

# THE HAJJ

## *Pilgrimage to Mecca*



In the name of God,  
the Compassionate, the Merciful

Pilgrimage or Hajj, is one of the modes of worship and pillars of Islam. *“Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to God, those who can afford the Journey”* [Quran,3:97]. Visiting the House of God is a duty upon Muslims who have attained the age of puberty, are mentally sound and are able to afford the journey financially and physically.

Pilgrimage or Hajj is a very significant act of worship that was started by the patriarch of monotheism, the Prophet Abraham.

The sanctuary in Mecca known as *Ka’bah* (the black cube) where pilgrims circle is believed to be the first house of worship built on earth by Adam with the help of the angels. The only remnant of the old building is *Al-Hajar Al-Aswad*, or the Black Stone. The Quranic account tells us that the *Ka’bah*, centuries later, was once again raised high from the foundation and erected by Abraham and his son Ishmael. *“And (mention O Muhammad) when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House (Ka’bah), ‘Our Lord, accept from us; surely You are the Hearing, the Knowing’”* [2:127]. The Black Stone is in fact the cornerstone of the *Ka’bah*. It is a symbol of the progeny of Abraham. It is the cornerstone of the Kingdom of God. In fact, the Psalms contains a clear reference to it:

*“The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.”* [Psalm 118:22] Ishmael was looked on as being rejected by God, or so the Israelites believed. Yet it was a progeny of Ishmael that the Last Prophet, the ‘head-stone of the corner’ was to arise.

God later asked Abraham to proclaim the call to Hajj or pilgrimage, *“And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men: they will come to you on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways”* [22:27].

The sacred house didn’t only become a host to the multitudes of pilgrims, but a central focal point for Muslims around the world. Muslims everywhere direct their faces towards the Ka’bah in their daily prayers.

### THE HAJJ, DEFINITION AND RITES

Literally Hajj means, *“To set out for a place.”* Today, Muslims from across continents take this tiresome but worthwhile spiritual journey. From as far away as Australia, America, Canada, to Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Middle East pilgrims begin their travel to Mecca in order to fulfill their once in a lifetime religious obligation. The Hajj is the world’s largest single gathering of human beings in the world. Those who undertake such an awesome journey are in essence responding to the call for Hajj Abraham made in obedience to God’s command. This duty has been performed annually by Muslims since it was made an obligatory act of worship for them over fourteen hundred years ago.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instituted the rites of the Hajj as a commemoration of the events that took place in this

sacred land with Abraham, Hagar, his wife, and his son Ishmael. In essence the Hajj is a tribute to Abraham and his family who upheld monotheism, preached it, and lived by it.

Pilgrims prepare themselves physically and spiritually for this once in a life time experience. They enter the state of *Ihram* (sacred purity) and wear the required garb (*Ihram* clothing), at appointed places called *Miqat*, and declare their intention loudly, "Here I am 'O Lord (intending to) perform Hajj." Women are simply required to wear normal modest dress and maintain their head scarf. Men use two white unstitched sheets. One wrapped around their waist covering the lower part of the body and the other draped over the shoulders covering the chest. The pilgrims then enter Mecca marching toward the *Ka'bah* chanting the *Talbiyah* (response to the call), Here I am 'O Lord (responding to Your call), Here I am 'O Lord, You have no partners, Verily all Praise and Blessings are Yours and also Dominion. You have no partners.

Among the rites of the Hajj are the *tawaf* or circumambulating around the *Ka'bah*, the running between the hills of Safa and Marwah, the stay at Mina, the journey to Arafat (day of repentance and atonement), passing the night at Muzdalifah and stoning pillars that represent the devil.

### THE TURNING (TAWAF)

Pilgrims, dressed uniquely in simple seamless white sheets, march toward the *Ka'bah*. This uniformity in appearance signifies equality. It removes the notion of discrimination. Blacks, whites, and all colored-skins; kings, presidents and laymen; scholars, the learned and the unlettered, the well-off, the rich and the poor, men, women and children, each stand shoulder to shoulder chanting the *Talbiyah*, an expression of devotion to God: Here I am 'O Lord (responding to Your call).



A single Muslim community gathers before God. A sea of people circles the *Ka'bah* in a counter clockwise motion seven times. The Black Stone is the start and end point of the seven rounds.

The turning around the *Ka'bah* resembles the angels turning around the Throne of the Most Merciful, God Almighty, in the

frequented house in heaven. "And you shall see the angels surrounding the Throne (Divine) on all sides, glorifying the praises of their Lord" [39:75]. Like the angels, Muslims are engaged in the glorifications of their Lord in the oldest house (of worship), the *Ka'bah*.

Before proceeding to the next ceremony people follow the practice of the Prophet Muhammad offer an optional prayer at the station

of Abraham where he used to stand to observe the construction of the *Ka'bah*.

### THE RAPID WALK (AL-SAI')

Before rushing to perform the second rite, the rapid walk (*al-Sai'* in Arabic), pilgrims usually refresh themselves by drinking from the well of Zamzam, a real wonder.

Hagar, the wife of Abraham, and her infant son Ishmael were left alone in the barren valley of Bakka (today Mecca) after Abraham was commanded to leave them there. In that is a great lesson of obedience. Once her provisions finished, Hagar, alone with her son, was in search for water to quench the thirst of her baby boy. She would hastily move from one hillock called al-Safa toward another called al-Marwah. Her determination and trust in God was so great that she never gave up hope. She continued to move in that direction back and forth seven times until she found herself at the place where Ishmael was left. There, God performed a miracle. Water gushed at the feet of her infant son by the help of an angel. God indeed was well aware of her situation and He indeed looked after her needs. The Quran recalls, "Verily! *Al-Safa and Al-Marwah are of the Symbols of God.*" [2:158]

Pilgrims trace the footsteps of Hagar. Ending the circular motion of *Tawaf* they now begin their second rite in a linear direction. The pilgrims rapidly walk nearly a quarter mile seven times back and forth between the hills of al-Safa and al-Marwah keeping the centuries old tradition. There are great lessons to be learnt from the actions of Hagar. One, due to her complete dependence and reliance on God, Hagar never gave up her struggle in search for salvation. Two, one must always be hopeful and optimistic. The third is to persevere and be patient in one's struggle towards salvation.

### MINA

On the eighth of Dhul Hijjah, the 12th lunar month of the Islamic calendar, the pilgrims begin their journey to Mina.

After many months of emptiness and desertion, the ten mile long valley of Mina is filled by a flock of pilgrims. Several hundred

thousand tents are erected to accommodate the multitude of people. Pilgrims on that day focus on the aim of the journey while preparing themselves spiritually



to commence this once in a lifetime act of worship.

### THE JOURNEY TO ARAFAT

On the ninth of Dhul Hijjah, the pilgrims while reciting the chant proceed toward Arafat some five miles away from Mina. This ceremony is the most important of all the rites of Hajj. Arafat is

the climax of Hajj. One's Hajj is not accepted if he/she misses it.

As one of the most significant stations, while pilgrims are in the presence of God, they are required to stretch their hands out before their Lord supplicating to Him. This is the height of God consciousness.

Arafat is the perfect place for one to show his or her remorse



and regret for the sins one has committed. It is the time for the confession of the sorrowful soul; of the injustices it committed.

Aside from the daily prayers, while some pilgrims recite the Quran, others may engage in deep contemplation and meditation reflecting on the past and the course of the future. They submit themselves to the Ever-living, the Eternal, and the Absolute, pray for forgiveness and beg for His mercy. It is a time for repentance and renewal of covenant. Pilgrims believe that God will accept their sincere repentance and forgive their sins after renewing their covenant with Him. In return, the pilgrims are expected to worship none but Him, abide by His instructions and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and do their very best to abstain from sins and bad actions.

Group leaders often echo the words of the Prophet Muhammad in his last farewell sermon delivered on a small mound on the plain of Arafat called *Jabal al-Rahmah*, or the Mount of Mercy. It is believed that it was there when Adam and Eve supplicated after realizing that they had disobeyed God. In their repentance they said, *“Our Lord! We have wronged our souls. If You do not forgive us and bestow Your mercy upon us, we shall certainly be lost.”* [7:23]

The Prophet preached a message of brotherhood, love and compassion and the importance of being kind to one another. He addressed commerce and trade issues and warned against indulging in usury and interest practices.

He laid down the obligations of men over their wives and the rights they have over their husbands. Prophet Muhammad reiterates much of what the Quran says about women.

Prophet Muhammad speaks of the equality of human beings before God and the Law. He asserts, *“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor does a non-Arab have superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black nor does a black have any superiority over a white, except in righteousness.”* Man is born free.

He appeals to his community to uphold the modes of worship and to follow the right path as he reminds them of the Day of

Judgment, *“Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds.”*

With this message, pilgrims become quite emotional. As the sun is about to set, their supplications and prayers become more intense. Not knowing whether they will ever make it back to this place, pilgrims shed tears of regret and sorrow hopeful that after this moment God will forgive them.

The Prophet on this occasion once said that God descends to the nearest heaven and boasts to the angels saying, *“Look at My servants. They have come from far and near, with hair disheveled and faces covered with dust, to seek My Mercy, even though they have not seen my chastisement.”* The prophet concludes his saying, *“Far more people are freed from the Hellfire on the Day of Arafat than on any other day.”*

### **MUZDALIFAH**

Immediately after sunset literally millions of pilgrims leave Arafat and rush toward another plain field between Arafat and Mina, called Muzdalifah. Tracing the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad, pilgrims spend the night there offering their combined sundown and night prayers. Older men and women among others may proceed to their tents in Mina after midnight. The rest spend the entire night in the open until dawn sleeping on the ground. The scene in Muzdalifah reminds the pilgrims of the day of resurrection and Judgment Day. Pilgrims prepare for departure upon concluding the dawn prayer heading back to Mina toward the largest pillar representing Satan, the devil. In preparation for the next rite pilgrims before leaving Muzdalifah usually collect pebbles slightly bigger than the size of a chick pea.

### **STONING THE DEVIL (RAMI)**

It is mentioned that, while Abraham is carrying out God's command to sacrifice his son Ishmael (according to the Islamic tradition) in a place called al-Aqabah in Mina, Satan tries to convince him not to do it. Angel Gabriel inspires Abraham to pelt Satan with pebbles. Abraham hurls seven stones at the devil. Satan tries again, but this time through his wife Hagar. Angel Gabriel inspires Abraham to again pelt Satan and he does. For the third time, Satan tries to persuade Ishmael to stop his father but to no avail. Angel Gabriel once again inspires Abraham to pelt the devil.

Commemorating this tradition, pilgrims, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Dhul Hijjah, pelt the largest pillar representing the devil with seven stones. This ritual of stoning the devil continues for the next three days, the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. Each pillar (small, medium and large) is pelted with seven stones. This symbolic ritual is an act that reminds Muslims to reject the temptation of the devil and to drive him away as he tries to prevent the believers from being obedient to God.

## THE DAY OF SACRIFICE (YAUM AL-NAHR)

On the same day, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Dhul Hijjah, pilgrims sacrifice sheep and camels honoring Abraham, who in an act of submission to God's command, was willing to sacrifice his first son Ishmael and his son's acceptance to be sacrificed. Because of their supreme obedience to God, God replaced Ishmael with a lamb to be sacrificed instead.

Some pilgrims slaughter their animal themselves, but most people purchase a sacrifice coupon ahead of time which allows animals to be slaughtered on that day in their name without having to be present. The meat is distributed among the poor.

Muslims around the world celebrate this day known as Eid al-Adha or the Feast of the Sacrifice. The celebration is continued for the next three days. Schools, governments, and some businesses in Muslim majority countries close for four days. Muslims celebrate two Eids, the former being Eid al-Fitr or Feast of Breaking the Fast that occurs at the end of Ramadan.

## SHAVING THE HEAD (HALQ)

After stoning the pillar representing the devil, pilgrims are required to perform a *halq* or *taqsir*. It is more meritorious for men to shave the entire head (*halq*). They may, however, shorten the hair (*taqsir*) by cutting at least the size of a fingertip. Women simply trim or cut off a lock of their hair. The rite of shaving off the head is a symbol of rebirth. All sins are cleansed.

## CONCLUSION

The Hajj rituals have a very emotional and psychological effect on pilgrims. They return home spiritually transformed and with a renewed commitment. In spite of the physical hardships, the Hajj, according to some pilgrims, is the greatest spiritual experience of their lives. Having the image of the *Ka'bah* engraved in their minds, the circling of the *Ka'bah* reminds the pilgrims to keep God in the center of their lives. The Hajj is all about Repentance, Revitalization of Faith and Renewal of Covenant.

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