

THE  
NOCTURNAL  
JOURNEY

— and the —  
Heavenly Ascension

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Heavenly Ascension

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**Shaykh Muhammad Mahy Cisse**

Nasrul Ilm Atlanta  
Atlanta, GA; USA  
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First Edition: Paperback  
Published and Printed in the United States of America

**ISBN: 978-0-615-25567-5**

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**Front Cover:** *A far-off view of Jerusalem; the Masjid commonly known as the Dome of the Rock, with its golden dome; often mistaken as Masjid Al-Aqṣā, of which only its minaret is visible. A simple search online in our free-time would be a small but significant step towards raising global awareness and attracting international attention among Muslims and non-Muslims alike, thereby exposing the state-sponsored desecration and secret demolition being wreaked upon this sacred site.*

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الحمد لله الذي أهلّ أهلّ قريته من صفوة خلقه للدخول إلى  
حضرة قدسه وجلّهم عن أنانيهم بأنبيته وأشهدهم على الحق  
خصّ حبيبهم صلى الله عليه وسلم

**P**raise be to Allāh, who has enabled the people of His nearness—some of the best of His creatures—to enter the presence of His Holiness, and has attracted them from their selfhood to His Selfhood, and has made them truly aware of the special nature of His Beloved (Prophet), whom Allāh has endowed with blessing and salvation in His embrace and His nearness, and whom He has caused to travel by night and ascend towards Him, as He has said in the clear text of the Qur’ān:

Glory to (Allāh) Who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Place of Worship to the Farthest Place of Worship... [17:1]  
*Subhāna 'lladhī asrā bi-'abdi-hī lailan minal-Masjidi'l-Ḥarāmi ila'l-Masjidi 'l-Aqsā.*

By the Star when it sets—your companion is neither astray nor being misled; nor does he speak from his own desire.  
*Wa 'n-najmi idhā hawā: mā ḍalla ṣāhibu-kum wa mā ghawā: wa mā yanṭiqu 'ani 'l-hawā:*

It is naught but an inspiration that is inspired, which the Owner of mighty power has taught him, the Possessor of great strength; so he attained to perfection, while he was on the highest horizon.  
*in huwa illā wahyun yūhā 'allama-hū Shadīdul-quwā: Dhū mirra: fas-tawā wa huwa bil-'ufuqil-'a' lā.*

Then he drew near and came nearer still, until he was two bow-lengths or nearer, and He revealed to His servant that which He revealed. [53:1-10]  
*thumma danā fa-tadallā fa-kāna qāba qawsaini aw adnā fa-awhā ilā abdi-hi mā awhā.*

Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord. [53:18]  
*la-qad ra'ā min āyāti Rabbi-hi'l-kubrā.*

*Ahādīth* [Prophetic traditions] concerning his Nocturnal Journey and his Heavenly Ascension have been transmitted in an uninterrupted succession, which leaves no room for disagreement or doubt about the authenticity of these reports.

We decided to set forth the most perfect of these reports from the collection entitled *ash-Shifā'* [Healing], by Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (May Allāh bestow His mercy upon him), who relates on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik رضي الله عنه, that Allah's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

I was presented with *Burāq*—a long, white, riding animal, bigger than the donkey and smaller than the mule, which sets its hoof at the far end of its body—so I rode upon it until I came to *Bayt al-Maqdis* [Jerusalem], where I tethered it with the hoop used by the Prophets. Then I entered the mosque and performed two cycles of ritual prayer therein. When I came out, the angel Gabriel brought me a vessel of wine and a vessel of milk, so I chose the milk and Gabriel said, “You have made the wise choice!” Then he ascended with us toward heaven.

When Gabriel sought permission to enter, he was then asked, “Who are you?” He replied, “I am Gabriel.” He was asked, “And who is with you?” He said, “Muḥammad!” He was asked, “Has he been sent for?” He replied, “He has been sent for.” The gate was then opened for us, and I found myself in the presence of Adam عليه السلام, who bade me welcome and invoked blessing upon me.

Gabriel then ascended with us toward the second heaven, where he sought permission to enter. He was asked, “Who are you?” He replied, “I am Gabriel.” He was then asked, “And who is with you?” He said, “Muḥammad!” He was asked, “Has he been sent for?” He replied, “He has been sent for.” The gate was then opened for us, and I found myself in the company of the two maternal cousins, Jesus the son of Mary عليه السلام and John the son of Zachariah عليه السلام, who bade me welcome and invoked blessing upon me.

Gabriel then ascended with us toward the third heaven, where the same questions and answers were exchanged. The gate was then opened for us, and I found myself in the presence of Joseph عليه السلام. He had been allotted half of all goodness and beauty (apportioned to the world).

Gabriel then ascended with us toward the fourth heaven, where the same questions and answers were exchanged. The gate was then opened for us, and I found myself in the presence of Enoch عليه السلام, who bade me welcome and invoked blessing upon me, saying, “Allah ﷻ has said:

And We have raised him to a high station. [19:57]

*wa rafa'nā-hu makānan 'aliyyā.*

Gabriel then ascended with us toward the fifth heaven, where the same questions and answers were exchanged. The gate was then opened for us, and I found myself in the presence of Aaron عليه السلام, who bade me welcome and invoked blessing upon me.

Gabriel then ascended with us toward the sixth heaven, where the same questions and answers were exchanged. The gate was then opened for us, and I found myself in the presence of Moses عليه السلام, who bade me welcome and invoked blessing upon me.

Gabriel then ascended with us toward the seventh heaven, where the same questions and answers were exchanged. The gate was then opened for us, and I found myself in the presence of Abraham عليه السلام, who was resting his back on *al-Bait al-Ma'mūr* [the Inhabited House]. It is entered every day by 70,000 angels, who will not return until the Day of Resurrection.

Gabriel then took me to the *Sidrat al-Muntahā* [Lote-Tree of the Farthest Boundary]. Lo and behold, its leaves were like the ears of the elephants and its fruits were like pomegranates! When it is covered by its business that covers it, it is transformed, so that not one of Allāh's creatures is able to describe it, because of its beauty.

Allāh then inspired me with that which He inspired, and He made it incumbent upon me to perform fifty ritual prayers every day and night. Then I descended to Moses, who asked, "What has your Lord made incumbent upon your community?" I said, "Fifty ritual prayers." He said: "You must go back to your Lord and beg Him to lighten the load, for the members of your Community are not capable of that! I know full well because I put the Children of Israel to the test!"

I therefore returned to my Lord and said, "O my Lord, lighten the load for my Community!" He relieved me of five ritual prayers, so I went back to Moses and told him, "He has relieved me of five!" Moses said: "The members of your Community are incapable of that, so you must return to your Lord and beg Him to further lighten the load!" I therefore kept coming and going between my Lord ﷻ until He said: "O Muḥammad, each one of those five ritual prayers performed every day and night is worth ten ritual prayers, so they add up to fifty ritual prayers! If someone intends to perform a good deed, but he does not perform it, I shall record it to his credit. If he does perform it, I shall record it ten times to his credit. If someone intends to commit a bad deed, but he does not commit it, I shall not record a bad deed. If he does commit it, I shall only record one single bad deed."

I then descended until I reached Moses. When I informed him of this, he said: “Go back to your Lord and beg Him to lighten the load still further!” I said: “I have returned to my Lord until I have come to feel embarrassed in front of Him!”

Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ said: “Thābit enthusiastically rated this Prophetic tradition [*ḥadīth*] from Anas as faultlessly excellent, and no one has presented anything more accurate than this.”



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## HIS LEADING THE PROPHETS IN THE RITUAL PRAYER



According to the *ḥadīth* transmitted on the authority of Abū Hurayra, the Prophet ﷺ said:

I saw myself in a congregation of the Prophets. The time of the ritual prayer arrived, so I led them in the prayer. Then someone said: “O Muḥammad, this is Mālik, the Keeper of Hellfire!” I turned around and he preceded me in the salutation of peace.

According to the traditional account of Abū Hurayra:

Then he traveled until he arrived in Jerusalem. He tethered his riding beast to the rock and performed the ritual prayer together with the angels. When the ritual prayer was concluded, they said: ‘O Gabriel, who is this with you?’ He said, ‘This is Muḥammad, Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ, the Seal of the Prophets!’ They said: ‘Was he sent for?’ He said: ‘Yes!’ They said: ‘May Allāh grant him long life as a brother and a *khalīfa* [successor], for how excellent is the brother and how excellent is the successor!’ Then they met with the spirits of the Prophets, and they extolled Abraham.

Abū Hurayra related the speech of each one of them, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, David and Solomon. Then he quoted the speech of the Prophet ﷺ and said, “Muḥammad ﷺ, too, extolled his lord (*Almighty and Glorious is He*), and then said:

Each one of you has extolled his Lord, and I am extolling my Lord. Praise be to Allāh, who has sent me as a mercy for all the worlds, and to provide all human beings with good tidings and admonition; He has sent down to me the *Furqān* [Criterion], which contains the explanation of everything; He has made my *Umma* [Community] the very best community; He has made my Community a very moderate community; and he has made it so that the members of my Community will consist of those from amongst the first forbears, *and* from amongst the last generations to come. He has expanded for me my breast, and He has relieved me of my burden. He has exalted for me my estimation and recognition. He has made me an opener and a seal.

“Abraham therefore said: ‘This is your<sup>1</sup> gracious gift, Muḥammad!’”

Then he described the *Mi`rāj* [Heavenly Ascension] in a manner similar to what has been related previously.



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WAS THE NOCTURNAL JOURNEY  
PERFORMED IN THE SPIRIT OR IN  
THE PHYSICAL BODY, OR IN BOTH  
OF THEM TOGETHER, WHETHER IN  
A STATE OF SLEEP OR A STATE OF  
WAKEFULNESS?



As reported by Ibn Ishāq, on the authority of ‘Ā’isha and Mu‘āwiya, “If the Nocturnal Journey was performed in his spirit, he did not lose his physical body.” The scholars have maintained, however, that ‘Ā’isha was a young girl at that time, and the Prophet had not yet married her. She and Mu‘āwiya did not say that the Nocturnal Journey was a dream, and it is possible that news of the Nocturnal Journey in the physical body had not reached them.

As for the evidence pointing to its having been performed in his physical body, some of it is included in what has been related in the report of Shaddād ibn Aws, on the authority of Abū Bakr. According to this report, Abū Bakr spoke to the Prophet ﷺ on the night when he performed the Nocturnal Journey, saying: “O Messenger of Allāh, I looked for you yesterday in your place, but I did not find you!” He received the response: “Gabriel ﷺ conveyed me to *al-Masjid al-Aqsā* [in Jerusalem].”

According to Qādī ‘Iyād: “The truth and veracity of this, if Allāh so wills, is that it is a Nocturnal Journey in the body *and* the spirit in the whole story. This is indicated by the Qur’ānic verse, the authentic reports, and factual consideration. Dismissing the literal meaning and the reality in favor of interpretation is appropriate only in the case of absurdity,<sup>2</sup> and there is nothing absurd about the Nocturnal Journey in his body and state of wakefulness, for if it had been a dream, Allāh would have said:

Glory be to the One who carried **the spirit of His servant** by night.  
*subhāna ‘l-ladhī asrā bi-rūhi abdi-hī lailan*

— and He would not have said:

Glory be to the One who carried His servant by night. [17:1]  
*subhāna 'lladhī asrā bi-'abdi-hī lailan*

— nor would He have said:

And indeed, he saw Him yet another time—by the Lote-Tree of the Farthest Boundary, near to which is the Garden of Abode. When that-which-shrouds enshrouded the Lote-Tree, the eye did not turn aside, nor did it go astray. Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord. [53:13-18]  
*wa la-qad ra`ā-hu nazlatan ukhrā 'inda Sidrati'l-Muntahā 'inda-hā Jannatu'l-Ma'wā idh yagh-sha 's-Sidrata mā yagh-shā mā zāgha 'l-basaru wa mā taghā la-qad ra`ā min āyāti Rabbi-hi'l-Kubrā.*

“Had it been a dream, it would have contained no sign and no *mu`jiza* [miracle]. The unbelievers would not have thought it farfetched and they would not have denied it. The weaklings among those who had embraced Islām would not have apostatized because of it. They would have (only) been fascinated by it, for dreams (in which people have visual experiences) like this<sup>3</sup> are not denied. Such denial would not have issued from them, as a matter of fact, unless they had known that its report was related only to his body and his state of wakefulness.

“As mentioned in the *hadīth*, we all know how the tribe of Quraysh was so affected by this occurrence, to the point that when the Prophet went out from the house of Umm Hāni' to inform the people of the honor bestowed upon him by Allāh, Umm Hāni' clung to the Prophet's robe, trying to prevent him from informing the people about it, for she was afraid that they would call him a liar. He therefore grabbed hold of his robe and stripped it off.

“Umm Hāni` said: ‘A light arose beside his heart, almost dazzling my eyes, so I fell down in prostration. When I raised my head, lo and behold, he had gone out, so I said to my neighbor, a woman of noble birth: Follow him and take note of whatever he says! When she came back, she told me that Allāh's Messenger had reached a troop of Quraysh inside the wall surrounding the Ka`ba,

including Mut`im ibn `Adiyy and Abū Jahl, so he informed them of his Nocturnal Journey.'

"When Allāh's Messenger gave the news of the Nocturnal Journey to that company of Quraysh, they raised a stupendous clamor over that Nocturnal Journey. Some of them started clapping their hands, and some were placing their hands on their heads, overwhelmed in dumbfounded amazement at the manner in which he had been caused to travel by night, ascend to Heaven, then return to his riding beast, all before the cold set in. If it had been a dream, no one would have been amazed at his experience. When that true story was told, even some of the Muslims accused him of lying, except those who were strong in belief and firm in faith.

"It was validated and substantiated by the Veracious Abū Bakr – the Veracious Prophet was running toward him when the men of Quraysh ran up to him, saying: 'Does your companion now claim that he was caused to travel by night to Jerusalem?' Abū Bakr asked: 'Has he said so?' They replied: 'Yes!' He responded: 'Certainly, if he has said it, then he has spoken the sincere truth!' They said: 'Do you believe him, and attest that he has indeed gone (all the way) to Jerusalem and come back before morning?' He retorted: 'Yes! Indeed, I believe him and attest to it, however improbable! I believe him and attest to the heavenly report about a night-journey and ascension!'

"They asked him to describe it, so he (the Prophet) gave them a description. If it had been a dream-experience, they would not have asked him for a description of the places he went, for information about their caravan, where he came across it, and when it should return. On the basis of these proofs, it could only have been an experience in the state of wakefulness."

