

History of Masjid al-Aqsa

Khutbah Series:

02. Our Prophet ﷺ and Masjid al-Aqsa

OUR PROPHET (PEACE BE UPON HIM) AND MASJID AL-AQSA

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Beneficent.

When discussing our beloved Prophet's (SAW) relationship with Masjid al-Aqsa, we normally think of three things.

1. Masjid al-Aqsa as the first Qiblah
2. Isra and Mi'raj
3. The virtues of Masjid al-Aqsa promised by our beloved Prophet (SAW)

Regarding **the first point**, of Masjid al-Aqsa as the first Qiblah, our beloved Prophet (SAW) was given the mission of being a Prophet when he reached the age of 40, in the year 609 CE – 13 years before the Hijrah.

Among the earliest verses revealed to the Prophet (SAW) – when he was still so frightened about what was happening to him, that he used to wrap himself in a mantle (cloak) in panic – was the beginning of Surah Muzzammil (73:1-2).

**“O you who are wrapped up in your mantle,
stand up to pray for much of the night.”**

In this verse, Allah comforts the Prophet (SAW) by acknowledging his distress, then He gives instructions, and purpose for the religion through the introduction of the mighty pillar of Islam called Salaah.

Now, have we asked ourselves which direction the Prophet (SAW) faced in Salaah? He was in Makkah at the time...? The answer is Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, Palestine. Our Prophet (SAW) was taught by angel Jibril (AS) to stand and face Masjid al-Aqsa in Prayer. Although there is no specific verse in the Qur'an that gives the order to face that direction, however, we can use the following verses (Surah al-Baqarah 2:143-145) to confirm this:

**“...And We did not prescribe the Qiblah which you used to observe,
except to know the one who follows the Messenger,
as distinct from the one who turns on his heels.
It was burdensome indeed, but not on those whom Allah guided.
Allah will not allow your faith go to waste.
Certainly, Allah is very kind, very merciful to the people.
We have been seeing you turning your face to the heavens.
So, We will certainly assign to you a Qiblah that you would like.
Now, turn your face in the direction of Al-Masjid al-Harām,
and (O Muslims), wherever you are, turn your faces in its direction.
And those who have been given the Book know well that it is the truth**

**from their Lord, and Allah is not heedless of what they do.
But even if you should produce every kind of sign
for those who have been given the Book,
they would never accept your prayer direction,
nor would you accept their prayer direction:
nor would any of them accept one another's direction..."**

These verses first state that the Prophet (SAW) and his followers did not face Makkah – and this was difficult for them. They were in Makkah, the House of Allah – the Ka'bah – was right in front of them. Furthermore, they were ridiculed for turning away from the house that the patriarchs of the Arabs, Ibrahim (AS) and Isma'il (AS) had built. Yet despite this, they persevered.

Thereafter, Allah had allowed the Prophet (SAW) and his companions (RA) to face the direction that they had long longed for, the direction that would please them, the direction of the Ka'bah – the sacred Masjid.

And lastly, the verse shows a parting of the ways between Islam and the “people of the Book” who came before – that neither would follow the Qiblah of the other.

An interesting fact from when the Caliph Umar (RA) visited Masjid al-Aqsa, was that when deciding where to make the Masjid, rather than putting it behind the Rock, so both the Rock and the Ka'bah were faced, he had it built in front of the Rock, so the people would only face the Ka'bah, due to the above verse.

Masjid al-Aqsa remained the Qiblah from the time the Prophet (SAW) was taught to perform Salaah, all the way through his life in Makkah as a Prophet – a period of 13 years, - till the second year of his life in Madinah after Hijrah.

Even though Masjid al-Aqsa is no longer the Qiblah, it has not, in any way, lost any of its importance or sanctity to the Muslims, especially given that our beloved Prophet (SAW) has grouped it with Masjid al-Haram and Masjid al-Nabawi – an honour not given to any other Masjid.

The Prophet (SAW) said:

“Do not undertake a journey to visit any mosque but three: this Masjid of mine, the Masjid al-Ḥarām, and the Masjid al-Aqsa.”

(Bukhari and Muslim)

Abu Darda' (RA) relates that the Prophet (SAW) said,

“The reward of a Salaah (prayer) in al-Masjid al-Haram (Makkah) over other masjids is equivalent to 100,000 prayers (in reward), a

prayer in my masjid (Madinah) is equivalent to 1,000 prayers and a prayer in Bayt al-Maqdis (al-Aqsa Sanctuary) is equivalent to 500 prayers.” (Al-Bayhaqi)

These orders and virtues still stand and will stand until the Last Day.

The second point that links Masjid al-Aqsa to our beloved Prophet (SAW) is that it was part of the journey of the Isra and Mi'raj.

While living in Makkah and constantly being harassed by the Quraysh, the Prophet (SAW) in a single year lost his two biggest supporters, his wife, Khadija (RA) and his uncle Abu Talib. He also tried to reach out to more people by calling the people of Ta'if, a nearby town, to Islam. This event ended with the Prophet (SAW) being chased by its people while being pelted with stones. Our beloved Prophet (SAW) suffered so many injuries, that his feet stuck to his sandals due to his collected blood. Yet our Prophet (SAW) persevered, he did not complain or show regret, or even question why this was happening to him if he was Allah's chosen Prophet. He continued his mission with absolute sincerity and dedication.

After these events, almost as a comforting gift to him, Allah granted our beloved Prophet (SAW) the honour of Isra and Mi'raj. This took place in 621CE – two years before Hijrah.

Isra is the night journey when our Prophet (SAW) led by Jibril (AS) travelled in a single moment from Makkah to Jerusalem, while mounted on a heavenly animal called the Buraq. When he got to Masjid al-Aqsa, he tied his Buraq to a wall and entered the holy sanctuary.

On the holy grounds, our beloved Prophet (SAW) saw many people all waiting in lines for someone to lead them in prayer. Our Prophet (SAW) also got in line to wait, but was ushered forward by Jibril (AS) to lead the prayers.

After the salaah, Jibril (AS) told our Prophet (SAW) that Allah had gathered all the Prophets, every single one of them, to perform Salaah behind him on this great day. This happened at Masjid al-Aqsa. The only place in the world that has this honour.

From here, our Prophet's (SAW) Mi'raj began. Allah chose Masjid al-Aqsa as the starting point of our Prophet's (SAW) journey to heaven – and beyond that, to Allah's Throne – where our Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was given an honour no one before him or after him would ever receive.

This could have been from the Ka'bah, but Allah chose and elevated the status of Masjid al-Aqsa for this honour.

This also played an important role for two reasons:

1. The Prophet's (SAW) visiting Masjid al-Aqsa specifically was chosen by his enemies as a point of interrogation. The Quraysh of Makkah were aware that the Prophet (SAW) had never visited Masjid al-Aqsa before, but there were people among them who had been there often. So, they tried to question him on Jerusalem and its landmarks to try to catch him out – they would be ready to say the Prophet's (SAW) whole journey was a lie, if he got Jerusalem's details wrong.

They questioned him on many random things: to describe the walls, the churches, towers, the streets, etc. Things that most people wouldn't even notice or remember.

To help our Prophet (SAW) Allah showed the whole city to the Prophet's (SAW) eyes, as though he was still there, so he could calmly and completely answer all the questions asked of him – so the Quraysh could not falsify the Prophet's (SAW) amazing journey.

2. On the way back from Masjid al-Aqsa, our Prophet (SAW) met with numerous caravans of the Arab tribes who were headed to Makkah. He greeted them, and they recognised him. Back in Makkah, his enemies also asked about these caravans. Our Prophet (SAW) answered where each were and in how many days they would return. On the caravans' return on their correct days, all the travellers gave witness that they saw the Prophet (SAW) and that he was travelling at incredible speeds.

These two aspects of his journey silenced the dissenters, who – even if they couldn't believe in the Miracle of Mi'raj – had to concede that, at the very least, the Prophet (SAW) did not lie to them.

It is interesting to note that the history and study of Masjid al-Aqsa corroborates an aspect of the Prophet's Mi'raj, and also the Qur'anic account of the war between the Romans and Persians, which happened during the Prophet's (SAW) lifetime.

During the lifetime of our beloved Prophet (SAW), while he was still in Makkah (before Hijrah), Masjid al-Aqsa was under the control of Rûm - East-Roman Empire Christians.

These Romans, as Christians, only cared about the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Masjid al-Aqsa was neglected by them. Furthermore, due to ill relationships, the Jews were completely denied entry into Jerusalem.

When our beloved Prophet (SAW) started receiving Wahi (Revelation), the unthinkable happened. The superpower of Rûm lost to Persia. They lost so much territory in such a short time, that it seemed impossible for the Romans to recover.

It was at this point, that Allah revealed the verses of Surah Rûm

“Alif-Laam-Meem.

Rûm has been defeated in the nearer land;

and they, after their defeat, will triumph within a few years.

To Allah belonged the matter before and (to Him it belongs) thereafter.

And on that day the believers will rejoice with Allah’s help.

He helps whomsoever He wills.

And He is the Mighty, the Very-Merciful.

It is a promise from Allah.

**Allah does not fail in His promise,
but most of the people do not know.”**

Historic records show us that in the years 615-617, Rûm lost Palestine and the entire Levant – a massive amount of land and resources. Yet the Qur’an promised that within a few years they will regain victory over these taken lands. And amazingly, from those same records, we can see that the Romans regained all those lands in 629 CE – within the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW), while he was in Madinah.

The Persian takeover of Palestine is significant because they had control of Masjid al-Aqsa when our beloved Prophet (SAW) went for his miraculous journey of Isra and Mi’raj in 621 CE.

During this time, the area of Masjid al-Aqsa was completely empty and open. It only had some of the outer walls still standing, to which our Prophet (SAW) had tied the Buraaq when he arrived. Even though the area was empty, it was still known for being a holy place. Whether it was the Christians, Persians, Jews or Pagan Arabs, the area visited by the Prophet (SAW) on his night journey, was known and recognised by everyone. There were no guesses or mixed opinions of any of the people recorded, as to where the area of Masjid al-Aqsa would be.

Isn't it amazing that this information about the Persians defeating the Romans and then the Romans defeating the Persians is not only mentioned in the Qur'an, but that the area called "Masjid al-Aqsa" is also in the Qur'an? That this specific area in the city of Jerusalem, which had no structure on it, was recognised by all faiths as the "house of Allah"?

Even the Pagan Quraysh who had questioned the Prophet (SAW) on its description knew of it. And that same description guided Umar (RA) when he went to Jerusalem to build a Masjid on the Masjid al-Aqsa area. He was even accompanied to the very same place by Jewish and Christian leaders, as well as Ka'b al-Ahbaar (RA) who, before becoming a companion of the Prophet (SAW), was a Jewish scholar, who also knew the location of this Masjid.

Had the area not been recognised by Muslims, Christians and Jews, those who opposed Islam would not have left this issue alone. They would have mocked the Prophet (SAW), asking "What Mosque?" and "How can you be sure of the location?" But the universally recognised location of this house of worship – this Masjid al-Aqsa – forced his enemies to acknowledge that the Prophet (SAW) correctly described an area, that he had never visited prior to Mi'raj.

The third point which connects Masjid al-Aqsa to our Prophet (SAW) is that outside of the two holy Masjids in Makkah and Madinah, it is the place that has the most du'as and blessings of the Prophet (SAW).

We have already heard two of them:

The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Do not undertake a journey to visit any mosque but three: this Masjid of mine, the Masjid al-Ḥarām, and the Masjid al-Aqsa."

(Bukhari and Muslim)

Abu Darda' (RA) relates that the Prophet (SAW) said,

"The reward of a Salaah (prayer) in al-Masjid al-Haram (Makkah) over other masjids is equivalent to 100,000 prayers (in reward), a prayer in my masjid (Madinah) is equivalent to 1,000 prayers and a prayer in Bayt al-Maqdis (al-Aqsa Sanctuary) is equivalent to 500 prayers."

(Al-Bayhaqi)

But there are also more. e.g.:

'Abdullah ibn 'Amr (RA) related that the Prophet (SAW) said,

“When Sulayman ibn Dawud (AS) constructed Bayt al-Maqdis, he asked Allah three things. He asked Allah that his judgement be in line with His Judgement. This was granted. He asked Allah for an empire which cannot be attained by anybody after him. This was granted. And he asked Allah, when he completed the construction of Masjid al-Aqsa, that anyone who comes solely to perform Salah in this masjid, be so exonerated from his sins, so much so (that he becomes as sinless) as the day his mother gave birth to him.”

(Al-Nasa'i)

Maymunah (RA) relates that she said,

“O Messenger of Allah, inform us about (visiting) Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem)”.

He said, “It is the land of gathering (al-mahshar) and resurrection (al-manshar), visit it and pray there, as one Salah performed there is equivalent to a thousand performed elsewhere.”

She further asked, “What about the one who doesn't have the capacity to travel to Jerusalem?”

He replied, “Then send some oil to be used in its lamps, as the one who sent oil to be used in its lamps will be like the one who performed Salah there.”

(Ibn Majah)

(Note: the difference in the number of virtues may just be a narrator not remembering properly.)

Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman (RA) reports that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said,

“The most superior I'tikaf (seclusion) is that of three masajid: al-Masjid al-Haram (in Makkah), the Masjid of the Prophet (in Madinah), and the Masjid of Bayt al-Maqdis (in Jerusalem).”

(Al-Bayhaqi)

Umm Salamah (RA), the wife of the Prophet (SAW), relates that she heard the Messenger of Allah (SAW) saying,

“If anyone enters into the state of Ihram for Hajj or Umrah from Masjid al-Aqsa and then proceeds to the Sacred Masjid, his former and latter sins will be forgiven” or “he is guaranteed paradise.”

(Abu Dawud)

These as well as many other Hadith show how Masjid al-Aqsa, Jerusalem, and Palestine were all blessed by the prayers of our beloved Prophet (SAW).

May Allah put in our hearts true love and appreciation for Masjid al-Aqsa and its people. And may Allah make us all and reward us all for being among those who seek to protect Masjid al-Aqsa and its people, using every means available to us.

Lastly, please remember three points that we all need to adopt in order to be counted among those who truly want to help Masjid al-Aqsa and its people.

1. Remember Masjid al-Aqsa and the people of Palestine in your prayers – as often as you can.
2. Try to visit Masjid al-Aqsa with your family. Your going there helps defend the Masjid, and gives hope and support to its people.
3. Keep up-to-date with what is happening there, and take part in whatever way you can to get as many people involved in speaking/emailing about the situation in Al-Aqsa.

Remember, no matter how small or insignificant you think such actions are, for you and me, they may be an act which Allah rewards us His mercy, and forgiveness.

اللهم احفظ فلسطين وأهل فلسطين،

والقدس وأهل القدس،

والأقصى وأهل الأقصى،

واربط على قلوبهم وثبتهم،

يا رب العالمين.

O Allah! Protect Palestine and the people of Palestine,
and (protect) Quds and the people of Quds,
and (protect) Masjid al-Aqsa and the people of Masjid al-Aqsa,
and strengthen their hearts and keep them steadfast,
O Lord of the Worlds.