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“Glorified (and Exalted) is He (Allâh) [above all that they associate with Him]. Who took His slave (Muhammad SAW) for a journey by night from Al-Masjid-al-Harâm (at Makkah) to Al-Masjid-al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem), the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him (Muhammad SAW) of Our Ayât (proofs, evidences, lessons, signs, etc.). Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer” - Surah al-Israa: Ayah 1

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 ﻭﺍﻟﻤﺎ ﻭﻋﺮﻭﻣﻢ ﻣﻤﺮﻭﻟﺮﻭﺍ
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O my people! Enter the holy land (Palestine) which Allâh has assigned to you, and turn not back (in flight) for then you will be returned as losers. - Surah al-Ma’eda : Ayah 21

15 years after the Hijrah, (637-8 Gregorian calendar), Islam was spreading at pace under the leadership of Umar ibn ul Khattab (RA) and the Muslim army had reached the blessed land of al Quds (Jerusalem). The city was under the rule of the eastern Roman Empire, also

“If only someone else had said this, O Abu Ubayda! Verily, we were a disgraced people and Allah honoured us with Islam. If we seek honour from anything besides that with which Allah has honoured us, then Allah will disgrace us.” Source: al-Mustadrak 214

The other narration states he took the robe and replaced his own travel-weary and patched thawb with this elegant robe. After trying it on, he paused and then asked for his own ripped thawb back and on putting it on he said “O Abu Ubayda, Islam is here.” pointing at his heart.

As he approached the fort of Al-Quds it was the turn of his servant to ride the camel and Umar(RA) insisted he take it despite him offering to Umar (RA) to ride instead. At the Damascus gate, the Muslim army cheered while the watchful eyes of the Byzantine archers remained poised to attack, withholding only in the hope that this was their prophesised Farooq. Most of the Christians assumed that it was Umar(RA) atop the camel. He was still in the simple clothing which he had travelled in and could hardly be distinguished from his servant, much to the amazement of the Patriarch who was now facing one of the world’s most powerful people. The patriarch Sophronius left the fort and circled Umar(RA) and counted - 1, 2, 3 ... up to 17 and then smiled and confirmed that he (RA) matched their description of Farooq - a tall, strong, humble man with 17 patches in his garment. He then led Umar(RA) on a tour through the city towards the Holy Church of Sepulchre and introduced him to the cities leaders.

At a short distance from the church, Umar (RA) wrote a covenant, Uhd Umuriya, to safeguard the Christian community which is still present in churches and sites across Al-Quds, and at this site, Masjid-e-Umar still stands till today. Imam At-Tabari (rh) records Umar’s covenant as follows:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
أَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَبْدِ مَنَافٍ الْهَاشِمِيُّ الْكَافِرُ
الْمَكِّيُّ الْيَهُودِيُّ الْغَابِي الْبَدَوِيُّ الْفَارُوقِيُّ الْبَدَوِيُّ الْفَارُوقِيُّ
الْمَكِّيُّ الْيَهُودِيُّ الْغَابِي الْبَدَوِيُّ الْفَارُوقِيُّ الْبَدَوِيُّ الْفَارُوقِيُّ
الْمَكِّيُّ الْيَهُودِيُّ الْغَابِي الْبَدَوِيُّ الْفَارُوقِيُّ الْبَدَوِيُّ الْفَارُوقِيُّ

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. This is what is granted of security by the servant of Allah, Umar, the commander of the faithful, to the

people of Jerusalem. He grants them safety for their lives, their property, their churches, and their crucifixes, for their ill, their healthy, and their entire community. Their churches will not be occupied, demolished, or reduced in number. Their churches and crucifixes will not be desecrated and neither anything else of their property. They will not be coerced to abandon their religion and none of them will be harmed.

Source: Tareekh At-Tabari 2/449

As the time for Asr prayer began, Umar(RA) asked to be directed to the site of the Al-Aqsa masjid. Then Umar(RA) asked Ka'b b. Ahbar, a Rabbi who had reverted to Islam about the location of

He was shocked to find it covered with rubbish as the Romans had been using the area as a rubbish tip. The Khalif(RA) knelt down immediately and with his own hands began to clear the area. When the Muslims saw what he was doing, they followed suit and soon the whole area was cleansed.

Umar(RA) requested Bilal (RA) to call the adhan but he declined as he hadn't undertaken an adhan since the passing of the Prophet(SAW) due to the intense emotions it provoked. Umar (RA) insisted and Bilal (RA) relented to the command of the Leader of the Muslims. As he pronounced the takbeeraat (saying Allahu akbar) of the adhan, all the Muslims started to cry, for it reminded them of the days of the Prophet (peace be upon him). It is said that Umar (RA) cried and wept as he never wept before. The onlookers were surprised to see these hardened soldiers so taken by the beautiful voice of Bilal(RA) and recognised their humility and love for the Prophet (SAW).

Near the niche of Dawud (AS), the Muslims offered two rak'ah Asr travellers prayer, in the first of which Umar (RA) recited Surah Sa'd (38) and in the second of which he recited Surat al-Isra (17), containing reference to the Isra' and Mi'raj. Then he(RA) asked Ka'b al-Ahbar (RA) - a former Jewish rabbi who had embraced Islam - "Where should I build the mihrab (prayer niche)?" Ka'b (RA) suggested behind the rock, so that you will offer it behind the two qiblahs," i.e. the qiblah of Musa and the qiblah of Muhammad. Umar (RA) replied, "You speak like the Jews. We will build the niche in front of the Rock. The entire site is part of the mosque. Therefore, our niche should be in the best part, which is in the front portion." Umar (RA) thereafter commissioned the construction of a wooden mosque (which could accommodate 3,000 worshippers) on the southern end of the compound where the present Qibly masjid stands. By doing so he returned the sanctuary to the purity of its past worship,

which had been abandoned both by Christianity and Judaism.

This story reminds us of the immediate need for us each to perform this blessed journey to Al Quds, and I'll briefly outline the reasons why we should hurry to fulfil this:

1. The land of the Qur'an & Salaah

Allah(SWT) could have taken the Prophet(SAW) from Makkah, but he took him from the blessed land of Al-Quds, Jerusalem, to highlight its importance and the importance of the Prophet(SAW) as the leader of the Anbiyaa (Prophets) and Sayyid-ul Mursaleen (Master of the Messengers).

Zaid Ibn Thabit (ra) reports that the Prophet (saw) said, "How blessed is Al-Sham"! The Companions (ra) asked, "Why is that"? The Messenger (saw) replied, "I see the Angels of Allah spreading their wings over Al-Sham". Ibn Abbas (ra) added, "And the Prophets lived therein. There is not a single inch in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) where a Prophet has not prayed or an Angel not stood". [Tirmidhi, Ahmad]

Abu Umama (ra) reports that the Prophet (saw) said, "Prophethood descended upon me in three places: Makkah, Madinah and Al-Sham. Once it is brought out from any of them, it shall never return to it". (Abu Dawud) In another narration it states, "The Quran was revealed in three places - Makkah, Madinah and Al-Sham". (Tabarani) Ibn Kathir, the great scholar of Islam, said, "Al-Sham here means Bayt Al-Maqdis (Jerusalem). [Abu Dawud, Tabarani] The scholars explain it was the following ayah which was revealed here:

وَسْأَلُكَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَمَا أَصْبَرُوا لِلْبَلَاءِ
وَأَنذَرْتُكَ أَلْيَسَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

And ask (O Muhammad SAW) those of Our Messengers whom We sent before you: "Did We ever appoint âlihah (gods) to be worshipped besides the Most Gracious (Allâh)?" - Surah Zukhruf : Ayah 45

The Prophet ﷺ said:

تَبَا لَأَشْمِ . وَأَنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ تَبَارَكُ اللَّهُ
عَنْهَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ تَبَارَكُ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ

'Tuba is for Ash-Sham.' So we said: 'Why is that O Messenger of Allah?' He said: 'Because the angels of Ar-Rahman spread their wings over it

تَبَارَكُ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ (Tirmidhi)

Waleed bin Muslim said: "10,000 eyes that saw the messenger of Allah (peace and blessings

be upon him) entered Shaam.” It is the land of eminent Sahabah who are currently buried there such as Ubadah bin Samit and Shaddad bin Aws (may Allah be pleased with them all) amongst many others.

Ibn Asakir stated that “One of the sacred places on earth is Shaam (Levant); the most sacred part of Shaam is Palestine; the most sacred part of Palestine is Al Quds (Jerusalem); the most sacred part of Jerusalem is the noble sanctuary; the most sacred part of the noble sanctuary is Masjid al-Aqsa.”

It was where all the prophets prayed salah behind the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him)) as the Imam.

It was the direction of prayer for the Muslims for 16 or 17 months after hijrah.

It was also the place where the greatest act we can perform in our lives which is the salaah itself - this gift was revealed to the Prophet(SAW) directly from this location.

2. Dua of Sulaiman (AS)

Abdullah ibn Umar ibn al-Aas related that the Prophet (SAW) said:

When Sulaiman bin Dawood (AS) completed the building of Bait ul Maqdis, he asked Allah(SWT) for 3 things:

- Rulership corresponding with wisdom
- A kingdom unparalleled to any after him
- That no-one attends this masjid with the desire only to pray here except that he returns sinless like the day he was born

The Prophet(SAW) said the first two were granted to him and I wish that the third is also.

Imam Ibn Hajar As Asqalani stated that the wish of the Prophet (SAW) is evidence of its acceptance. This hadith is found in Musnad Imam Ahmed (27762), Sunan An-Nisai (1408), Sunan Ibn Majah (693), Saheeh Ibn Khuzama (1268), Saheeh ibn Hibban (1633)

The Prophet ﷺ specifically said:

مَنْ جَاءَ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ بِلَادِ أَسْطُرَىٰ فَاجْعَلْهَا مِثْلَ حَبْلٍ مَسْجُودٍ
مَنْ جَاءَ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ بِلَادِ أَسْطُرَىٰ فَاجْعَلْهَا مِثْلَ حَبْلٍ مَسْجُودٍ

Go to Syria, for it is Allah’s chosen land, to which his best servants will be gathered

- Abu Dawood

3. "... Only travel to three places"

قال " لا تخرجوا في سفر الا الى ثلاث مساجد المسجد الحرام والمسجد الاقصى والمسجد الذي بناه الله لرسوله صلى الله عليه وسلم "

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Do not set out on a journey except for three Mosques i.e. Al-Masjid-Al-Haram, the Mosque of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ), and the Mosque of Al-Aqsa, (Mosque of Jerusalem)." - Sahih al-Bukhari 1189

Abdullah Ibn Umar (ra) relates, I asked the Prophet (saw), "Apostle of Allah, tell us the legal injunction about (visiting) Bayt Al-Maqdis (Jerusalem)." The Apostle of Allah (saw) said, " Go and pray there. If you cannot visit it and pray there, then send some oil to be used in the lamps". [Bukhari]

A Saheeh narration relates that it was reported that Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: we were discussing, in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him), which of them was more virtuous, the mosque of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) or Bayt al-Maqdis. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: One prayer in my mosque is better than four prayers there, but it is still a good place of prayer. Soon there will come a time when if a man has a spot of land as big as his horse's rope from which he can see Bayt al-Maqdis, that will be better for him than the whole world. (Al-Hakim and Adh-Dhahabi).

4. The land of protection and resurrection

It is this land to which Isa (AS) will travel after returning to Syria. Mujamma Ibn Al-Harith (ra) narrates that the Prophet (saw) said, "Ibn Maryam (Jesus) will kill Al-Dajjal (the Anti-Christ) at the door of Ludd (a town in Palestine)". [Ahmad, Tirmidhi]

Maymunah Bint Sa'd (ra) reports that she asked the Prophet (saw), "O Messenger of Allah, give us a pronouncement about Al-Quds (Jerusalem)". The Prophet (saw) replied, "It is the land where they will be raised (Al-Hashr) and gathered (Al-Mahshar)". [Ahmad, Tabarani]

5. Support your forgotten brothers and sisters

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said regarding the inhabitants of the blessed land, "They and their wives, children and slaves (male and female) are in ribat (guardians, literally a fort) in the cause of Allah". [Tabarani]

Muawiyah Ibn Sufyan (RA) relates that the Prophet (SAW) said, "There is a group among my

all want change but how many of us are willing to change? That change starts with us individually and communally.

We need to ask ourselves why we have forgotten this land of the Qur'an, the land of the Prophets and the blessed land of the believers upon which we were gifted with a direct communication to Allah(SWT) - the salaah.

So what can you do?

ONE: Educate yourself on the blessings and status of Masjid ul Aqsa, its surroundings and history

TWO: Visit Al Quds as soon as possible, with your friends and families. It is easier for the residents of Luton than many in the world - a direct flight from the airport takes only 4.5 hours at a relatively low cost (apprpx £325 return).

THREE: Regular and sincere dua (supplication) to the Most-Able and All-Aware, Allah(SWT). Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah

...فلا تأسف على ما فاتك ولا تاتوا بآفة اليأس
فلا تأسف على ما فاتك ولا تاتوا بآفة اليأس

"...never give up hope of Allâh's Mercy. Certainly no one despairs of Allâh's Mercy, except the people who disbelieve." - Surah Yusuf: Ayah 87

The believers must remember this.

As the hadith of our beloved Messenger (SAW) states *Idhaa* ahabba qawman ibtalaahum

...فلا تأسف على ما فاتك ولا تاتوا بآفة اليأس
فلا تأسف على ما فاتك ولا تاتوا بآفة اليأس "فلا تأسف على ما فاتك ولا تاتوا بآفة اليأس"

It was narrated from Anas bin Malik that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "The greatest reward comes with the greatest trial. When Allah loves a people He tests them. Whoever accepts that wins His pleasure but whoever is discontent with that earns His wrath." [Sunan Ibn Majah 4031]

We ask Allah(SWT) that He restores al Quds to its rightful owners. We ask that He(SWT) that He relieves all Muslims from oppression and occupation that they face. We ask Allah(SWT) that He brings peace to this mubaarak land and to all lands across the world.

Allahumma aslih ahwaalal Muslimeena fee filasteen

Allahumma aslih ahwaalal Muslimeena fee kulli maakaan

Allahum majma'ahum 'ala kalimatil haqqi yaa Rabb al 'Aalameen

Allahummahkum dimaa al muslimeena fee filasteen

Allahummansur al muslimeen wal mustad'afeena fee kulli maakan yaa Rabb al 'Aalameen