth 500 times more than anywhere else.”

[Al-Tabarani, al-Bayhaqi and al-Suyuti]

Anas ibn Malik رضي الله عنه relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, “The prayer of a person in his house is a single prayer; his prayer in the Masjid of his tribe has the reward of twenty-five prayers; his prayer in the Masjid wherein the Friday prayer is observed has the reward of five hundred prayers; his prayer in Masjid al-Aqsa has a reward of five thousand prayers; his prayer in my Masjid (the Prophet’s Masjid in Madinah) has a reward of fifty thousand prayers; and the prayer in the Sacred Masjid at Makkah has a reward of one hundred thousand prayers.”

[Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah]

B. *Virtues of performing I'tikaf*

If someone makes a vow to perform i'tikaf (seclusion for worship) in Masjid al-Haram (in Makkah), the Prophet’s Masjid (in Madinah), or in Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem), he is to fulfil his vow, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “One should not undertake journeys except to three Masajid, Masjid al-Haram, Masjid al-Aqsa, or this Masjid (the Prophet’s Masjid).”

If someone vows to perform i'tikaf in another Masjid, it is not obligatory on him to fulfil it and he may perform that i'tikaf in

any Masjid, for Allah ﷻ did not specify any particular place for His worship, and there is no superiority of one Masjid over another (with the exception of the three Masajid mentioned above). It has been confirmed that the Prophet ﷺ said, “A prayer in my Masjid is superior to one thousand prayers in any other Masjid but Masjid al-Haram (in Makkah), and a prayer in that Masjid is superior to a prayer in my Masjid by one hundred prayers.”

Thus, if someone makes a vow to perform i'tikaf in the Prophet's Masjid, he may fulfil it in Masjid al-Haram since that one is superior to the Prophet's Masjid.

[Fiqh al-Sunnah]

C. *Virtues of charity*

This hadith is exceptional, as it is the only hadith that draws a parallel between charity and performing *salah* (formal prayer). This should encourage the believers to donate towards al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa). No other similar recommendation has been made for any of the other Masajid. Muslims are requested directly to oversee the welfare of Masjid al-Aqsa and make this a duty of each and every one. The Prophet's proclamation ﷺ of assisting Masjid al-Aqsa, coupled with the mention of performing *salah* there, should not be underestimated and is a clear indication for the believers to engage in the welfare of al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa).

Maymunah bint Sa'd ﷺ relates that she asked the Prophet ﷺ, “O Prophet ﷺ! Inform us about Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem).” He said, “Visit it for prayer.” She asked, “If one of us cannot visit it, what should we do?” He said, “If you cannot go for prayer then send some oil to be used in its lamps; whosoever gives oil for its lamps, will be as if he has prayed in it.”

[Imam Ahmad, Ibn Majah, Sunan Abu Dawud,
and al-Tabarani]

This hadith is a clear indication of the high regard for Masjid al-Aqsa that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ wished to emphasize to the Muslims.

D. *Travelling for prayers*

Yet again, we see the Sacred Law (Shari‘ah) teaching and encouraging us to visit al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa), seeking to build in our hearts love and affection for the blessed place. The encouragement to travel towards al-Aqsa is also a signal to the believers to keep themselves informed about Masjid al-Aqsa, assist with its needs, and increase their *taqwa* (God-consciousness) by building love for Masjid al-Aqsa, one of the greatest symbols of Islam.

Abu Hurayrah ؓ relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, “You should not undertake a special journey to visit any place other than the three Masajid with the expectations of getting greater reward, the Sacred Masjid of Makkah, this Masjid of mine, and Masjid al-Aqsa (of Jerusalem).” In another narration the words are, “For three Masajid a special journey may be undertaken, the Sacred Masjid (Ka‘bah), my Masjid, and the Masjid of al-Quds (Jerusalem).”

[Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, and Sunan Abu Dawud]

Abu Sa‘id ؓ who participated in twelve ghazawat (battles) with the Prophet ﷺ said, “I heard four things from the Messenger of Allah (or I narrate them from the Prophet ﷺ) which won my admiration and appreciation. They are that: (i) no lady should travel without her husband or without a *mahram* (non-marriageable kin) for a two-day journey; (ii) no fasting is permissible on the two days of ‘Id al-Fitr, and ‘Id-al-Adha; (iii) no prayer (may be offered) after two prayers, after the Mid-afternoon (‘Asr) prayer till the sunset, and after the Morning prayer (fajr) till the sunrises; (iv) there is no travel (for visiting) except for three Masajid, Masjid al-Haram

(in Makkah), my Masjid (in Madinah), and Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem).”

[Sahih al-Bukhari]

In an era of air travel, where the world has become easily accessible, travelling to Masjid al-Aqsa should be easy. However, it is surprising to find that despite the advice of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the ease with which one can travel, most Muslims in the West have not visited al-Aqsa. Our selective concept of *din* has subconsciously allowed us to ignore Masjid al-Aqsa. It is important to realize that we must serve the *din* as the need requires, rather than what pleases us and is simple to carry out.

E. *Starting Hajj or 'Umrah from Masjid Al-Aqsa*

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used all means possible to ensure that the Ummah does not forget al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa). The most sacred journey for the Muslim is the journey of Hajj or 'Umrah, and the Prophet ﷺ stated that every Muslim should consider travelling via Masjid al-Aqsa to perform these acts. It became the norm of the pious predecessors (salaf) to follow the Prophet's ﷺ advice, and they would enter their ihram (Hajj garments with the right intention) in al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa). These numerous references in the Shari'ah to al-Aqsa should ensure that it remains at the forefront of our concerns and serve as a warning to the believers against neglecting it. The advice of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the tradition of the pious predecessors need to be revived and believers need once again to strive to enter the state of ihram from al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa) before proceeding for Hajj or 'Umrah.

Umm Salamah ؓ, the Mother of the Faithful, relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, “If anyone puts on ihram for Hajj or 'Umrah from Masjid al-Aqsa and then proceeds to the Sacred Masjid, his former and latter sins will be forgiven, or he will be guaranteed paradise.” The narrator 'Abdullah was in doubt

as to which of these words (“his former and latter sins will be forgiven, or he will be guaranteed paradise”) he ﷺ said.

[Sunan Abu Dawud]

“Yahya ﷺ related to me (Malik) from a reliable source that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar once entered ihram at Iliya’ (Jerusalem).”

[Imam Malik]

Some of the Companions known to have worn their ihram from al-Aqsa include, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab ﷺ, the second righteous Caliph; Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas ﷺ; ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar ﷺ; Tamim al-Dari ﷺ; ‘Amr ibn al-‘As ﷺ; Abu Hurayrah ﷺ; and ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas ﷺ.