Title: A Journey to the real meaning of Hijra

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A Journey to the real meaning of Hijra
The Hijri Calendar
The hijri calendar was established by the second Rightly Guided Caliph and the Prophets close Companion, Umar Ibn al-Khattab, in 637/638 AD. According to al-Jabarti, the great chronicler of the late C18 and early C19, Abu Musa al-Ashari wrote to the then caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab saying, Letters have reached us from the Commander of the Faithful, but we do not know which to obey. We read a document dated [the month of] Sha'ban, but we do not know which of the Sha'bans is meant: is it the month that has passed, or that which is to come?" After consulting the Prophets Companions, Umar Ibn al-Khattab established the year of the Prophets emigration as the beginning of the Islamic calendar since it was the single most important event in the Islamic world at that time. The Islamic calendar is usually abbreviated in Western languages from the Latin Anno Hegirae the year of the Hijra.

The Islamic calendar consists of 12 purely lunar months. They are (1) Muharram, (2) Safar, (3) Rabie al-Awwal, (4) Rabie al-Thani, (5) Jumada al-Awwal, (6) Jumada al-Thani, (7) Rajab, (8) Saban, (9) Ramadan, (10) Shawwal, (11) Dhul-Qida, (12) Dhul-Hijja.

Lexical meaning of hijra
The word hijra comes from the root h/j/r. These letters in Arabic indicate movement and locomotion. In whatever order, the letters covey sound audibility. And because sound causes movement in air and moves from one place to another, from the mouth of the speaker to the words of the hearer, the root letters also connote transport and movement. Hijra from one place to another involves movement and transport.

In Hans Wehrs Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, the meanings listed for the noun hijra include: departure, exit; emigration, exodus; immigration while the meanings listed for the verb hajara include: to emigrate; to dissociate o.s, separate, part, secede, keep away (from), part company (with); to give up, renounce, forgo, avoid (s.th.); to abandon, surrender, leave, give up, vacate (s.th. in favor of s.o.); to desert one another, part company, separate, break up.

In Islamic tradition, the word hijra is used to describe the emigration of Muslims from Mecca to other places to flee the persecution of the polytheists. However, it is most commonly used to refer to the Prophets emigration from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD.

Kinds of hijra
There are two kinds of hijra physical and moral.

Physical hijra
Physical migration can be defined as a process of moving, either across an international border, or within a state. Encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants.

Religious persecution and the quest for religious freedom has played an important role in migration, forcing people to flee for their lives. The connection between religion and migration is a cross-cutting issue throughout the history of major religions such as Christianity (e.g. the spread of Catholicism by Portuguese and Spanish during the 11th and 12th centuries), Islam (e.g. the first and second migration during Prophet Mohameds time), and Judaism (e.g. the migration from eastern to Western Europe and overseas, and to the United States of America during the 19th).

The relentless persecution of the early Muslims prompted Prophet Muhammad [peace and blessings be upon him] to allow those who lacked power and protection to flee to Abyssinia. Muhammad Ibn Ishaq stated, When the Messenger of Allah witnessed the trials descending upon his Companions, he compared this with his own good state derived from his own status with Allah the Almighty and from his uncle Abu Talib, and, recognizing that he was unable to prevent the evil befalling them, he told them, I wish you would go forth into the land of Abyssinia, for there is a king in whose realm no one is harmed, where truth prevails. Stay there until Allah the Almighty gives you relief from your plight.This migration to Abyssinia took place seven years before the Prophets own hijra to Medina and was followed by a second one to Abyssinia a few years later.

The Prophets hijra to Medina
While in Mecca, the Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him] continued to invite the Arab tribes that flocked to Mecca to Allah the Almighty and into Islam, presenting himself to them and the message of guidance and mercy he brought. This went on until Allah granted victory to His Messenger through the Medinians who believed in him and agreed to give him and the Muslims aid and refuge. It was only after this that the Messenger of Allah the Almighty [peace and blessings be upon him] ordered the Muslims, both those who had previously emigrated to Abyssinia and returned and those who had stayed with him in Mecca, to go to Medina and join their Muslim brothers and sisters there. He, however, stayed on in Mecca waiting for his Lord to give him permission to emigrate.

When the Quraysh could endure Prophet Muhammad [peace and blessings be upon him] no more, they decided to get rid of him once and for all. They consulted among themselves on how best to do this and Abu Jahl Ibn Hisham said, I think we should select one young man from each tribe, and someone who is strong, of excellent lineage and reputation as a leader. We should give each one a sharp sword and they would go to him and use the swords to strike him in unison. They would kill him and we would then be rid of him. If they do this, his blood will be spread over all tribes. And the Banu Abd Manaf will not be able to do battle against them all. So they will accept blood money which we can pay them.

Gabriel came to the Messenger of Allah [peace and blessings be upon him] and commanded him not to sleep in his bed that night. The Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him] asked Ali Ibn Abu Talib to sleep in his bed instead of him, promising that no harm would come to him. Taking a handful of dirt and sprinkling it at those who gathered outside his door to kill him, the Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him] slipped away unseen after he had recited the following verses, Ya Sin. By the Qur'an, full of Wisdom,-Thou art indeed one of the apostles, On a Straight Way. It is a Revelation sent down by (Him), the Exalted in Might, Most Merciful. In order that thou mayest admonish a people, whose fathers had received no admonition, and who therefore remain heedless (of the Signs of Allah..The Word is proved true against the greater part of them: for they do not believe. We have put yokes round their necks right up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up (and they cannot see). And We have put a bar in front of them and a bar behind them, and further, We have covered them up; so that they cannot see [Quran 36: 1-9]. He then made his way to Abu Bakr who had made preparations for the journey.

And so Allah the Almighty gave His permission to His Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him] to emigrate. The event marks the beginning of the Islamic era as was agreed upon by the Companions during Umars rule.

Moral hijra
The term hijra has important subtle meanings associated with it other than physical movement from one place to another. In addition to its physical sense, it also means to abandon something and neglect it. This meaning finds support in some Prophetic traditions such as the one narrated by Abdullah Ibn Umar in which the Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him]said, The muhajir (emigrant) is the one who abandons what Allah has forbidden [Bukhari and Muslim].

The idea of a metaphorical hijra has numerous references to the life of the Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him]. Just as the Prophets hijra to Medina was a transitional line between two statesa state of weakness to a state of security, the hijra of the soul is likewise a transitional line between the human weakness for sin to a position of security from sin, a state of disobedience to one of obedience. The Prophets departure from Mecca was a flight from the polytheists and from a hostile unbelieving environment, with the aim of finding security in another secure place and forming a new community based on piety; it was a move to a better situation conducive to production for the sake of Allah. In a similar vein, a person undertaking a moral hijra migrates from everything Allah has forbidden without falling prey to his earthly desires. It is a flight for the sake of moral refuge from all forms of evils and corruption. It is a spiritual leave-taking from oppression to justice; from cruelty, harshness, and pitilessness to mercy, compassion and grace; from intolerance to forbearance; from indulgence to moderation; from miserliness to generosity and munificence; from malignity to benevolence; from selfishness to charity and altruism; from hard-heartedness to sympathy; from hostility to goodwill and friendliness; from conflict and strife to peace and amity; from ignorance to knowledge; from pride to humility; from sins to repentance; and from defiance and resistance to Allahs commands to complete submission to him. It is most of all a return to mans natural disposition of good. Perhaps the spiritual hijra is best expressed by the words of our Prophet Ibrahim who said, I will flee to my Lord: He is the Almighty, the All-Wise [Quran 29: 26]. Also Allah's command to our Prophet Muhammad Say, Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah , Lord of the worlds [Quran 6:162]. No partner has He. And this I have been commanded, and I am the first [among you] of the Muslims [Quran 6:163]

The metaphoric content of the journey is evoked every time a person decides to emigrate from prohibitions and disobedience. Like the Prophets journey from Mecca to Medina, the flight to moral excellence and obedience is not without difficulties. Man's existence on earth is not a promenade through life. His path is fraught with hurdles and fears, but with being mindful of Allah and following the guidance of our beloved prophet (peace be upon him) by all means of love, makes human's journey in life light and easy full of satisfaction believing by heart that Allah the Almighty is knowing and acquinted.It often means for saking what one desires for what Allah desires. Because man has been ordered to strive for the life prescribed by Allah the Almighty, he cannot succumb to harsh conditions or to his weakness and desires. He must rely on Allah and cannot blame circumstances that are forced upon him or the temptations he meets along his way, taking in mind that Allah intends us ease not to put burden on us. He also cannot give in or rely solely on Allah to live the virtuous and pious life required of him. He has to exert effort to attain the glory of Allah's pleasure. On returning from a battle, the Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him] once said, We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad. This tradition clearly demonstrates mans part in struggling against his own weakness and inclination for wrong doing.

The secret nature of the Prophets hijra and the precautions he took all demonstrate his human insecurities. He ordered Ali to sleep in his bed in his place, chose an unconventional route to Medina, took measures to wipe out their footsteps, and sheltered with his companion Abu Bakr in a cave to hide from the pursuing enemy. All of this reveals his reliance on Allah but at the same time, his employment of every human endeavor to achieve his goal. In a similar fashion, we are instructed to employ every measure possible to achieve our goalobedience to Allah and the attainment of His pleasure both of which will ultimately secure for us Allahs promise of an eternal life in paradise in the hereafter. This promise alone is a motivating force to do better, to shun disobedience and to strive for Allahs pleasure.

The end of the Prophets journey and the triumphant welcome he received in Medina foretell our own triumph at the end of our journey on earth and our entry into paradise. The Prophets flight from Mecca to Medina, from a land of hostility to a land of security should serve as a moral compass for us. By all scales, the Prophets journey to security was not easy and neither is our own. The conscious decision to migrate from both major and minor transgressions is indeed of great magnitude and the difficulties that may ensue in its wake should not deter us from embarking on it. In essence, the Prophets migration was about fulfilling his mission on earth. Our moral migration, in turn, must also be about fulfilling our mission on earth for Allah says, I created jinn and man only to worship Me [Quran 51: 56]. It should determine our departure from the various realms of sin to a desire to attain Divine propinquity and secure our place in the hereafter. Although oftentimes difficult, a perpetual moral migration is the mark of a life lived along the lines of righteousness and success.

Although all kinds of hijra involve entering unchartered territory and therefore evoke a sense of fear in pledging to withstand the tribulations ensuing from the decision to stay on the path of truth, it is important to remember that Allah the Almighty is always the best Companion on the road to righteousness. We should always keep in mind the Prophets words of reassurance to Abu Bakr when, on their way to Medina, the Qurayshy search party that was after them came too dangerously close to the mouth of the cave where they were hiding. When Abu Bakr expressed his alarm, the Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him] told him, Have no fear for Allah is with us.

As the beginning of the Islamic new year draws close, we would do well to reflect on the many lessons we can derive from the momentous journey on which the beginning of the Islamic calendar is based. We should not be content to celebrate the new Islamic year without drawing moral and psychological parallels from the Prophets journey from Mecca to Medina to our own context and lives.