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FROM THE TIME the Prophet ﷺ received the first revelation in 610AD the Makkans began their hostility and persecution. By 622, towards the end of the Makkan period, Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ hardships were increasing exponentially. Compounding this were the deaths of his beloved wife Khadijah ﷺ, who was his confidante and source of emotional support; and in the following month his uncle, Abu Talib who was his protector. Furthermore, his clan Banu Hashim and his Muslim followers were recovering from a boycott imposed by the powerful Quraysh clan that lasted three years. Under this strain, the Prophet ﷺ sought out protection and went to the neighbouring town of Ta’if. Unfortunately the torment and abuse he ﷺ was to suffer there was unparalleled. Hence, this year of his life is known as the ‘year of grief and mourning’ in the *sirah* of the Prophet ﷺ.

In Ta’if the leaders not only rejected the message but also ordered the people of the town to stone and humiliate Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The time leading up to al-Isra’ was without a doubt the most difficult, lonely and severe period in his earthly existence.

Many years later when his wife ‘A’ishah ﷺ asked him about his hardship he recalled this period: “‘A’ishah ﷺ asked the Prophet ﷺ, “Have you seen a day worse than the day of the Battle of Uhud?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “I have suffered from your people all of what

I suffered. The hardest time that I suffered from them was the day of 'Aqabah¹, when I presented myself to (i.e. invited to Islam) Ibn 'Abd Yalil ibn 'Abd Kulal.² He did not accept me. So, I went with deep sorrow and was almost unconscious, until I found myself in Qarn al-Tha'alib. I raised my face and I saw a cloud above me, and I found Jibra'il in it. He called me and said, 'Allah has heard your people's speech to you and what they answered you. He has sent you the Angel of the Mountains; you may order him of whatever you want.' The Angel of the Mountains called me, greeted me, and said, 'O Muhammad, if you would like, I would collapse *Akshabayn*³ over them.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Nay, I hope that Allah will bring from them those who would worship Allah alone without associating any partners with Him.'"

After the humiliation suffered by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Ta'if, he made a very powerful supplication to Allah ﷻ, which reflects both the great magnanimity and deep sorrow of the Prophet ﷺ. His supplication was:

"O Lord, I complain to You of the feebleness of my strength, the scantiness of my resources and the ease with which people humiliate me. O Most Merciful of the merciful, You are the Lord of the oppressed, and You are my Lord. To whom do You entrust me? To a distant one who glowers at me? Or to an enemy to whom You have given power over me? If You are not angry with me, I do not care, but Your strength is more generous for me. I seek refuge in the light of Your countenance for which the darkness becomes radiant, and through which the affairs of this world and the next become good, that You may not be angry with me or Your wrath descend on me. You have the right to blame me until You are satisfied, and there is no power or might except in You."

Besides the torment, humiliation and torture, his concerns now turned towards the difficult return journey to Makkah. The nature

of Arabian tribal society was such that any individual coming into a town or a village needed to have an alliance with, or protection from, a man of good standing in that town or village.⁴ However, with no protectorate in Makkah and with Ta'if having rejected him, his worries multiplied. Before he entered Makkah he sent messages to a few people seeking protection but to no avail. Finally al-Mutim ibn Adiy, who was a non-believer, offered his protection, which the Prophet ﷺ accepted. Having to seek the protection of a non-Muslim exposes the vulnerability the Prophet ﷺ faced in Makkah.

The loss of his wife and uncle, the distressful journey to Ta'if and his vulnerable position in Makkah, all resulted in this being the most hazardous and distressing time in the Prophet's ﷺ life. It was in this phase of his life that Allah ﷻ took him on al-Isra' and al-Mi'raj, as if to reassure, remind and empower him.

The journey draws attention to the towering and lofty position that the Prophet ﷺ held regardless of the rejection he was facing from his people on the earth. By bringing the Prophet ﷺ to His presence, and showing him ﷺ the world of the hereafter, Allah ﷻ fortified him with a resolute conviction. The Prophet ﷺ was then capable of putting in perspective the trials and tribulations he was encountering on earth. The grandeur that he experienced on the journey washed away the concerns he had for himself, and his sorrow at losing his nearest and dearest. It also made clear the insignificance of those who challenged and questioned the message, and reassured him of the pivotal role and position of his Ummah (Community). Thus the greatness of al-Isra' and al-Mi'raj emerges from the historical context that the Prophet ﷺ found himself in, his position therein, and the impact it had on him as an individual.