



Synopsis of Friday Sermon

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IONA
REPENTANCE
REVITALIZATION OF FAITH
RENEWAL OF COVENANT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on June 07, 2013

The Night Journey and Ascension

Muslims all over the world commemorate the occasion of ‘the Night Journey and Ascension’ (*al-Isra’ wa’l-Mi’raj*) around this time. This blessed event is mentioned in Surat al-Isra’. “Glory be to Him who took His slave on a journey by night from the Masjid al-Haram to the Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, in order to show him some of Our Signs. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing” (*al-Isra’*, 17:1). *Al-Aqsa* means ‘the farthest’ and is called so because of the far distance of the mosque (referred to) in Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) from the sacred mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) in Makkah. This *ayah* is speaking about the miraculous night journey which took the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) from Makkah to Jerusalem and thereafter to the farthest place in the heavens and back. This place is called the *Sidrat ul-Muntaha* (the Lote Tree of the utmost boundary), where no creation has or will ever reach, and where Muhammad (SAW) was brought to be in Allah’s divine presence.

The first house of worship erected on the earth was the sacred mosque at Makkah. “The first House established for mankind was that at Bakka (Makkah), a place of blessing and guidance for all beings” (*Aal ‘Imran*, 3:96). Ibrahim (AS), who along with his son Ismail (AS) had erected this mosque (*Ka’ba*) had later after forty years built *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* in Jerusalem. Both these mosques are considered holy, blessed and interlinked with one another, making it incumbent upon Muslims to protect their sacredness and sanctity from any intervention, invasion, destruction, or occupation—a trust (*amanah*) entrusted to the Muslim *ummah*.

It is reported that the Prophet (SAW) said, “You should not undertake a special journey to visit any place (of worship) other than the three mosques: the sacred mosque of Makkah, this mosque of mine (in al-Madinah), and Al-Aqsa mosque (in Jerusalem).” According to another *hadith*, he (SAW) said, “The prayer prayed in the sacred mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) is equivalent to one hundred thousand prayers, and the prayer in my mosque (*al-Masjid al-Nabawi*) is equivalent to one thousand prayers and the prayer in Jerusalem is equivalent to five hundred prayers.” These Prophetic traditions highlight the importance and significance of these three holy places of worship.

The occasion of *al-Isra’ wa’l-Mi’raj* may be thought of as the transition from the Meccan phase to the Medinan phase. It represents a clear paradigm-shift in the mission of the noble messenger of Allah (SAW)—a shift from the peaceful and non-violent phase in Mecca to the confrontational and armed-conflict phase in Madinah. The specific date of this blessed night journey is not known. There are varying opinions. However, Imam al-Nawawi’s opinion that it took place on the 27th night of the month of Rajab prevails over other opinions, and is generally accepted by Muslims all over the world.

There is no *hadith*, evidence from the *Sunnah*, or from the practice of the companions (*sahaba*) that emphasizes additional *‘ibadah* on that particular night or the day preceding or following it. To do so with the intention that it will bring one closer to Allah is nothing but an innovation in *deen* (*bid’ah*). We are informed

through a *hadith* that says, "...Beware of newly invented matters, for every invented matter is an innovation and every innovation is a going astray, and every going astray is in Hell-fire." The occasion itself is very significant and invites us to remember it and draw useful lessons from it.

During the ten long years of preaching in Makkah, the Prophet (SAW), his companions, and the small community of believers were subjected to all kinds of humiliation, abuses, imposition of economic sanctions, and boycott by the larger community of Makkah. As if this was not enough, following the deaths of his uncle Abu Talib and his beloved wife, Khadija (RA), both of whom had been supportive of him to their level best; plots were hatched to eliminate the Prophet (SAW). Cognizant of these developments, the Prophet (SAW) decided to move the base of his *da'wah* work from Makkah to al-Ta'if, a town in one of the suburbs of Makkah. Accompanied with Zayd ibn Haritha, he proceeded to al-Ta'if to spread God's message, but alas only to be vehemently rejected by its cruel inhabitants. They drove the two out, pelting stones at them to the point that the Prophet (SAW) left al-Ta'if with his feet bleeding and his heart broken. This was one of the most difficult periods he had faced in his missionary work. Disappointed, dismayed, confused, and no one to turn to for support, he turned to his Lord with a lacerated heart to give vent to his wounded feelings in the following words: "O Allah! I appeal to you for the weakness in my strength, and my limited power, and the treatment of contempt and humiliation from people. To you, the most Merciful of all the Merciful ones, you are the Lord of the oppressed, and you are my Lord. Under whose care are you leaving me to? To an enemy oppressing me? Or to a friend you have given control of my affair? If there is no anger from you on me I will forever be content. However, your blessing is vastly important for me. I seek refuge with the glory of your light, which the heavens and earth are lit from that your anger does not befall on me, nor your displeasure descends on me. To you is the supplication until you are pleased, and there is no control or power except by you."

To pacify the Prophet (SAW), Allah (SWT) responded to this *du'a* in an unusual way. He called him to His Divine Presence; thus the occurrence of the night journey followed by the ascension, and the Prophet's coming to the Divine Presence of the Lord of all worlds.

Under the protection of a polytheist (*mushrik*) by the name of Mut'am ibn Ali, the Prophet (SAW) left al-Ta'if for Makkah. The stage was being set for the Prophet (SAW) and his followers to migrate from Makkah to Madinah. It was during this period of time that one night Jibril (AS) asked Muhammad (SAW) to mount a white, winged horse-like creature named Buraq. The Buraq took him to *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* in Jerusalem, where gathered together in one place were the prophets from Adam (AS) to 'Isa ibn Maryam (AS). Muhammad (SAW) led them all in prayer, as a token of confirmation of being the seal of all prophets and messengers. From there Muhammad (SAW) and Jibril (AS) began the final leg of their journey, up to the heavens. This is known as the Ascension of the Prophet. While travelling upward toward his destination at *Sidrat ul-Muntaha*, the Prophet (SAW) met Adam, Yahya, 'Isa ibn Maryam, Yusuf, Idris, Harun, Musa, and Ibrahim (peace be upon them all) at each of the seven heavenly stations as they affirmed and expressed faith in his Prophethood.

At *Sidrat ul-Muntaha*, the Prophet (SAW) witnessed the 'Much Frequented House (*Bayt al-Ma'mur*), a replica of the Holy *Ka'ba* on earth. It is said that seventy thousand angels encompass it every day while they are glorifying Allah (SWT). Engulfed in the glory and light of the Divine Presence, Muhammad (SAW) experienced an ineffable ecstasy.

The gift of fifty daily prayers, which in consultation with Musa (AS) were reduced to five were given to the Prophet (SAW) and his followers. The reward of the reduced five prayers was kept equivalent to that of fifty prayers.

Al-Isra' wa'l-Mi'raj not only signifies the end of the period of persecution and passive resistance through transition to Madinah, but also signifies the role of leadership over Makkah and Jerusalem (*al-Quds*). It so happened that as a result of Bani Israel's constant breach of their covenant made with Allah, and other crimes and transgressions, the two thousand years old leadership role of the *ummah* of Musa (AS)—the Bani Israel was transferred to the *ummah* of Muhammad (SAW). This happened just about two years after the *hijrah* bringing the history of Bani Israel to an end.

This shift in leadership is very significant to Muslims because after Muhammad (SAW), it is the Muslims who assume the role of being in charge. Allah's *Sunnah* of preferring one *ummah* over another is based on how it conducts itself. There was a time when Bani Israel was given preference over all other nations. This was followed by a time when Bani Israel fell into ignominy for rejecting the signs of Allah, for killing prophets without any justification, and for their disobedience and transgressions. "*O Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you and favored you over other people*" (*al-Baqarah*, 2:47). "*They are stricken with disgrace wherever they are found, except through a rope (covenant) from God and a rope from the people. And they have incurred the wrath of God unto themselves and have been struck with with humiliation; that is because they have persistently disbelieved in God's revelation and killed prophets without any right, all because of their disobedience and boundless transgression*" (*Aal 'Imran*, 3:112). Praising the newly installed *ummah*, Allah says, "*You are the best nation ever to be produced before mankind. You enjoin the right, forbid the wrong and have faith in Allah*" (*Aal Imran*, 3:110).

Consequently, it behooves the Muslim *ummah* to be responsible for the safety, security, and protection of *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* and Palestine. The significance of the whole episode of *al-Isra' wa'l-Mi'raj* can hardly be over emphasized. The incidents that took place during this journey show the significance of the occasion while providing useful lessons at the same time.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW)'s leading other prophets and messengers in prayer at *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* signifies the importance of that land of the prophets. His meeting with Adam (AS), the father of all humanity (*Abul Bashar*) in the first heaven, and Adam (AS) pleading him to save his children from hell is also significant as the responsibility of conveying the message now devolves upon us Muslims. We become responsible today for guiding humanity to what pleases Allah, and to take people out of darkness into light.

In the second heaven he came across the last two Prophets that came immediately before him—'Isa (AS) and Yahya (AS). Meeting them was a reminder to be wary of the plots and conspiracies of those and their like who had killed Yahya and attempted to crucify 'Isa ibn Maryam. This is a message and reminder to us to remain united, and to be one against the enemy.

In the third heaven he was greeted by Yusuf (AS), the symbol of honor and purity. He, as the Qur'an informs us was put to severe trials by the wife of al-Aziz, who had tried to seduce him. A quick lesson to derive from here is to be cautious of the trials (*fitan*) of women who may tempt one away from the work of *da'wah*. This is all the more relevant in the promiscuous society of North America where we live and work. According to a *hadith*, "The world is sweet and green, and Allah having put you in it in your turn watches how you act; so protect yourself from the world and from women, for the first trial of Bani Israel was with women."

In the fourth heaven, the Prophet (SAW) met Idris (AS) about whom Allah says, "*Mention Idris in the Book. He was a true man and a Prophet*" (*Maryam*, 19:56). The lesson to be derived is that we have to be truthful, honest, and sincere in what we do, and to be with those who are truthful. The Qur'an exhorts us to have *taqwa* of Allah and to be in the company of the truthful. "*O you who believe! Have taqwa of Allah and be with the truly sincere ones*" (*al-Taubah*, 9:119).

In the fifth heaven, there was a meeting with Harun (AS), the symbol of eloquence in speech. As a caller to Allah (*da'ee*), one has to be articulate and eloquent in what one presents to the people. As we learn from the Qur'an, Musa (AS) recognizing his own limitation of eloquence in speech had taken Harun (AS) along with him to Firaun and his followers as Harun (AS) was more fluent and expressive than him in speech.

In the sixth heaven, the Prophet (SAW) met Musa (AS), who had been honored with talking directly with Allah (SWT). "*And Allah spoke directly to Musa*" (*al-Nisa'*, 4:164). This was a sign as if Allah was saying to Muhammad (SAW) that just as He had made Musa (AS) victorious over Firaun, so would He make him victorious over the Firaun of his *ummah*—Abu Jahl. And indeed this happened, for shortly afterwards, Abu Jahl and many of his followers were killed in the Battle of Badr. Allah (SWT) tells us that Musa (AS) was

truly sincere. *“And mention Musa in the Book. He was truly sincere and was a Messenger and a Prophet” (Maryam, 19:51)*. We too have to be sincere. We also need to understand the Firaun; the rebellious, the transgressors, and the false gods (*taghut*) of our times. It is the system of godlessness (*ilhad*) and disbelief (*kufir*) prevalent everywhere that we have to grapple with.

Finally, in the seventh heaven, he was greeted by the father of the prophets (*Abul Anbiya'*)—Ibrahim (AS) who was an ummah all by himself. *“Ibrahim was a community in himself devoted to God and true in faith, He was not one of the polytheists” (al-Nahl, 16:120)*. Just as he had sacrificed everything for Allah’s sake, so should we be ready to try to emulate him. The Prophet (SAW) had been asked to declare, *“...My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for God, Lord of all the Worlds” (al-An’am, 6:162)*.

Some of the other useful lessons to be drawn are: (1) To maintain and guard our salah that keeps us mindful of Allah, and connected to Him; (2) To continue the mission of the Prophet (SAW) by holding on persistently to the work of *da’wah* assigned to this ummah. The way of life of truth has to prevail ultimately. *“It is He (Allah) who sent His Messenger with the Guidance and the way of life of Truth so that He may make it prevail over all other ways of life, and Allah is sufficient as a witness” (al-Fath, 48:28)*; (3) To do whatever we can within our means as an *ummah* to protect *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* and see to it that it remains standing and functional; (4) To work with our Jewish, Christian, and Muslim brothers and sisters, and people of conscience from all walks of life in order to end the occupation of Palestine and to end the legacy of usurping lands and violating human rights therein.

The boycott movement has gained momentum in the West. Academicians, artists, and politicians among others have joined hands to express their solidarity in trying to stop the greatest and most blatant injustice of our time. Falsehood cannot remain forever. It has to vanish and give way to truth. However, the struggle against falsehood takes its toll by way of hard work and sacrifice. We have to do our part and Allah (SWT) will do His. *“No! We hurl the truth against falsehood, and truth obliterates it- see how falsehood vanishes away! ...” (Al-Anbiya’, 21:18)*.

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