

THE NIGHT JOURNEY OF MUHAMMAD

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Late in the Meccan period of Muhammad's life the story of Muhammad's "Night Journey" to Jerusalem became a part of the Islamic tradition. Islam's claims to Jerusalem are tied to this event. The Night Journey is believed to be a miracle in the life of the Muhammad.

The Night Journey in the Quran

The story known as "The Night Journey" or the "Miracle of the Miraj" is recorded in only one place in the Quran, 17:1. The verse reads as follows:

Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless,- in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things). (Quran 17:1)

The verse as it appears indicates that Muhammad was taken on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque (the Ka'aba in Mecca) to the farthest Mosque (the temple in Jerusalem) . He was given special insight into some of the signs and wonders of Allah.

Muslim scholars are in agreement that this night journey, be it a spiritual or physical journey, would have taken place in approximately 621 AD in the middle years of Muhammad's life as a prophet of Allah and at the end of his time in Mecca.

Some Muslims believe that Quran 17:60 and 53:13-18 also refer to "The Night Journey," but the evidence is not as clear and not all scholars are in agreement about this. They read as follows: Behold! We told thee that thy Lord doth encompass mankind round about: We granted the vision which We showed thee, but as a trial for men,- as also the Cursed Tree (mentioned) in the Qur'an: We put terror (and warning) into them, but it only increases their inordinate transgression! Quran (17:60) For indeed he saw him at a second descent, Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass: Near it is the Garden of Abode. Behold, the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable!) (His) sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong! For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest! (Quran 53:13-18)

The Night Journey in the Hadith

Later in history, the "Night Journey" story was expanded upon in Hadith accounts that include descriptions of:

- Muhammad riding upon a winged animal similar to a mule that Allah himself had ridden upon in the past.
- Meeting Abraham, Moses, and Jesus who were all standing before Allah waiting for someone to lead them in prayer.
- The angel Gabriel urging Muhammad to lead the other prophets in prayer
- Muhammad's body being cut open and filled with wisdom.
- Muhammad being escorted through the tiers of heaven by the angel
- Being greeted by Adam, John, Jesus, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham

- Upon meeting Moses in the 6th tier of heaven Moses wept because more followers of Muhammad will enter paradise than people of his own era.
- With the help of Moses Muhammad was able to “bargain” with Allah to reduce the number of required daily prayers from 50 to five.

Hadith References to Night Journey

Below is the description of the “Night Journey” as recorded in Hadith, be sure to note the string of “informer” and “relaters” of the story (in italics). As you can see it was many generations after Muhammad’s life that the story was related and added to Hadith.

The following is taken from Ibn Sa'd's Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir Volume I, English translation by S. Moinul Haq, M.A., PH.D assisted by H.K. Ghazanfar M.A. (Kitab Bhavan Exporters & Importers, 1784 Kalan Mahal, Daryaganj, New Delhi - 110 002 India)

“Muhammad Ibn 'Umar al-Aslami informed us; he said: Usamah Ibn Zayd al-Laythi related to me on the authority of 'Amr Ibn Shu'ayb, he on the authority of his father, he on the authority of his ('Amr's) grand-father; (second chain) he (Ibn Sa'd) said: Musa Ibn Ya'qub al-Zam'i related to me on the authority of his father, he on the authority of his (Musa's) grandfather, he on the authority of Umm Salamah; (third chain) Musa said: Abu al-Aswad related to me on the authority of 'Urwah, he on the authority of 'Ayishah; (fourth chain) Muhammad Ibn 'Umar said: Ishaq Ibn Hazim related to me on the authority of Wahb Ibn Kaysan, he on the authority of Abu Murrah the mawla of 'Aqil, he on the authority of Umm Hani daughter of Abu Talib (fifth chain) he (Ibn Sa'd) said: 'Abd Allah Ibn Ja'far related to me on the authority of Zakariya Ibn 'Amr, he on the authority of Abu Mulaykah, he on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas and others; their consolidated narrations are: The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, was taken by night on the seventeenth night of First Rabi' before Hijrah, and one year before the blockade in the mountain pass of Abu Talib, to Bayt al-Muqaddas. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said: I was mounted on a beast whose size was between a donkey and a mule, with two wings in its thighs, which came up to its hoofs and were set in them. When I went near it to ride, it became restive. Thereupon Gabriel placed his hand on its head and said: O Buraq! are you not ashamed of what you are doing? By Allah no servant of Allah has ridden you before Muhammad, more honoured in the sight of Allah. It felt ashamed till it was covered with sweat, and became calm; then I mounted it. It moved its ears, and the earth shrank to such an extent that its hoofs (seemed to touch its surface) at the end of the range of our sight. It had a long back and long ears. Gabriel accompanied me and he never lost touch with me nor did I till we reached Bayt al-Muqaddas; and al-Buraq reached its halting place. It was tied there and it was the place where the beasts... of the Prophets were tied before the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him. He (the Prophet) said: I saw the Prophets who had assembled there for me. I saw Abraham, Moses and Jesus and, I thought there must be some one to lead them (in prayers); Gabriel made me go forward till I offered prayers in front of them and inquired from them (about their mission). They said: We were commissioned with Unity (of Allah).”

“Some of them (narrators) said: The Prophet, may Allah bless him, had disappeared that night, so the members of family of 'Abd al-Muttalib went out to search him. Al-'Abbas went to Dhu Tuwa and began to shout: O Muhammad! O Muhammad! The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said: I am here. He said: O my brother's son! You have worried the people since the (beginning of the) night, where had you been? He said: I am coming from Bayt al-Muqaddas. He said: In one night? He said: Yes. He said: Did you experience anything which was not good? He said: I did not experience anything but good. Umm Hani said: He was taken on this journey from our house. He slept that night with us; he offered al-'Isha prayers, and then he slept. When it was pre-dawn we awoke him (to offer) morning (prayers). He got up and when he offered morning prayers he said: O Umm Hani! I

offered al'Isha prayers with you as you witnessed, then I reached Bayt Al-Muqaddas and offered prayers there; then I offered morning prayers before you. After this he got up to go out; I said to him: Do not relate this to the people because they will belie you and harm you. He said: By Allah I shall relate to them and inform them. They wondered at it and said: We have never heard a thing like this. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said to Gabriel; O Gabriel! my people will not confirm it. He said: Abu Bakr will testify to it; and he is al-Siddiq. The narrator added: Many people who had embraced Islam and offered prayers went astray. (The Prophet continued,) I stood at al-Hijr, visualised Bayt al-Muqaddas and described its signs. Some of them said: How many doors are there in that mosque? I had not counted them so I began to look at it and counted them one by one and gave them the information concerning them. I also gave information about their caravan which was on the way and its signs. They found them as I had related. Allah, the Almighty, the Great, revealed: "We appointed the vision which We showed thee as an ordeal for mankind". He (Ibn Sa'd) said: It refers to the vision of the eye which he saw with the eye."

Below is the account of the "Night Journey" including the discussion about the number of daily prayers as recorded in Hadith Bukhari 4:429:

"The Prophet said, "While I was at the House in a state midway between sleep and wakefulness, (an angel recognized me) as the man lying between two men. A golden tray full of wisdom and belief was brought to me and my body was cut open from the throat to the lower part of the abdomen and then my abdomen was washed with Zam-zam water and (my heart was) filled with wisdom and belief. Al-Buraq, a white animal, smaller than a mule and bigger than a donkey was brought to me and I set out with Gabriel. When I reached the nearest heaven. Gabriel said to the heaven gate-keeper, 'Open the gate.' The gatekeeper asked, 'Who is it?' He said, 'Gabriel.' The gate-keeper asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel said, 'Muhammad.' The gate-keeper said, 'Has he been called?' Gabriel said, 'Yes.' Then it was said, 'He is welcomed. What a wonderful visit his is!' Then I met Adam and greeted him and he said, 'You are welcomed O son and a Prophet.' Then we ascended to the second heaven. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel said, 'Gabriel.' It was said, 'Who is with you?' He said, 'Muhammad' It was asked, 'Has he been sent for?' He said, 'Yes.' It was said, 'He is welcomed. What a wonderful visit his is!" Then I met Jesus and Yahya (John) who said, 'You are welcomed, O brother and a Prophet.' Then we ascended to the third heaven. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel said, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is with you?' Gabriel said, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has he been sent for?' 'Yes,' said Gabriel. 'He is welcomed. What a wonderful visit his is!' - (The Prophet added:). -There I met Joseph and greeted him, and he replied, 'You are welcomed, O brother and a Prophet!' Then we ascended to the 4th heaven and again the same questions and answers were exchanged as in the previous heavens. There I met Idris and greeted him. He said, 'You are welcomed O brother and Prophet.' Then we ascended to the 5th heaven and again the same questions and answers were exchanged as in previous heavens. There I met and greeted Aaron who said, 'You are welcomed O brother and a Prophet". Then we ascended to the 6th heaven and again the same questions and answers were exchanged as in the previous heavens. There I met and greeted Moses who said, 'You are welcomed O brother and a Prophet.' When I proceeded on, he started weeping and on being asked why he was weeping, he said, 'O Lord! Followers of this youth who was sent after me will enter Paradise in greater number than my followers.' Then we ascended to the seventh heaven and again the same questions and answers were exchanged as in the previous heavens. There I met and greeted Abraham who said, 'You are welcomed O son and a Prophet.' Then I was shown Al-Bait-al-Ma'mur (i.e. Allah's House). I asked Gabriel about it and he said, This is Al Bait-ul-Ma'mur where 70,000 angels perform prayers daily and when they leave they never return to it (but always a fresh batch comes into it daily).' Then I was shown Sidrat-ul-Muntaha (i.e. a tree in the seventh heaven) and I saw its Nabk fruits which resembled the clay jugs of Hajr (i.e. a town in Arabia), and its leaves were like the ears of elephants, and four rivers originated at its root, two of them were apparent and two were hidden. I asked Gabriel about those rivers and he said, 'The two hidden rivers are in Paradise, and the apparent ones are the Nile and the Euphrates.' Then fifty prayers were enjoined on me. I descended till I met Moses who asked me, 'What have you done?' I said, 'Fifty prayers have been enjoined on me.' He said, 'I know the people better than you, because I

had the hardest experience to bring Bani Israel to obedience. Your followers cannot put up with such obligation. So, return to your Lord and request Him (to reduce the number of prayers.' I returned and requested Allah (for reduction) and He made it forty. I returned and (met Moses) and had a similar discussion, and then returned again to Allah for reduction and He made it thirty, then twenty, then ten, and then I came to Moses who repeated the same advice. Ultimately Allah reduced it to five. When I came to Moses again, he said, 'What have you done?' I said, 'Allah has made it five only.' He repeated the same advice but I said that I surrendered (to Allah's Final Order)' "Allah's Apostle was addressed by Allah, "I have decreed My obligation and have reduced the burden on My slaves, and I shall reward a single good deed as if it were ten good deeds."

Other Hadith references to the "Night Journey" appear in:

- Hadith Muslim, 1:309
- Hadith Bukhari, 5:226
- Hadith Bukhari 5:228
- Hadith Bukhari 7:482
- Hadith Bukhari 8:583
- Hadith Muslim 1: 329

Logical Fallacies:

To the Christian reading these accounts, there are many oddities that need to be addressed:

1. Was this a real physical journey or a dream or spiritual event? There is no real way of answering this question 1500 years after it happened. Muhammad's favorite wife Aisha was reported to have said "he was transported only in his spirit (bi-ruhihi), while his body did not leave its place." There are no accounts, however, of Muhammad himself, or any of his companions claiming the journey to be an actual physical journey.
2. Does this event give Islam a claim to Jerusalem? This one verse in the Quran is the only record of Muhammad's connection to Jerusalem. It is certainly expanded upon significantly in Hadith, but nonetheless Islam had no physical claim to Jerusalem in Muhammad's lifetime. The city was taken by force in 637 AD led by Abu Ubaidah. Five years after Muhammad's death and long after the "Night Journey" took place.
3. What Temple or Mosque was Muhammad referring to in the Quran 17:1 passage? As we know from Jeremiah chapter 52 the original Temple of Solomon was destroyed in approximately 587 BC. And the re-built temple was destroyed in 70 AD. In Muhammad's lifetime the temple was not standing in Jerusalem and the temple now referred to as the Al Aqsa Mosque was not built until AD 691, seventy years after the "Night Journey" took place.