

Mi'raj

By Nigel Jackson

Mi'raj: The *Mi'raj* or Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad upon the *Lailat al Mi'raj* (Night of Power) through the 7 heavens to the Divine Throne, mounted upon the mystic steed of the Prophetic messengers, the Buraq. Farid ud-Din Attar in the *Mantiq-ut-Tayr* ('The Conference of the Birds') exhorts the wayfarer to 'First put aside the self, and then prepare/ To mount Buraq and journey through the air:/ Drink down the cup of Nothingness: put on/ The cloak that signifies oblivion—/ Your stirrup is the void; absence must be/ The horse that bears you into vacancy',¹ defining the exemplary Prophetic path of *fana'*—attaining ascent to the station of *Al-Haqq*, the gnosis of eternal subsistence in the Real, *Baqa'-bi-Allah*, through the annihilation of the *Nafs*, the extinction of the profane ego. The Ascension of the Prophet is recounted in verse 1 of Surah 17 of the Holy Qur'an:

'Glorified is He who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far distant place of worship, the neighborhood of which We have blessed, that We might show him of Our signs! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer'².

The Qur'anic account of the *Isra'* and the *Mi'raj* reveals the visionary archetypal pattern reflected in the spiritual journeys of the saints—as Ibn 'Arabi expounds in *Al-Futubat Al-Makkiya* (The Meccan Revelations):

...the ascensions (*ma'arij*) of the saints are the ascensions of their spirits and the vision of their hearts, of forms in the intermediate world and of embodied spiritual realities...throughout this journey the servant remains God and not-God. And since he

¹ *Mantiq-ut-Tayr* ('The Conference of the Birds'), by Farid ud-Din Attar, trans. A. Darbandi & D. Davis, 'The Conference of the Birds' lines 3973-3978, London 1984).

² Trans. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall.

remains God and not-God, He makes the servant travel...in Him, in a subtle spiritual (*ma'nawi*) journey³

The spiritual voyager traverses and experiences the Beautiful Names wherein are instantiated

the 'different "colorings" of his states: for they are Names in God, but "colorings" [of the soul] in us...Thus when God makes the saint (*al-wali*) travel through His most Beautiful Names to the other Names and [ultimately] all the divine Names, he comes to know the transformations of his states and the states of the whole world. And [he knows] that the transformation is what brings those very Names to be in us.⁴

Employing the technical terminology of spiritual alchemy, of phases of 'dissolving' (*tabtil*) and 'reintegration' (*tarkib*), Ibn 'Arabi describes how the spiritual voyager who has 'completed his share of the journey through the Names and has come to know the Signs (*Ayat*) which the Names of God gave him during that journey' (*ibid.*) in returning realizes the 'reintegration' of the gnosis of the Self which he has gained in his or her successive passage through each of the spheres, 'taking from each world that which he had left there and reintegrating it in his self, and he continues to appear in each successive stage until he arrives back on earth.' (*ibid.*)

By way of transposition on the contingent plane of the cosmological sciences of Arab Hermetism a parallel can be seen to be mirrored in the 7th verse of the 'Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis' where it is asserted: 'It rises from earth to heaven and comes down again from heaven to earth, and thus acquires the power of the realities above and the realities below.

The archetypal Prophetic pattern of the *Mi'raj* and the subsequent return thus characterizes the spiritual state of 'perfect realization', the state of those saints who are termed the *Raji'un*, 'The Returned'—whose state corresponds with the mysterious 'invisibility' of the *Afrad*, the highest adepts and initiates. From the Akbarian perspective, the Prophetic mystery of the *Isra'* and the *Mi'raj* upon the Night of Power is to be comprehended as the epitome of the initiatory voyage of the gnostic, the 'Journey to the Lord of Power', which is continuous with the spiritual realization, attained via the comprehensive numinous 'unveilings' and harmonic 'totalization' of the Beautiful Names of Allah, of the degree of the Perfect Man (*Al-Insan Al-Kamil*).

³ *Al-Futubat Al-Makkiya* ('The Meccan Revelations') pp. 212-214 trans. Michel Chodkiewicz, William Chittick & James W. Morris, Lahore 2004.

⁴ *Ibid.*