

The Hijra (Migration)

When most of the Muslims left Makkah and settled in Yathrib, it occurred to the idolaters that if Islam struck roots in the oasis in their north, and became viable, it would pose a threat to their commercial interests in Syria.

They saw Islam as a new “peril” rearing its head in the north. They, therefore, convened a meeting in their city hall at which they considered the most effective way of forestalling this “peril.” After some debate, they agreed, *by consensus*, that the only way of averting this new peril, was by killing its author – Muhammad himself – while he was still in Makkah.

This decision raised a few other questions such as who would kill him, how, when and where. They further debated these questions, considered numerous options, and finally decided, again *by consensus*, that one warrior from each clan of each tribe living in Makkah and its environs, would be selected; all of them would attack the house of Muhammad simultaneously, and would kill him, just before dawn of the following day. Such concerted action, they felt confident, would “immobilize” the Banu Hashim who would be unable to fight against all the clans at the same time in retaliation for the murder of Muhammad.

The Prophet, however, was ready to meet an exigency like this. Apprised in time of the plan of the Quraysh to kill him, by a secret convert, he called his devoted cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, disclosed to him the plan of the Quraysh, and his own plan to outwit them. His plan was to put Ali in his own bed, and then to slip out of the house at an opportune moment.

The Quraysh, seeing Ali covered in a mantle, would imagine that Muhammad was sleeping, he explained. He also asked Ali to restore all the deposits of the pagans to their owners, and then to leave Makkah and to meet him in Yathrib. Ali understood everything, and the Apostle commended him to God's protection.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The young men whom the Quraysh had prepared for performing Muhammad's assassination had

blockaded his house during the night lest he ran away. On the night of the Hijrah, Muhammad confided his plan to Ali ibn Abi Talib and asked him to cover himself with the Prophet's green mantle, and to sleep in the Prophet's bed. He further asked him to stay in Makkah until he had returned all valuables deposited with Muhammad to their owners. (*The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935*)

Marmaduke Pickthall

The slayers were before his (Muhammad's) house. He gave his cloak to Ali, bidding him lie down on the bed so that anyone looking in might think Muhammad lay there. (*Introduction to the Translation of Holy Qur'an, Lahore, 1975*)

The polytheists surrounded the house of Muhammad. They peeked inside and beheld a recumbent figure covered in a blanket, and were satisfied that their "quarry" was safe. The opportune moment for the Apostle to escape came sometime after midnight when the pickets had dozed off. He silently walked through them and out of the precincts of his house.

The pagan pickets had been caught off-guard, and the Apostle of God had succeeded in eluding their surveillance!

Ali slept in the bed of the Prophet all night. Just before daybreak, the pagan head-hunters stormed into the house with drawn sabers to kill the Prophet. But their surprise and dismay knew no bounds when they noticed that it was Ali and not Muhammad who was sleeping in the bed. They seized Ali for questioning and possibly for torture.

But the captain of the pickets told them that Muhammad could not have gone too far, and that they might still catch him if they did not waste precious time in questioning Ali whereupon they released him. This event is celebrated in the history of Islam as Hijra or Migration.

M. Shibli, the famous Indian historian of Islam, writes in his biography of the Messenger of God:

...the pagans of Makkah hated Muhammad, yet they trusted him. Whoever had any valuables, he brought them and deposited them with him. He was their "banker." He knew about the plans of the Quraysh to kill him. He, therefore, called Ali, and said: "Allah has ordered me to go to Yathrib. You sleep in my bed and tomorrow return all the deposits of the Makkans to them."

This was a situation fraught with the gravest danger. Ali also knew that Quraysh had resolved to kill the Apostle of God that night, and that to sleep in his bed was to sleep in the jaws of death. But when was Ali ever afraid of death? The conqueror of Khyber slept in the jaws of death so soundly as he had never slept in all his life. (*Life of the Apostle of God, Azamgarh, India, 1976*)

The Apostle did not have time to explain to Ali in detail how many deposits he had and to whom they were to be turned over. It was enough for him to tell Ali to return all the deposits to their (pagan) owners, and he (Ali) did. It was just like the Feast of Dhul-'Asheera when all that the Apostle had to do, was to

ask Ali to invite to dinner the elders of the clan of Banu Hashim.

No detailed instructions were necessary. Ali instinctively understood what his master expected from him. Being entrusted to restore the deposits of the Makkans to them, is proof that Ali was the confidante and the “private secretary” of the Prophet of Islam even before the Migration to Yathrib.

If Hijra highlights Ali's unquestioning loyalty to his master, Muhammad, it also demonstrates his incredible courage. The pickets of the enemy might have killed him either believing that he was Muhammad, or upon the discovery that he was not, out of sheer frustration. He understood this perfectly, but for him no risk was too great if he could save the life of the Apostle of God.

It was this devotion and this courage that won for him the accolades of Al-Qur'an al-Majid. Qur'an has paid tribute to his loyalty and his daring which he displayed on the fateful night of Hijra (Migration) as follows:

And among men there is one who sells his life to win the pleasure of Allah. Allah is very kind to His devotees. (Chapter 2; verse 207)

Razi, the famous commentator of Qur'an, says in his *Tafsir Kabir* (vol. II, page 189) that this verse was expressly revealed in recognition of Ali's great and glorious service on the night of Hijra when he made it possible for Muhammad, the Apostle of God, to leave Makkah. Because of Ali, he could leave in safety.

On that historic night, a strange and a mysterious business transaction took place, the first and the last of its kind in the entire history of Creation. It was a sale-and-purchase transaction between Allah and one of His slaves. The slave in question was Ali ibn Abi Talib.

On a silent and moonless night, Allah came into the “market” as a “Customer.” He came to buy a certain commodity. His slave, Ali, came into the “market” as a “merchant.” His mission: to sell the commodity that Allah was seeking. The “commodity” was his soul, his life!

Allah, the “Customer,” contemplated the quality of the “commodity,” and found it superb. He, therefore, decided to buy it on the spot. He paid the “price” to the “merchant,” and the “commodity” changed hands, same as in any other business transaction. From that moment, the “commodity” – Ali's life – ceased to be his, and became the peculiar property of Allah. The sale and purchase transaction between Master and slave was thus completed, to the entire satisfaction of both parties.

There were “witnesses” too of this transaction. They were the angels and the stars – myriad's of them – watching from their celestial “galleries.” They beheld in silent amazement and silent admiration as Ali sold his life to Allah. Al-Qur'an al-Majid became their “spokesman” to the mortals on this earth, and recorded what they – the witnesses – observed on that memorable night.

The “record” of this transaction, as preserved by Qur'an, is now with us, and it is imperishable and indestructible. It will last on this earth as long as those angels and the stars – “the witnesses” of the

transaction – will last in Heaven!

Ali had sold the “merchandise” to Allah. Now freed from “anxiety” for the safety of that “merchandise,” he could sleep, and he went to sleep – in the bed of Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of Allah. On that Night of Destiny, he slept himself into immortality. At dawn, when he woke up, or rather, when he was awakened by the clangor and rattle of the spears and the swords of the head-hunters, sent by Quraysh, to kill Muhammad, he had become immortal!

Out of all His slaves, Allah selected Ali to carry out His Plan. That Plan was to protect His Messenger, from his enemies. The latter had worked out a plan for the destruction of Islam. They believed that if they killed Muhammad, Islam would be destroyed. They, therefore, planned and conspired to kill Muhammad. But they didn't know that Allah had a plan of His own – a Counter-Plan – ready for this occasion. It was Allah's Counter-Plan that was going to checkmate the Quraysh by saving the life of His Apostle. The Qur'anic reference to Allah's Counter-Plan occurs in the following verse:

And (the unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah. (Chapter 3; verse 54)

Ali ibn Abi Talib was the “key component” in the Counter-Plan of Allah. Ali's role guaranteed the success of the Hijra (Migration) of Muhammad, and the success of Hijra alone made the birth of the political state of Medina possible. If Hijra had failed, the State of Medina would never have come into existence. The State of Medina was the physical apparatus of the first and the last Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Allah made His slave, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Instrument through which He put that Kingdom on this earth.

When Muhammad was out of the perimeter of his house, he went to the house of Abu Bakr, and told him that God had ordered him to leave Makkah that same night. Since they had no time to linger, they immediately left the city, and went to a cave called Thaur in the south of Makkah. They reached the cave and entered it while it was still dark.

They were hiding in the cave when, a few hours later, the head-hunters also arrived in their pursuit. According to tradition, a spider had spun its web across the entrance to the cave, and a bird had laid an egg at it. The head-hunters argued that if anyone had entered the cave, the web and the egg would be broken, but since both were intact, no one had entered it. Thus convinced that the fugitives were not in the cave, they gave up the hunt and returned to Makkah.

While the head-hunters were debating the point whether or not they should enter the cave to capture the fugitives who might be hiding in it, Abu Bakr was seized with panic, and he said to the Apostle: “We are only two and our enemies are so many. What chance we have of saving our lives if they enter the cave?” The latter said: “No. We are not two. There is a Third One with us, and He is Allah.” This incident has been referred to in Al-Qur'an al-Majid as follows:

And God helped His Apostle when the unbelievers banished him. And when they were in the cave, he said to the second of the two: "do not be grief-stricken. God is with us." And God bestowed His peace upon him (upon His Apostle) (Chapter 9; verse 40)

The Apostle and Abu Bakr spent three days in the cave. In Makkah, during this time, interest in capturing the Apostle had waned. On the fourth day, Abdullah, the son of Abu Bakr, brought two camels with him for them to ride. Abu Bakr offered one of the camels to the Apostle but he refused to accept it as a gift, and paid its price before riding it. He and Abu Bakr then mounted these camels, and skirting Makkah to the north and east, they rode toward Yathrib in the north.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

When Abu Bakr brought two camels to the Apostle, he offered the better one to him and invited him to ride her. But the Apostle refused to ride an animal which was not his own, and when Abu Bakr wanted to give him it, he demanded to know what he had paid for it, and bought it from him. (*Life of the Messenger of God*)

The two travelers covered the distance between Makkah and Yathrib in nine days, and on the tenth day arrived in Quba, a place two miles south of Yathrib where they stayed in the house of Kulthum bin Hind, as his guests. The Apostle decided to await the arrival of Ali from Makkah before entering Yathrib. In the meantime, he laid the foundations of a mosque in Quba. It was a rough structure the completion of which is said to have taken fourteen days.

The Messenger of God arrived in Quba on Monday. On Thursday, Ali also arrived. He had returned the cash, the jewelry, the documents and other valuables of the Makkans to them. His master was thrilled to see him, and thanked God Who had brought him safely out of Makkah.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Ali stayed in Makkah for three days and nights until he had restored the deposits which the Apostle held. This done, he joined the Apostle, and stayed with him in Kulthum's house. (*The Life of the Messenger of God*)

S. Margoliouth

On Monday the 8th of Rabi-I of the year 1 A.H., corresponding to September 20 of the year A.D. 622, the Prophet reached Kuba, now a great place for gardens and orchards. Hospitality was offered by an aged convert, Kulthum son of Hind, the name of whose slave "Success" seemed to the Prophet of good augury (Isabah, iii, 1138).

It was accepted, though for receptions the house of another convert was found to be more convenient. At Kuba the Prophet determined to remain until Ali joined him which happened on the Thursday; with him was Suhaib ibn Sinan, who had been forced to hand over his savings to the Koreish. On the Friday,

the Prophet rode from Kuba towards Yathrib, and is said to have performed service in the Wadi Ra'unah. (*Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931*)

The route was lined with merry multitudes of the Yathribites who were wearing their best holiday clothes. Women and children were singing songs of welcome from the rooftops of their houses. It was a scene that could hardly have been invented in fantasy. Muhammad, the Apostle of God, must have been deeply moved by such a reception.

Every (Arab) citizen of Yathrib was eager to become the host of the Prophet of Islam who was entering his city as a guest. But not wishing to disappoint even the humblest citizen, he dropped the reins of his she-camel, and declared that he would stay wherever she would halt. The she-camel ambled past many houses, and then halted in front of the house of Abu Ayyub, whereupon he became the proud host of the Apostle of God. Abu Ayyub was a distinguished citizen of Yathrib, and belonged to the clan of Banu Najjar. Both Amina, the mother of the Apostle, and the mother of his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, had belonged to this clan.

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