

“Call to the path of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation,  
and argue with people in the best manner.” (Holy Quran, 16:125)

# *The Light* AND **ISLAMIC REVIEW**

Exponent of Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement  
for over ninety years

April – June 2012

In the spirit of the above-cited verse, this periodical attempts to dispel misunderstandings about the religion of Islam and endeavors to facilitate inter-faith dialogue based on reason and rationality.

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احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

◆ Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., U.S.A. ◆

P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, U.S.A.

*The Light* was founded in 1921 as the organ of the AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN ISHA'AT ISLAM (Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam) of Lahore, Pakistan. *The Islamic Review* was published in England from 1913 for over 50 years, and in the U.S.A. from 1980 to 1991. The present periodical represents the beliefs of the worldwide branches of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore.

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The main objective of the A.A.I.I.L. is to present the true, original message of Islam to the whole world — Islam as it is found in the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, obscured today by grave misconceptions and wrong popular notions.

Islam seeks to attract the *hearts and minds* of people towards the truth, by means of reasoning and the natural beauty of its principles.

*Hazrat* Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), our Founder, arose to remind the world that Islam is:

**International:** It recognizes prophets being raised among all nations and requires Muslims to believe in them all. Truth and goodness can be found in all religions. God treats all human beings equally, regardless of race, nationality or religion.

**Peaceful:** Allows use of force only in unavoidable self-defence. Teaches Muslims to live peacefully under any rule which accords them freedom of religion.

**Tolerant:** Gives full freedom to everyone to hold and practise any creed or religion. Requires us to tolerate differences of belief and opinion.

**Rational:** In all matters, it urges use of human reason and knowledge. Blind following is condemned and independence of thought is granted.

**Inspiring:** Worship is not a ritual, but provides living contact with a Living God, Who answers prayers and speaks to His righteous servants even today as in the past.

**Non-sectarian:** Every person professing Islam by the words *La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur rasul-ullah* (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is a Muslim. A Muslim cannot be expelled from Islam by anyone.

*Hazrat* Mirza Ghulam Ahmad taught that **no** prophet, old or new, is to arise after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. However, *Mujaddids* will be raised by God to revive and rekindle the light of Islam.

**About ourselves**

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore has branches in many countries including:

U.S.A.	Australia
U.K.	Canada
Holland	Fiji
Indonesia	Germany
Suriname	India
Trinidad	South Africa
Guyana	Philippines

**Achievements:**

The Anjuman has produced extensive literature on Islam, originally in English and Urdu, including translations of the Holy Quran with commentaries. These books are being translated into other languages, including French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. The Anjuman has run several Muslim missions around the world, including the first ever in Western Europe.

**History:**

**1889:** *Hazrat* Mirza Ghulam Ahmad founds the Ahmadiyya Movement.

**1901:** Movement given name *Ahmadiyya* after Holy Prophet Muhammad's other famous name *Ahmad*.

**1905:** *Hazrat* Mirza appoints central body (Anjuman) to manage the Movement.

**1908:** Death of *Hazrat* Mirza. Succeeded by Maulana Nur-ud-Din as Head.

**1914:** Death of Maulana Nur-ud-Din. Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam founded at Lahore as continuation of the original Anjuman. Maulana Muhammad Ali elected as Head.

**1951:** Death of Maulana Muhammad Ali after fifty years of glorious service to the cause of Islam. Maulana Sadr-ud-Din (d. 1981) becomes Head.

**1981–1996:** Dr Saeed Ahmad Khan, an eminent medical doctor and religious scholar, led the Movement, at a time of intense persecution.

**1996–2002:** Prof. Dr Asghar Hameed, a distinguished retired University Professor of Mathematics, and learned Islamic scholar, served as Head.

**2002:** Prof. Dr Abdul Karim Saeed Pasha elected Head.

## Allah: A Christian Response

Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens

*[This article reproduces two sermons by Rev. Timothy Ahrens, Senior Minister of the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, located in downtown Columbus, Ohio. The First Congregational Church is well-known for its devotion to social justice, and Rev. Ahrens has been an inspiration to many, including the Editor, for his commitment to building relationships of understanding and friendship between faith communities. In these two sermons, Rev. Ahrens addresses the issue of whether Christians, Muslims and Jews worship the same God. Answering in the affirmative, Rev. Ahrens then, drawing upon the work of Dr. Miroslav Volf, goes on to outline six elements that provide practical guidance in fostering better communication and relationships between Christians and Muslims.]*

### Part 1 – August 14, 2011

During the month of Ramadan in 610 A.D., an illiterate Arab businessman had an experience that changed the history of the world. Every year at this time, Muhammad ibn Abdallah used to retire to a cave on the summit of Mount Hira, just outside Mecca, where he prayed, fasted and gave alms to the poor. By 610, the 40-year-old Mohammad had become deeply concerned about the growing divide between rich and poor in the Arabian Peninsula. The rich were becoming richer and treating the poor worse and worse. The nomadic code of compassion and concern for the poor was being abandoned. Murder was increasing. Hunger, starvation and poverty were arising at an alarming rate (sounds strikingly like our times). A compassionate man, Mohammad was beside himself as he climbed Mt. Hira and entered the cave.

All of that changed on the 21st night of Ramadan, when Muhammad awoke to a devastating presence, the angel of the Lord Gabriel, who squeezed him tightly and said, “READ!”

As an illiterate man, he answered, “I am not one of they who can read.” The Angel insisted, “Read!” Again Muhammad said, “I am not one of they who can read.”

Now the Angel Gabriel embraced him and repeated this exchange saying, “Read in the name of Allah (God) who created mankind from a clot of blood. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who by the pen taught man what he did not know.” Now Mohammad repeated the angel’s words aloud and two years later, when he first spoke of this encounter to his wife, he recalled to her, “It was as if the words were impressed on my heart.” He was so frightened that he fled the cave. As he was leaving, he heard Gabriel’s voice saying, “O Muhammad, you are

God’s messenger and I am Gabriel.” (Drawn from Karen Armstrong’s *Islam*, pp.3-4 and Stephen Schwartz’s *The Two Faces of Islam*, pp. 9-10).

Having been visited by Gabriel several more times, in 612, Mohammad began to share these revelations beyond his family. He began to lead prayers with all who would join him. In time, the revelations were written down as 114 suras (or chapters), which now compose the holy book of Islam known as the Quran, which translated means, “the recitations.” These suras are vastly different in length, some a few sentences and some pages in length. It is the 114 suras that imams chant in the five time daily prayers of the mosque. Having received the revelations over 22 years, Mohammad died in 632 - having recited these all to scribes who gave us the Quran in Arabic.

It is now 1,401 years later. With the “sliver of the sun” appearing in the east we have arrived at the 14th day of Ramadan (around 4:30 a.m.). Next Sunday, is called “the Night of Power,” Laylat al-Qadr.

It is said in Islam that on Laylat al-Qadr, whatever you prayerfully ask of Allah will be granted. Last year on Laylat al-Qadr, I was in a remote section of Cairo, Egypt, praying with Imam Belal and hundreds of Muslim faithful in the Bani Hashim Mosque. In this mosque that had been opened for eight years, I was told that I was the only (known) Christian to have ever crossed its threshold. As the men and boys touch their heads to the ground (before me) in supplication and surrender, and the women and children did the same in a screened in area behind me, I sat quietly, observing and offering only one prayer to our one God. “God of Abraham, help your children to be at peace. Guide us that we may live in harmony with you and one another.”

I prayed over and over for God’s peace to be upon God’s people. As the imam sang and the faithful responded, I felt God’s peace within and around me. Perhaps, on this most historic “Night of Power” - just perhaps - this one prayer offered from the depth of my soul would reach the ears and heart of Almighty God - Allah - and be granted. In my heart of hearts, I felt that night (and still feel today) that if we cannot find a way of peace, the Night of Power, along with Christmas Eve and the first night of Passover and all our holy nights and days of religious joy, will be no more. I believe that like the people on the Arabian Peninsula 1,400 years ago, we humans created have such a divide between ourselves religiously and economically, that we need God to grant us peace.

God of Abraham, hear our prayer . . .

This week, over half of the world’s population - 1.3 billion Muslims and 1.7 billion Christians - 3 billion

people worldwide - will worship one God. The question is: Are we worshipping the same God?

When conservative evangelical Pastor Rick Warren (of *The Purpose Driven Life* fame) offered the invocation at President Obama's inauguration on January 20, 2009, he created a firestorm among his conservative brethren when he not only acknowledged God as our Father (Christianity) and "the God of Israel" (Judaism) but added, "You are the compassionate and merciful one toward everyone you have made." This final phrase of his opening acknowledged as well the God of Islam - Allah - who is spoken of throughout the Quran as compassionate and merciful. Conservatives skewered Pastor Warren calling him a blasphemer and adding, "Allah cannot be God." They went on to say, you choose Jesus or Allah - but they are incompatible because Allah cannot be God to the Christians.

I find this perspective strange and filled with lies. As I worshiped in Arabic-speaking Christian churches throughout my time in the Middle East, "Allah" was one the word I recognized all the time. Genesis begins, "In the beginning, "Allah" created the heavens and the earth." "Allah" is the Arabic name for God - no more, no less. Arabic Christians definitely worship "Allah" - although they are clear in pointing out their differences with Islam.

In his 2011 book, *Allah: A Christian Response*, Yale Divinity School professor of theology Miroslav Volf writes: "For monotheists to worship God means, among other things, to espouse a set of values about what ultimately matters in human life. To worship a different god is to espouse a different set of values. A clash of gods is a clash of ultimate values. That's why the question of whether a given community worships the same god as another community has always been a crucial cultural and political question, not just a theological one" (p. 7).

For example, when the war in Iraq got underway and tensions began escalating between Muslim communities and some Western governments, U.S. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Lt. General William Boykin suggested that, "Allah is not a real God and that Muslims worship an idol" (not a theologian and certainly not a diplomat either). Pat Robertson was blunter. He said, "The conflicts between Islam and the West concern the matter of whether, the moon God of Mecca known as Allah is supreme or whether the Judeo-Christian Jehovah, the God of the Bible, is supreme." Robertson's claim that Allah is the moon God of Mecca is historically false and turns the differences between the God of the Quran and the God of the Bible into a bad and damaging caricature. Nevertheless, Robertson correctly expressed the political impact of a radical difference between the gods that people variously worship.

So what is the truth of Allah? Do Muslims, Christians and Jews worship the same God? I believe the answer is "Yes."

What I am about to say may be disconcerting to some of you. To others, you feel supported in your long held beliefs. I am deeply grounded my conviction that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. Nevertheless, I affirm a number of things about Allah.

I believe that there is only one God in our monotheistic faiths. We do understand God's character differently; the object of our worship is the same. Islam and Christianity describe God as loving and just, even if we have differences of understanding how God's love and justice are seen and known. The God of Islam and the God of Christianity - the one and only God - commands that we love our neighbors, even though the way in which we should love our neighbors differs. We both have robust moral frameworks to our faith traditions. We both (should) resist contemporary culture's claim for self-pleasure rather than love and justice for all, as the hallmark to the good life. In addition, both Christians and Muslims are called to love (the one) God with all our hearts, souls, strength and mind.

Whether we do this through the teachings of Jesus or the revelation given to Mohammad, it is all about God. Jesus points to his father. Mohammad points to Allah as the only true God to worship and praise. Like two brothers glorifying their heavenly Father, the words differ, but the measure of meaning points to only one God. While the Holy Trinity is the greatest stumbling block for the Quran and contemporary Muslims, it is also the greatest stumbling block for every great teacher in the church (drawn from Volf, pp. 14-15).

We need to struggle with the truth claims of our faith as we actively seek to find common ground with our sisters and brothers in Islam and Christianity. We need to read the Gospels and our Bibles as people of faith, not as ideologically and politically combative captives of our various cultures.

Laylat al-Qadr, the "Night of Power," is only one week away. One year ago on this night, I was asked by my interpreter, named Mohammed, why I had come to Egypt and the Bani Hashim Mosque. I answered, "If I were not here, then we all may not be here one day." He understood. We ALL need to figure out how to live, love and practice our faiths in ONE GOD. The future of our life on this fragile globe we call home depends on this.

I invite you to join me in praying: "God of Abraham, help your children to be at peace. Guide us that we may live in harmony with you and one another."

In part II of this sermon series. I will delve even deeper into the agreements and disagreements between Islam and Christianity. In the meantime, may we reach out in love to another and may peace prevail. Salaam alakem! (Alakem Salaam!).

## Part 2 – August 28, 2011

Extremism concerns all of us when facing the troubling times and challenges between 1.7 billion Christians and 1.3 billion Muslims. With the 10th anniversary of 9/11/01 only two weeks away, and shows, films, articles, You-Tube videos, books and more about to hit the airwaves and print waves, I hope what I am about to say will help you put the armor of love and face those who may be seeking to vilify and separate people even more and once again.

Having spent time living, praying, fasting and worshipping with Muslims in Palestine, Egypt and here in central Ohio as well, I have experienced the love of God in deep and meaningful ways. It is our charge as Christians to reach out and build relationships with our Muslim sisters and brothers. Let me repeat: **WE ARE CHARGED TO REACH OUT AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS - in this case Islam.**

Perhaps no Christian has ever placed the charge in front of us more eloquently than the Apostle Paul has in today's passage from Romans 12:9-21. Listen again to Paul's words as I take excerpts of Paul speaking directly to the heart of relationship with people of other faiths (and no faith at all). Paul says:

Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with mutual affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ...Rejoice in Hope... persevere in prayer...live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty...do not claim to be wiser than you are...do not repay evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all...live peaceably with all... (AND MOST SIGNIFICANTLY), do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

To get there, let me suggest six elements we need in order to create an environment that discourage extremism and fosters communication and relationships between Islam and Christianity. I draw upon from Dr. Miroslav Volf's book, *Allah: A Christian Response* to guide our response.

**1. We need a discourse about truth.** Extremism thrives when reasoned debate about important issues of public concern is absent. Inversely, where extremism thrives, such reasoned debate tends to shut down. At their core, the values of

Christian and Muslim faith are not about irrational stances of blind passions. In both faiths, believers use reason and make truth claims. Reasoned and thorough conversations of faith are the only way we to look closely at our faith claims.

**2. We need the acknowledgment of a common God.** For Christians and Muslims to each worship a different God would mean that one group is made up of idolaters while the other worships the true God. It would also mean that the two groups have a very different set of ultimate values. It leads to divisions constantly growing and a divide never to be breached. On the other hand, if we acknowledge our one God, we will also be acknowledging our large and deep set of overlapping values, which provide a moral framework in which to debate our differences rather than seek to silence or stop the other.

Last fall, we held an event in our sanctuary which filled out pews. It was an interfaith rally for peace. We walked from here to the Statehouse. I was fortunate to walk and talk with a young Muslim woman who wore the traditional head cover. Her father is a Syrian Muslim and her mother grew up a Southern Baptist in the mountains of West Virginia. Here's a story:

Not only was mom Southern Baptist, but her father was a Baptist preacher. Needless to say, the first meeting between this young woman's West Virginian grandparents and her parents wasn't real smooth. But in time her grandpa accepted his son-in-law because they shared a faith in one God. She said, "Now dad is grandpa's favorite in-law. Think of it. They both pray five times a day, neither of them drinks or smokes; they respect their wives, love their children, and believe strongly in education and family values." She smiled and said, "You see! Southern Baptists and Muslims share a lot in common." I would add - they have a common God with a common set of ultimate values!

**3. We need to stand strong in our belief that God is merciful, loving and just.** We cannot simply stand in any set of values as we seek to walk together in the name of our One God. We could stand in the values that our God was a fierce and irrational deity whose angry whims must be obeyed. This would be false and untrue. Both Muslims and Christians agree that Allah - our one God - is merciful, loving and just. Our God is beneficent to all and merciful toward transgressors. Our God is just. These are bridges of grace and truth that no extremists can blow up - no madman in any faith tradition can destroy these

beliefs. Love and justice, mercy and grace are divine and therefore ultimate values. All human practices and behaviors must be measured against these values.

4. **We need adherence to God's command to love our neighbors.** Miroslav Volf writes, "If God commands believers to hate all infidels and love only coreligionists, extremism has a religious sanction. On the other hand, if God commands believers to love all neighbors - utterly irrespective of their creeds - then we have strong religious reasons to oppose extremism and work for caring and just relations among peoples of all religions" (Ibid p.260). Frankly, the more we embrace and live into God's command to love neighbors, the more religious we are and the less extremist we will be.

5. **We need to stand against injustice and prejudice in our religious traditions.** One of the elements that feed extremism is real or perceived injustice. We need to find ways to listen to others who share the claims of injustice and then work toward justice for all. In addition, extremism thrives on feeding of prejudice and demonizing others. It starves when the light of knowledge falls on others and their humanity becomes manifest.

Dr. Volf writes: Prejudice and demonization are forms of falsehood, and falsehood in assessing others is always a form of injustice. Commitment to love and justice is a commitment to learn the truth about others - the pleasant and the unpleasant (the ugly and the beautiful) - and to understand their motivations and aspirations. Commitment to love and justice is also to truth about oneself and to a deeper understanding about one's own relation to others (Ibid, p. 261).

6. **Finally, we need to stand against disrespect.** We are all aware of the Danish cartoons, five years ago which graphically insulted Mohammed. Perhaps you have been the recipient of hateful or even purposefully malicious emails about Islam - which are particularly troubling when they come from folks who confess the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, as their Lord and Savior. In the face of these kinds of insulting acts, we have seen that the ire and hatred of extremists inflamed particularly when the sacred symbols of the Muslim faith are desecrated. The command to love our neighbors demands that we refrain from such disrespect. We do not need to agree with the views of Muslims, we just need to be civil rather mean-spirited as we disagree (Ibid, p. 262).

I ask all of you to do what one member of First Church did last week. Upon receiving a vicious and hateful email sent to a number of people, she called me. We talked. She took my information and her information and responded with a clear, thoughtful and loving answer to the email - including a response which said that in generations past, women, blacks, (and today) gays could have been named in the lines about Muslims and we would have found the emails to be sexist, racist, homophobic and just simply hateful. At every turn, with every opportunity we need to stand up against disrespect.

On this 48th anniversary of "The March on Washington" in which The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. cried out to the heart and soul of America to end the trials and travails of civil injustice and racial inequality in our nation in his "I Have A Dream" speech, I call upon all of us to be the drum majors of peace and justice in this community in relations between Muslims and Christians.

We need to find a way out of the polarizing extremes dividing people of faith in Islam and Christianity. It begins with our conviction and commitment to find ways, in the power and the name of One God, to listen and learn; to challenge and be challenged; to worship and pray together; to break down walls that divide and build-up relationships that strengthen us.

Standing before 250,000 people at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., Dr. King said it this way to people in his time (and all time):

This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together... to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

Years ago, there was a young woman who pursued justice with all her heart, soul, mind and strength. Like Dr. King, she died at a young age. When others of her generation were looking for leaders to guide them forward - a Dr. King, a Gandhi, someone, anyone, she said, "I believe that God is telling us that we are the ones we have been looking for."

I believe you are ones God has been looking for to lead us in the ways of peace and justice within and between Islam and Christianity. May you come to know your way in this calling and step boldly into doing the right thing. God knows we need you. Amen. ■

## Finality of Prophethood

A Sermon from January 27, 1922

**Maulana Muhammad Ali (translated into English  
by Dr. Muhammad Ahmad)**

*[This article is an English translation (ably done by Dr. Muhammad Ahmad) of a Jummah Khutba (Sermon) by Maulana Muhammad Ali from January 27, 1922. In this Khutba, Maulana Muhammad Ali addresses the Islamic belief of “finality of prophethood” in the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. In particular, he addresses the meaning of the term “seal of the prophets” as contained in the Holy Quran 33:40, and responds to the peculiar interpretation of this term as advanced by the Qadian section of the Ahmadiyya Movement. In the logical and convincing fashion in which his sermons were always delivered, Maulana Muhammad Ali explains the meaning of the term “seal of the prophets” as establishing the absolute end of prophethood with the appearance of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. In addition, he clarifies how the unity of the Muslim ummah (community) is dependent on accepting the Holy Prophet Muhammad as their spiritual father, as this is the true significance of the concept of finality of prophethood in Islam.]*

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah, after this I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil. In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful.

### Meaning of the Term “Seal of the Prophets”

*Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the prophets. And Allah is ever Knower of all things. (33:40)*

This verse of the chapter *Al-Ahzab* (The Allies) forms the basis of a very well established and sacred principle of our Islamic faith. This principle has had uniform acceptance amongst the Muslims over the last thirteen hundred years and has survived otherwise bitter sectarian divide. No one contested its validity.

Sometimes, however, the words of the Holy Quran are interpreted to suit one’s personal views. In terms of Shariah, this form of interpretation is called *Tafsir-bil-rai*, or commentary based upon personal opinion. In this quest, the words of the Holy Quran and the sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are casually rejected. Once an errant principle is accepted, the words of the Holy Quran are manipulated in support of it and attempts are made to

draw a wrong conclusion from them. When the followers of the Shia sect decided to elevate the status of Hadhrat Ali above the other venerable companions of the Holy Prophet, they started falsely accusing them. Many a verse of the Holy Quran was thus interpreted to prove the elevated spiritual status of Hadhrat Ali, Imam Hasan and Imam Hussein, and to declare the other companions as hypocrites. Many words were thus wrongly interpreted to support this false notion.

Following this faulty standard of interpreting the Holy Quran, the belief of continuation of prophethood was invented by a section of the Ahmadiyya Movement (under leadership of Mirza Mehmood Ahmad). Attempts are now being made to derive a meaning in support of such a notion from various verses of the Holy Quran. Even the verse of *Al-Fatihah* “Guide us on the right path,” was put forth to support this errant view. Is the supplication to be guided on the right path a prayer for acquisition of prophethood? Was our Holy Prophet not a prophet when he was taught this prayer and hence was advised to ask for it? Certainly after he attained prophethood, there was no need for continuing to supplicate in this matter! This is indeed very strange logic: that the Holy Prophet was taught to ask for prophethood after he had already been delegated this responsibility. It would have made more sense if this had occurred before he was given the mantle of prophethood.

In a similar manner the words of the *As-sala ‘ala-n-Nabiyy* are misinterpreted to prove this erroneous doctrine. The other day a follower of Mirza Mehmood Ahmad came to visit us and tried to prove this point. He made this claim that the *as-sala ‘ala-n-Nabiyy* clearly supports the doctrine of continuation of prophethood! In this prayer we recite, “O Allah, exalt Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad as thou exalted Abraham and the followers of Abraham. Thou art indeed Praised, Magnified. Oh Allah, bless Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad as thou blessed Abraham and the followers of Abraham. Thou art indeed Praised, Magnified.” By this he implied that since the greatest blessing and exaltation given to the followers of Abraham was the gift of prophethood, it is what the followers of Muhammad are also asking for when they recite these words.

If only these people would give some thought to their statements they would realize what they are saying and appreciate its grave consequences! If what they say is correct, and this is indeed the real implication of *As-sala ‘ala-n-Nabiyy*, it would mean that the Holy Prophet has not yet been given prophethood and we are praying for this to happen. We are supplicating for the exaltation and blessing for Muhammad before his followers who are mentioned afterwards in this prayer. Thus without

thinking these people interpret these words in accordance with their wishes. They create a doctrine and then attempt to manipulate the Quranic word and hadith accordingly. They come up with strange concepts in pursuit of their vain desires!

Similarly they interpret this Quranic verse, “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the prophets,” to imply continuation of prophethood. As I will shortly explain, the manner in which they arrive at this conclusion negates the real purpose and intent of this verse. The two statements, “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men” and “but he is the Messenger of Allah”, do not seem to be apparently connected. In reality what this means is that although physically Muhammad is not the father of any of you, by being the messenger of Allah he becomes your spiritual father, for a messenger spiritually stands in such relationship with his followers. If physically he is not the father of any of you, it does not imply any shortcoming. They agree with this interpretation up to this point that the Holy Prophet did not have any male offspring and he was the spiritual father of his followers.

After this come the words, “and (he is) the Seal of the prophets.” From the time of the Holy prophet to this date these words have always been interpreted to mean that with The Holy Prophet all prophethood has ended and nobody has had the courage to contest this meaning. We should now ask ourselves what is the relationship of this statement with the previous one? It is a fact that ever since the institution of prophethood was mandated by Divine intent, prophets have followed each other in succession. When a prophet is succeeded by another, it implies that the spiritual dispensation of the previous prophet has ended and that of the new one begins. This verse tells us that the Holy Prophet Muhammad is the Seal of the prophets after whom there is no prophet. If another prophet comes after him, the implication would be that his spiritual dispensation has ended. The Holy Prophet, however, is such a spiritual father that his spiritual lineage extends till the Day of Judgment. The Holy Prophet was not the physical father of any of your men, but he is no doubt your spiritual father. No other spiritual father is now destined to come in the world after him. Since every prophet stands in the position of a spiritual father, there is no prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad and he is the seal of the prophets.

Now this verse is being interpreted [by the aforementioned group] to mean that there will be prophets after the Holy Prophet Muhammad from amongst his followers who will be given this office through a stamp of approval by the Holy Prophet. In other words in the past it was God who appointed prophets and now it is the

Holy Prophet Muhammad who gives the stamp of approval for this purpose! If you give it careful thought, with this interpretation the verse is deprived of its original meaning. Considering this interpretation, it would mean that although the Holy Prophet Muhammad is not the physical father of any of your men, he is nevertheless your spiritual father; there will, however, be other spiritual fathers after him, even though they may be offshoots of his spirituality, they will still be fathers. Similarly, that the Holy Prophet is thus being informed by Allah that physically you are not the father of any of these men amongst your followers, but your spiritual dispensation is also coming to an end because after you there will be others who will also bear this spiritual relationship to your followers. By using the term messenger or prophet in opposition to the term father, it is ascertained that every messenger is in likeness to a spiritual father for his followers. Thus, if other prophets were to appear they would necessarily be the spiritual fathers of this nation.

The belief that the coming of prophets after the Holy Prophet Muhammad by his stamp of approval somehow elevates the status of the Holy Prophet is completely wrong. Interpreting the term “seal of prophets” in this manner does not bring good news, nor does it elevate the status of the Holy Prophet. Indeed it is sad news: that along with the termination of the physical male progeny of the Holy Prophet, we are also informed that his spiritual descendants are also coming to an end and other prophets and messengers are to follow him who would be in the position of spiritual fathers for this nation.

If we analyze this interpretation of the Seal of the prophets from another angle we also conclude that it is incorrect. It has always been the case that all messengers and prophets are spiritual fathers for their nations and therefore do not have any distinctive title. In the case of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, he was given the special distinction of being the *seal of the prophets* by Allah. If the meaning of this term “seal of the prophets” was not clear and for thirteen hundred years no one understood its correct meaning in spite of all efforts, then one may ask why this term was used after all. Is it not strange that for thirteen hundred years all that people understood this verse to mean that there was to be no prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad and after thirteen hundred years this new meaning is realized. If this is in reality the meaning of the term, that prophets and messengers will continue to come, then this was nothing new because messengers and prophets have always been coming. What was then the need to use a new term “seal of the prophets”? The other strange aspect of this interpretation is that Allah has not explained it in any other verse of the Holy Quran so that it may be understood by the people.

If this ancient tradition was undergoing such a momentous change, Allah should have clearly explained it elsewhere in the Quranic text or advised the Holy Prophet so that he could have explained it in some *Hadith* (collection of sayings of the Holy Prophet). We have repeatedly asked the proponents of this view to produce a single *Hadith* that supports this interpretation of the “seal of prophets”, but they fail to respond.

I ask this very simple question: which verse of the Holy Quran or Hadith gives the explanation of the term “seal of the prophets” as meaning from now on prophets will be made by receiving a seal of approval from the Holy Prophet Muhammad? Has the Holy Prophet Muhammad made such a statement anywhere? It is quite apparent that for thirteen hundred years Muslims did not understand this to be the meaning of this term. Nor did Allah the Most High, or the Holy Prophet Muhammad, or any *Mujaddid* (Reformer), or Muslim saint give this explanation. In fact the Holy Prophet throughout his life understood and explained this verse differently. In one *Hadith* he states: “I am the last of the prophets” (*la nabiyya bahdi*), and “nothing remains of prophethood except good news” (*mubashiraat*). He also said: “I am the last brick of the edifice of prophethood,” and “If there were to be a prophet after me, it would have been Umar.” On another occasion he addressed Ali with the following words: “O Ali your relationship with me is like that of Moses with Aaron except that Aaron was a prophet and there can be no prophet after me, therefore you cannot be a prophet.” In addition we have the following:

*I have been named Aqib for Aqib is the one after whom there is no prophet.*

*There will be thirty liars, from amongst my followers who cover truth with falsehood (dajjal). Each one of them will think that he is a prophet. I am the last of the prophet's there is no prophet after me. (Tirimdhi, Vol 1, under letter Sad).*

All these *Hadith* are full with explanation of the term “seal of the prophets” which confirms the Holy Prophet to be the last of the Prophets. Contrary to this there is not a single Hadith, not even a weak one, or a statement of a companion of the Holy Prophet which gives the meaning of “seal of the prophets” as being prophethood through a stamp of approval by the Holy Prophet Muhammad. What this implies is that from the time of the Holy prophet till now, after thirteen hundred years, all of his followers remained unaware of this explanation and remained in a state of error regarding this principle of belief (we seek the protection of Allah from this).

### Philosophical Conception of Finality of Prophethood

I want to draw your attention to another aspect of the belief in finality of prophethood. Allah, the Most High, has declared finality of prophethood as the foundation of a magnificent union amongst the followers of Islam. This is the reason why with the mention of termination of physical male offspring of the Holy Prophet is included in the verse about the seal of the prophets. After the words “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men”, it is stated “but he is the Messenger of Allah”. Thus, calling him the Messenger of Allah after negating his physical male progeny clearly implies that he is their *spiritual* father. The reason for mentioning this with negation of physical sons is that if there were to be male descendants of the Holy prophet they would have been given an honorable and distinctive position amongst his followers. This would have served as an obstacle to unity and equality amongst the followers of Prophet Muhammad, Allah says that Muhammad is not the (physical) father of any of your men, for if that would have been the case his progeny would have acquired a distinctive status amongst you (and under such circumstances, equality and unity could not have been maintained). On the other hand, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and, therefore, the spiritual father of his followers. All those who believe in him are, thus, his spiritual sons without any distinction. They are all brothers like the sons of the same father and are members of the same family. They have inherited the same property from their father and are equal partners in it. They follow a common law and Shariah, and all Muslims from any nation or country that practice this are like one family and the sons of the same father.

In support of this concept the Holy Quran states: “The believers are brethren (49:10). Regarding the wives of the Holy Prophet it is stated: “And his wives are (as) their mothers.” (33:6). Thus, by calling all Muslims as children of one father and his wives as their mothers, they were all made brethren and the basis of unity and cooperation amongst the Muslims was laid down. There is no racial distinction between Muslims they are all on equal footing as sons of one father. If the Holy Prophet had physical progeny such a fraternal bond could not have been established amongst the Muslims. Some would have been called sons both through physical and spiritual lineage, while others would only have been spiritual children. As has frequently happened in the world, spirituality is totally abandoned in favor of the physical inheritors. Such preferential treatment leads to corruption.

### Applicability to the Qadian Section of the Ahmadiyya Movement

Such behavior in our times has also led many people in the Ahmadiyya Movement to falter and give preferential treatment to the son of its Founder. As a consequence, they abandoned the Quran and Hadith and came up with the interpretations mentioned earlier. They have rejected the commandments of the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet and the Promised Messiah in deference to the directions given by the son (Mirza Mehmood Ahmad). How full of wisdom is the Quranic revelation when it tells us that the Holy Prophet has no male progeny but he is the spiritual father of all believers and this distinction remains till the Judgment day. This is further elaborated by these Quranic verses:

*He it is Who raised among the illiterates a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His messages and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and Wisdom (62:2).*

*And others from among them who have not yet joined them. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. (62:3)*

These verses tell us that the Holy Prophets teachings and purification extends to his followers for all times. In other words, he is their spiritual father till Judgment day. In the verse discussed earlier, the term Messenger was used to indicate that he was their spiritual father. In these verses the function of the Messenger is mentioned as teaching and purifying, confirming that spiritual life will now only be dispensed through one father, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Though different words are used, the message and meaning of all these verses is the same.

Some of the followers of Mirza Mehmood Ahmad make the statement that before the time of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad the teachings of the Holy Quran had become remote. I am surprised at this comment, for if the Holy Quran had become inaccessible in this manner, who taught Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad? In fact by teaching and purifying him, it was proven that the same purifying force, the Holy Quran which purified and taught the venerable companions of the Holy prophet was still as effective and had not become weaker. It can still after thirteen hundred years produce men of such high spiritual caliber. This force is not diminishing, but gaining strength. If it was decreasing, it would one day disappear. This is why the Holy Quran states: “And surely the latter state is better for thee than the former”(93:4). This verse tells us that the spiritual power of the Holy Prophet will not diminish, and the latter stage would be better than the former. As the rising sun goes on shining brighter till midday so will the spiritual

light of the Holy Prophet keep on gaining strength. His status of being the spiritual father will, therefore, not now be terminated to make room for the coming of another prophet or messenger. The followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad will remain as brothers like the offspring of one father. All of you Muslims are brothers because of this spiritual bond. The brotherhood created amongst Muslims as a result of this spiritual relationship is however ignored by most people, although this spiritual bond should be appreciated more than the physical bond between a father and son. We love our blood brethren despite their shortcomings and overlook their weaknesses. Alas! We show enmity towards our spiritual brothers to whom we are related through our spiritual father and quarrel over minor differences. If you love the Holy Prophet then you should also love his spiritual offspring.

According to *Hadith* of Bukhari the Holy Prophet said: “None amongst you can be a believer until he loves me more than his father, his brother and all other people.” If you love the Holy Prophet Muhammad more than anyone else, you will also love his spiritual children. In this manner all Muslims will become brethren to each other, like the children of one father. In order to establish this fraternal bond between the Muslims, the Holy Prophet Muhammad has been made the only father of this nation. No new messenger can now come for this nation, nor can anybody else be its father. If in fact a new prophet does appear, the bond of unity and cooperation amongst this nation will be shattered. In fact, the coming of a prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad totally negated harmony and unity amongst the Muslims.

These claims that we will all unite under the banner of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad are mere verbal assertions. So many prophets have come into this world – is there a single individual who has been universally accepted? You should first demonstrate if you can make the world accept a person of the Holy Prophet’s exalted status. Has the striving by Muslims for thirteen hundred years succeeded in making the world accept him as a prophet? Unilaterally making Hazrat Mirza Sahib a prophet will not result in the rest of Muslims accepting him as one. You can, however, succeed in having him accepted as a *Mujaddid* (Reformer). You have the example of the previous *Mujaddids* in this case, who have been accepted by the majority of the Muslims. Beware! Making a prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad and nullifying his spiritual inheritance cannot be the basis of unity amongst the Muslims. In fact, this spreads hypocrisy and dissension. It is quite obvious that all Muslims will not accept a prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. After hundreds of years of efforts, possibly, this belief may find acceptance

amongst a portion of them. What else will be accomplished by such a belief other than destroying the current bond of kinship amongst the Muslims? Remember that unity amongst Muslims can only be maintained if the Holy Prophet Muhammad is regarded as the spiritual father of this nation.

### Unity through Belief in Finality of Prophethood

Those of you who are present here right now are few but consider each other as brethren. Just as a brother does not immediately get angry with his brother, but loves his brother because they are the sons of the same father, similarly you should, being the spiritual progeny of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, love each other. You in fact have re-established this bond by accepting the Reformer of this age. Therefore, this bond of love should even be greater. It is not right to get offended by minor issues and make them the basis of strife. The Holy Prophet has laid down a principle to settle such mutual discord: “You cannot be a believer unless you love for your brother what you love for yourself” (Bukhari, Chapter 1, Section 12, under letter *Sad*). Whenever you are dealing with each other, remember this golden rule. You should have this concern in your heart before you usurp the right of another. You should always ask yourself the question, would I like this if I were in his place? If somebody does make a mistake, forgive him as you would forgive your brother.

The other day when I was travelling, somebody mentioned two brothers who were aggrieved with each other. I said it was easy to resolve this matter. Assuming that they have hurt each other to some degree, letting this linger on is detrimental for the religious cause. Is personal loss not worth sacrificing for the religious cause? If one could understand this, all quarrels can be set aside. I advise all my friends to set aside their personal differences and jealousies. It does not behoove a Muslim to reject the command of Allah and His Prophet for matters of the world and be resentful of his fellow Muslims. This can sometimes result in great loss. Even as it is, Muslims are being destroyed by mutual sectarian strife. I pray that we are not amongst those who hold rancor for each other in our hearts, and rather are of those who strengthen the mutual bond of love and decrease discord. Ameen. ■

## Mi'raj-un-Nabi

### An Explanation of the Holy Prophet's "Night Journey"

By Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad

*[This article is an English translation of the original in Urdu, and was first published in the June/July 1981 issue of the Islamic Review. It is being republished here with slight revisions. In this article, the author provides an in-depth analysis of the significance(s) of the "miraj", the renowned story of the Holy Prophet's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. By explaining the underlying meanings of the various aspects of the miraj story, Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad transforms a legendary tale into a practical and inspiring lesson of hope in times of distress. His interpretations on this subject also present an exemplary illustration of the manner in which visions and prophecies, in general, are to be understood.]*

### Introduction

The literal meaning of the Arabic word *mi'raj* is the "ladder". In Islamic terminology it stands for a particular occurrence on the 27<sup>th</sup> night of the Islamic month of *Rajab*. The word *mi'raj* is not mentioned in the Holy Quran but is found in many narrations of Hadith. In the Holy Quran, instead of *mi'raj* the word *Asra* is used in the first verse of Surah Bani Israel (Chapter 17) and commentators of the Holy Quran, in all ages, have interpreted this verse to be referring to that event which is commonly referred to in the Hadith as the *mi'raj* of the Holy Prophet.

The *Mi'raj-un-Nabi* (*mi'raj* of the Holy Prophet) has been mentioned in many reports of Hadith, some of these being *sahih* (authentic), others *hasan* (good), and yet others *zafeef* (weak). Nevertheless all Muslims agree to the occurrence of the event of the *Mi'raj*. Differences, however, are found since the time of the early Caliphate about the mode of *Mi'raj*; that is, as to whether it was a bodily ascension of the Holy Prophet to the heavens, or a spiritual experience through a vision. Before going into the details of these differences and their validity, it seems useful to address some relevant questions the rendering of which makes the complete and unambiguous comprehension of the concept of *Mi'raj* possible.

These questions are:

1. Do we comprehend Allah in a material-physical form?
2. Can we see Allah with our physical eyes?

3. Is Allah's being close to us a physical phenomenon or a spiritual sense?
4. Where is Allah? Is He seated in the skies only or is He omnipresent?
5. In the Holy Quran the word *Sama'a* is used for skies. Does it always mean the physical space above us or can it refer to the concept of spiritual elevation?
6. How can a man get closer to Allah? Is this via rockets and planes, or through good deeds?
7. Are human eyes the only means of one's vision, or are there other means for which seeing is possible?

Four variant opinions about the mode of *Mi'raj* are prevalent among Muslims since the early days of Islam. These are as follows:

1. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him), was carried bodily from the Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca) to Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem) – or as some say, in Medinah – and therefrom to the heavens up in the skies.
2. The Holy Prophet Muhammad was carried bodily from the Masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa and therefrom only his spirit was allowed to rise to the heavens (i.e. a belief in a partial physical, partial spiritual *Mi'raj*).
3. That the whole event of carrying from masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa and then onward to the heavens was simply a manifest vision, a spiritual experience in a state of being awake without moving the body from where it was.
4. That the whole event was shown in the form of a dream or in a state of sleep

Let it be very clear, that believing in the truth of any one of these four opinions and dispensing with the remaining three will not in any way detract from one's *iman* (faith) as a Muslim, as the exponents of all four of these opinions have drawn deductions from the Holy Quran, the Hadith and the reports of the companions of the Holy Prophet and each one of them is possessed of sound arguments in support. Nor does the difference of opinion as to the mode of *Mi'raj* reduce the significance of the event of *Mi'raj*. By saying that the Holy Prophet ascended to the heavens or that the heavens descended to the presence of the Holy Prophet, nothing is subtracted from this great event of human history. The idea of physical ascension in *Mi'raj* no doubt offers a very beautiful journey which the human mind can visualize. Stories of physical ascensions to the heavens by the founders and righteous men and prophets are common-

ly found in the mythology of Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and even Sikhism – in certain cases it goes to the extent of raising to the heavens of a religious personage or a leader of a nation along with his horses and chariots. Today, based on our advanced state of knowledge and understanding, we know that these stories of physical ascensions are stories, stories based on traditions, legends and mythologies. Thus any effort on anyone's part to insist on the belief of the bodily ascension of the Holy Prophet does not in any manner prove the superiority of the Holy Prophet over other religious personages; rather, it simply places him on the same level of all other legendary heroes of human history.

Legends in all ages have fed on ignorance, and it is especially true in spiritual matters. When spiritual experiences reported by way of metaphor are interpreted by people devoid of any spiritual experience themselves, they always tend to interpret it in physical terms, as their own comprehension is limited to things apparent to their physical senses. A deeper spiritual sense is beyond their capacity. If a person sees the sun, the moon, the stars and the skies, he does not think the sight of these things carries any message of hope for him, or has any special significance for him, or that there is a prophecy in it for him. If the same person sees the sun, the moon, the stars or the skies in a dream or a vision, then he tries to find the spiritual significance of these things and dig out the underlying meanings. Similarly is the case of the *Mi'raj-un-Nabi*.

### Explanation of Quranic references to the Holy Prophet's *Mi'raj*

*Mi'raj* is an event of the early days of the mission of the Holy Prophet. We know that the first verse of Surah Bani Israel (Chapter 17) is one of the early revelations. Now this was a period full of afflictions, difficulties, adversities and trials for the Holy Prophet and his companions. Those who have read the history of the period know fully well that the magnitude of the sufferings of the Holy Prophet and his companions experienced was so great that it could be endured only by those with the firm conviction of faith found in men appointed by God. Reading through the verses appearing at the end of Surah Bani Israel (17:90-93), one finds that the opponents of the Holy Prophet were asking all sorts of questions and were raising all types of objections; we find them stating:

And they say: We will by no means believe in thee, till thou cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us,

Or thou have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which thou cause rivers to flow forth abundantly,

Or thou cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces, as thou thinkest, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us),

Or thou have a house of gold, *or thou ascend into heaven*. And we will not believe in thy ascending till thou bring down to us a book we can read. Say: Glory to my Lord! am I aught but a mortal messenger?

Now, just as in verse 60 of this same Surah, where the *Mi'raj* is called a "*ru'yah*" (a **manifest vision**), here too in reply to these demands the Holy Prophet replies: "**Glory to my Lord! Am I ought but a mortal messenger?**" Had the *Mi'raj* been a physical ascension, his reply to perform all these feats, which included ascending into heaven, would have been very different than.

Most naturally, in such adverse circumstances what was required was something which could provide a ray of hope to the Holy Prophet and his companions on the one hand and a manifest proof of his truthfulness on the other hand. A physical ascension of the Holy Prophet on his journeys between Masjid al-Haram and Masjid al-Aqsa, not witnessed by his opponents, if offering anything at all, was only to the Holy Prophet himself and to no one else. This will not suffice to establish the truthfulness of his mission. What was required was something greater than this, a clear proof of the truth of Islam visible to all and sundry and that is what is contained in the first verse of Bani Israel (chapter 17:1) This verse contained a message of success of the mission of the Holy Prophet and his Ummah.

Glory to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Mosque, whose precincts We blessed, that We might show him of Our signs! Surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

The verse starts with the word, "*Subhana*" (*praise be to*) – which indicates that this verse is in reply to the objections of the opponents of Islam because all lexicons agree that the use of the word "*Subhana*" preceding the word Allah indicates that Allah is free from the matters or things attributed to him by the opponents.

The next word is "*Asra*", which means "walking during the night", and if we consider it is derived from the root, "*Sarriya*" and "*Sarat*", then it means, "vastness of a piece of land".

Next comes the words, "*Bi Abdi hi*", meaning "His servant"

Next is the word, "*Laylan*", which means, "the night" and it is also written for the days of affliction and distress, symbolizing a period of darkness. Night is also considered the most suitable time for spiritual strides.

The "Sacred Mosque" is Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. The "Remote Mosque" is Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, and it is also applied to Masjid-e-Nabwi in Madina by some commentators.

In the next words, "*Barakna Ghoulahu*" (i.e. "whose precincts We blessed"), is an indication of the gathering the material and spiritual good in the person of the Holy Prophet, as Palestine, for its plenty of water resources and growth, is considered an economically rich land as well as being spiritually rich, being and abode of many prophets of the past.

And the purpose of the *Mi'raj* is explained in the words, "*Li Nuriyahu min ayatina*" ("that We might show him of Our signs"). Accordingly, the purpose of the *Mi'raj* was to show some signs and prophecies to the Holy Prophet and, through him, to others as well. In fact, the verse relating to the *Mi'raj* prophecies about the great success to be achieved by the Holy Prophet and about the great heights – both material as well as spiritual - to be attained by him and his *Ummah*. If by Masjid al-Aqsa is meant Masjid-e-Nabwi in Madina, then this verse predicts an honorable migration to Madina wherefrom the blessings of Islam will reach the whole world. Verses predicting and promising the establishment of the rule of the Prophet in Mecca, Madina and even Palestine during that period of affliction and trials, and the news of the great spiritual and material heights to be reached by the Muslims, in those difficult days, would have given a message of hope to the Muslims. And fulfillment of these prophecies would have served as the greatest evidence of the truthfulness of the mission of the prophet. Can there be a greater *sign* than this?

### Essence of Hadith on the *Mi'raj*

The event of *Mi'raj* has been reported in a number of Hadith in great detail. One finds mention of miracles and signs in all great religions of the world. All prophets of Allah have wrought such miracles which appear supernatural to us and it is this part of religion which has been the cause of a vast majority being led into what is called *religiosity* by today's thinker-philosophers. *Mi'raj* is one of these events.

The philosophy underlying *Mi'raj* is simply this: that after the proclamation of prophethood by the Holy Prophet, he was subjected to great afflictions and in such a distressed condition glimpses of the success awaiting the Holy Prophet and his *Ummah* and the resultant elevation of the human race were manifested to the Holy Prophet.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, narrating the experience of *Mi'raj* states:

- “I was asleep in Hateem when the roof of the house opened and Gabriel descended in the company of a few other angels.
- First of all they led me to *Zam Zam* (a fountain in Mecca) and opened my chest there, took out my heart and washed it with the water of *Zam Zam*. Thereafter a tray full of *Imaan* (faith) and wisdom was brought and Gabriel took *Imaan* and wisdom from the tray and placed it in my chest and closed it.
- After that an animal called “*Buraaq*” was brought. It ran at great speed so that each of its steps was touching the horizon. Riding on this “*Buraaq*” we first came to Masjid al-Aqsa and offered two *raka’at* prayers and thereafter we set out on a journey through the skies to heaven in the company of Gabriel.
- We met Adam on the first sky. There I was shown two rivers and on my asking, Gabriel told me that these were Euphrates and Nile. We met Prophet Joseph on the second, Idrees on the third and John and Jesus on the fourth, Haroon on the fifth, Moses on the sixth and Abraham on the seventh sky.
- Then we passed through the garden where I saw a river on which palaces having domes of pearls and grounds of musk were built; then we reached a place where the sound of the pen of the Creator could be heard and therefrom we proceeded to “*Sadratul Muntaha*” and then Allah drew nearer to me so that the distance was reduced to the extent of two ends of a bow, even lesser.
- Then I was given three gifts: 1) the last verses of Surah Baqarah (Chapter 2, “The Cow”), 2) good news of Allah’s Mercy that He will forgive all except those who set up equals with Him, and 3) saying of prayers fifty times a day was enjoined. “I met Moses on my way back ...”. Then is the narration of the talk between Moses and the Holy Prophet and the ultimate reduction of the prayer times to five.
- On his way back he returned to Masjid al-Aqsa where all the prophets of the past had assembled and all of them offered their prayers led by the Holy Prophet and one Hadith tells us “*fastalqaza wa huwa fil masjidalharam*” (i.e. that thereafter he awoke and he was in Masjid al-Haram).

This in brief is the gist of the story reported in the books of Hadith. A beautiful legend indeed, if one considers it a bodily journey and does not consider uncovering the underlying meanings. It will not serve any useful purpose for a person and his companions who are suffering severe afflictions at the hands of their opponents. If we believe it to be a manifest vision and spiri-

tual experience, though, then it contains prophecies and promises for the success of those who are passing through a period of hardships and misery. It paints a picture of the bright future for them. Let us extrapolate the hidden beauties of this vision:

1. Gabriel’s opening the prophet’s chest and placing “*Iman*” (faith) and “wisdom” in it is an indication of the facts that the Holy Prophet’s heart has been cleansed of all base sentiments and that the Holy Prophet and his *Ummah* have been bestowed with “*Iman*” and “Wisdom”, all prejudices replaced with open-mindedness, a natural element of wisdom.
2. The Holy Prophet travelling on “*Buraaq*” is an indication that the religion of the Holy Prophet will spread with great speed, and history bears testimony that Islam spread much faster than other religions. Secondly, the Holy Prophet’s riding on the “*Buraaq*” which appeared in animal form rather than something having wings to fly, is an indication that animal passions have been subjugated by the Holy Prophet and that with the advent of Islam animal passions will give way to the progress of humane rationalism.
3. Rising to the skies and meeting the prophets of the past is an indication of the great heights to be touched by Muslims and along with them the whole human race, and that all the prophets are the parts of one scheme and all were raised to lead humanity to one goal – that is, rising to the destined heights. All other prophets welcoming the Holy Prophet is a clear prophecy of the fact that the followers of all other religions will embrace Islam and that the welfare of the human race lies in the unity of all believing people.
4. The Holy Prophet’s leading the prayers of the other prophets is a very significant indication of the finality of the Prophethood. This tells us that whatever good for the human race was possible had been done and they are offering their prayers led by a prophet who finalized the process; now none else will be raised as a prophet. In Masjid al-Aqsa all the prophets handed over the spiritual as well as worldly *Khilafat* to the Holy Prophet by accepting him as their Imam and as a result of this the Bani Israel and the Christians lost the succession to the prophets in favor of the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet.
5. By showing the Nile and Euphrates to the Holy Prophet, it was prophesied that in the near future not only Bait-ul-Muqaddas would fall to the Muslims but Egypt, Iraq, and Syria would also come under Muslim domain.

6. When Moses was shown to the Holy Prophet in a weeping condition and complaining about hardness of heart of his followers, in this was drawn a complete picture of the state of hard heartedness, thanklessness, crookedness, materialism and altering of the teachings of Torah by the Jews. Moses shedding the tears indicates his grief over the low moral and spiritual state of his Ummah and what Moses tells the Holy Prophet about the prayers has an element of warning for the Muslim nation in neglecting to discharge the duty of saying prayers regularly, which is evident to all today.
7. The Holy Prophet's teaching the farthest lote-tree and the shedding of Allah's light on it and the opening of the windows of the garden of heaven towards this tree is a prophecy of the establishment of a new world order, what is known as *Islam*, and bestowing the spiritual and worldly kingdom on the Holy Prophet. The tree stands for this new world order, Islam. The wisdom behind giving it the form of a tree instead of a man or any other animal form is that the teachings of Islam on various aspects of life are intertwined with each other in a very orderly manner just as the various parts of the tree are related to each other. Though orderliness is found even in the human boy or in animal form but due to freedom of will at times this order changes into disorderliness, therefore, the parable of the tree was offered. Secondly it was a custom in Arabia that when they had to select their ruler or king they assembled under a large lote-tree and selected their king. Thus this tree indicates establishing the kingdom of the Holy Prophet in the world and was a message of hope during that period of distress that not withstanding all the present afflictions his kingdom would be established. Would not this have served as a miraculous symbol of the truthfulness of the mission of the Holy Prophet for those opponents who were demanding signs from him?
8. Shedding of the light and bringing the garden of the heavens nearer to the Holy prophet is an indication of Allah's mercy on the Prophet and a promise that the period of hardships was to come to an end soon.
9. The three gifts received by the Holy Prophet also have great significance:
  - a. *Salat* or the prayer, which has been called the *Mi'raj* of a believer, is the greatest mode of spiritual elevation and in it all the believers were made to share the *Mi'raj* with the Holy Prophet.
  - b. The promise of mercy and forgiveness to all except those who set equals with Allah is in fact the cornerstone of the Islamic doctrine of "Unity

of Allah." The wisdom of this unity of Allah is now dawning on the Christian thinkers of the west.

- c. The third gift – the last verses of Surah "Baqarah" (Chapter 2, "The Cow") – wherein is contained the promise of the triumph of Islam, its great future and coming to an end of the period of hardships – carries the message of completion of the *Deen* (religion) and principals of forgiveness and mercy. Thus the "*Meraj-Un-Nabi*" in fact is the story of the *Mi'raj* of the human race, which has been told in parables and metaphor concealing in it the great message of hope for suffering humanity.

Hardly a few years has passed after the *Mi'raj* before the prophecies and promises contained in it started coming true, one after the other, and the opponents of Islam, in spite of all the might at their command, were startled and defeated at the hands of humble helpless sufferers - the Holy Prophet and his companions – and Allah's promise was fulfilled. ■

## Lessons on the Quran:

### Sura Al-Baqarah, Section 3 (Part 2)

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

*[Lahore Ahmadiyya members in various cities in the USA gather each week for a Quran study group via skype. The study group commenced with lessons from Sura Fatihah and continued with a subsequent section of the Quran every week. Members take turns presenting on a particular section, and discussion from all participants follow. This article is based on a lesson presented to the study group by the Editor. It deals with the latter part of Section 3 of Sura Al-Baqarah, the first part being published in the Jan-Mar 2012 issue.]*

As mentioned last week, this section of the Holy Quran contains lessons on the concept of Unity of God. As such, Maulana Muhammad Ali titles the section "Divine Unity". This concept of unity of God is illustrated in this section through examples of the work of God in nature. The latter part of this section also provides valuable insight into some of the distinctive features (and corresponding benefit) of Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation of the Quran

### Chapter 2, Verse 26

*Surely Allah disdains not to set for any parable – a gnat or anything above that. Then as for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord; and as for those who disbelieve, they*

*say: What is it that Allah means by this parable? Many He leaves in error by it and many He leads aright by it. And He leaves in error by it only the transgressors.*

Maulana Muhammad Ali explains in his commentary that the “parable” cited here refers to the two – one regarding the *spider* and the other regarding the *fly* – that are used in the Quran to illustrate the weakness of false deities. In 29:41, the parable regarding the spider is mentioned:

*The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house, and surely the frailest of houses is the spider’s house.*

In 22:73, the parable regarding the fly is mentioned:

*O people, a parable is set forth, so listen to it. Surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly though they should all gather for it ...*

MMAli explains that instead of the spider or fly, the “gnat” is mentioned here because the “gnat” is considered among the Arabs as an insignificant, weak creature that represents the “utmost of weakness”. In *Mathnavi*, we find the popular Sufi Maulana Rumi expressing the same point by using the term “gnat” in one of his poems; he writes:

*Everyone is overridden by thoughts;  
that’s why they have so much heartache and sorrow.  
At times I give myself up to thought purposefully;  
but when I choose,  
I spring up from those under its sway.  
I am like a high-flying bird,  
and thought is a gnat:  
how should a gnat overpower me?*

There may be another significance as well. This reference to a “gnat” in this verse is in response to objections to the use of “parables” in the Holy Quran. Although seemingly tiny, weak and insignificant, the “gnat” is said to lay on average approximately 300 eggs. That’s why, if you have ever had these small bugs in your home, you know it is almost impossible to get rid of them; it is the eggs that have been laid that produce the recurring infestation. Similarly, the *parables* contained in the Holy Quran, though seemingly simple and unattractive to some, are based on undeniable truths that in turn produce a number of valuable lessons. At times it seems there is no end to the number of lessons that may be drawn from a given parable contained in the

Quran, different interpretations of the lessons being reached throughout the ages and helping people understand the spirit behind certain verses. It is interesting to note that the previous verse (addressed in the last lesson) speaks of “gardens” and “fruits”. And, in this context, the use of the word “gnat” as an illustration seems to be quite appropriate, as gnats are found in vegetation, mostly over-ripe fruits and moist plants. It seems to be suggested that the “Garden” and the reward of “fruits” spoken of in the previous verse is not attainable via overly-complex doctrines and convoluted arguments. Rather, by understanding simple, basic concepts, as contained in the straightforward parables presented in the Quran, can one recognize and appreciate the truth that leads to God.

This section also provides some fascinating illustrations of the uniqueness of Maulana Muhammad Ali’s translation. In this particular verse, we see the word “disbeliever” used. Interestingly, some other translations use the word “unbelief” (or “unbeliever”) rather than “disbelief” (or “disbeliever”). Although there may not appear to be much difference, the implications of the differing terms is quite important. “Unbelief” simply means not believing (possibly due to never receiving the information, or simply not agreeing with it). “Disbelief” means something more – it means having received information and forming an opinion that the information is wrong. As used in the Holy Quran, it is also clear that the term “disbelievers” is not used simply for those who do not believe in the message of the Quran, but those who actively oppose it. By using the word “disbelief” or “disbeliever” as opposed to “unbelief” or “those who do not believe”, the criticism that it is unfair to condemn those who have never received the message or who innocently failed to understand the message becomes moot. The “unbelievers” or the “infidels” are not people who simply do not believe in Islam, but rather are those who actively try to oppose that message of truth with ulterior motives.

Another example of the unique choice of words found in the Maulana Muhammad Ali translation is presented in the last part of this verse, which states: “*Many He leaves in error by it and many He leads aright by it.*” As Maulana Muhammad Ali explains, the significance of “*leaving in error*” is akin to “*finding one as erring*” or “*pronouncing one to be erring*”. It does not mean “causing” one to be in error, as some critics suggest, for that would mean (God forbid) that Almighty Allah *intends* to mislead some people and *causes* them to follow the wrong path. Quite surprisingly, some Quran translations do just that. The Yusuf Ali translation states: “*By it He causes many to stray, and many He leads into the right path*”. The Pickthall translation is just as if not more disturbing, as it reads: “*He misleadeth many thereby, and He guideth many thereby.*”

These small differences in the translation have a huge impact in the work of spreading the correct teachings of Islam to others. When I'm asked by other Muslims what is so special about the Maulana Muhammad Ali translation/commentary, I usually explain that, to me, it is like a handbook for rebutting all of the allegations and criticisms made against Islam (and religion in general) in this day and age. Whether it is about the term "jihad", or about the significance of "miracles", or about the correct understanding of the term "jinn", or about "the relationship between science and religion", this translation/commentary equips one with the information needed to respond to these attacks. And these types of minor differences, like the use of the word "disbelief" instead of "unbelief" or, like in this instance, "leaving in error" as opposed to "causing to stray" or "misleading", makes one realize just how valuable this work is. These differences sometimes go unnoticed but have a tremendous effect on presenting a form of Islam that stands up against *all* criticisms; it actually preempts the criticism by clarifying the correct meaning in the translation itself, something that other translators did not, it appears, have the foresight to do.

### Chapter 2, Verse 27

Moving on to Verse 27, the word "transgressors" (as used in verse 26) is explained. It states:

*Who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation and cut asunder what Allah has ordered to be joined, and make mischief in the land. These it is that are the losers.*

Again, here we see that those who God condemns are not simply those who believe differently (like people of other faiths) or those who have no belief at all, but rather those who actively oppose the message of the Quran. And three qualities are presented as defining who these "transgressors" are.

First, it states those "Who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation". Naseer Ahmad Faruqi Sahib states in his commentary that the "covenant" spoken of here is something that is ingrained in our souls (see 7:172). It is an inherent testimony as to the existence of God within us, something very different from an outward covenant or pledge that one consciously makes. I believe an illustration of this inherent covenant is revealed by the reaction of when someone (including atheists or people who are simply not that religious) are startled. It is seems a universal spontaneous reaction to be startled, regardless of where one is from or which language one may speak, is to utter the words "Oh my God" or something quite similar. This phenomenon is universal. No matter how disbelieving a people may be, there is some reference in their language to an expression like "Oh my God". So, the first quality of the "transgressor" is to actively oppose this natural inclina-

tion towards an expression of belief in God.

The second quality of the "transgressor" is that of "*cutting asunder what Allah has enjoined*". Maulana Muhammad Ali mentions that this refers to the "disregard of others' rights". It seems, in particular, it may refer to the right of "freedom of religion", as the first quality has to do with belief in God. So, it may be in reference to those who prevent others from believing in God and practicing their faith.

And the third quality is that of "*making mischief in the land*". It seems that this may be in reference to taking the opposition to the inherent inclination towards God and prevention of rights of others to another level. It appears to refer to the causing of war and other cruelties against humanity on the basis of this denial of believe in God and opposition to believers.

### Chapter 2, Verse 28

The next verse states:

*How can you deny Allah and you were without life and He gave you life? Again, He will cause you to die and again bring you to life, then you shall be brought back to Him.*

This verse outlines the stages of life. First, there is nothing. Then one is given life. Then one eventually dies. Then, we are told, one is brought back to life and eventually returns to Allah (the Creator). There are several points that come to my mind upon reading this verse:

1. The obvious point is that death in this world is not the end. Rather, although our body may degenerate into dust, our soul continues to progress to another state.
2. Based on the foregoing point, a clear contradiction emerges with the belief held by many Muslims about Hazrat Isa. Many Muslims believe Hazrat Isa did not die, as all other humans in the past did, but rather was raised to Allah where he is still alive today. As the established sequence in this verse clearly indicates, one must die first and then he/she will be brought back to life and only then will be brought back to God.
3. Another point concerns the reference to being brought back to God. As God is omnipresent, the reference cannot be to a physical place (where Allah resides), but rather must refer to a spiritual state or condition. Moreover, being brought "back" to Allah suggests that we were all with Allah as some previous point; for you only go "back" to a place if you have been there before. Being brought back to Allah refers to our soul – the spirit of Allah breathed into each of us – reuniting with Allah at some point after our physical journey on earth.

4. Another point is that it seems to indicate that whatever happens to the soul after death (whether it progresses to a state or condition of heaven or hell), everyone eventually returns back to Allah (which appears to be referring to the state of heaven). Just like the term “*inna lilahe wa inna ilahirajioon*” (“Surely we belong to Allah and most certainly our eventual return is to Him”), it implies that hell is not eternal, but rather is a transitory state, which also leads to the eventual returning to Allah.
5. Another point is the lesson that these stages of life and death can also apply in the spiritual sense. Sufis have long explained that everyone must die first, in a metaphorical manner, before they can be born again into true believers. And this death merely represents being in a very low position. We see that all prophets and righteous people suffer tremendously at the hands of opponents. Because of the strong opposition, it is as if they have died in the eyes of people. But after perseverance, it is as if they are brought back to life by continuing their mission and advancing. This spiritual analogy of life, death and being brought back to life again also is expressed in 19:23 of the Holy Quran. While giving birth to Hazrat Isa, Hazrat Maryam cried out:

*“Oh would that I would have died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten”.*

In Sufi terminology, the names *Maryam* and *Isa* represent the particular spiritual stations a person may reach. *Maryam* is one who is pure by nature and *Isa* is one who after being pure (that is, being in the state of *Maryam*) goes through many trials and tribulations in order to achieve a God-sent mission. All prophets and saintly persons, who are all pure, at a particular time in their lives, when they are in the midst of their missions, are put through such trials and tribulations that only a statement the like of “Oh that I would have died before this and been a thing quite forgotten” can signify the severity and turmoil of their condition. By being steadfastness, and through their conviction and devotion, these holy people are brought back to life by overcoming the obstacles that appeared to have caused them to die. This spiritual illustration of the life, death and being brought back to life is the significance of much misunderstood *ilham* (vision) of Hazrat Mirza Sahib in which he sees himself as Hazrat Maryam, then becomes pregnant and then becomes Hazrat Isa.

## Chapter 2, Verse 29

*He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth. And He direct Himself to the heaven, so He made them complete seven heavens; and He is Knower of all things.*

This concept of “seven” heavens is repeated several times in the Holy Quran and people have interpreted it in different ways. Some interpret the word “seven” as representing “many” or a “large number”. So, they believe there are many heavens. Others interpret the word “seven” as a definite amount and apply it to various scientific facts. For instance, some believe the “heavens” refers to the atmosphere, which is made up of seven distinct layers (there are four categories of layers – the troposphere, the stratosphere, the mesosphere and the thermosphere – and there are 3 transitory layers between each of them, the tropopause, the stratopause and the mesopause). Others interpret this as seven “ways” and apply it to the “orbit” of the seven major planets in our solar system.

Some believe the seven heavens refer to seven (or many) other universes. This interpretation seems to be supported by other verses of the Quran. In 65:12, we read:

*Allah is He Who created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof. The command descends among them ...*

In this verse we are told that just as there are 7 heavens, there are a like number of earths, and MMA explains that term “the command descends among them” has been interpreted by past scholars as meaning the “existence of life and death in them”. And in 42:29, specific mention is made of life in the heavens; it states:

*And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and what He has spread forth in both of them of living beings.*

This concept of the “heavens” expanding beyond the confines of our universe and the possibility of the existence of “parallel” universes is a hot topic for scientists. A lot of talk is also heard recently about the possibility of other “dimensions” that we are simply unaware of and the existence of “dark matter” (something that cannot be seen or touched but can be detected because of its gravity). These are all scientific developments that would not be contrary to the verses in the Quran about other “earths” and “heavens” and possibility of life found in them as well.

However one interprets it, the inevitable conclusion is the awareness that the universe(s) is so vast and complex and our knowledge and understanding is so limited. And the section appropriately ends with the fitting statement: “*and He is Knower of all things*”. Simply thinking about God’s creation, which this last verse forces us to do, allows us to appreciate that we too, in a sense, are like the insignificant *gnat* mentioned earlier.

May Almighty God help us in putting in perspective the way we perceive ourselves and our place in all of His vast creation. Ameen. ■

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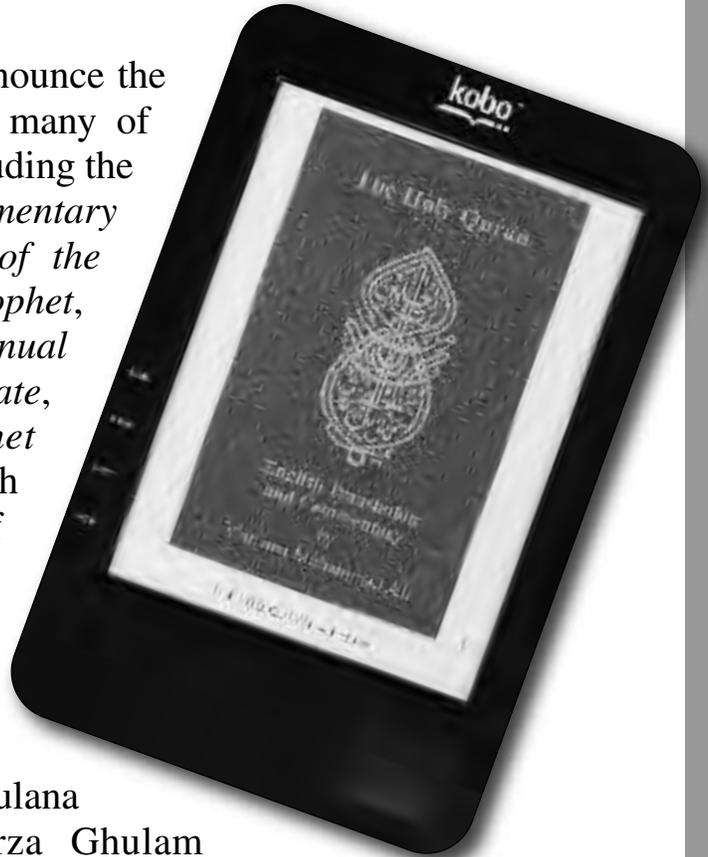
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