

THE BID'AH OF LAILATUL MI'RAAJ (Title by The Majlis)

By Mufti Taqi Usmani

Celebration of Lailatul Mi'raj

It is generally believed that the great event of Mi'raj (ascension of the Holy Prophet to the heavens) took place in the night of 27th of Rajab. Therefore, some people celebrate the night as "Lailatul- Mi'raj" (the night of ascension to heavens).

Indeed, the event of mi'raj was one of the most remarkable episodes in the life of our beloved Holy Prophet . He was called by Almighty Allah. He traveled from Makkah to Baitul-Maqdis and from there he ascended the heavens through the miraculous power of Allah. He was honored with a direct contact with his Creator at a place where even the angels had no access. This was the unique honor conferred by Allah to the Holy Prophet alone. It was the climax of the spiritual progress which is not attained by anybody except him. No doubt the night in which he was blessed with this unparalleled honor was one of the greatest nights in the history of this world.

But, Islam has its own principles with regard to the historic and religious events. Its approach about observing festivals and celebrating days and nights is totally different from the approach of other religions. The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet did not prescribe any festival or any celebration to commemorate an event from the past, however remarkable it might have been. Instead, Islam has prescribed two annual celebrations only. One is Eid-ul-Fitr and the other is Eid ul-Adha. Both of these festivals have been fixed at a date on which the Muslims accomplish a great 'ibadah (worship) every year. Eid-ul-Fitr has been prescribed after the fasts of Ramadan, while Eid-ul-Adha has been fixed when the Muslims perform the Hajj annually. None of these two eids is designed to commemorate a particular event of the past which has happened in these dates. This approach is indicative of the fact that the real occasion for a happy celebration is the day in which the celebrators themselves have accomplished remarkable work through their own active effort. As for the accomplishments of our ancestors, their commemoration should not be restricted to a particular day or night. Instead, their accomplishments must be remembered every day in the practical life by observing their teachings and following the great examples they have set for us.

Keeping this principle in view, the following points should be remembered with regard to the "Lailatul-mi'raj":

(1) We cannot say with absolute certainty in which night the great event of mi'raj took place. Although some traditions relate this event to 27th night of the month of Rajab, yet there are other traditions that suggest other dates. Al-Zurqani, the famous biographer of the Holy Prophet has referred to five different views in this respect: Rabi-ul-Awwal, Rabi-u-Thani, Rajab,

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Ramadan and Shawwal. Later, while discussing different traditions, he has added a sixth opinion, that the mi'raj took place in the month of Zulhijjah.

Allama Abdulhaq Muhaddith Dehlawi, the well-known scholar of the Indian subcontinent, has written a detailed book on the merits of Islamic months. While discussing the 'Lailatul-mi'raj' has mentioned that most of the scholars are of the view that the event of mi'raj took place in the month of Ramadan or in Rabi-ul-awwal.

(2) It is also not known in which year the event of Mi'raj took place. The books of history suggest a wide range between the fifth-year and the twelfth year after the Holy Prophet was entrusted with prophethood.

Now, if it is assumed that the event of Mi'raj took place in the fifth year of his prophethood, it will mean that the Holy Prophet remained in this world for eighteen years after this event. Even if it is presumed that the mi'raj took place in the twelfth year of his prophethood, his remaining life-time after this event would be eleven years. Throughout this long period, which may range between eleven years and eighteen years, the Holy Prophet never celebrated the event of mi'raj, nor did he give any instruction about it. No one can prove that the Holy Prophet ever performed some specific modes of worship in a night calling it the 'Lailatul-mi'raj' or advised his followers to commemorate the event in a particular manner.

(3) After the demise of the Holy Prophet also, no one of his companions is reported to celebrate this night as a night of special acts of worship. They were the true devotees of the Holy Prophet and had devoted their lives to preserve every minute detail of the sunnah of the Holy Prophet and other Islamic teachings. Still, they did not celebrate the event of mi'raj in a particular night in a particular way.

All these points go a long way to prove that the celebration of the 27th night of Rajab, being the lailatul-mi'raj has no basis in the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet or in the practice of his noble companions. Had it been a commendable practice to celebrate this night, the exact date of this event would have been preserved accurately by the Ummah and the Holy Prophet and his blessed companions would have given specific directions for it.

Therefore, it is not a Sunnah to celebrate the Lailatul-mi'raj'. We cannot declare any practice as a sunnah unless it is established through authentic sources that the Holy Prophet or his noble Companions have recognized it as such, otherwise it may become a bid'ah about which the Holy Prophet has observed in the following words: "Whoever invents something in our religion which is not a part of it, it is to be rejected."

Being mindful of this serious warning, we should appreciate that the 27th night of the month of Rajab is not like 'Lailatul-qadr' or 'Lailatul-bara'ah' for which special merits have been mentioned expressly either by the Holy Qur'an or by the Holy Prophet .

However, all the recognized modes of 'ibadah (worship) like Salat, recitation of the Holy Qur'an, dhikr, etc. are commendable any time, especially in the late hours of night, and obviously the 27th night of Rajab is not an exception. Therefore, if someone performs any recognized 'ibadah in this night from this point of view nothing can stop him from doing so, and he will be entitled to the thawab (reward allocated for that recognized 'ibadah insha-Allah.) But it is not permissible to believe that performing 'ibadah in this night is more meritorious or carries more thawab like 'Lailatul-qadr' or 'Lailatul-bara'ah', because this belief is not based on any authentic verse or on a sunnah of the Holy Prophet . Similarly, it is not a correct practice to celebrate this night collectively and to invite people to special ritual congregations.

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(4) Some people suggest some special modes of worship to be performed in this night. Since no special mode of worship is prescribed by the Shari'ah in this night, these suggestions are devoid of any authority and should not be acted upon.

It is believed by some that the Muslims should keep fast on 27th of Rajab. Although there are some traditions attributing special merits to the fast of this day yet the scholars of hadith have held these traditions as very weak and unauthentic reports which cannot be sufficient to establish a rule of Shari'ah. On the contrary, there is an authentic report that Sayyidna 'Umar, Radi-Allahu anhu, used to forbid people from fasting on this day, rather to compel them to eat if they had started fasting.

It should be borne in mind here that a "nafl" fast can be observed any day (except the six prohibited days of the year); therefore, fasting on 27th of Rajab is not prohibited in itself. What is prohibited is the belief that fasting on this day is more meritorious than fasting in other normal days. One should not fast in this day with this belief. But if someone fasts therein, believing it to be a normal nafl fast, there is no bar against it."

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