



An Unforgettable Journey

2019

Though it happened long ago, I can still vividly recall the memory of standing in front of the Mountain of Light on the outskirts of Mecca. In that moment, many years ago, I gazed up at the silhouette of its peak, etched against the backdrop of a star-studded sky. The memory remains as clear as if it had happened just yesterday, etching a lasting impression in my mind.

At 3 a.m., the mountain lies in serene slumber. Surprisingly, the starlight provides just enough illumination to make out some of my immediate surroundings. Despite the temptation of what appears to be a relatively short and straightforward hike to the summit, the darkness engenders a sense of unease within me, particularly because I'm unsure if there's a well-defined trail to follow. Hiking in these conditions is a daunting prospect, leaving me apprehensive about what lies ahead. Standing at the end of a small uphill road and gazing up at the mountain, it appears that there are no discernible trails leading to the summit. While it doesn't seem like there's a significant elevation gain, attempting this hike in the dark can be risky and potentially dangerous, especially without a clear path or visibility. With a mix of excitement and nervousness coursing through me, my heart urges me to place my trust in Allah (SWT) and let go of worry since I may not find this opportunity again in the future. I focus on reciting some verses from the Holy Qur'an and earnestly seek Allah's Guidance. Proceeding cautiously, I begin to discern faint traces of a narrow, weathered path winding its way through the scattered stones and boulders. As I survey the desolate landscape, it becomes evident that there are no trees to be found in this barren land. Sometimes the trail disappears, and my progress is slow due to the darkness. It is really an easy hike and pretty much any healthy person can do it, but a flashlight would be handy in the dark. Gradually, a couple of makeshift steps appear here and there comforting me that I must still be on the trail. I now realize that my initial fear and hesitation about this whole pilgrimage (Hajj) and hiking this mountain was baseless.

Indeed, as with numerous challenges in life, we often become the architects of our own mental obstacles and perceive our dreams as unachievable. For many years, I had postponed this journey, offering a litany of excuses. Now, as I stand here, having finally embarked on this pilgrimage, I come to the stark realization that in truth, no external force or circumstance had ever prevented me from embarking on this journey. The only one to blame for the years of delay is myself, as I allowed hesitation and excuses to hold me back from pursuing my dreams. This experience serves as a poignant reminder that, often, the greatest hindrance we face is the one we create within our own minds.



Above me, the resplendent Milky Way, a masterpiece crafted by the Supreme Designer and Artist (59:24), stretches majestically across the night sky. And yet, the Milky Way itself is but a minuscule speck in the vast expanse of the universe. It's truly remarkable how immersing ourselves in the embrace of nature consistently evokes a sense of well-being and a profound connection to our Creator. It seems to be woven into the very fabric of our being, encoded in our DNA, to recognize and cherish the beauty, love, harmony, and peace that surround us in the natural world. Nature serves as a reminder of the magnificence of the universe and the presence of a divine hand behind it all, fostering a deep appreciation for the wonders of creation.

Was the mystical Night Journey on a night like tonight? How did the stars overhead celebrate it on that spectacular night more than 1400 years ago? I have been fascinated with Night Journey since childhood. How did Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) feel when he found out that he would be taking a journey to places in the seven heavens where even the angels were not allowed to enter? Was he excited, anxious, and happy? What did he observe and learn? What did he talk about when he met the previous prophets? How did the other prophets feel when they met the last promised prophet who would be completing the on-going prophetic mission from the time of Adam (PBUH)? How did it feel to be in the upper heavens where the concept of “time” doesn’t apply? What was the reaction of angels to see the “Representative” of Allah (SWT) up there? It must have been an extraordinary joyous event for the entire universe to witness the **Representative of Allah (SWT) on Earth** (2:30) ascending to the heavens. What thoughts filled the minds of the angels as they encountered and extended their welcome to a truly exceptional human being, one who stood as the closest to Allah (SWT) in the entire universe? Did they finally comprehend what Allah (SWT) had informed them in Verse 2:30 thousands or millions of years ago? **The Night Journey’s significance is far beyond our comprehension.**

My heart begins to quicken its pace as I come to the realization that with every switchback in the trail, the summit draws nearer. Despite this being a relatively straightforward one-hour hike, its intense spiritual essence has left me feeling drained of energy. Pausing for a moment, I steal a glance at the city below. Although the Kaaba is not yet visible from my current vantage point along the trail, I hold onto the hope that it will come into view once I reach the summit. With an estimated ten more minutes of hiking ahead, I press on towards my destination. My mind continues to race with thoughts about what I should recite and convey if I happen to find the Cave of Hira. It's akin to walking towards an exceptionally significant meeting in my life, but the truth is, I don't feel fully prepared, and I'm uncertain about what words to utter. The weight of the moment hangs heavy on my mind as I press forward, hoping to navigate this extraordinary experience with the grace it deserves. Would I be able to concentrate and at least perform a prayer without my mind wondering around? Would I be so nervous that I forget to express my true thoughts and feelings? Would it be too abrupt to enter the cave and immediately start asking for forgiveness? *Oh Allah, please help me to be humble in the best way. Please have Mercy on me and let me experience this the best way possible.* Upon reaching the summit, I find myself in a short and narrow alley flanked by weathered wooden tables and white tents on both sides. I've heard that some individuals call these tents home and sell small items during the day. After a couple of minutes, I pass by these stalls, and the trail continues once more, beckoning me forward. Suddenly, to the left, an area emerges, offering an awe-inspiring panorama of the shimmering city lights. Amidst the distant skyline, the brightest point, representing the Kaaba, glitters like a radiant diamond. This mountaintop overlook, perched at the cliff's edge, resembles a grand stage, its orientation seemingly paying homage to the Kaaba.

On this stage, a few hand-woven rugs partially cover the surface. In the tranquil night's hush, an elderly man, prayer beads in hand, is sitting cross-legged, gazing up at the celestial expanse. The comforting stillness, the gentle cool breeze, the encompassing darkness beneath a star-studded canopy, and the solitude of this mountain together create a truly unique and mystical experience. *The resplendent Kaaba casts its radiant glow across the distant skyline, while the city lights, reminiscent of butterflies in fervent embrace, seem to orbit it with grace.* How can I immortalize this exquisite and tranquil moment for eternity?

It seems that a narrow path extends on the other side of the overlook. Holding onto the rugged boulders, I carefully navigate down a couple of exceedingly steep ones. After a minute or so of descent, a colossal boulder looms ahead, obstructing the entire path. Along the sides of this

massive stone, there are dark crevices resembling narrow caves. Opting for the left side, I cautiously proceed, but the passage progressively narrows with each step. I nervously squeeze myself through a particularly tight spot. With a heart pounding in the darkness, I persist, driven by determination. After a few anxious minutes, I finally push through the colossal boulder to the other side, and there is the brightest star in the sky. To my left lies the very destination I've been yearning for—the mystical Cave of Hira!

The humble cave perched atop this mountain has kept a watchful eye on the Kaaba for countless millennia, extending its welcome to the prophets of Allah (SWT) who undertook their sacred pilgrimage. This cave has borne witness to the sacred events of history, including the momentous occasion when Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his son, Prophet Ismael (PBUH), constructed the Kaaba. Its enduring presence stands as a silent testament to the profound spiritual history that has unfolded beneath its sheltering embrace, when disbelievers planned to murder Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in bed, when he migrated to Medina, when he gave blanket immunity to everyone after capturing Mecca without fighting, and unfortunately during the years to come, when his progeny and the pure Imams (the true gates of knowledge and representatives of Allah on Earth) were killed one by one at the hands of the corrupt rulers. A true representative of Allah (SWT) cannot logically be someone who has worshipped idols, committed sins, and doesn't possess the ultimate knowledge of the "Word of Allah". **A Representative of Allah (SWT) on Earth (2:30) is the one chosen only by Him.** He qualifies for that position by his level of knowledge, closeness, and surrendering to Allah (SWT). The Light of Allah (SWT) has increased in him so much that he is purified and spotless. He has learned the Allah's Attributes to such a degree that he doesn't deviate from them in life. His spiritual knowledge is so much that Allah (SWT) has put him in charge of implementing the "Word of Allah" on Earth. That's why he is above the angels, and they are required to prostrate to him (e.g., 18:50, 15:29, 20:116). **From Prophet Adam (PBUH) till Judgement Day, the Earth has never been and will not be without the true "Representative of Allah (SWT)".**

Towards the rear of the cave, a minuscule natural opening within the rock formation offers a tantalizing view of the city below and the resplendent stars above. This remarkable tiny cave, with its low, cave-like ceiling, takes on the appearance of a diminutive chamber, providing just enough room for a couple of individuals to stand and engage in prayer. As I step inside, a surge of nervousness courses through me. The entrance to the cave is diminutive, and the instant I cross the threshold, a potent energy field envelops me, filling the space with an almost tangible presence.

Is this a dream? My knees falter, and I lower myself to the ground, bowing in prostration, my forehead resting upon the natural, stony floor of the cave. The cool and reassuring touch of the ground contrasts with the heat coursing through my flushed forehead. My heart thumps within my chest, its rhythm is a testament to the intense emotions surging through me.

Despite my heart racing, I am overwhelmed by an overpowering sense of love and peace for being in this sacred place. A torrent of emotions swirls within, words and feelings seeking release, yet in this profound moment, I find myself rendered speechless and humbled. Would my tears be enough to convey my thoughts and feelings?

I do not worship this cave, the Kaaba, any person, animal, statues, or any other objects.

My worship is solely directed towards Allah (SWT), as He alone is worthy of it. The significance of the Kaaba (and this cave) lies in the powerful symbolism they represent and the positive spiritual energy they radiate (22:26). How can I convey the profound sensation of standing upon the very ground where, more than 1400 years ago, the last prophet of Allah (SWT) and an archangel met?! I find myself within the very cave where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sought closeness to Allah (SWT) throughout the passing years. It is within these sacred walls that he engaged in meditation, observed fasts, gazed upon the celestial expanse, had his first encounter with Archangel Gabriel, received his divine appointment as a prophet, and embarked upon his arduous prophetic mission. The cave, akin to a steadfast and ancient companion, stood by the Prophet's side throughout the years, offering its sanctuary for his worship of Allah (SWT). Reflecting upon its history, it's plausible that even Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his son, Prophet Ismael (PBUH), who built the Kaaba thousands of years ago, might have sought solace within these very walls. It's a thought-provoking notion that other prophets of Allah (SWT), during their pilgrimages to Mecca, may have likewise found a place for meditation and communion within this same sacred cave, making it a timeless witness to their spiritual journeys. Do I really deserve to be here? My whole body is shaking, and I thank Allah (SWT) repeatedly for granting me this humbling experience.

This journey has prompted a profound reflection upon my entire life. It has become clear that much of my time was spent pursuing material possessions, whether it be acquiring a new car, changing jobs, managing mortgages and loans, or adding more worldly burdens that have, in essence, become heavy chains weighing me down. I've come to recognize that I have, in some ways, unwittingly become a slave to the material aspects of life. Standing before the Kaaba often brings about a sense of spiritual liberation, allowing individuals to shed the burdens of material pursuits

and ego-driven desires. It's a moment of reflection and connection with a higher purpose that can lead to a reevaluation of one's priorities and values. Can we control our desires like Prophet Abraham did when facing the ordeal of sacrificing his beloved son? This pilgrimage is about sacrificing desires to get close to Allah (SWT). Embracing this newfound sense of freedom from the distractions of life can be a transformative experience, leading to a deeper understanding of oneself and a more meaningful journey in the future (22:28). The goal of this pilgrimage (Hajj) is to learn to submit to the Will of Allah (SWT) as Prophet Abraham (PBUH) did when facing the decision to sacrifice his son (37:102-103). It is to learn to trust in Allah (SWT) and to control one's desires, to be aware of the whispering enemy (35:6), to make true vows to Allah (SWT) (22:29), to be reborn, and to reset your life back to a clean slate. It is to experience humbleness when your knees start shaking in front of Kaaba and to feel united with millions of other people regardless of their race, education, titles, money, etc. The cave is only a small spiritual token compared to the entire pilgrimage.

I have been searching deep inside my heart for answers. How much of my life have I wasted on meaningless things? Is my soul's balance sheet in the red (99:7-8)? How can I be sure that my good deeds outweigh the negatives? I have had the Islam's treasure chest in my possession since childhood, but I have barely looked inside. Oh Allah; You are with me wheresoever I may be (57:4) even though the worldly affairs always tend to pull me away from You. You hear my heart (29:5) without me noticing it. You know all that I do and think (57:4) but I am too blind to see Your Signs. Seeking refuge in You is only a heartbeat away (114:1). You continue having Mercy on me while I don't appreciate it enough and don't know its magnitude (1:3). You remember me even though I often forget You (33:41). You always provide for me unconditionally, but I am "too busy" to thank You. You forgive me repeatedly, but I fail to heed (2:37). You always inspire and teach me (34:50) while my arrogant perception is that "I" have accomplished everything *on my own*. You always give me opportunities to improve myself through my choices and actions, but I complain instead. You close one door while opening many more (94:5) but I rush to misinterpret it as misfortune. Your Signs are everywhere inside and outside of me, but I am not wise enough to recognize them (10:5).



You are my Creator, Protector, Sustainer, and Teacher and we will all return to You. As Hazrat Imam Ali Ibn Talib (A.S.) elegantly said in Dua Kumayl:

يَا مَنْ اسْمُهُ دَوَاءٌ وَذِكْرُهُ شِفَاءٌ وَطَاعَتُهُ غِنَى

“Your Name is the remedy, remembering You is the cure, and obeying You is the wealth”

You are the First and the Last (57:3). You created us in the best form (95:4) and blew into us a unique and pure spirit (15:29) so we would have the potential to elevate ourselves above the angels. The unique spirit is what makes us different than other living things and angels. Life's ups and downs, happiness and sadness, success and failure, losses and gains are all opportunities for us to learn Your Attributes and to get closer to You. How can I thank You for the lifelong unconditional Love and Mercy that You have bestowed upon me? How can I repent (28:67) for my errors when I neither remember them nor know their extent? Have I really submitted to your Will (2:112) or am I still chasing the worldly things? Would I be able to take control of my desires so I can get closer to You? Have I done my best in raising my kids? Have I been kind enough to my parents (31:14)? Have I helped the poor and orphans (93:9-10)? Would this journey help me to be born again? In my heart, I am acutely aware of my own shortcomings, and the overwhelming embarrassment I feel in seeking Your forgiveness is tempered only by the knowledge that You are my sole refuge and hope. I am seeking nearness to You through remembering You.

وَلَا تَشْغَلْنِي بِالْاهْتِمَامِ عَنْ تَعَاهُدِ فُرُوضِكَ وَاسْتِعْمَالِ سُنَّتِكَ

“Please do not let anxiety keep me from the performance of my duties to You

and the observance of Your Laws” (from the 7th Dua, Hazrat Imam Sajjad, A.S.)

Please give me a chance to get closer to You and to gain knowledge of the Holy Qur'an. Please grant me knowledge and fresh opportunities so I may do good and make up for my past errors. I humbly seek Your help with having firmness and perseverance in the perfection of my soul. Would You please teach me Your attributes so I can practice them? I am acknowledging how much precious time I have wasted on trivial things. Is it too late now to change?

As I look back on my life, vivid memories resurface, including the painful recollection of my childhood attempted kidnapping. Even now, the mere thought of that harrowing ordeal remains a source of profound anguish. My heart aches for all those who have endured the anguish of separation from their families due to the selfishness, arrogance, oppression, greed, racism, and wars inflicted upon them by others. Utter powerlessness washed over me within mere seconds, as the sinister grip of fear took hold. From behind, a malevolent force tightly clutched my throat, compelling me to step into an unfamiliar and ominous realm. With each forced stride down the street, I left behind my family and the world I had known. In a state of profound shock, I gasped for air, rendered helpless and incapable of talking or turning my head to glimpse my assailant or muster the strength to resist. Dangling from my neck, I could still feel my simple handmade leather charm containing some prayers lovingly penned by my grandfather when I came into this world. Amidst those chaotic and distressing moments, [I invoked Your Name](#). In a couple of minutes, You, with Your infinite grace, dispelled the malevolent darkness and ushered me back into the embrace of peace (13:11). In that moment of liberation, my heart overflowed with love, beauty, joy, hope, and tranquility. Tears gave way to a radiant smile, and I joyfully made my way home, as if the harrowing experience had never occurred. It was a single crossroad with the potential to alter countless aspects of my life and the lives of others. It is impossible to calculate the full impact, but Allah (SWT) has full Knowledge of it. Would I still be here tonight hiking this mountain and confessing to You?! After all these years, a sense of humility washes over me as I offer my gratitude for the countless times You have saved me. I find myself traversing the landscape of my memories, realizing how often I've been spared from imminent perils and how seemingly inconsequential decisions could have led to my downfall. How many other similar situations in my life are there that I am not even aware of?



Following my prayers, moments of repentance, and the cherished solitude within the cave, I reluctantly departed as I noticed the presence of other individuals patiently waiting outside. On my way back to the overlook area, curiosity led me to explore the path on the opposite side of the massive boulder, where I soon realized it was considerably wider and more accommodating. Seated

upon the flat stage area, where a refreshing breeze enveloped me, I devoted the remainder of that unforgettable night to prayers. There is an undeniable enchantment in forgoing the sweet embrace of sleep and humbling oneself before the Creator in the silent shroud of darkness. (51:17, 39:9). The mesmerizing calls to prayer echoed from various directions, filling the crisp morning air. It sent shivers down my spine to witness the entire city awakening in unison for prayer. By this time, we had formed a group of twenty individuals, all gathered in anticipation of performing the morning prayer at the pinnacle of the mountain. **People of varied ethnicities, nationalities, educational backgrounds, wealth, influence, skin tones, ages, and genders stood side by side, united in peace, harmony, and equality.** Everyone was on their own unique night Journey, transcending differences and embracing the collective spiritual experience.

