

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدانا
لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ
عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ



THE HAJJ

Symbol of Universal Brotherhood

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In the name of Allah the most gracious, the most merciful

The Hajj is the fifth and final pillar of Islam. It is a declaration of Belief, a process of renovation, and an expression of inspiration, motivation and devotion. It is an acknowledgement of the command of God.

The Hajj is an ancient rite, which was well established in Arabia long before Islam, It was one of the few traditions of the monotheistic religion of Abraham that survived the onslaught of pagan practices. The holy Qur'an relates the story of how the Father of the prophets', Abraham, built the Qa'ba with the help of his son Ishmael and in obedience to Allah proclaimed the Hajj to all mankind. "Recall when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House, praying, our lord, accept this from us, you are All Hearing, All knowing. Our Lord make us submissive to you and make out of our descendants a community that submits itself to you and show us the ways of your worship and turn to us in Mercy. You are Much-Relenting. Most Compassionate."(1:127) There are reports, which take the Hajj further back in history and associate it with man's first steps on this planet. As Qur'an has said "The first House (of Prayer) established for mankind is the one at Bakkah it is full of blessing and a center of guidance for the whole world." (2:96) The barren hills and inhospitable valleys of Arfat, Muzdalifah, Mina and Mecca have undoubtedly been held in great awe and reverence from the depths of antiquity.

Islam took Hajj back to its original form. The idols were completely abolished and the holy places were purified for worship of the one God, Allah. The various aspects of Hajj consequently regained their significance. The throwing of the pebbles (j'amarat), which is part of the ritual, ceased to be an adoration of an idol and became once more a symbol of resistance to temptation and full surrender to Allah. The tawf, which was in paganism homage to the numerous idols and the Black Stone, became in Islam an act of glorification of the one God of Abraham.

The tribe of Quraish was brought down to the level of others through the egalitarian principle of Islam. 'Those most honored in the eyes of Allah are the most pious', says the Holy Qur'an. "O mankind! Lo! We have created you from a male and a female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct."(50:13) Distinction on the basis of family tribe, race, or colour was declared abhorrent to the religion of Islam. Quraishites were made to dress like all others in two lengths of white unstitched material so that all men come to the house of Allah devoid of the sin of pride. They stand humbly in front of Creator. They stand with heads uncovered, sans splendor, sans worldly magnificence. Only the women were allowed to wear ordinary clothes provided that they covered all their bodies except their hands and faces. The indignities that womanhood suffered before Islam in the Hajj and outside it were thus redressed by treating them as a privileged group.

The Haram is inviolate. Any person taking refuge in it may not be disturbed even if he committed the most hideous crime. He is, however, not to be fed or sheltered so that he would be forced to leave the Haram and face the consequences of his crime. The animals and plants of the Haram are protected; they are to exist in peace and harmony with their environment.

The pilgrims are particularly instructed to refrain from lewdness, abuse, or hostile argument. The Muslim should not commit any of these at any time but they are more sinful during the Hajj. He must refrain from any sexual activity, or from contracting a marriage. He must not use perfume or cut his hair or clip his nails. The male must keep his head uncovered and the female must keep her face unveiled. Who being of the pilgrim must be completely devoted to Allah without attention to appearance? His instincts must be restrained by his awe of the Lord that his aggression towards man, animal or plant must be blunted or completely annihilated, and the sex urge fully sublimated. He comes to his God disheveled and covered with dust to seek His mercy and crave His forgiveness.

The experience is, for so many, a rebirth. Indeed the prophet-peace be upon him-stated: Those who perform the Hajj in the right manner and with full spiritual and emotional involvement shall come down from Arfat pure "as experience should transform the ordinary man into a new one, a true Muslim fully devoted to the faith and completely submersing his will of his Creator. It is hard to describe such an experience, it defies language. Its attraction is so compiling that the dream of every Muslim whatever his place of birth or place in society is to come to Mecca and to receive the grace of Allah.

The Ka'ba has always been held in great esteem. It stands in the center of the city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia. It is a place of sanctity held in respect by all Muslims. Whoever enters it is safe and secure from all danger. It has been declared by Allah Almighty to be a sanctuary for all mankind.

The Ka'ba had to symbolize its spiritual pre-eminence with physical pre-eminence. The sacred House of Allah must dominate the profane abodes of men. Mecca was also seen as the property of all Muslims, the dweller and the visitor. For this reason some authorities forbid the charging of rents for accommodation in Mecca. It must remain a holy and not a commercial city.

Al-Ghazzali says in this regard: Allah has favored this Ummah with the Hajj. He honored the Ancient House by calling it His own and He appointed it as destination for His servants and made the area around a sanctuary to glorify it. He made Arafat like a pipe pouring into this courtyard. To emphasis the sacredness of the place he made all its animals protected animals. Visitors from long distances arrive disheveled, covered with dust, humble to their Lord, sublimating to Him and submitting to his power.

So if this is the case why are we not to reap the benefits of Hajj, which is performed by over two million Muslims every year? We should seriously reflect on the reasons behind our shortcomings. These are not, however, far to seek. We perform the rites and rituals of Hajj but the real soul has vanished. Many who go on Hajj when they are in the last stage of their lives? Many who go on Hajj are illiterate and unaware of the revolutionary aspects of Islamic teachings, where as the acquisition of knowledge is the prime duty of every Muslim, male or female. Thus, Hajj is performed without a conscious effort to understand its purpose and to assimilate its true spirit. When all our Ibadah (praying) become routine rituals and habits bereft of its soul there is no doubt that we do not receive their full blessings and beneficial results.

At present our situation is not different as a person came to see Junaid al-Baghdadi (may Allah have mercy on him) after performing Hajj. Shaikh 'Uthman ibn' records the following conversation Ali al-Hajwiri (may Allah have mercy on him) in his famous book kashf al-Mahjub: "When you said goodbye and left your home for Hajj, did you say goodbye to your sinful life as well? He said: "No". "During the journey when you traversed from one place to the other, did you traverse towards nearness to Allah as well? He replied: "No". "When you discarded your worldly clothes and put on Ihram, did you discard your imperfections from your life?" He answered: "No". "When you did Tawaf of the Ka'bah, did you see the gracious beauty of Allah?" He said "No." When you did sa'l of Safa and Marwah, did you arraign Safa (Purity) and Muruwah (goodness)?. He replied: "No". "When you went to Mina, did your worldly Mina (Ambitions) also cease?" He replied: "No". "When you stayed in 'Arafat, did you spend any time in 'Irfan (Knowing) of Allah?" He said: "No". "When you were slaughtering did you slaughter your carnal self as well?" He said: "No". Then Junid al Baghdadi (may Allah be pleased with him) advised him, "You really did not make your journey to Hajj, as you did not experience and achieve the things I have mentioned. Go back and do as I told you, only then will you reach Maqam Ibrahim.

Thus, it is essential that we try and recreate the consciousness through education and da'wah among the masses so that they understand the real Message of Islam and mould their lives according to Islamic teachings. It is only through such efforts that the Ummah can retain its identity and attain unity.