

Muhammad's Visit to Ta'if

More than ten years had passed since Muhammad, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait, had first begun to preach Islam. His success in these ten years had been rather modest, limited as it was to the conversion of fewer than 170 men and women in Makkah. But after the death of his wife, Khadija, and his uncle, Abu Talib, it appeared that the Quraysh would wrest even that limited success from his hands.

Makkah had proved inhospitable to Islam and it occurred to the Prophet that he ought, perhaps to try to preach the new faith in some other city. The nearest city was Ta'if, 70 miles in the south-east of Makkah, and he went there in late 619. Zayd bin Haritha went with him.

In Ta'if, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, called on the three chiefs of the local tribes, and invited them to abandon their gross idolatry, to acknowledge the Oneness of God, to repudiate man-made distinctions of high and low, and to believe in the equality and brotherhood of all men.

The chiefs of Ta'if were a conceited and arrogant crew, and they did not want even to listen to Muhammad. They greeted him with mockery and ridicule and set upon him the idlers and the louts of the city. They pelted him and Zayd with clods and rocks. Wounded and covered with blood, Muhammad staggered out of Ta'if.

Once he was outside the city walls, he almost collapsed but a certain gardener took him into his hut, dressed his wounds, and let him rest and recuperate until he felt strong enough to resume his journey across the rough terrain between Ta'if and Makkah.

But when Muhammad arrived in the environs of Makkah, he sensed that he could not reenter his native city now that his uncle, Abu Talib, was not there to protect him. Pagan hostility toward him had reached the flash point. He realized that if he entered Makkah, he would be killed

Muhammad could not enter his hometown, and there was no other place to go to. What was he to do?

In this extremity, Muhammad sent word to three nobles in the city asking each of them to take him under his protection. Two of them refused but the third one – the gallant Mutim ibn Adiy – responded to his signal of distress. It was the same Mutim who had, earlier, flouted the chiefs of Quraysh by tearing into

pieces their covenant to boycott the Banu Hashim, and had brought the two clans of Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib from the Sh'ib Abu Talib back into the city.

Mutim ordered his sons, nephews and other young men of his clan to put on their battle-dress. He then marched, in full panoply of war, at their head, out of the city. He brought Muhammad Mustafa with him, first into the precincts of the Kaaba where the latter made the customary seven circuits, and then escorted him to his home.

Abd-al-Rahman 'Azzam

None of the Makkan chieftains from whom Muhammad requested protection for safe entry into the city would extend him help; but a good-hearted pagan chief, al-Mut'im ibn-'Adi, took him under his protection and brought him home. Thus did Muhammad re-enter Makkah – *guarded by a polytheist!* (*The Eternal Message of Muhammad, published by the New English Library, London, 1964*)

Sir John Glubb

In Taif the Prophet was stoned and chased. Afraid to return to Mecca now that he no longer enjoyed the protection of Abu Talib, he sent a message to several leading idolaters, asking their protection. Two refused but eventually Mutim ibn Adi, chief of the Nofal clan of Quraysh, agreed to protect him.

Next morning, he, his sons and nephews went fully armed to the public square of the Kaaba, and announced that Mohammed was under their protection. The protection of Mutim ibn Adi enabled the Apostle to return to Mecca. (*The Life and Times of Mohammed, New York, 1970*)

The application of Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, upon his return from Ta'if, to Mutim ibn Adiy, a non-Muslim, seeking his protection, raises once again, a most uncomfortable question, in a most pointed manner, on the attitude and conduct of the Muslims.

Why didn't the Apostle ask any of them to take him under his protection even though some of them were said to have been rich and influential, and some others were touted to have been the terror of the pagans? Why is it that the Apostle sought the protection of a non-Muslim but didn't condescend even to inform the Muslims that he wanted to reenter Makkah and was in need of protection?

Or another question! Why didn't the Muslims themselves go to the city gate and escort *their* Prophet to his home? Here they had a splendid opportunity to demonstrate to him that they were worthy of his trust even if he had considered them unworthy. But they missed the opportunity. They did not do anything that would show that they had any anxiety for his personal safety.

Pagan Arabia, however, was not devoid of its share of chivalry and heroism. These qualities were personified in Mutim ibn Adiy, Abul Bukhtari and a few others. They were the knights of Arabia, and it was their chivalry that was to make their country famous in later centuries. Pagan Arabia never produced nobler figures than these. Even Muslims ought to acknowledge their debt of gratitude to them.

After all it were they who dared the Quraysh in some of the most critical moments of the life of the Prophet of Islam. In doing so, they were inspired only by their own ideals of chivalry. They considered it their duty to defend the defenseless.

The failure at Ta'if was utterly heart-breaking for the Prophet, and he knew that but for the heroic intervention of Mutim ibn Adiy, he might not have been able to enter Makkah at all. To a casual observer it might appear that the Prophet had reached the limits of human endurance and patience. The progress of Islam had come to a standstill, and the outlook for the future could not look bleaker.

But did Muhammad give way to despair in the face of persistent failures and in the face of violent confrontations with the polytheists? It would only be natural if he did. But he did not. He never despaired of God's boundless mercy. He knew that he was doing God's work, and he had no doubt at all that He would lead him out of the wilderness of hopelessness and helplessness to the destination of success and felicity.

It was in one of the darkest and most dismal moments in his life that Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was elevated by God to the highest heavens, perhaps in recognition of his refusal to accept defeat and failure in the line of duty. God honored His Messenger with Isra' and Me'raj. Isra' is his nocturnal journey from "the Sacred Mosque" to "the Distant Mosque" (Masjid el-Aqsa); and Me'raj is his ascension to the Heaven. Isra' and Me'raj foreshadowed the great and the historic events that already loomed over the horizons, though at the moment there was no way to perceive them.

The mystic meaning of Me'raj refers to the constant struggle of the individual soul against evil. It has its setbacks and failures. But if it is true to itself, and is true to Faith in God, He will give it victory against evil.

The story of Me'raj, therefore, is a fitting prelude to the journey of the human soul through life. The first step on this journey is to be taken through moral conduct – a sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of fellow human beings, service to God through service to His creation, and an awareness of His presence with us at all times.

Isra' is referred to in the first verse of the 17th chapter of Al-Qur'an al-Majid as follows:

Glory to God who did take His slave for a journey by night from the sacred mosque to the farthest mosque whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for He is One who heareth and seeth all things.

Isra' and Me'raj took place on the night of the 27th of Rajab (the seventh month of the Islamic calendar) of the twelfth year of the Proclamation, i.e., one year before the Migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Medina.

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