

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Strategic Significance of
The Fast of Ramadan
& Isrâ' and Miraj

Imran N. Hosein

Masjid Dar al-Qur'an
New York

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ISBN 983-9541-19-6

First published 1997

Reprint 2001 by
Masjid Dar al-Qur'an
1514 East Third Avenue, Bayshore
New York 11706, USA.
Tel: (516) 6659462

Printed in Malaysia
by
CS Multi Print Sdn Bhd
Kuala Lumpur

O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint. (Qur'an 2:183)

Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgement (between right and wrong). So everyone of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if any one is ill, or on a journey the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. God intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you, and perchance ye shall be grateful. (Qur'an 2:185)

ANSARI MEMORIAL SERIES

The Ansari Memorial Series is published in honor of the eminent Islamic Scholar, *Sufi Shaikh*, and former *Shaikh al-Islam* of the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago, *Maulana* Dr. Muhammad Fadlur Rahman Ansari (1914-1974), and it commemorates the 25th. anniversary of his death. It comprises, so far, the following seven books:

1. *Dreams in Islam - A Window to Truth and to the Heart;*
2. *The Religion of Abraham and the State of Israel - A View from the Qur'an;*
3. *The Importance of the Prohibition of Riba in Islam;*
4. *The Prohibition of Riba in the Qur'an and Sunnah;*
5. *The Caliphate the Hejaz and the Saudi-Wahhabi Nation-State;*
6. *One Jama'at - One Ameer: The Organization of a Muslim Community in the Age of Fitna;*
7. *The Strategic Significance of The Fast of Ramadan and Isra' and Mi'raj.*

These books were all written by Imran N. Hosein, student of *Maulana* Ansari, and were published by *Masjid Dar al-Qur'an*, Long Island, New York, U.S.A., *Masjid al-Ansari*, Montrose, Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago.

Maulana Ansari was a graduate of Aligarh Muslim University, India, where he studied Philosophy and Religion. He derived his Islamic philosophical and spiritual thought from the greatest Islamic scholar of this age, *Allama* Dr. Muhammad Iqbal. Iqbal was the author of that masterpiece of Islamic scholarship: *The Re-*

construction of Religious Thought in Islam'. Maulana Ansari's great work of Islamic scholarship, the two-volume: '*Qur'anic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society*' which was his Ph.D. thesis for his doctorate in Philosophy, itself represents the most outstanding contribution to Islamic scholarship by any of the students of Iqbal.

Maulana Ansari received his spiritual training from Maulana Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, a renowned Islamic scholar, *Sufi Shaikh*, and roving missionary of Islam. He received the *sufi* epistemology from both Allama Iqbal and Maulana Siddiqui, and passed it on to his own students. That *sufi* epistemology is emphatic that the process of knowledge commences with the pursuit of Truth through the study of the written word and the critical observation of the external world. Allah, the Most High, is Truth (*al-Haq*), and Truth comes from Allah. Uncorrupted Truth now exists in the world only in Islam. When Truth is discovered it must be embraced with sincerity, and must be applied to the totality of life. The Truth will then be internalized, *i.e.* it will enter into the heart. Allah, the Most High, puts it Himself into the heart, and He refers to this when He says in the *hadith al-Qudsi*: *My heavens and My earth are too small to contain me, but the heart of My faithful servant can contain Me.*

When Truth enters into the heart, then the heart is given a divine light (*nurullah*) which permits the believer's powers of observation and intuitive insight to penetrate beyond the *external form* to reach *internal substance*. It is only with that inner light of the discerning heart of a true believer *that the world can be correctly read*. The Ansari Memorial Series is devoted to an effort of understanding the world today, explaining it accurately, and responding to its unprecedented challenges appropriately. That effort, of course, is always subject to critical evaluation.

Allah, the Most High, has provided the believers with a medium through which they can receive confirmation that they have been blessed with that capacity for intuitive knowledge (*i.e.*, knowledge which the heart sees). That medium is 'true and good dreams, and visions', an experience which constitutes the last part of prophethood still remaining in the world after the death of the Prophet (*s*). The Ansari Memorial Series therefore includes a pioneering work in that forgotten branch of knowledge, *i.e.* *Dreams in Islam*. Intuitive knowledge is also indispensable for penetrating such subjects of strategic contemporary relevance as: '*The Prohibition of Riba in Islam*' and '*The Religion of Abraham and the State of Israel - A View from the Qur'an*', and so these subjects have received attention in the series.

It is with intuitive knowledge alone (*firasa*) that one can achieve confirmation that we now live in the age *ofjitan*, the last stage of the historical process. Empirical and discursive knowledge and thought can only suggest, but cannot directly perceive the true nature of the age in which we now live. The implication of the confirmation (of the age *ofjitan*) is that the authentic *jama'ah* with the authentic *Imam/Ameer* must now be established, and sustained, with greater urgency than ever before, and all believers must hold fast to them with *as-sam'u wa-ta'atu* (listening and obeying), for that was the command of the Prophet (*s*). *One Jama'at - One Ameer: The Organization of a Muslim Community in the Age of Fitana* directs attention to this important subject.

It is significant that *Maulana Ansari* was the *Shaikh al-Islam* of the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago from 1964 until he died in 1974 and, indeed, the leadership of the *Dar ai-Islam* Islamic movement amongst African-American Muslims in North America gave him the *bai'ah* (pledge of obedience) in 1969, and accepted him as their leader as well. *Dar ai-Islam* was established

in Brooklyn; New York, in 1962, and was led by *Imam* Yahya Abd al-Kareem. It is now led by *Imam* Jameel al-Amin (the former H. Rapp Brown).

The next two books to be published in this series are still to be written. They will, *Insha Allah*, be devoted to the topics: *The Return of Jesus - A View from Islam*; and *Surah al-Kahf and the Modern Age*.

Maulana Dr. Ansari honored his own *Shaikh*, *Maulana* Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, by establishing the Aleemiyah Institute of Islamic Studies in Pakistan, and by publishing the Aleemiyah Memorial Series. The Ansari Memorial Series represents a humble effort to follow in that noble tradition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Imran N. Hosein was born in Trinidad, West Indies, in 1942. He studied Islam under the guidance of the distinguished Islamic scholar and Sufi Shaikh, Maulana Dr. Muhammad Fadlur Rahman Ansari (AI-Qaderi), at the Aleemiyah Institute of Islamic Studies, Karachi, Pakistan. He also did post-graduate studies in Philosophy at Karachi University, and in International Relations at the University of the West Indies, Trinidad, and the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, Switzerland.

A former Foreign Service Officer in the Trinidad and Tobago Foreign Service, he resigned his job in 1985 to devote his life to the mission of Islam. He was appointed Principal of the Aleemiyah Institute of Islamic Studies, Pakistan, a position he held until 1988. In 1989 he migrated to USA and was appointed Director of the Institute for Islamic Education and Research in Miami, Florida. Since 1991 he has worked in New York as Director of Islamic Studies for the Joint Committee of Muslim Organizations of Greater New York. This included the Islamic Community of the United Nations at the UN headquarters in Manhattan, NY, where he has conducted the Friday congregational prayers once monthly for six years. In December 1996 he was appointed by Dr. Israr Ahmad as Director of Da'wah for Tanzeem-e-Islami of North America.

He has traveled extensively in the cause of Islam visiting South East Asia, for example, seven times since 1988 on Islamic lecture tours. He has recently completed a full year of service to the cause of Islam in the Caribbean islands of Grenada, Tobago and Trinidad.

As an author in Comparative Religion he has produced a seminal work on 'Islam and Buddhism in the Modern World', published in Pakistan in 1972. His works on Islam and International Relations include 'Diplomacy in Islam - An Analysis of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah'. A collection of his writings was published in Singapore in 1991 under the title 'Islam and the Changing World Order'.

His most recent works, published in 1997 in the Ansari Memorial Series (which commemorate the 25th. death anniversary of Dr. Ansari), are :- 'The Importance of the Prohibition of Riba in Islam', 'The Prohibition of Riba in the Qur'an and Sunnah', 'The Religion of Abraham and the State of Israel - A View from the Qur'an', 'The Caliphate, the Hejaz and the Saudi-Wahhabi Nation-State', and 'One Jama'at One Ameer - The Organization of a Muslim Community in the Age of Fitna'. He hopes to complete two more books in the Ansari Memorial Series on the topics:- 'Suratul Kahf and the Modern Age', and 'An Islamic View of the Return of Jesus'.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This booklet, on the subject of fasting in Islam, comprises four sections. In the first section we discuss the basic objective of the institution of fasting in Islam as one of the development of 'values'. We argue the point that values are an indispensable foundation of 'power'. In the second section we seek to explain the linkages which exist between fasting, on the one hand, and such specific values as charity, chastity, and freedom, on the other. In the third section there is an attempt to demonstrate a certain chronological sequence through which the compulsory fast in Islam can lead the believer to spiritual or religious experience. We then proceed to demonstrate the link which must always exist between moral and spiritual values, or between morality and religion and, hence, between religion and power. And finally, in the fourth section we examine the effect of fasting on the physical body and on physical health. Physical health and strength are a vital requirement, materially and psychologically, for the development of power.

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Some of the analysis presented in this booklet is derived from a series of lectures on fasting in Islam which were first delivered in numerous mosques in Trinidad, in the West Indies, during the month of Ramadan in 1984, and subsequently repeated in other parts of the world, including New York. The power dimension of fasting was developed during Ramadan 1993 and was articulated during my Islamic lecture tour of Malaysia and Singapore in the summer of 1993.

We must enter a note of warning concerning the increasing number of secularized Muslims emerging in our midst who are either careless or indifferent with regards to the fast of Ramadan, or who do not consider it necessary to observe the fast at all. That phenomenon, which is far advanced in Trinidad, is also present here in the United States of America, and is now emerging in Singapore and Malaysia (a region of the world which I have been privileged to visit seven times in the last ten years).

Such Muslims should understand, before it is too late, that it is in the nature of the secular society to dilute, to weaken, and to eventually render irrelevant, the distinction between 'Truth' (*Al-Haqq*) and 'Falsehood' (*Al-Batii*), between that which is 'Permitted by Allah' (*Al-Halal*) and that which is 'Prohibited by Allah' (*Al-Haram*), between conduct which is virtuous (*Al-Maaruf*) and conduct which is sinful (*Al-Munkar*). Without being fully aware of it, the secularized Muslim eventually lives a life which is in no way moulded and conditioned by the rewards of heaven (*Al-Jannah*) and the punishments of hell (*Jahannam*). Indeed, secularized Muslims eventually lose consciousness of what is 'sin'.

In the secular society it is not the Word of Allah which is the measure of all things. Rather man, himself, positions himself at

the centre of his universe, and he becomes the measure of all things. He determines what is right and what is wrong. His reason sits in judgment on anything which claims to be the Word of God. And when the Word of God does not appear to conform to man's rational predilections, then the Word of God must either be rejected or, worse, subjected to a progressive interpretation! This is called the secularization of religion. And this is the terrible fate which has befallen Judaism and Christianity in the U.S.A. It was inevitable for them because they had distorted the revealed Truth. It is inexcusable for Muslims because the revealed Truth in the Qur'an is protected by Allah Himself And the basic understanding of that Truth is located in the explanations provided by the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh), in his personal example (*sunnah*), and the model of a sacred society which he created!

In order to protect themselves from being completely absorbed and integrated into the new sophisticated secular *Jahiliyah* (Le. Ignorance of Truth revealed by Allah), such secularized Muslims should make haste to learn the lesson that Islam presents to humanity: an alternative model of life and of society, a model which is a rival to today's secular model. Islam's model is the 'sacred' model. In the sacred model this world acquires meaning only with reference to that 'transcendental' world from which emerges *Al-Haqq*, *Al-Halal* and *Al-Maaruf* When we understand how this world relates to that world then this world, also, becomes sacred. Life becomes 'sacred' . And through fasting we enhance our state of harmony with the sacred life and the sacred world! The sacred life is a life which is lived for the purpose of pleasing Allah!

I pray that the reader may benefit from the information and analysis presented here and, in particular, that secularized Muslims who have stopped fasting may be persuaded to return to the life of the sacred and to the institution of fasting which does so much to

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remind us of the unseen world and to fortify us with the values which come from that unseen world. Without values the only future mankind can expect is one of unhappiness and frustration, and tragedy after tragedy!

May Allah accept our humble service in the cause of His Revealed Truth - Truth which can bring peace and contentment, fulfilment and success to human existence. Ameen!

CHAPTER 2

FASTING IN ISLAM - ITS BASIC OBJECTIVE

In its second chapter the Qur'an addresses those who believe in it (i.e. the Qur'an) as a Divine revelation and informs them of the promulgation of the compulsory fast for them. Verse 183 then goes on to point out that fasting was made compulsory not only for the Muslims who believe in the Word of Allah revealed in the Qur'an and who are followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh), but for all those religious communities which preceded this community of believers. Thus the compulsory fast is to be found Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and others.² The verse then ends by indicating that the objective for which the compulsory fast was promulgated is the acquisition of piety and godliness (*taqwa*).

The Qur'anic viewpoint, **therefore**, is that fasting has always been an obligatory feature of the religious way of life. By instituting the compulsory fast for the religious community which followed the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh), the Qur'an was simply bringing

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that Muslim community into a state of conformity with an essential requirement of the religious way of life.

When the Qur'an went on to point out that the basic objective of fasting was the acquisition of piety and holiness (*taqwa*), it followed that this must also have been the basic objective of fasting in all previous religious communities established by the thousands of Prophets and guides sent by Allah to every nation and tribe. (Qur'an 13:7)

An immediate implication of this conclusion is that no religion which claims to be founded on the One Truth can or should condone the exploitation of the institution of fasting as a political weapon or a form of protest. And yet, in 1986, the Foreign Minister of Nicaragua, who was a Catholic priest, completed three weeks of his fast-unto-death in a protest against the policies of the government of the United States of America towards the Sandanista government in Nicaragua. In much the same way the Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who was a devout Hindu and a role-model of modern reformed Hinduism, used fasting as a political weapon in his struggle against British rule in India.

Piety and Godliness, therefore, is the criterion with which we judge the institution of fasting as it functions, not only in the religious community established by Muhammad (pbuh), but in all other religions and religious communities. When fasting inculcates piety and godliness then it is functioning in accordance with its original purpose. When it does not or, rather, no longer does, then a deviation has occurred. And it behoves the followers of the deviant religion to struggle to retrieve the original objective of fasting.

Now while the majority of Muslims, the world over, observe the compulsory fast of Ramadan, we find in this age the unique phe-

phenomenon of large numbers of Muslims who do not fast. When we inquire into this phenomenon what we find is that it has emerged almost exclusively as a result of a considerable impact of modern western civilization on such Muslims.

This is not surprising since modern western civilization, which is largely constructed on secular and materialistic foundations, does not attach much practical value to piety and Godliness. As a consequence one comes across people who find it inconvenient to fast because it interferes with the efficient fulfilment of their professional obligations. Indeed a former President of Tunisia attempted to prohibit the compulsory Islamic fast because he claimed that it had a negative impact on productivity and thus constituted an obstacle to economic growth and prosperity. Others, who have imprisoned themselves in the comforts and luxuries of modern sensate culture (which is a feature of western rather than Christian civilization), find fasting to be either too rigorous, or just plain inconvenient.

While we shall be attempting a rational exposition of the benefits to be derived from fasting, we should also urge such Muslims to take serious note of the fact that fasting was made compulsory by Allah Himself. Any Muslim who challenges this and holds the view that he is under no obligation to fast is, in fact, in a state of defiance and rebellion against Allah. And since Islam connotes 'submission' to the Will of Allah, it should be obvious that such a person is not in Islam. Indeed such a Muslim places himself outside the religious way of life altogether since the Qur'an declares:

“And whosoever desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted from him. . .”(Qur'an 3:85)

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On the other hand, the Muslim who recognizes the obligatory nature of fasting and yet does not observe the compulsory fast because of laziness, inconvenience or whatever reason is, in fact, committing a sin and must expect to be punished by Allah for it. Similarly, since fasting was made compulsory for those religious communities which preceded the advent of the Prophet (pbuh), it follows that the followers of those religions will also incur Allah's punishment if they, too, fail to observe their compulsory fast.

FASTING AND POWER

Now taqwa possesses both a moral and a spiritual dimension. In respect of its moral dimension it connotes moral rectitude which is the fruit of a divinely-grounded vigilance, on the one hand, and the purification of the heart (*tazkiyah*) on the other. Moral rectitude manifests itself in acts of commission (*awamir*) and omission (*nawahi*), i.e. performing virtuous acts required by the moral code such as 'giving alms to the poor', on the one hand, and refraining from evil acts (also prohibited by the moral code) such as acts of bribery and corruption on the other.

Almighty Allah declares in the Qur'an:

"Whosoever purifies (the nafs) has achieved success. And whosoever corrupts it has failed. " (Qur'an, 91:9)

The implication of this verse of the Qur'an is that values must be recognized as one of the foundations of power. Indeed there is a specific confirmation of such in the chronological sequence of the revelation of the Qur'an.

After the migration from Makkah to Madinah had been effected, and shortly after victory over the Quraish at Badr, Allah revealed the Surah entitled *Al-Anfal* (the spoils of war) in which He recalled the road which had been travelled:

"Call to mind (that time) when you were a small (band), weak, helpless (and vulnerable) in (your) territory, and afraid that (hostile) people would finish you off. Then (Allah) provided you with (a way to) safety and refuge, and empowered you with His aid, and provided you with wholesome resources that you might be grateful. "

(Qur 'an, 8:26)

The power to which Allah refers was, of course, manifest in the battle of Badr. And the manifestation of that power was of such strategic importance in the Divine scheme that Allah went on to describe it as the '*Furqan*', or criterion, through which truth was distinguished from falsehood (verse 29). He also says:

"That it (the demonstration of power) might serve to confirm Truth and expose Falsehood, distasteful though it be to those in guilt. " (Qur 'an 8:8)

What is of critical importance for our topic is the fact that Allah chose a moment shortly before the month of Ramadan, in which the battle of Badr was fought, to reveal the verses of the Qur'an which promulgated the compulsory fast of Ramadan. It should be clear as daylight that the fast of Ramadan was instituted to function as a means through which the community may be empowered. If not, how can we possibly explain the long delay in promulgating the institution of fasting? Would it not have been

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beneficial to the oppressed Muslims of Makkah to have been given the fast of Ramadan? Would it not have enhanced their fortitude to resist the kuffar? The fact that Allah waited more than fourteen years, after the commencement of the revelation of the Qur'an, to reveal the verses relating to the compulsory fast of Ramadan, is a direct indication of the relationship which exists between fasting and power.

There is a link between fasting and power. The link is that fasting not only builds, but also, reinforces and consolidates values, and values form an indispensable foundation of power.

Also, since no nation, society or civilization can ever rise to greatness without establishing and sustaining the moral health of its people, it follows that the institution of fasting in religion plays a role of crucial importance in nation-building and in the process of establishing a healthy and enduring society and civilization. In fact the Qur'an goes beyond this to claim that survival, in the historical process, depends upon moral health. It does so when it declares that those who purify themselves and permit the proper growth and development of their moral being will succeed (in history as well as in the Divine scheme of things). Those, on the other hand, who corrupt themselves and, in the process, obstruct the growth and development of their moral being, will eventually perish. (Qur'an, 91:9-10) This holds true as much for the social order, the nation and civilization, as for the individual.

The Qur'an does not merely state this thesis as a fact. It does more than that. It seeks to demonstrate the validity of the thesis by inviting attention to the historical process at work in the rise and fall of nations and civilizations. And, in order to facilitate that inquiry it narrates the history of certain nations and tribes which perished because of moral corruption consequent upon the collapse of values.

RELIGION AND THE STATE

Now the very survival of a nation or civilization is dependent on the establishment and preservation of values and the development of moral health. Religion, through its belief system of the transcendental world, is the only source of values. There are no such things as secular values. Religion, also, through such institutions as fasting, has a glorious record of achievement in the moral struggle. As a consequence there is an essential linkage between religion and the State, a linkage which the State can only ignore at its peril.

The modern nation-state, built on the dual foundations of secularism and nationalism, is incapable of redefining secularism in such a way as would permit religion to function as an effective moral force in the establishment of a healthy social order. Similarly it finds itself increasingly incapable of transcending narrow nationalisms to embrace the concept of the unity and fraternity of all mankind in order that it may be able to digest the claim of religion that moral values are not only universal and absolute, but require a non-discriminatory application amongst the many different peoples in the world.

MORALITY AND RELIGION

Now although moral rectitude is an essential dimension of *taqwa* we should note that it does not function as an 'end in itself', nor does it function independently. Rather it depends on metaphysics and serves goals which are essentially transcendental. It is the spiritual dimension of *taqwa* which is really dominant, This is clear from the opening statement of the second chapter of the Qur'an which declares that the Qur'an provides (consequential) guidance for those who possess *taqwa*. It then goes on to identify the constituent elements of *taqwa* and singles out, as first in im-

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portance, belief in the unseen transcendental world (*al-ghaib*). Next comes the establishment of continuous communion with God through regular prayer (*iq mah al- sal t*) and spending freely to assist the needy and under privileged with the recognition of wealth as a gift from God (*infaq*). *Taqwa* requires belief, not only in the Qur'an, but also in all other revealed religious scriptures. And since the Qur'an does not name all those scriptures, the true religious way of life cultivates respect for all religious scriptures in the world which claim a Divine origin, and requires belief in those scriptures to the extent that one can recognize Truth in them. And then the last constituent element of *taqwa* is 'unshakable' faith in a life 'here-after' (*al- akhirah*). (Qur'an, 2:3-4)

Taqwa, therefore, is initially dependent on the recognition that this world in which we live is not the only world. There is another world beside and beyond this world. Indeed, in comparison with that world, which is permanent and abiding, this world is temporary, transient and fleeting. (Qur'an,29:64) It will not last forever. It will one day come to an end and be transformed by its Creator into another world which will be quite different from this one. (Qur'an,14:48)

Taqwa is dependent on the recognition that human beings will survive their physical death and will, upon the transformation of the world, be roused from the slumber of their graves to be subjected to accountability for their conduct. That day of accountability will witness the truth of all that religion stood for, and hence it is called 'the Day of Religion' (*yaum ai-din*). On that day Almighty Allah will sit in Judgment over humanity and will reward and punish as appropriate. Heaven exists for reward while hell exists for punishment

Finally *taqwa* is dependent on belief in the transcendent unity of religious Truth (*AI-Din*) since it requires belief in all divine scrip-

tures and in all the Prophets. There can only be One Truth since Truth is God, and God is One! This belief in the unity and universality of Truth engenders a spirit of profound respect for 'Truth' which is located in a religious community and scripture other than one's own, - even if it be a mere remnant of the Truth!

When we study the history of the evolution of religion what we find is that at its earliest stage religion was basically concerned with the organization of society and the rules of conduct conducive to the emergence of moral consciousness. This appears to be the basic purpose fulfilled in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. The historical record indicates that symbolism played a significant role in the pursuit of both these objectives. Mythology was, perhaps, a failure to understand the true meaning of religious symbolisms. At the next stage religion concentrated on the development of a religious psychology conducive to the proper growth and development of moral consciousness. At a still higher stage religion turned man's attention away from this world to an almost exclusive devotion of things mystical and other-worldly. In its final form, however, with the revelation of the Qur'an, it achieves a harmonious balance in pursuing the goals of the social, moral and mystic dimensions of human consciousness. The conception, however, of a life hereafter, of accountability, and of worship of a single Deity who was both immanent and transcendent, always formed part of religious truth even when it was only implicitly stated. This was the 'substance' of Truth.

The final standpoint of religion regarding man's earthly life is that it should not be lived as an end-in-itself. Live in this world, says religion, but live for the next world. Live in this world in the manner of a traveller who is continuously conscious of the fact that his destination lies in the next world.

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Living for the next world implies, in fact, living for Allah. And this brings us to yet another way at which the Qur'an looks at *taqwa*. Religion, it would appear, evaluates all human conduct on the basis of what will 'reach' Allah and what will not. It is only the 'substance' of religion which reaches Allah.

Thus the Qur'an declares:

"It is not the flesh and blood (of the animals of sacrifice) which reach Allah. Rather it is the Taqwa of your hearts which reaches Him..." (Qur'an 22:37)

And thus the basic objective of fasting is nothing less than the penetration of the very substance and soul of religion.

The *taqwa* which the believer acquires while fasting is, therefore, something which reaches Allah. But before this can be achieved the human 'self' must travel on a road which progressively elevates it from the physical, to the moral and, finally, to the spiritual dimensions of its existence. It must, first of all, come to grips with the purely carnal self (*nafs al-ammara*). This rebellious 'wild beast' in man has to be tamed and disciplined. And fasting is one of the most effective means of controlling it.

It is in sexual immorality that the wild beast in man is at its wildest and most destructive and for this reason religion uses fasting for a direct attack on lust and carnal passion. This is achieved in Islam through the prohibition of sexual relations during the period of the fast each day and then virtually recommending sexual relations during the night which follows the day of fasting. (Qur'an, 2:187) The partners would thus bring to bear on their sexual conduct the moral and spiritual refinement acquired during the day of fasting.

As the self turns away from the unbridled fulfilment of all the demands of the 'wild beast' in man and turns towards that which can reach Allah, it is filled with regret for its past conduct and reproaches itself in this respect. This stage in the development of the self is termed '*nafs al-lawwamah*' by the Qur'an.

Finally, as the self purifies itself and turns to Allah, it acquires *taqwa* which reaches Allah. This is the stage of the beatified self (*nafs al-mutmainnah*). This, indeed, is the stage of spiritual excellence and it is here that religion really exists.

The beatified self, throughout history, has only tolerated its own existence in this world. It really lived in a world which transcended this world. This 'turning away' from the mundane towards the sacred, away from the spatio-temporal towards the transcendental, has been the fundamental objective of all religions.

But the Qur'an did not encourage 'turning away' from this world. Rather it transformed this world into a sacred world. It transformed sex into something sacred. Work, also, became something sacred. The believer was expected to live fully in this world and to strive to make a success of his life in this world. There was to be **no** incompatibility between living in this world and living for that world!

One cannot, however, really embark upon a journey through which the true consciousness of living for that world can be nurtured without mobilizing the ascetic element in human nature. Fasting, with its denial of that which is otherwise lawful, provides the perfect entree to the ascetic life and this, in turn, provokes the turning of the face to Allah.

Our conclusion is that power cannot be sustained without values. And values all emerge from Truth! Therefore values cannot be

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established or sustained without religion. For it is religion, and religion alone, which can provide the metaphysical or spiritual requirements which make morality possible!

When Muslims fast they should be constantly conscious of the fact that religion is at work building and sustaining values which, in turn, permit power to be established and sustained. That power, in turn, functions as a historical force which validates Truth. (Qur'an, 8:8)

NOTES OF CHAPTER 2

1. *It is interesting to observe that after the opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an, which is itself named 'Opening Chapter' the next chapter of the Qur'an is entitled the Chapter of the 'Cow' (al-Baqarah). While the choice of this name is attributed to the parable of the 'cow' in Jewish history which is found in the chapter (Qur'an, 2:67-71), it also has great significance for Hindus who consider the cow to be a holy animal. Now the choice of the cow, which performs the wondrous feat of eating grass and producing milk, as a holy animal, can be considered to have been a preliminary step in the evolution of the religious consciousness, - leading eventually to the recognition of all animals as sacred. Similarly the choice of the Ganges as a holy river and Bharat as a holy land would lead eventually to the recognition of everything in this universe as holy and sacred. And this is a position which can only truly be sustained with the recognition of the world as real and as God's creation. Secondly, the world and all it contains must be recognized to be functioning as a medium which leads the developed religious consciousness to God Himself. And this, of course, is the position of Islam itself which em-*

braces a spiritual interpretation of the universe, a universe which overflows with the 'Signs of ALLAH' (the ayatullah). And the Signs of ALLAH lead directly to Allah Himself.

2. *David is mentioned in the Bible as having fasted for seven days (Samuel 12:16-7). Moses fasted in order to show gratitude to Allah for the deliverance of AI-Israelites from Pharaoh and also for the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29). Jesus Christ not only kept fasts but also commanded his followers to fast (Mathew 6:15-7, Luke 5:33-5, Acts 13:23). May Allah's blessings be upon them all).*

CHAPTER 3

FASTING IN ISLAM - LAWS AND LINKAGES

The compulsory fast of Islam is to be observed during a fixed period of time (*ayyaam maduda*) (Qur'an 2:184), and the Qur'an identifies this fixed time as the lunar month of Ramadan in the hijri calendar. (Qur'an, 2:185)

The compulsory fast commences when the new crescent moon of Ramadan is visible, or when the month of Sha'ban (which precedes Ramadan) has completed its thirtieth day, whichever is first. The fast is observed daily from dawn to sunset. During this time one must refrain from eating or drinking anything. One must also refrain from sexual intercourse. After the sun has set and the daily fast has ended one may partake of food and drink, and may engage in sexual relations. The month-long fast ends when the new crescent moon of Shawwal is visible or the month of Ramadan has completed its thirtieth day, whichever is first.

In the very process of instituting fasting with an imperishable link with the lunar month -a span of time determined by nature of

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which Allah is the author, the Qur'an provided a built-in mechanism in religion which safeguarded against the process of the secularization of time.

The Qur'an itself claims that it was revealed in the month of Ramadan, and this was so momentous an occasion that the believers were required to fast for the entire month in order to show their gratitude to Almighty Allah. And so Islam forged an imperishable link between the revealed scripture (the Qur'an) and fasting. Now this is a matter of great importance for, as we have already noted, the goal of fasting is *taqwa* and *taqwa* 'reaches' Allah. The Qur'an, on the other hand, is an unbroken link between man and Allah. It is the 'word' of Allah and hence possesses the Divine quality of uncreated eternity. Yet it exists in a living human language, Arabic, and is thus readily accessible. The Qur'an is, therefore, a 'rope' from Allah by holding on to which man can either ascend to Allah, or be drawn to Allah. (Qur'an, 3: 101)

In the secular society the fast of Ramadan plays the strategically important role of restoring the consciousness of the existence of the unseen world and of the revelations which have been sent from that world as guidance for mankind. When once such revelations are accepted by man he is obliged to submit to its authority.

We are also informed that the Qur'an was revealed (or sent down) on a single night in Ramadan, namely the 'night of power' (*lailatul qadr*). Now this is a matter of tremendous importance. Ramadan is the month of the compulsory fast, and Ramadan is also the month in which exists the night the Qur'an was revealed. That night is the night of power. There is, therefore, a clear link between fasting and power, a link determined by Allah Himself Who chose Ramadan for the compulsory month-long fast.

Historically, however, it is clear that the Qur'an actually reached the Prophet (through the medium of the arch-angel Gabriel) in bits and pieces over a period of twenty-three years. The explanation for this appearance of contradiction is that when Allah said that He sent down the Qur'an in Ramadan, what He meant was that the Qur'an was sent down to the lowest heaven (*sam al-duniyah*) in Ramadan during the 'night of power'. Indeed it still exists there where its verses (*ayats*) adorn the lowest heaven as lamps. (Qur'an, 67:5) Like all the other revealed scriptures the Qur'an is described as a 'light' from Allah and therefore each verse of the Qur'an is a 'light'. (Qur'an, 64:8) It was, therefore, from the lowest heaven that the angel Gabriel brought the Qur'an piecemeal to the heart of the Prophet (Allah's blessings be upon him) over a period of twenty three years. The first revelation came to the Prophet (Pbuh) on that 'night of power' when he was meditating in the cave of Hira! Allah chose to give to the night of the first revelation the name 'night of power'. He could have named it the night of 'Truth', or of 'Peace', or of '*Din*' (religion). He did not! Since He named it the 'night of power', the implication is that the Qur'an contains within it that through which power can be acquired. We thus have linkages between fasting and power, and between the Qur'an and power.

In the establishment of a direct link between the month-long compulsory fast of Ramadan and the continuous recitation and study of the revealed scripture (Qur'an), religion has, in fact, reached a stage in its development never reached before. No other religious community was ordered to fast for as long a period as one month every year. Nor was fasting so organically linked to the recitation of the revealed scripture in any previous religious community. Muslims, indeed are so fond of reciting the Qur'an while fasting that the writer was amazed when, as a young student just arrived in Cairo, he found so many people reciting the Qur'an while trav-

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elling in crowded buses to work in the mornings of Ramadan. Some, in fact, were standing in those packed buses with one hand clasping the Qur'an and the other holding the rail. Not only do Muslims recite the Qur'an while fasting but, in addition, they perform during the nights of Ramadan, the prayers of the 'night vigil' (*qiyam al-IaU* or *taraweeh*) in which the entire Qur'an is sometimes recited. This recitation, like all others in salaah, is always performed in the original Arabic text of the Qur'an.

Now although the Qur'an recognizes that other religious scriptures also possess light (Qur'an, 5:47-49) and hence can be used in conjunction with fasting for achieving spiritual nobility, the problem which non-Muslims face is that they are seldom in a position to recite their scriptures in the original language in which they were revealed, and in which language alone they possess light. Most scriptures no longer exist in their original language, and when they do, the language is either dead or archaic and hence not readily accessible to the believing masses. Only a very tiny fraction of Christians today have ever read the Hebrew Bible, for example.

In a very real sense, the Qur'an is, perhaps, the only revealed scripture which is readily accessible today to the overwhelming majority of those who believe in it, accessible, that is, in the original language and text in which it was revealed.

This lends itself to further support for the claim of the book to be the revealed word of God!

FASTING IN ISLAM - THE LINK WITH JUDAISM

Ramadan is the month of spiritual retreat for Muslims. They are permitted to eat and drink until the break of dawn and must abstain from food, drink and sex until sunset. (Qur'an, 2:187)

Prior to the revelation of the Qur'anic verses relating to fasting, it would appear that the Muslims fasted without taking an early morning meal. Ibn Abbas has commented on those Qur'anic verses as follows: "When the people offered the night prayer, they were asked to abstain from food and drink and (intercourse with) women. They kept fast till the next night." [*Sunan Abu Daud*, Kitab al-Siyam] This was the way that the Jews and Christians fasted, for the Prophet (Pbuh) has said: "The difference between our fasting and that of the recipients of previous scriptures (Jews and Christians being specifically referred to) is eating shortly before dawn." [*Mishkat al-Masabih*, Kitab al-Siyam.] The fact that the Muslims fasted the way Christians and Jews fasted is not only indicative of the original Islamic attitude towards Christianity and Judaism but, also, provides invaluable evidence of how Christians and Jews fasted in those early days.

With the revelation of the new *shari'ah* (sacred law) the Muslims were now required to fast from dawn to sunset for the entire month of Ramadan. The change from the previous law of fasting to the new (as well as other such changes) is referred to in the Qur'an as '*Naskh*' (abrogation or supersession):

"We do not abrogate any Ayah (revelation) or cause it to be forgotten but (that) We (replace it) with that which is superior to it or similar to it". (Qur'an, 2:106)

No verse of the Qur'an itself was ever abrogated. Abrogation was always with reference to previous revelations. Secondly, even when a *shari'ah* was abrogated for the Muslims, it still remained operationally valid for those on whom it was enforced, until, of course, they chose to enter into the ummah of Muhammad (Pbuh).

LINK OF FASTING TO SEX AND CHASTITY

In their month-long retreat during the fast of Ramadan Muslims are specifically permitted, as we noted earlier, to approach their wives during the night which **follows** the day of fasting. This union of husband and wife during the nights of Ramadan injects a spiritual content into sexual relations and then elevates that spiritualized sex to a status worthy of participation in a spiritual retreat. Now what Islam achieves here is nothing less than revolutionary, for the satisfaction of the sexual needs of man have almost universally been held to be incompatible with his highest spiritual strivings. The religious mind through the ages has maintained an aloofness from sexuality which it has either held in contempt or reluctantly tolerated. Islam makes a break with the immediate past and works for the integration of man's sex life into the period of his most intense and sustained spiritual mobilization. In doing so it spiritualized the sex bond and establishes a philosophy of sex which is the *sine qua non* for the emancipation of woman in this modern age.

So long as sex is considered to be incompatible with man's spiritual strivings woman's status in society will always be problematic. Such a philosophy of sex, which excludes sexual life from the world of the sacred, and which recognizes no reality for woman beyond her material reality, almost naturally causes man to eventually approach woman for the satisfaction of lust and base carnal passion. Whenever this occurs the mind creates an image of woman as a toy, a plaything and an object to be used and abused; and herein lies the explanation for the continued exploitation of woman in the modern world. The feminist movement in the western world seems to have completely overlooked this aspect of the problem.

As soon as sex is spiritualized, as it is in the fast of Ramadan, man approaches woman with light rather than lust. And in the flame of spiritual illumination sex attains a status which is truly sacred, a gift from God through which a man and woman attain peace, tranquillity, intense pleasure and contentment and most important of all, a union and unity which facilitates the approach to The One. It is in this context that we can properly examine the statement of the Prophet (Pbuh): ' Three (things) have been made dear to me (by Allah) in this world of yours - women, and fragrance (of perfume), and prayer has been the cooling of my eyes."

Ibn Arabi, in his famous work *Fusus al- Hikam*, comments on this saying of the Prophet (Pbuh) in some detail:

"Then God drew forth from him (namely man) a being in his own image, called woman, and because she appears in his own image, man feels a deep longing for her, as something yearns for Itsself.. \ Thus, women were made beloved to him, for God loves that which He has created in His own image... „1

For Ibn Arabi the love for woman is founded on the conception of woman as a being who emerged from man. Now whatever may be the merits of this conception of woman (which is basically a Christian conception) on which Ibn Arabi bases his explanation of the statement of the Prophet (pbuh), it does not appear to be supported by the Qur'an which speaks of spiritual creation of the male and the female from the same nafs (self). From that single *nafs* did Allah create its mate. (Qur'an 4: 1) No gender has been specifically recognized for that original *nafs*.

In so far as biological creation is concerned the Qur'an says that Allah has caused (all) mankind to emerge from the earth in the manner of trees and plants. (Qur'an 71: 17) It also states that the

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nutfā (sperm) becomes an *alaq* (fertilized embryo which clings to the wall of the womb). And it is at this stage that Allah causes either the male or the female to emerge. (Qur'an, 75:37-9)

Ibn Arabi is more convincing when he speaks of woman as a medium in which, and through which, man can contemplate God:

"When a man loves a woman, he seeks union with her, that is to say the most complete union possible in love. And there is in the elemental sphere no greater union than that between the sexes. It is precisely because such desire pervades all his parts that man is commanded to perform the major ablution (i. e. to take a bath after sexual intercourse). Thus the purification is total, just as his annihilation in her was total at the moment of consummation. God is jealous of His servant that he should find pleasure in any but Him, so He Purifies him by the ablution, so that he might once again behold Him in the one in whom he was annihilated, since it is none other than He whom he sees in her."

[p.274J1]

Indeed woman is the most perfect such medium, according to Ibn Arabi:

"Contemplation of the Reality without formal support is not possible, since God in His Essence, is far beyond all need of the Cosmos. Since, therefore, some form of support is necessary, the best and most perfect kind is the contemplation of God in women."

[p.275J2]

It is important that we should note that the Prophet (Pbuh) said: "Three things have been made dear to me . . .". He did not say:

"Three things did I love." The implication is that it was the Divine will which ordained that women be loved more than all the world. The reason, as Ibn Arabi explains, is that of all the *Ayat* (signs and symbols) of Allah which exist in the world, woman is the closest *Ayatullah* (symbol of Allah) to man. She is the closest 'window' to heaven! Hence man should approach woman with the respect which is due to the sacred. And, through woman, he should seek to approach his Lord.

Yet another approach to the subject is to be found in Dr. P.R. Ansari's observations that "the satisfaction of the sexual need bears a certain relationship with an expansion in man's spiritual release."³ This is not to say that the celibate is incapable of spiritual progress. It is rather a view to the effect that in negating sex in order to pursue spiritual growth, man is, in fact, disregarding an in-built mechanism in his own nature which constantly balances the physical and the spiritual.

Finally we may note that the spiritualization of sex, which is initiated in fasting, makes a significant impact on sexual morality since it establishes the firmest possible foundations for chastity. It is in the context of the permission to approach wives during the nights of Ramadan that the Qur'an finds it appropriate to observe that: "They (your wives) are apparel for you, and so are you for them." (Qur'an 2:187) Thus when a husband goes to a woman other than his wife for his sexual satisfaction, he is, in fact, depriving his wife of her clothing and thus subjecting her to a certain kind of nakedness with all its attendant vulnerability, embarrassment and shame. Chastity is an imperative for stable and happy family life. And this is the foundation of the stable family unit without which an enduring civilization cannot be established.

LINK BETWEEN FASTING AND CHASTITY

In much the same way that the Qur'anic stamp of approval for sexual relations during the nights which follow the days of fasting leads to the spiritualization of sex and chastity, so too, does the Qur'anic exemptions from the compulsory fast for those who are ill or on a journey, permitting them to make up for the 'missed' days after Ramadan, lead to a certain religious pragmatism, realism and moderation. When religion ceases to be realistic and practical it soon loses its appeal to the masses. It is precisely for this reason that the Qur'an comments, in the context of the exemptions: "God intends every facility for you: He does not want to put you to difficulties." (Qur'an 2:185)

Those, on the other hand, who are permanently incapable of fasting either because of the nature of their illness or because of the disabilities of old age, are permitted to feed the poor in lieu of fasting. And this reference to charity brings us to the social dimension of fasting. Ramadan is the month when God is most charitable to His creatures. Thus the Prophet is reported to have said: "When Ramadan begins the gates of heaven are opened...The gates of mercy are opened...The gates of hell are locked and the devils are chained." Indeed during Ramadan: "...some are freed from hell by God, and that happens every night. This generosity and charity from above' also found expression in the life of the Prophet who, according to Ibn Abbas:

"When the month of Ramadan began, set every prisoner free and gave to every beggar. "

As a consequence, spending freely of one's substance in charity is an integral part of the institution of fasting in Islam. It is significant that the compulsory fast of Ramadan was not promulgated

by the Qur'an until the Muslims had migrated from Makkah and had settled themselves as an organized community in Madinah. This was so precisely because fasting in Islam is not a strictly private affair but has a social function to perform in alleviating the condition of the poor, the destitute, the under-privileged and the weak in the society. So integral is this care for the poor and needy to the religious way of life that the Qur'an considers its neglect to be a repudiation of religion:

"Seest thou one who repudiates religion? Then such is the (man) who repulses the orphan (with harshness) and encourages not the feeding of the indigent. So woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers. Those who want (but) to be seen (of men) but refuse (to supply) (even) neighbourly needs. " (Qur'an, 107:1-7)

It should be clear that the institution of fasting in Islam makes a vitally important contribution to Islam's championing of that noble cause. Indeed what Islam accomplishes in fasting is nothing less than the spiritualization of charity, for this is the implication of the linking of charity with fasting.

The momentum generated in the month of Ramadan in respect of the spiritualization of charity, 'is enhanced at no less a place than the house of God itself (the Kaaba in Makkah), when during Hajj and Umrah, the pilgrim who is forced by illness to shave his hair before the completion of the rites, is required to compensate for this either by fasting or by feeding the poor. (Qur'an, 2: 196) Thus even in the House of God Himself, fasting and charity have *the same* status.

In a contemporary world in which 'aid' as a form of 'imperialism' is so common, Islam's spiritualization of charity is sorely needed.

LINK BETWEEN FASTING AND HUMAN FREEDOM AND DIGNITY

The Qur'an states that the divine compensation which is exacted for accidental homicide by a Muslim of a Muslim includes "freeing of a believing slave" or, for those who find this beyond their means, "fasting for two months continuously." (Qur'an 4:92) Hence the freeing of slaves is invested with a special degree of spirituality in Islam since it is equivalent in status to prolonged fasting. Now this is an achievement of great significance indeed for it permits the process of the dismantling of the institution of slavery to proceed in a manner which ensures the full rehabilitation of the freed slaves.

The negative after-effects of slavery and, in particular, the damage to the human personality, are still very visible in the western hemisphere more than a century after the abolition of slavery in western civilization. The descendants of freed slaves in the United States of America are yet to be successfully integrated into American society. The explanation of this pathetic situation lies in the fact that slavery was abolished in response to basically economic compulsions. Humanitarianism appears to have played a minor role in the whole affair. No evidence exists of any significant spiritual motivation in the dismantling of the institution of slavery.⁴

We wish to suggest that this is the basic reason why western civilization has been able to live with, or at least to tolerate western-imposed apartheid on the soil of the very continent from which the West enriched itself by enslaving a free people. In other words, apartheid is a manifestation of the spiritual bankruptcy of secular western civilization.

In India, on the other hand, the caste system imposes a very real form of slavery on millions of people in that hapless country. It is of crucial importance to note that there is a form of colour discrimination which is involved in the caste system. The fair-skinned Aryan is never at the bottom of the social order. That is reserved for the dark-skinned indigenous Indians. Although the caste system has been denounced by many great Hindu spiritual and religious leaders and Hindu reform movements, as well as being made illegal by the Indian constitution, it continues to survive and to impose terrible sufferings on low caste and caste-less Hindus to this day. In Christianity as in Hinduism, there appears to be a no basic linkage between fasting on the one hand, and the recognition of human freedom and dignity on the other. And it is the consequent inability to mobilize the spiritual consciousness and bring it to bear on such social problems as caste in India, apartheid in South Africa, and the integration of the descendants of freed slaves into American society which explains the continued existence of these manifestations of social cancer.

Islam's basic achievement really lies in the functional linkage it has established between fasting, on the one hand, and charity, chastity and recognition of human freedom and dignity, on the other. The one envelops the others in a spiritual embrace of profound practical consequences.

1. *Ibn Arabi - The Bezels of Wisdom, translated by R. W.J. Austin, SPCK, London, 1980, pg. 274*
2. *Ibidp275*
3. *Answer to a question posed to Dr. Ansari by the author.*
4. *See the excellent work of Dr. Eric Williams 'Capitalism and Slavery'.*

CHAPTER 4

BETWEEN THE TWO NIGHTS

The *Mi'raj* or ascension of the Prophet to the special Divine presence took place on 27 Rajab. This date appears to be linked in the Islamic calendar to 27 Ramadan, the likely day of the 'night of power' (*lailatul qadr*).

It seems that this period of two months is a special season in which the collective spirituality is progressively enhanced until finally the individual effort of even the average worshipper elevates him to eligibility for some form of religious experience. This, in turn, launches him on a path of spiritual growth.

The progressive enhancement begins on 27 Rajab when the worshipper refreshes his memory about the Prophet's *Mi'raj* and reminds himself that the five daily prayers (*Salat*) which were brought 'down' from 'above' in the *Mi'raj*, are the vehicle for his personal *Mi'raj*. He thus pays serious attention to improving the quality of his *salat*. This involves, most of all, developing a 'devout' frame of mind.

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In the month of Shaban he follows the example of the Prophet and fasts - a trial run, really, to prepare the body and the mind for the rigors of the fast of Ramadan. Thus the preliminary fast of Shaban is added to (*salat*) and worship moves into a higher gear. On 1 Ramadan not only does the compulsory fast for all (adult) Muslims begin but, also, there is *qiyam al-lail* or the prayers of the night-vigil, when it is customary for the entire Qur'an to be recited. Fasting, the night-time prayer vigil and the recitation of the Qur'an have a dramatic impact in effecting a substantial qualitative improvement of worship.

When on 21 Ramadan the withdrawal from worldly affairs and seclusion in the Masjid ('*itikaj*) for ten days commences, the worshippers reach a pitch or intensity of worship which makes this period most conducive (spiritually) for religious experience.

Finally comes 27 Ramadan, the night of power (*lailatul qadr*) when Allah sends down the angels and Gabriel for 'every errand', (Qur'an, 97:4) - i.e. to bestow, among other things, the supreme gift of *Miraj* to all those who have deserved it or who have earned it.

When the Qur'an asserts that 'the night of power (*lailatul qadr*) is superior to a thousand months', (Qur'an 97:3) the implication is that that which can best be experienced on that night (namely spiritual experience which launches spiritual growth) is better than an entire life-span (a thousand months standing for an average lifespan) lived without it.

There are profound psychological and sociological lessons to be learnt from Islam's fast of Ramadan. The enhanced collective spirituality of Ramadan, for example, literally reaches down to embrace even the weakest of the believers and to assist and strengthen his resolve to observe the fast.

Secondly, with the institution of the fast of Ramadan and its attendant charity, prayers, and the recitation of the Qur'an, Islam takes the believer to the third stage of the process of religious development, the stage of total conformity and harmony with the externally imposed sacred law.

In the first stage, we should recall, the individual was invited to enter into Islam and to submit **publicly** to the Truth. In the second stage, on the other hand, the process witnessed the internalization of the externally proclaimed belief. This was the stage of faith (*al Iman*). With the fulfilment of stage three, or total conformity with the sacred law, the stage is now set for that spiritual growth (through *al-Shariah*, *al-Tariqah*, *al- Ma 'arifah* and *al-Haqiqah*) which is the true goal of the religious way of life.

CHAPTERS

FASTING AND THE PHYSICAL **BODY**

We eat and drink for energy, which we then burn up when working or playing. When we generate greater amounts of energy than we actually use we then end up with excess energy and this is stored in the body as fat.

There are two ways through which we can get rid of fat, and that is either by rigorous exercise, which burns up a lot of energy rapidly, or by fasting. When we are fasting we still need energy to meet our daily requirements. When the source of energy through food and drink is limited the body uses its stored energy. In this way we get rid of excess fat.

By reducing or eliminating excess body fat every year during the fast of Ramadan fasting makes an important contribution to physical health.

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It should be obvious, however, that this elimination of excess fat will not be achieved if one fasts for the whole day and then, at the time of breaking the fast, eats three times as much food as one would normally eat. In fact this overeating after a long day of fasting can have a distinctly negative impact on health. The human body, like a motor car, needs to be serviced at regular intervals. By changing spark plugs, points, condenser, oil, oil filter, etc. and then 'tuning' the engine, the car works better and more efficiently. There is, in addition, an increase in the life of the car.

Similarly the human body needs to be serviced and Islam achieves the servicing of the body during the fast of Ramadan. While fasting, a number of bodily organs (in particular the stomach) are rested and thus serviced. This servicing restores human health and increases man's longevity.

Physical strength cannot be sustained without good health, and fasting is essential for the maintenance and the preservation of good health. Indeed fasting helps in the cure of many illnesses! The question is: does Islam establish a link between physical strength and power? And the answer is: Yes, it does!

When *Ai-Israelites* questioned the Divine choice of Saul as their king on the grounds that he was not a man of wealth, Allah responded and pointed out that Saul was eligible for the status conferred upon him because he possessed 'knowledge' and (physical) strength. (Qur'an, 2:247)

FASTING AND CREATIVITY

In order to realize his potential man must achieve in his life-pattern a balance between continuity and change.

As soon as he becomes stuck in a permanent syndrome of routine and habits he shuts out from his life fresh and new vistas, and **that** expansion of the mind and the spirit which exists within him as a potential realization.

A temporary change from daily routine to something different can release creative energy, refresh the mind and restore strength and vitality to a body which may have become tired and stuck in a **daily** routine.

In the fast of Ramadan the believer experiences just such a change. The change is effected in the realm of man's biological existence and interferes with the daily routine in respect of food, drink and sex. The change is so fundamental, so disruptive of daily routine, that the believer lives a different life in Ramadan. This movement from routine, not only refreshes the body and restores vitality but, more importantly, releases creative forces with the potential of penetrating worlds that were hitherto inexperienced and unexplored by the believer, worlds which transcend his normal experience.

SHARING HUNGER WITH THE DESTITUTE

Abstinence from food and drink from dawn to sunset forces on the believer the personal experience of hunger and thirst. In the crucible of personal experience he learns of what suffering the poor and destitute must bear. As a consequence of the acquisition of this understanding of poverty, the believer's heart and mind is opened for the development of greater sympathy for the poor and greater feelings of charity, kindness and generosity. And these surely are virtues which lift men and societies to honour and greatness in the march of history.

FASTING AND THE VALUE OF FOOD

Abstinence from food and drink from dawn to sunset and the consequent experience of the pangs of hunger and thirst impresses upon the consciousness of the believer the value of food and drink. Food and drink or sustenance is not a thing to be **taken**~ for granted, not a thing to be wasted. Rather it is providence (rizq) and hence sacred. The spirituality generated during the long day of fasting invests the food and drink with which the fast is broken with what can most appropriately be termed 'sacramental value'.

Respect for food and drink in turn protects one from the abuse of food and drink - as well as over-indulgence in either or both.

That the world is in need of proper respect for food is demonstrated year after year in some of the most affluent countries in the world where food is destroyed in order to prevent prices from tumbling in a market which is flooded.

Even among Muslims the respect for food is now sometimes lacking' a thing unknown in the past in Islamic civilizations. The writer recalls with horror the spectacle of Arab students dining in the common hall of the Karachi University students hostels and, upon the completion of their meal, wiping their hands clean with the soft flat bread which was prepared for their meals.

CHAPTER 6

THE LAST WORD

The ummah of the Prophet (pbuh) is in a very sorry state today. Despite the Divine command to build power to the maximum extent possible the ummah is weak and helpless - as weak helpless and vulnerable as it was in Makkah. At that time the Prophet (Pbuh) led the community, with Allah's help, to that state of power with which they succeeded in defeating the enemy at Badr.

Today's ummah has a primary obligation to restore power! There is no other subject more important to Muslims today than the restoration of power, that power which can function as an effective deterrent to the enemy, which can be used for responding to aggression and for liberating the oppressed and tyrannized, and through which 'Truth' can be seen more clearly by mankind to be 'Truth'. These are the functions of power as established in various verses of the Qur'an. If that power is not restored then the consequence for the world of Islam will be more Bosnias, Kashmirs, and Palestines. There will be universal fasad (corruption and disarray) on earth and the misery will fall on all, not just on the guilty. Muslims, however, will face the brunt of the suffer-

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ing. To avert that fate which is already at our doorstep, we need to restore power.

We learn from the seerah that the foundations of power must first be established before we can actually take the battlefield.

This is the significance of the thirteen years in Makkah, the Hijrah, and the first year in Madinah. The foundations of power are FREEDOM, KNOWLEDGE, VALUES, FAITH, UNITY (and Fraternity), LEADERSHIP and DISCIPLINE. A study of the main points made in this paper reveal that the institution of the collective fast of Ramadan makes a significant contribution towards developing **and** sustaining ALL those foundations of power.

Our appeal to the intellectual, moral and spiritual guides of the contemporary ummah is to direct urgent attention to the following:

* Articulate the relationship between fasting and power; why else, indeed, did Allah delay the promulgation of the new shariah regarding fasting until after the first Ramadan in Madinah?

* Work for the recognition of the strategic input which the fast of Ramadan is supposed to make in the development of power; this input being described in the development of values, in winning inner freedom, in facilitating the penetration of the transcendental foundations of knowledge, in strengthening faith, in uniting the community, in developing a life of self-discipline etc.

* Mobilize Muslims in such a way that the fast of Ramadan may actually result in that input for power being achieved individually and collectively. Ameen!

SECTION TWO

THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF ISRA AND MIRAJ

THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF ISRA' AND MIRAJ

INTRODUCTION

Any proper examination and analysis of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (divinely blessed is he and in eternal peace), when viewed in its totality, would surely reveal that his miraculous journey by night from Makkah to Jerusalem and thence, through the heavens, to the special divine presence (Isra' and Miraj), was the most important event in his entire life. Not only was it his personal *summum bonum*, and the turning point in his historical mission, but it is clear from the guidance which he imparted and from his own way of life that this event was a crucially important element - Nay! - the very substance of the prophetic paradigm. And since the Qur'an declares that the believers have in the Messenger of Allah the very best example and model (of conduct and behavior), the Miraj thus constitutes a supreme personal goal for which all his true followers should continuously strive.

THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF ISRA AND MIRAJ

As a consequence it is important for Muslims to have a clear understanding of the totality of the event and an equally clear perception of that journey (Miraj) and spiritual goal for which individual worshippers should strive.

We propose, in this booklet, first to explain the event of the journey (Isra and Miraj) and its mechanics, namely: What happened? - When did it happen? - and How did it happen? And then, in an attempt to explain the dynamics of the event of the journey, namely: Why did it happen? - we propose to undertake an analysis of the subject from the perspective of psychology, epistemology, comparative religion, theology, politics and spirituality.

Finally we shall attempt to provide some guidance for the individual believer in quest of his or her own personal experience of *Miraj*.

THE EVENT

Chapter 17 of the Qur'an is entitled *Al-Isra* (The Night Journey) and is so named on account of the first verse of the chapter:

"Glory be to Him (Allah) who made His servant (Muhammad) go by night from the sacred Mosque (in Makkah) to the farthest Mosque (in Jerusalem) whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him (some) of Our signs. He is the Hearer, the Seer."

This journey was necessary in order that Allah could show certain of His Signs to His Messenger. The journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and back to Makkah is known as *al-Isra*.

Later in the same chapter the Qur'an declares (verse 161) that *al-Isra* was (and still is) a test and a trial for mankind:

And We refrain from giving signs only because the ancients disbelieved them. To Thamoud, We gave the she-camel as a visible sign, yet they laid violent hands on her.

We give signs only by way of warning.

We have told you (Muhammad) that your Lord encompasses all men. We have made the vision which We showed to you only as a test for men's faith, and likewise the tree accursed in the Qur'an. We seek to put fear in their hearts but it only increases their wickedness.

In Chapter 53, which is entitled *AI-Najm* (the Star), the Qur'an refers (in Verses 8-18) to *al-Miraj* or ascent into the heavens:

.. He (Allah) revealed to His servant (Muhammad) that which He revealed. His heart did not deny that which it saw. How can you (unbelievers) then question that which he sees?

He beheld Him once again at the farthest lote-tree. Near it is the Garden of Abode (Paradise). When that tree was covered with what covered it, his eyes did not wander, nor did they turn aside: for he saw some of the Greatest signs of his Lord

This ascent into the heavens culminated with the audience in the special presence of Allah, Who then revealed to His Messenger "what He revealed", and "his heart did not disbelieve that which he saw". The second stage of the journey from Jerusalem to the heavens and back is known as *al-Miraj*.

The Hadith literature, which records the sayings of the Prophet (Pbuh), provides us with an abundance of information relating to the journey. Firstly, we are told that the entire journey took place within such a short span of time that the spot on which the Prophet (Pbuh) was sleeping was still warm when he returned to it. He was transported on a heavenly animal named Buraq which was "a white beast, between a mule and an ass, with wings at his sides wherewith he moved his legs; and his every stride was as far as his eye could see." It was an animal used by others (Prophets, perhaps) for celestial transcendental journeys.

Secondly, the Prophet (Pbuh) was transported from Makkah to Mt Sinai (where Moses had the vision of Allah), and thence to Bethlehem (where the virgin birth of Jesus took place), before being taken to the ruins of Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. At Masjid al-Aqsa, which was the original 'temple' built by Prophet Solomon (Pbuh), he led the congregational prayer in which numerous Prophets participated - among them Abraham, Moses and Jesus whom he saw in their terrestrial forms. Gabriel then offered him two cups, one with milk and the other with wine. He chose the milk and drank it. Gabriel commented that he had chosen rightly, and that both he and his followers would be rightly guided.

According to the Seerah of Ibn Ishaq, the Prophet then ascended into the heavens by climbing a heavenly ladder made of light. In other versions of the Seerah, the journey was resumed with Buraq, which he mounted by stepping on the sacred rock *sakhrāh* at the centre of the site of the temple.

Different Prophets greeted him in different heavens. Their greeting was always: "Welcome my brother!" He marveled at the difference in the terrestrial form in which he had just seen Abraham, Jesus, Moses etc., at Masjid al-Aqsa, and the new transcendental

form or celestial reality in which they now appeared. In the highest heaven he was greeted by Abraham with the words: "Welcome my son!" (and He was later to comment while describing to his companions the features of that Prophet, that he himself resembled Abraham).

During the journey he saw many strange sights - men sitting before two plates of meat, one which had rotten stinking meat and the other fresh well-cooked meat, and they were eating from the rotten meat. "Who are these men?" he asked Gabriel, "and why are they eating the rotten meat?" "These are the adulterers who turned away from the wives Allah had provided them, and committed adultery with other women", said Gabriel. The Prophet (Pbuh) then saw women who had also committed such sins and whose punishment was "hanging by their breasts from the roof." As for those who had indulged in usury or interest, they were seen eating balls of fire which were being passed out through their extremities and then reconsumed.

The Prophet saw an extraordinarily beautiful girl in heaven. Her eyes were (shaped) like eggs (in the sheer beauty of their shape). Gabriel explained that she was the reward which Allah had been pleased to confer on Zaid bin Haritha, the adopted son of the Prophet (Pbuh). More than ten years later Zaid would die as a martyr fighting in the cause of Islam.

At his request the Prophet was shown hell by the never-smiling Angel who guarded hell. Not even for Muhammad (Pbuh) did he smile. When the cover was removed huge terrifying flames shot out from hell. In hell, of which he was given a glimpse, he found that the majority of those incarcerated were women-folk (a possible explanation for this is the facet that the woman, as wife and mother, exercises enormous influence within the home and is there-

fore capable of inflicting incalculable damage on her family and home if she holds false beliefs or if she is evil in her conduct).

Upon the conclusion of his special audience with Allah, the Prophet (Pbuh) received the gift of the congregational prayers (*salaah al-Juma 'ah*). It was originally prescribed to be performed fifty times a day. Moses kept on sending the Prophet (Pbuh) back to Allah to get it decreased since he, Moses, already had significant experience with his own community and was skeptical about the capacity of the followers of the Prophet (Pbuh) to pray so many times a day. It was finally decreased to five times a day, a number with which Moses was still unhappy but which the Prophet (Pbuh) accepted "because he was too embarrassed to seek any further reduction."

On his return to Makkah (Le., the morning after the event) the Prophet (Pbuh) informed the public of what had transpired the previous night. The disbelievers were openly skeptical and summarily dismissed his claim. Even some of those who were Muslims were also affected in the same way and decided to leave Islam. Abu Bakr (RA) displayed such faith on this occasion that he was rewarded by the Prophet (Pbuh) with the title *al-Siddiq*.

The Prophet (Pbuh) did make an effort to provide evidence to support his claim of the miraculous journey. For example, he claimed that he had stopped on the way to help retrieve a runaway camel for a caravan which was then camped some distance out of Makkah. "The lead camel of that caravan", he declared, "had different hues (which he described) and was transporting such and such merchandise." At another stop where another caravan was camped and all the travelers were asleep, the Prophet (Pbuh) claimed that he uncovered a container of water, drank the water, and replaced the cover, before continuing with his journey. Both

these claims were validated when the caravans subsequently arrived in Makkah and confirmed what had happened. The Prophet (pbuh) was able to provide proof of his journey to 'doubting Thomases' by describing Jerusalem to the disbelieving Quraish while it was held raised by Allah before his very eyes (an event which should have suggested the possibility of television long before its actual discovery).

The angel Gabriel accompanied him throughout this entire journey but himself stopped at the 'farthest lote tree' (*sidrah al-muntaha*), beyond which only Muhammad (Pbuh) advanced to the meeting with his Lord.

THE JOURNEY - REAL OR DREAM?

Having described the event we must now turn to the not unimportant matter of an explanation of how it took place. Was it a dream or a vision in which something manifested itself before the inner eye, or was it, in fact, a real journey? It is only if it was a real journey that it would become necessary to explain how it took place.

Now all the companions of the Prophet (Pbuh) believed that it was a real and, therefore, miraculous journey. Only two, Aisha (the Prophet's youngest wife) and Muawiyah (the son of Abu Sufyan) believed that it was a dream or vision. At the time of the event, however, Aisha was still a little girl of nine or ten years of age, and Muawiya was not only a little boy but he was in a family or household which was leading the opposition to the Prophet (Pbuh) and which openly ridiculed his claim that it was an actual journey.

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It would, therefore, be quite proper to say that at the time when the event took place there was a unanimity of view amongst the companions of the Prophet (Pbuh) that it was a real journey and not a dream (which would imply an imaginary journey), or a vision (which would imply a spiritual journey). Such a situation of unanimity could never have developed had the Prophet (Pbuh) himself not described the event as they interpreted it.

We must reject the interpretation that the journey was a vision or a dream for two additional reasons apart from the fact that the Qur'anic introduction "Glory be to Him" (*Subhan al-lazee*) and the reference to 'His Servant' (*abdihi*) being transported lend themselves to the interpretation of a real journey rather than a dream. Firstly, it is only in the context of a real journey (albeit a miraculous journey) that we can possibly understand the statement that the spot where the Prophet (pbuh) was lying was still warm when he returned from the journey, or the claims regarding the water which he drank and the runaway camel which he helped retrieve. Secondly we cannot explain the demand for proof nor the taunts and doubts of the Quraish nor, most of all, the apostasy of some Muslims except in the context of a claim by the Prophet (Pbuh) that it was a real and, hence, miraculous journey.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In order to appreciate the psychological or strategic significance of the miraculous event we must look to the exact moment when it took place. The most authentic sources indicate that this event took place on the night of 27th Rajab in the eleventh year after the commencement of his mission, when the Prophet (pbuh) was 51 years of age. Shortly before this event the Prophet (pbuh) had, at age fifty, suffered the two greatest blows he had ever suffered since the announcement of his prophethood ten years earlier.

Firstly, Abu Talib who, because of his position as leader of an important clan of the tribe of Quraish (Banu Hashim) and as the Patriarch of Makkah, was able to offer security and protection to the Prophet (pbuh), now died, and the Prophet (PBUH) was left in a position of grave insecurity. Shortly before this the Prophet (pbuh) suffered another serious blow when his beloved wife and life-long companion, Khadija (RA), died. To the intense grief and the loneliness of a widower were now added the grave burden of the Prophet's (pbuh) insecurity.

But the darkest day of his life and of his mission was yet to come when, shortly after, he ventured to the city of Taif with the hope of extracting some form of support from Banu Saad Bin Bakr (in which tribe he was suckled) and other tribes in that city which would alleviate his perilous insecurity. The tribal chiefs not only rejected his approach but ordered the street urchins to stone him out of the city. With blood flowing from his wounds, his heart lonely and forlorn with grief, and his enemies closing the noose around him and his small band of followers, it appeared as though the end was in sight.

Not once, not even at such a hopeless moment, did the faith of the Prophet waver. He relied on none but Allah. He turned to none but Allah. Regardless of the hopelessness of the objective situation in which he now found himself, there was no thought of any compromise with the forces ranged against him and his followers.

It was at precisely this moment, not sooner and not later, that the miraculous journey (*Miraj*) took place. And it marked the turning point in his mission (apart from being the greatest honour ever bestowed by Almighty God on any of His creation). Through his steadfast commitment to 'Truth' and to the mission of strug-

gle for establishing the supremacy of 'Truth', and through his noble patience in the face of unrelenting adversity, the Prophet (Pbuh) earned the Grace of divine intervention (*af-Isra waf Mira*) which then charted a course to victory.

Four and a half months after the *Mira* (i.e. the month of *Zil Ha*) in the same 11th year of the Call) the tide began to turn and a way was provided for the Prophet (Pbuh) and his followers to escape from the perils of Makkah. The opening was from the city of Yathrib (later to be renamed Madina) and was grasped in the first pledge of Aqaba. By the time of the second pledge of Aqaba one year later (*Zil Ha*) in the 12th year of the Call) the way was clear for the migration to Madina (*Hijrah*) which took place three months later (*Rabi af-awwaf* in the 13th year of the Prophet's (Pbuh) mission). *Hijrah* was followed by the successful establishment by the Muslims of the city-State of Madina with the Prophet (pbuh) as supreme authority. This was followed by military victory at Badr and diplomatic and political victory at Hudaibiyah until, finally, complete victory over the Quraish at Makkah in the year 8 A.H. (eight after *Hijrah*).

Thus *af-Isra* and *Mira*, in marking the turning point in the Prophet's (pbuh) mission, also ordained a psychology of *da 'wah* (inviting people to God), to the effect that it is the obligation of the believers to persevere in the mission of truth despite all adversities, and no matter how long the struggle may last (the Prophet was aged 51 and had, by then, pursued the mission for 11 long years), and to be steadfast and patient until Divine intervention charts the course of victory. Thus the strategic factor for success in the process of the Islamic revolution lies in the spiritual domain of Divine Grace. Revolutionary forces cannot invoke this Grace. They must earn it.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Allah has explained in the Qur'an that the purpose of the *af-Isra* was "to show him (i.e. the Prophet) of Our Signs". Now since the Signs of Allah are basically pregnant with knowledge, which is intended for the benefit of mankind (and this is why the verses of the Qur'an are also called Signs or *Ayat*), it should be obvious that Allah showed those Signs for the purpose of imparting some special knowledge to the Prophet (Pbuh). This fact is clearly reinforced by the use, at the end of the verse, of the divine attributes *af-Sami* (He Who hears) and *al-Basir* (He Who Sees).

Since it is He, Allah, Who really Sees and Really Hears, Real knowledge is with Him. *Al-Miraj*, therefore, was to the world of Real knowledge.

This is a matter of such supreme importance for the modern world that it could usher an intellectual revolution. The modern scientific method insists that only that which can be an object of observation and experimentation can be admitted into scientific knowledge. That which cannot be observed cannot be admitted as knowledge, because only scientific knowledge is real knowledge. Everything else belongs to 'disneyland'. The result has been that the secularization of knowledge has delinked knowledge from the sacred and the transcendental. And since the essence of things are located in their transcendental substance, modern scientific man can see things only as they 'appear' to him. As a consequence he is like a ship without a pilot, sailing the wide seas without a clue as to where he is going.

All human knowledge comes to man through the medium of the senses and the intellect, both operating inter-dependently within the framework of space and time. Man is, under normal circum-

stances, imprisoned within this framework of thinking and living. But through the Prophet's (Pbuh) *Miraj* Allah demonstrated, in as spectacular a manner as possible, that there is another world of knowledge which transcends space and time. Man can partake of that knowledge if he can pierce the spatio-temporal barrier. If and when he does, he will be able to acquire the knowledge of things 'as they are' in contrast to the prevailing knowledge of things 'as they appear to us'.

The *Miraj*, therefore, established the existence of transcendental knowledge, and the learned man (*Alim*) is he whose knowledge is enriched with transcendental knowledge. But the further significance of the *Miraj* into the world of transcendental knowledge is that it did not take place until the Prophet (Pbuh) had first spent long years learning from the Signs of Allah here-below. Transcendental knowledge thus appears to be the fruit which is earned after prolonged struggle in the quest for knowledge.

The epistemological significance of the *Miraj*, therefore, is that it affirms the existence of, and draws our attention to transcendental knowledge. It also provides us with the methodology which must be adopted if the acquisition of that knowledge is to be possible.

THE SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Since the *Al-Isra* and *Miraj* involved a real journey (rather than a vision or a dream) it is important that we should seek to understand how the journey was effected. How was it possible for the Prophet (Pbuh) to be transported from Makkah to Jerusalem and back to Makkah in a matter of a fleeting moment? Also, how was it possible for the physical being of the Prophet to be transported into the transcendental realms and to return to this spatio-temporal dimension of existence?

We are, in fact, faced here with a situation which is virtually identical to that of the ascent of Jesus (pbuh) - if we accept the majority Muslim view that Jesus (Pbuh) was transported bodily into the heavens and will return to this world before the end of the world.

Now since the physical body occupies space, one cannot, in terms of the Qur'anic Guidance, conceive of a physical approach to Allah Who is non-spatial and Who is also "with you wherever you are" and is "closer to (man) than his jugular vein". The only way, therefore, that we can understand this journey is by postulating the transformation of the physical body into its transcendental form which, by definition, pertains to that domain of existence which transcends space and time. Although the majority opinion in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and up to this day has been that the physical body made the entire journey, we noted earlier that there was a minority opinion to the effect that the body did not participate in the journey. It is important that we remember that the Prophet himself did not explicitly confirm the participation of the physical body in the physical form. Indeed he seemed to be deliberately vague on the subject.

Dr. Muhammad Fazlur Rahman Ansari, the learned author of "The Qur'anic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society", (World Federation of Islamic Missions, Karachi, 1973) supports the thesis of 'transformation' :

"The holy Prophet's *Miraj* was, however, an event of unique nature in which it should be accepted that his sacred personality had been transformed by God from the physical to the transcendental dimension of existence . . ." (Vol. 1. pS8)

Now both the physical and the transcendental are dimensions of the self-same human personality. *Al-Isra* and *Miraj* involved move-

ment within the individual person of the Prophet (Pbuh) from one dimension of existence to another.

Para-psychologists have conclusively demonstrated that out-of-body travel over long distances in very short periods of time is possible and actually happens. The transformation of the physical being has, however, eluded para-psychology. The secret explanation for this probably lies in the Sufi view of the origin of matter - that it is light which generates energy and gradually transforms itself into matter. The first thing which God created was a particle of light in intense motion, and from this original light emerged all creation. Matter, therefore, is at its origin, light. If scientific research can discover how to reverse the transformation of light into matter it will be possible for the physical being to be transformed - and herein lies the primary scientific significance of the Prophet's (Pbuh) miraculous journey.

One cannot commence the effort of seeking to discover the process of reverse transformation, however, until one has first understood the original process of creation through transformation. Nor can one penetrate the knowledge of the original process of transformation without turning to the divine guidance on the subject revealed through the Word of Allah (the Qur'an). For this reason also, therefore, the Qur'an remains a book of supreme scientific importance advent of Muhammad (pbuh).

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Nearly all, if not all the Prophets of Allah recognised by Jews and Christians at the time of the were in some way or another connected with Palestine and Jerusalem. Indeed many had their roots in that holy land. The Christians and Jews considered it a holy land because of Solomon's (Pbuh) temple which was built in

Jerusalem, because of the *Sakhrah* or holy rock close to Solomon's (pbuh) temple to which they turned in prayer, and because David (Pbuh) had established his kingdom there. Abraham (Pbuh) lived there and the Jews and Christians believed that the trial of the sacrifice of his son took place there. Therefore, none could, at that time, claim to be a Prophet of God and hope to have his claim accepted by the Jews and Christians unless he could demonstrate a powerful personal link with the holy land.

Now Muhammad (pbuh) was born of Arab parents in the city of Makkah in Arabia - a land which, to that time, had produced no Prophets of God. He spent his entire life in Makkah and Madina and never even once traveled to Jerusalem. It was very likely, therefore, that the majority of Jews and Christians would have very serious reservations about his claim to Prophethood despite the fact that he recognised and venerated the previous Prophets and claimed to be imparting the same guidance which the world received through them.

It was, perhaps, with the specific objective of enhancing the legitimacy of his claim of prophethood in the eyes of those who associated prophethood with Jerusalem that the *Sakhrah* (Holy Rock) of Jerusalem had been ordained as the direction to which he and the Muslims should turn in prayer (*Qibla*).

Shortly, however, before the Prophet's (pbuh) migration (*Hijrah*) to Madina where, unlike Makkah, there was a large and influential community of Jews and Christians, Allah strengthened his credentials in dealing with those two groups by taking him on a miraculous journey to Jerusalem and to the temple of Solomon (pbuh) (referred to in the Qur'an as Masjid al-Aqsa) so that he, too, could be physically linked to that holy land as were Prophets who preceded him. Indeed the Prophet (pbuh) had an added and

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unique honour in the fact that whereas other Prophets had themselves to travel to Jerusalem (Jesus (Pbuh) went on a donkey), Muhammad (Pbuh) was taken there by God Himself.

Nineteen months before he actually confronted the Jews and Christians of Madina with his physical presence, the powerful impact (and implications) of *A/-Mira* was beamed to that city and to the Christian and Jewish worlds by the Prophet from Makkah. Here was tangible and incontrovertible evidence of the truthfulness of his claim that he was the Prophet of God and that he was imparting the same guidance as was taught by the Prophets who preceded him.

The Prophet's (Pbuh) *Mira* is an indispensable strategic instrument for the projection of the Qur'anic guidance in the lands of Christians and Jews.

The second important theological significance of *A/-Isra* and *Mira* is to be found in the fact that he, Muhammad (Pbuh) led the congregational prayers at Masjid al-Aqsa in which participated all the Prophets of God. This amply demonstrates his status as leader of the Prophets.

In addition, the fact that, in so far as we are aware, he Muhammad (Pbuh) was the only one in the entire history of creation, to be honoured by Allah with an approach to Him closer than even Gabriel was permitted, is demonstrative of his added status (clearly established in the *Qur'an*) of being unique in all creation.

Finally, we must note the important fact of theological significance that, as a consequence of *A/-Isra* and *Mira* God's Messenger could invite the people to believe in the hereafter - in the world of unseen verities, of angels, heaven and hell, etc., not only on the basis of what was communicated to him by Gabriel, but

also on the basis of his direct experience of these verities. That direct experience was, for him, a confirmation of that which he had previously been taught through revelations. As a result of *Miraj* he could speak of those unseen verities with even greater conviction and this lent and still lends, added strength and appeal to his message.

The truths of religion can never be truly established until they are experienced. *Miraj* holds out the possibility that those truths can be experienced. This is a matter of supreme importance in today's world in which values are collapsing and corruption is doing great damage to political, economic, legal, educational and so many other social institutions. The verdict of history is that religion, and religion alone, can restore and sustain values. But religion can only do so to the extent that it can establish indubitable faith in the unseen world. Islam alone appears to have preserved the capacity to do so, and the *Miraj* plays a strategic role in that capacity.

THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Al-Isra and *Miraj* of the Prophet (Pbuh) have a political significance and implication with respect to the status of Jerusalem which is very important indeed for contemporary international politics and, in particular, for the problem of Palestine (more popularly referred to as the "Middle East Problem" - a term which skillfully avoids the use of the word 'Palestine').

The Prophet's (Pbuh) *Isra* and *Miraj* was meant to demonstrate to Jews and to Christians that he, Muhammad (Pbuh), was now God's Messenger on earth and had, as a consequence, inherited spiritual authority over the multi-dimensional legacies of previous Prophets. This was emphatically so in respect of Jerusalem,

to which he turned in prayer, and to which he was transported by God's order.

The fact that the Prophet (pbuh), upon his arrival in Jerusalem, is reported to have led the congregational prayer in Masjid al-Aqsa, in which participated all previous Prophets of Allah, is indicative of the fact that Muhammad's (pbuh) spiritual authority over Jerusalem superseded all previous claims to (spiritual) authority over the city. Of course, spiritual authority does not equate with political authority! Had this been the case the Prophet (pbuh) would have taken steps in his own lifetime, or would at least have given instructions to the Muslims to ensure that Islamic rule over Jerusalem was established. He did no such thing!

Had the Jews and Christians correctly understood the significance of the Prophet's (pbuh) miraculous journey to Jerusalem they would have accepted his claim that he was the Prophet of God and, in all probability, Jerusalem would have retained its exclusive status as the spiritual capital of the world. The change of the Qibla from Jerusalem to Makkah, took place seventeen months after the Hijrah to Madina, was a direct consequence of the manifest refusal of the Jews and Christians to accept Muhammad (pbuh) as the Prophet of God. For the Jews, indeed, this was their second consecutive rejection of a Prophet of God since they had previously rejected and ridiculed Jesus (pbuh), the son of Mary.

With the change of Qibla the spiritual capital of Islam became Makkah. By clinging to Jerusalem as their spiritual capital Jews and Christians reconfirm daily their rejection of the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh).

What then is the political significance of *Al-Isra*, and *Miraj* and the change of Qibla?

Firstly, it is, I believe, of crucial political significance to reiterate that although Jerusalem remained a Christian city throughout the life-time of the Prophet (Pbuh), he made no attempt to subject it to the rule of Islam and he left no instructions to this effect before his death. And yet, at the end of his life he publicly declared that his mission had been completed.

There does not, therefore, appear to be any theological and scriptural basis for the insistent demand of the member-States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) that no other status for Jerusalem can be acceptable to the Muslim world, other than a return of the city to Arab and Islamic sovereignty and control (Lahore Declaration of the Second Islamic Summit Conference, 1974).

Indeed it would appear to us to be, perhaps, an act of divine providence itself and the fulfillment of some divine plan that Jerusalem and Palestine should today be occupied by a secular nationalist Zionism which has 'high-jacked' Judaism. For it not only provides authentic Islamic forces with a heaven-sent opportunity to mobilize the Ummah and to break the chains which imprison the world of Islam today, but also, and just as important, to reach out beyond the Ummah to build a grand alliance or community of all forces which uphold authentic religion, divine truth and justice. And it is in this specific context that we criticize the Lahore Declaration.

Now although Islam holds the entire earth to be sacred to the extent that the Prophet (Pbuh) described the entire earth as a prayer carpet, *al-Isra* and *Mira* confirm Jerusalem as a land specially blessed by God (17: 1) not only because of the Prophets who lived there and because of the *Sakhr* and the temple built by Solomon (pbuh) etc., but also because it was from Jerusalem that Al-

lah took His Messenger on that unique journey which culminated in the approach to the special divine presence.

Jerusalem, therefore, enjoys a special spiritual status. It is a land specially blessed by Allah. Consequently there is a political obligation on the Muslims to protect the city's spiritual status and to prevent any attempt to modify or repudiate it.

It is therefore inconceivable that the Muslim Ummah can ever consent to, or acquiesce in, the establishment of a secular Jewish nation-state in holy Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital. Such would amount to nothing less than a sacrilegious violation of the special spiritual status of Jerusalem.

Jewish nationalism, misled by the secular Zionist Movement, did precisely this when it succeeded, in 1948, in establishing a secular state in Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital. The Palestine Liberation Organization, vanguard of secular Palestinian nationalism, appears to have the identical goal.

Muslims, and all who will join with them in that struggle, have a religious obligation to liberate Palestine and Jerusalem because its sacred character and status is being continuously violated by a bigoted occupying power with a monopoly claim of access to the sacred, a power which oppresses the indigenous people of the land with a contempt reserved for the sub-human.

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

We mentioned earlier that the *al-Miraj* was the most important event in the entire life of the Prophet (Pbuh). This is so because the *Miraj* culminated with the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) actually meeting with his Lord. According to the Qur'an the believer's life

has to be lived entirely for the sake of Allah. And the ultimate goal in life for the believer is to "meet with his Lord" (18: 11). Therefore the ultimate goal in life of the believer is to experience a personal *Miraj* which will spiritually transport him to a contact or meeting with the Lord which is appropriate to his spiritual status.

Miraj is, in fact a religious experience, although not all religious experiences qualify as *Miraj*. And since the Prophet (Pbuh) is reported to have said that prayer (*salaah*) which Muslims perform five times a day) is the *Miraj* of the believers, the implications is that prayer is most conducive to religious experience. Indeed, in the context of the statement of the Prophet (Pbuh) that the worshipper is closest of all to his Lord when he is in the posture of prostration (*sajda*) during prayer, the worshipper can in fact strive for repeated *Miraj* or religious experiences.

Even without these statements of the Prophet (Pbuh) it should be clear that prayer (*salaah*) is the vehicle through which the approach to Allah is pursued since of all the articles of divine guidance which have reach mankind through the Holy Prophet (pbuh), prayer (*salaah*) is the only thing he did not receive hereunder from Gabriel. For *salaah* he had to be transported to the special presence of Allah to receive it from Allah Himself. The implication is clear. *Salaah* was brought by Muhammad (Pbuh) himself from 'above' so that the believers may use it to go, themselves, 'above'.

Our interpretation of *Miraj* as a religious experience of the transcendental world is reinforced when we examine the time and date when the Prophet's (Pbuh) *Miraj* took place and the position it occupies in the sequence of spiritually important dates which follow it in the Islamic calendar.

THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF ISRAAND MIRAJ

Firstly the *Miraj* of the Prophet (Pbuh) took place in the night time and spiritual pilgrims are well aware that religious experience is much more likely to be achieved during worship in the night time. Secondly the *Miraj* of the Prophet (Pbuh) took place on 27 Rajab, a date which seems to be linked with 27 Ramadan (*lailatuf Qadr*). The month of Ramadan, which is the month of compulsory fasting contains within it a secret night known as the 'night of power'. It is usually thought to be 27 Ramadan.

It would appear that this period of two months (Rajab 27 - Ramadan 27) is a special season when the collective spirituality is progressively enhanced until finally the individual effort of even the average worshipper elevates him to eligibility for religious experience. This, of course, is subject to the condition that such an average worshipper is living a life of conformity with Allah's law.

The progressive enhancement begins on 27 Rajab when the worshipper refreshes his memory about the Prophet's (Pbuh) *Miraj* and is reminded that *safaah* is the vehicle of his personal *Miraj*. He pays attention to improving the quality of *Safaah*. On 15 Shaban he follows the example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet (Pbuh) and fasts for the day - a trial run, really, to prepare for the rigours of the fast of Ramadan. Thus on 15 Shaban, fasting (*saum*) is added to *Salaah* and worship moves into a higher gear. In addition there is the enhanced consciousness of the obligation to be charitable. The Prophet (Pbuh) was exceptionally charitable in the month of Shaban.

On 1 Ramadan not only does the compulsory month of fasting for all Muslims begin but, also, there is *qiyam af-fail* or the prayers of the night vigil, when it is customary for the entire Qur'an to be recited.

The recitation of the Qur'an in the month of Ramadan is unlike normal recitation at other times of the year. When the believer recites the Qur'an in Ramadan he does so with the image in his mind of the Prophet (pbuh) reciting the Qur'an for Gabriel who would check the recitation. In the last Ramadan of his life he was required to recite the Qur'antwice.

In addition, the month of Ramadan is the month of charity par excellence. Believers are supposed to be most charitable of all in Ramadan. Ramadan is also the month in which *Shaitan* is kept in chains and the most favourable opportunity exists to earn divine mercy and forgiveness. And so, all through Ramadan, from the very first sighting of the crescent moon of Ramadan to the eventual sighting of the crescent moon of Shawwal, the believer constantly prays to Allah for forgiveness for his or her sins.

Fasting, the night-time prayer vigil, charity, prayers for forgiveness, and recitation of the Qur'an has the dramatic impact of effecting a substantial qualitative improvement of worship. When on the 21 Ramadan the seclusion and withdrawal from worldly affairs for about ten days (*itiqaj*) commences, the worshippers reach a pitch or intensity of worship which makes this period most conducive (spiritually) for religious experience. Finally comes 27 Ramadan, the night of power (*lailatul Qadr*), when Allah sends down the angels and Gabriel for 'every errand' - I.e. to bestow, among other things, the supreme gift of *Miraj* to all those who deserve it and who have earned it.

When the Qur'an asserts that the night of power (*lailatul Qadr*) is superior to a thousand months (97:4), the implication is that which can best be experienced on that night (namely *Miraj*) is better than an entire life-time (a thousand months standing for an average life-span) lived without that experience (*Miraj*).

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CALIPHATE THE HEJAZ AND THE SAUDI WAHHABI NATION - STATE

The modern godless world is waging war on Islam, and it is time that Muslims wake up to that fact and respond to it appropriately. No one can possibly respond appropriately to a challenge unless and until he first recognizes and understands the nature of the challenge. Muslims should know that the Caliphate will one day be restored and Islam will replace today's godless modern West as the dominant force in the world. Muslims must now be sufficiently shaken up to look seriously for the causes of their impotence. This book seeks to educate Muslims and **provide them** with the means whereby they can avoid being duped, and led astray, by those who have betrayed Islam in order to live comfortably.

DREAMS IN ISLAM - A WINDOW TO TRUTH AND TO THE HEART

This book emphasizes the importance of dreams, and, in particular, the phenomenon of true dreams (of which there are no less than eight in the Qur'an), and dreams of the Prophet (s). The author argues that the western epistemology, derived from godless materialism, cannot explain the phenomenon of true dreams, nor can the scientific 'Protestant Islam' of the modern age do so. The Sufis have faithfully preserved the epistemology of Islam which **alone** can explain a true dream or vision. This book describes the classification and interpretation of dreams, and analyses all eight dreams located in the Qur'an. The book also records all the dreams of the Prophet (s) himself, as well as of his companions.

THE RELIGION OF ABRAHAM AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL - A VIEW FROM THE QUR'AN

This book refutes, from an exclusively Qur'anic perspective, the basic claim to legitimacy of the Jewish State of Israel, to wit: the belief of the Jews that they still remain the 'chosen' people of Allah, Most High, and that they were given 'exclusive' and 'eternal' title to the holy land of Palestine. The author argues that recognition of the State of Israel would imply acceptance of its basic claim to legitimacy, and hence would constitute an act of *shirk!*

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROHIBITION OF RIBA IN ISLAM

The main theme of this book is a demonstration of the importance of the prohibition of *Riba* in Islam. Most Muslims in the world today are largely ignorant of the importance of this prohibition, and of the severe punishment which awaits those **who indulge** in *Riba*, either as lenders, borrowers, bankers, or even witnesses. Punishment will begin in the grave itself

ONE JAMA'AT - ONE AMEER: The Organization of a Muslim Community in the Age of Fitān

This book first attempts a selective yet conclusive demonstration of the fact that we now live in the age of *Fitān* described by Prophet Muhammad (s) as the last age, or the age which will witness the end of history. It then points out that the Prophet (s) has given specific instructions that Muslims must hold on firmly to the (authentic) *Jama'ah* and to the *Ameer/Imam* (leader) in the age of *Fitān* if they are to survive the great trials and evil of this age with their faith intact.

THE PROHIBITION OF RIBA IN THE QUR'AN AND SUNNAH

This book attempts to present the otherwise complex subject of *Riba* in a way which is simple, and easily comprehensible. The book also refutes the false opinions that modern bank interest is not *Riba*, - that borrowing on interest for housing etc., is permissible because of the doctrine of necessity (*darura*), - that borrowing on interest in western countries is permissible because these countries are *Dar al-Harb*: - and that buying 'cash' and selling 'credit' with a 'mark-up' (see Muslim Credit Union) is permissible because it is not *Riba*. All those opinions are not just false, but dangerously false. All those transactions are *Riba* and, thus, *Haram!* Terrible, terrible punishment awaits those who persist in *Riba* even after the divine warning has reached them. The book also has an Appendix of Questions and Answers on *Riba*.

THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FAST OF RAMADAN & ISRA AND MIRAJ

Section One of the book attempts to demonstrate that fast of Ramadan was meant to play a strategic role in mobilizing the Muslim community for consolidation of its unity, solidarity, faith and morale, and for building that power with which to resist aggression, deter the aggressor, liberate the oppressed and validate the Truth. The trust of the argument is located in the analysis of the chronological sequence of the simultaneous divine promulgation of three things: i) change in *Qibla*; ii) permission for *Qital* (fighting); iii) fast of Ramadan

Section Two looks at the spiritual, scientific, epistemological, political theological and the strategic implications of *Isra* and *Miraj* of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s)
