

The Blessed Chamber

Conversations of tears and reverence with the men who replaced the covering of the Prophet's ﷺ resting place.

I still remember the conversations with the two old men in Makkah, while looking at their weaving. I was in Makkah, so I headed toward the factory of the covering of the Ka'bah, and there I learned that the factory has another honour, for it produces also a covering for the Prophetic Chamber.

I met at that time – several years ago – with men who partook in its production and installation, and I didn't want to waste that opportunity as their youngest was in his sixties and I feared that they would leave this world before I could document this work.

I recorded with them conversations that were mixed with tears and reverence; sometimes words would betray them, and at others, their emotions would choke them, as they spoke of their unique experience. Their limbs shook from just the memory – as if it happened yesterday – and not a quarter of a century ago.

A Place of the Utmost Grandeur

Shaykh Muhammad Ali Madani, head of the automated weaving division of the factory at that time, was generous with me. I learned from him that he was one of those who took part in weaving and installing the covering of the Prophetic Chamber. I

said to him, "Tell me about the covering and the Prophetic Chamber – describe them to me."

His sight wandered far, as if he was bringing those treasured memories before him. Then he answered: "On that day, I felt a state of complete amazement take over me. It is a grand spot – of the utmost grandeur. I do not know its exact circumference, but it seemed to me that the Prophetic Chamber was 48 metres in circumference

The awe of the place was so overbearing that nothing attracted my attention. I was so dazzled that I only saw the lamps hanging from the chamber ceiling, which were old gifts that would be given to the Mosque of the Prophet in ancient times. I was told that there were some Prophetic relics that were kept in another place - I don't know where - but I do know that some historical items were kept in the chamber of Sayyidah Fatimah al-Zahra – the same place that she lived in."

He added, "The chamber covering is a weave made of pure silk, green in color, padded with a strong cotton cloth, and it is crowned by a belt similar to that of the covering of the Honoured Ka'bah, except that it is red in colour. A quarter of its space is taken up by an embroidery of noble Qur'anic verses from Surah al-Fath,

"Their limbs shook from just the memory – as if it happened yesterday – and not a quarter of a century ago."

made
of lines of
cotton and wires
of gold and silver..."

The covering of
the Prophetic Chamber is
not changed every year like
the covering of the Honoured
Ka'bah, because it is kept in-
side the chamber and far from
the hands of the people and of the
elements, and so it is only changed
when needed.

Then I met Shaykh Ahmad Sahirty,
head of the embroidery division of the
factory. It was apparent to me back then
how old he was, and how weak his vision.
He took the initiative, saying, "How can I
speak to you about my feelings at the mo-
ment I entered the Prophetic Chamber...
I can't. That is a speech above my abili-
ties of speech, and I never thought that I
would one day be asked about this experi-
ence. And I guarantee you that I will not
be able to go through it again."

When the Doors Were Opened

He drew nearer to me and added, "Look
at the lenses of my spectacles – and he
pointed at their thickness – and look at
my white hair and the weight of the years
that I carry. My age I do not count, but
I've heard them say that I was born in the
year 1333 A.H. (1917 C.E.) And in all those
years, I did not know a single hobby other
than the love of beautiful scents and per-
fumes. I've spent such a long period of time
in those years that I've lived, trying to sati-
ate that voracious appetite that is still with
me; I travelled much and learned much,
but I can tell you this with confidence: that
I have my own special blends that you will
not find with anyone else, and that no one

else
could ever
make.

And I tell you this
because I discov-
ered my inability and the
meagerness of my knowledge
on that blessed night, when
the doors were opened to us,
and we entered the Prophetic
Chamber, and I inhaled perfumes
and scents that I have never known
before, and have never known since. I
still do not know the secret of its composi-
tion: it was a scent above scents, an aroma
above and beyond aromas – something
else that us people of expertise, the peo-
ple of the trade, have never experienced
before."

When I asked him to describe to me the
Prophetic Chamber, a slight chill struck
him and coursed through his body. And
he said in a faint voice, "I believe that the
chamber is 11 metres in height. Below the
green dome is another dome on which
is written: 'The tomb of the Prophet, the
tomb of Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq, and the
tomb of Umar ibn al-Khattab.' And I saw
also that there was another tomb that was
empty, and next to the four tombs was the
chamber of sayyidah Fatimah al-Zahra,
which is the house in which she lived.

From our awe we didn't know how to
remove the special pieces made for the
dome – our fingers would shake and our
breaths would race. We stayed 14 full
nights working from after the isha prayer
until the first adhan of fajr, in order to fin-
ish our task. We kept removing the pieces,
untying the knots of the old covering, and
cleaning all the dust and pigeon feathers
that were stuck in that pure place. This
scene goes back to the year 1971, and the

"A scent above scents, an aroma above and beyond aromas"

covering that we changed was old: it was 75 years old according to the date that was weaved on it, and had never been changed since.

I was the first to enter, with the Sayyid Habib, one of the notables of al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, As'ad Sheera the director of religious endowments of Madinah at the time, and Habib Moghrabi from the factory management, and Abd al-Karim Flomban, Nasir Qari, Abd al-Rahim Bukhari and others. We were 13 men, I don't remember most of them, for they have left unto the Mercy of Allah.

We were accompanied by the chief of the Aghas who kept the keys to the Prophetic Chamber, and a number of the servants of the Chamber. Whispering was our speech, and that was if signalling was not sufficient. I was, and still am, suffering from weakness of vision and these spectacles have not left my eyes since those days, but in that chamber I was another person... I felt it, and the difference was clear to me."

Wondrous Happenings

The Shaykh Sahirti made an oath, saying, "I used to put the thread into the hole of the needle without my spectacles, despite the dim light in which we worked. How do you explain that? And how do you explain the fact that I didn't feel the allergy that I suffered and still suffer from? Because I cough severely from the slightest bit of dust. But that day, I was not affected by the dust of the chamber, or the sand flying into the air. As if sand was no longer sand,

and as if the dust became a medicine for my ailment. I used to feel all during those nights that I was a young man, and that youthfulness had been given back to me.

Another strange thing happened to me whose secret I haven't understood until today. We had to take out the old covering, and it was carried by whoever carried it. The embroidered band, 36 metres long, remained. I said to them wrap it and leave it. I went up to it, and despite my weakness, carried it over this shoulder. I went out of the Prophetic Chamber with it, without ever feeling its weight. But after that, they came with five young men to carry it from where I had put it down and they couldn't."

The Shaykh began to weep silently and continued, while sighing, "Someone asked who carried it and brought it here. I replied saying, "Me". They didn't believe me. I said to them, "Ask Abd al-Rahim Bukhari, the famous calligrapher of the covering."

Translated from the Arabic interviews carried out by Omar al-Midwahy and posted on www.alarabiya.net

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And may Allah continuously bless the Messenger and his family with peace and light until the day in which his prophetic brother, Isa son of Maryam, is buried in the fourth empty grave of the Blessed Chamber, and yet even after that and forever.

"I was not affected by the dust of the chamber, or the sand flying into the air. As if sand was no longer sand, and as if the dust became a medicine for my ailment."