

# The Story of a Sacred City

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**T**he Holy City of Makkah is the first capital of Islam and home of the Prophet ﷺ, and the point on Earth from which the message of Islam spread. Every mountain, valley and road in it witnessed the steps of Muhammad Ibn Abdullah.

It was near the Holy Mosque in Makkah where the universe was enlightened by his birth, where he was raised and grew up amongst a sub-tribe of the Hashemites. It was here too that he was besieged with his family and followers by the materialist tribe of Quraish, who were concerned about their social and economic position and their trading influence in both the north and south of the Arabian Peninsula. Allah ﷻ, however, granted his Prophet victory, defeating the Quraish, and in fact the siege served to widen the appeal of Islam among the Arab tribes and throughout Makkan society.

To the north of the Sacred Mosque, overlooking the Kaaba from a distance halfway up an imposing mountain, is the cave of Jabal Hira'a, the only place where Muhammad would frequent for worship and meditation. From there, he contemplated the tranquility of the sky, the purity of the stars, observing the inner meaning of how the sun lit up the day and how the moon illuminated the night. The Truth in his heart was reaffirmed; that it was one God that both created and orchestrated the universe, and that all of nature was but all part of a divine system.

Indeed, the very first verse of the Holy Quran was revealed in this cave (*Read! In the Name of your Lord who created [all that exists]*). It is this verse that inspired Muhammad's followers to pursue knowledge during his lifetime and for centuries subsequent. And it was in this cave too that he received the command from Allah to spread his message of hope and spiritual serenity.

In Makkah (the district of Mina), we have the mosque of Baya'h (vow), located between two mountains where the Prophet met with a

group of the two tribes (Aus and Khazraj) who vowed to protect him and the cause, and encouraged him to migrate to Madinah. A mosque was built at this location and named Baya'h to honour this occasion.

On the south side of Holy Makkah is the Thawr Mountain that witnessed the blessed *Hijra* (migration) of the Prophet following his beseigement. It contains the cave where he and his companion Abu Bakr hid from the Quraishi trackers, and where the Quran's words "*the second of the two; when they were in the cave*" were revealed. From here he took the coastal road to Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah.

The location of the Sacred City of Makkah was known initially as the Valley of Ibrahim, named after the father of the Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH), who came here with his wife Hager and son Ismail, following a divine order. He kept them in a place near the Kaaba (which of course, was not yet built) with some food and water. No people were living in Makkah at that time and there was no possibility of life in the vicinity. Ibrahim kept them there and returned to the Levant. As he was leaving, Hager ran after him, fearful of the lack of food and water for sustenance. She eventually tired, and asked: 'Is this an order from God?' He turned to her and said: 'Yes.' She replied with tremendous faith and acceptance: 'Then God would not leave us in despair.' He continued his journey till he reached the bend of Kidaa' or Hajoon. He turned to the place behind him and said "Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your Sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful".

This is Makkah, which ever since has been a sanctuary, a place of abundance. Livelihood is coming to it from everywhere. It has become the world's most unique city. Muslims all over the world face in its direction to offer their prayers. The society of Makkah is a universal human society, where all ethnic backgrounds have merged: from east to west; from Bukhara, Samarkand and India to Morocco, countries from Africa to the north of the Mediterranean. It has thus become one cosmopolitan society with its unique own dialect, fashion and habits, which collectively represent the diversity of the Islamic world from which the pilgrims arrive and have occasionally stayed.

The urban parameter of cities around the world is traditionally determined by the human inhabitants. The parameter of the Holy City of Makkah has been ordained by Allah alone. The spiritual benefits within its boundaries are tremendous, which is why Muslims worldwide have always been eager to spend time within it, even outside of the obligatory Hajj period. **E**