SAMPLE

The Night Journey: Isra and Mi'raj

The Journey by Night (17:1)

Aira Aurora

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Contents

Disclaimer

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Verse of Isra — The Night Journey

Chapter 2: From Makkah to Jerusalem — The Sacred Journey

Chapter 3: The Ascension — Mi'raj

Chapter 4: The Three Gifts — Prayer, Paradise, and Mercy

Chapter 5: The Morning After — Disbelief and Belief

Chapter 6: The Test of Abu Bakr — The Title al-Siddiq

Chapter 7: Surah An-Najm — The Quranic Account of the Vision

Chapter 8: The Significance of Jerusalem in the Quran

Chapter 9: The Night Journey and the Believer — Personal Lessons

Frequently Asked Questions

Glossary

This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction

In a single night, the Prophet Muhammad traveled from the Sacred Mosque in Makkah to the Farthest Mosque in Jerusalem, ascended through the heavens, met the prophets who came before him, received the gift of prayer, and returned to his bed before the night ended. The Quran describes this event in a single verse: "Glory to Him who took His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (17:1).

One verse. An entire universe of meaning.

The Night Journey — Isra — and the Ascension — Mi'raj — are two parts of a single event. The Isra is the horizontal movement: from Makkah to Jerusalem. The Mi'raj is the vertical movement: from Jerusalem through the seven heavens to the presence of Allah. Together, they form one of the most extraordinary events in the life of the Prophet and one of the most richly significant passages in the Quran.

The Quran does not narrate the event as a story. It narrates it as a sign. The purpose of the Night Journey was not to demonstrate the Prophet's importance. It was to show him — and through him, the believers — the signs of Allah. The verse says: "to show him of Our signs." The journey was educational. It was transformative. It was a gift given to a servant who had endured years of persecution, loss, and rejection, and who would soon face even more.

This book examines the Night Journey as the Quran presents it: not as a fantastical tale but as a spiritual event with practical consequences. The most important of those consequences was the institution of the five daily prayers — the gift given to the Muslim community during the ascension. The Night Journey was not just a miracle. It was a transformation. And its effects are felt every day, five times a day, by every Muslim on earth.

Chapter 1: The Verse of Isra — The Night Journey

The Night Journey is introduced by the first verse of Surah Al-Isra (Surah 17): "Glory to Him who took His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (17:1).

The verse opens with "Glory to Him" — Subhan. This word, in the Quran, is used when something exceeds human understanding. It is not an exclamation of surprise. It is an acknowledgment of divine transcendence. The event is beyond normal experience. And the Quran frames it not by explaining how it happened but by glorifying the One who made it happen.

The subject of the verb is Allah. The verb is "took" — asra. The object is "His servant" — abd. The Quran does not say "His prophet" or "His messenger." It says "His servant." This is the Quran's way of grounding the event in the relationship that matters most: the relationship between the Creator and the servant. The Night Journey did not elevate the Prophet above servanthood. It revealed the depth of it.

The verse names two specific places: "from the Sacred Mosque" (al-Masjid al-Haram) in Makkah, and "to the Farthest Mosque" (al-Masjid al-Aqsa) in Jerusalem. These are not arbitrary locations. They are the two most sacred sites in the Quranic geography of worship.

The Sacred Mosque is the Ka'bah — the house built by Ibrahim and Ismail. The Farthest Mosque is the site of the Temple of Sulaiman in Jerusalem — the city that was the home of the Israelite prophets. By connecting these two places in a single night, the Quran links the mission of Muhammad to the mission of all the prophets who came before him. The Night Journey is not just a journey through space. It is a journey through prophetic history.

The Quran says: "whose surroundings We have blessed" — referring to the land around Jerusalem. The blessing of this land is a recurring theme in the Quran. It is the land of the prophets. It is the land where Ibrahim settled. It is the land where Musa led his people. It is the land where Isa was born. The Night Journey takes the Prophet Muhammad to the place where the prophetic legacy is deepest.

The verse states the purpose explicitly: "to show him of Our signs." The Night Journey was not a reward. It was not a vacation. It was a revelation. The Prophet was shown the signs of Allah — the heavens, the prophets, the paradise, the hellfire, the divine presence. Each sign was a lesson. Each vision

was a preparation for what was to come.

The Quran consistently frames divine intervention as educational. The signs (ayat) are not displays of power for their own sake. They are teaching tools. The Quran says: "And We showed him from Our signs the greatest" (17:1, in another reading). The signs shown during the Night Journey are among the greatest in the entire prophetic experience.

The verse closes with two divine attributes: "Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing." These attributes are not decorative. They are functional. Allah hears the prayers of the servant. Allah sees the condition of the servant. The Night Journey happened because Allah heard the Prophet's distress and saw his perseverance. And the Quran, by ending the verse with these attributes, connects the event to the ongoing relationship between Allah and every believer. Allah hears. Allah sees. And what He hears and sees, He responds to.

The Quran does not specify exactly when the Night Journey occurred, but it is generally understood to have taken place during one of the most difficult periods of the Prophet's life. The boycott had ended, but the opposition had not. The Prophet had lost his wife Khadijah, who had been his emotional support for twenty-five years. He had lost his uncle Abu Talib, who had been his political protection for forty years. The mission in Makkah seemed to have reached a wall. The people of Ta'if had rejected him with cruelty. He was, by every measure, at his lowest point.

It is precisely at this lowest point that Allah chose to take him on the greatest journey a human being has ever taken. The Quran's timing is not coincidental. The Night Journey was not a reward for success. It was a provision for hardship. It was Allah's way of saying to a servant in despair: the world you see is not the whole world. The reality you experience is not the only reality. There is more. And I will show it to you.

The Quran uses the word asra — "to take by night" — only once in the entire text, in this verse. The word implies a smooth, gentle movement. It is not the word for a violent seizure or a dramatic teleportation. It is the word for a quiet, secret taking — the way you might take a child by the hand and lead them through the dark to show them something beautiful.

The gentleness of the word reflects the nature of the event. The Prophet was not dragged through the heavens. He was taken. He was led. He was shown. The entire experience was framed by the relationship between the One who takes and the one who is taken — Lord and servant, Guide and guided, Teacher and student.

The Quran's choice of "His servant" — abd — over "His prophet" or "His

messenger" is one of the most theologically significant choices in the entire passage. The word abd appears throughout the Quran to describe the relationship between Allah and the human being. It denotes absolute dependence, complete submission, and total belonging. The Prophet is called abd in the most elevated moments of his experience — the Night Journey, the revelation of the Quran, the standing before Allah on the Day of Judgment.

The Quran says: "And if My servants ask you about Me, indeed, I am near" (2:186). The word abd is not a diminishment. It is an elevation — the highest status a human being can achieve in the Quranic worldview is to be a servant of Allah. And the Night Journey, the most extraordinary experience in the

Prophet's life, is framed not by his prophethood but by his servanthood.

The verse opens with "Glory to Him" — Subhana alladhi — and this grammar deserves attention. In the Quran, tasbih (glorification) appears at the moments when divine action exceeds human categories. The angels glorify Allah when they learn that Adam will be created (2:30). The thunder glorifies Him with His praise (13:13). And here, glorification opens the account of a journey that no tongue can adequately describe. The word teaches the reader how to receive the story: not with the question "how is this possible?" but with the acknowledgment "the One who did this is beyond what I assume is possible."

The journey thus begins in worship before it begins in motion. And this ordering is itself the first lesson of the Night Journey: every approach to the divine — even the most extraordinary — starts with the recognition that the One being approached transcends the categories of the one approaching. The servant does not master the event. The event enlarges the servant's sense of the Master.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

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Her work is published under the pen name Aira Aurora.

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