

The Timeless Sanctuary

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Gomaa is a renowned Islamic scholar from the Shafi'i and Ash'ari schools. From 2003 until 2013, he served as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, a position of religious authority second only to the Grand Imam the Sheikh of Al Azhar Sharif. An Egyptian native and one of Islam's most respected scholars of Islamic law, Gomaa oversaw Dar Al Ifta, Egypt's highest fatwa-issuing authority. Prior to his appointment

as Grand Mufti, he served as a professor of jurisprudence at Al Azhar University, where he specialised in Usul al-Fiqh, the science of religious law; there, he published over 25 books on various topics in Islam. Gomaa has also issued a number of fatwas on topics ranging from gender equality to democracy.

Muslims hold the Holy City of Makkah in the highest regard. It is their *Qibla*; their direction of prayer as well as their ultimate pilgrimage destination. The greatness of Makkah in the realm of space is like the greatness of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the realm of personae, and like the greatness of *Laylat-ül-Qadr* (Night of Power), of Ramadan, of the Friday and of the first ten days of the holy month of Dhu al-Hijjah¹ in the realm of time.

Muslims firmly believe that Allah ﷻ concerted all of His select choices previously revealed over history in His last and final revelation. For the good of mankind, He sent the greatest of humans to the most blessed location on Earth, with the most complete message and the most perfect scripture to the greatest community that has ever lived.

Makkah al-Mukarramah ("The Blessed") hosts The House of Allah known as *Masjid Al Haram* or the Sacred Mosque. This great city bore witness to the initiation of the message and its primordial form as well as to the sealing of the Divine messages and their perfect completion. It is thus a symbol of metaphysical Oneness and Unity.

Of Makkah, Allah Almighty says: "*Behold, the first Sanctuary ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakkah²: rich in blessing, and a [source*

of] guidance unto all the worlds"³ Of our master Prophet Muhammad, Allah Almighty says: "[And know, O believers, that] Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is Allah's Apostle and the Seal of all Prophets. And Allah has indeed full knowledge of everything."⁴

Allah Almighty tells us of his Sacred Mosque as a sanctuary of peace and security, as a living sanctuary and refuge. Allah Almighty says: "AND LO! We made the House (at Makkah) a resort for mankind and a sanctuary (...)"⁵

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AND [remember the time] when Abraham spoke [thus]: "O my Sustainer! Make this land secure (...)"⁶

"Have they not seen that We have appointed a sanctuary immune (from violence), while mankind are ravaged all around them? Do they then believe in falsehood and disbelieve in the bounty of Allah?"⁷

"Let them, therefore, worship the Sustainer of this House⁽³⁾ who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from fear."⁸

Allah Exalted in His Transcendence, vows by Makkah, calling it a "land secure": "and this land secure!⁽³⁾ Verily, We create man in the best conformation."⁹

The name "Makkah" is derived from the fact that it is described as the vanquisher of tyrants Tamak al-jabärin, which means it undoes their haughtiness.

Al Bukhari and Muslim both report by way of Abi Shurai'a Al Adawi who relates that the Messenger of Allah, said: "(...) Makkah has been made a sanctuary by Allah and not by the people, so it is not lawful for a person, who believes in Allah and the Last Day to shed blood in it, or to cut its trees (...)"¹⁰

The Sacred Mosque, set up by Allah as a source of guidance for

1. The Holy month of Pilgrimage
2. Bakkah is Makkah using another Arab dialect where the letter Mim is replaced with the letter Ba'

3. Al-Imran (the Family of Imran) 3:96
4. Al-Aazab (The Confederates) 33:40
5. Al-Anbiyya (The Prophets) 21:107

6. Al-Baqarah (The Heifer) 2:125
7. Ibrahim (Abraham) 14:35

all worlds, has a similitude in the Prophet Muhammad, also sent by Allah as a mercy unto all the worlds. Allah Almighty says: “We sent thee not save as a mercy for all the worlds.”¹¹ Allah Almighty describes our master Muhammad, as a refuge, a guarantor of security and safety for his people: “But Allah would not punish them while thou wast with them (...).”¹² He also says: “(...) If, then, after having sinned against themselves, they would but come round to thee and ask Allah to forgive them – with the Messenger, too, praying that they be forgiven – they would assuredly find that Allah is an acceptor of repentance, a dispenser of grace.” Allah Almighty also says: “Indeed, there has come unto you [O mankind] a Messenger from among yourselves: heavily weighs upon him [the thought] that you might suffer [in the life to come]; full of concern for you [is he, and] full of compassion and mercy towards the believers.”¹⁴

In ensuring the rank of Makkah, the city, as an abode of peace, a refuge and a sanctuary of security and safety, Allah has harshly warned those who transgress against the Sacred Mosque or cause any amount of harm within its premises, He says: “Behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth and bar [others] from the path of Allah and from the Inviolable House of Worship which We have set up for all people alike – [both] those who dwell there and those who come from abroad – and all who seek to profane it by [deliberate] evildoing: [all] such shall We cause to taste grievous suffering in the life to come.”¹⁵ The harsh warning Allah declared concerning Makkah is repeated once more but this time concerning those who transgress against Muhammad. He says: “(...) He believes in Allah, and trusts the believers, and is [a manifestation of Allah's] grace towards such of you as have [truly] attained faith. And as for those who malign Allah's Apostle – grievous suffering awaits them [in the life to come]!”¹⁶

At the time of the birth of the Prophet, Allah Almighty protected Makkah against the attack launched by the army of Abrahah. He sent against them swarms of flying creatures. Likewise, the Messenger of Allah told us that Allah Almighty will protect Makkah again at the end of time, from the attack of the False Messiah known as the Dajjal. Anas Ibn Malik narrated that the Prophet said: “There will be no town which Ad-Dajjal will not enter except Makkah and Madinah, and there will be no entrance (road of both Makkah and Madinah) but the angels will be standing in rows guarding it against him (...).”¹⁷ [narrated by both Al Bukhari and Muslim]

Allah dedicated angels and swarms of flying creatures to protect Makkah and make it impregnable, however, in the case of the Prophet it is Allah Himself who took it upon Him to protect and guard the Prophet Muhammad against all kinds of harm. He says: “O Messenger! Announce all that has been bestowed from on high upon thee by thy Sustainer: for unless thou doest it fully, thou wilt not have delivered His message [at all]. And God will protect thee from men (...).”¹⁸

Considering the many parallels in greatness between Makkah and the Prophet, it is no wonder that the Prophet Muhammad loved Makkah immensely and was bound to it in the most profound manner. This love was evident in the words the Prophet addressed to Makkah when he was forced out of it. On leaving, he stood on the outskirts of Makkah at a place called Al Āzūrah, and spoke to the Holy City: “Oh valley of Makkah! How good a town, how dear you are to me! If it were not for your people forcing me out of you, I would have never lived in any other than you” [narrated by At- Tirmidhi and Ibn Aban].

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The flight from Makkah also became obligatory for the companions of the Prophet, even if they too loved Makkah dearly. Ibn Shihab Az-Zuhri said: Ussail Al Ghifari, may Allah be pleased with him, came to us from Makkah and entered into the presence of Lady Aisha who asked him: Oh Ussail, how did you find Makkah? He said: I found Makkah green in every direction, its valleys white – in full blossom – its lemongrass fully flourished, its millet fully grown and its acacia everywhere. She said: Enough Ussail. Do not sadden us. The Prophet said: “Hush, o Uçail, let the hearts rest in solace.”¹⁹

Makkah has been bequeathed the ideal locus on Earth in order for it to be a centre from whence Islam would spread, fulfilling its role as a guidance to all worlds, as expressed in the words of Allah. Indeed, it is located in an intermediary zone of the globe as per the ‘sacred golden ratio’, further indicating its honour and lofty rank. This is demonstrated by taking into account the 360 meridians circling our globe. The division of the number of meridians between Makkah towards its east by the number of meridians to its west equals 1.616, which is the sacred golden ratio. Similarly if we take the 180 circles of latitude around our globe into account, dividing the number of circles of latitude to the North of Makkah by the number to its South will yield the same golden number 1.616.

It is in fact Allah's favorable response to the prayer of His Prophet Abraham that caused the people to fall in love with Makkah and to travel to it from far and wide. It is only because of this yearning that they journey to it via any means possible. Allah Almighty says:

“(...) cause Thou, therefore, people's hearts to yearn towards them and grant them fruitful sustenance, so that they might have cause to be grateful.”²⁰

A subtle meaning could be extracted from what seems to be very obvious in our allusion to Makkah being the prime locus on Earth, as well as the Ancient House²¹ being the first abode of worship set up for mankind on Earth. Thus, it is the first of all the mosques set up

8 Al-Ankabul (The Spider) 29:67

9 Quraish (Quraish) 106:3-4

10 At-Tin (The Fig) 95:4

11 Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 64, Hadeth 328

12 Al-Anfal (The Spoils of War) 8:33

13 An-Nisa° (The Women) 4:64

14 At-Tauba (The Repentance) 9:128

15 Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage) 22:25

16 At-Tauba (The Repentance) 9:61

17 Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 29, Āadith 15

18 Al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread) 5:67

19 Al-Isabah, by Ibn Hajor

for worshipping Allah on Earth, from whence the light of guidance for all mankind has radiated and shone through.

Allah ordained that this innate quality of Makkah be maintained and embedded within the very essence of this Holy City until the Day of Resurrection. This is evident in its unique quality as a place from whence people return to their pure state of innocence, totally cleared from sin, the same as the day they were born.

Those who heed the call and travel to Makkah for the pilgrimage are thus rewarded by a spiritual rebirth, as promised by the Prophet. Abu Hurairrah, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that he heard the Prophet, saying: "Whoever performs Hajj for Allah's pleasure and does not have sexual relations with his wife, and does not do evil or sins then he will return (after Hajj free from all sins) as if he were born anew."²²

Moreover, evidence from the Sacred Law indicates that rewards for good deeds are multiplied during certain periods and in certain places. This applies, for example, to the deeds done during auspicious periods such as the holy month of Ramadan and the first ten days of

the holy month of Dhu al Hijjah, as well as those done in virtuous places like the two holy shrines of Makkah and Madinah and Al Masjid Al Aqsa or the Farthest Mosque located in the holy city of Jerusalem. "The Messenger of Allah, said: "(...) a prayer in Al Aqsa Mosque is equal to fifty thousand prayers, a prayer in my mosque is equal to fifty thousand prayers; and a prayer in the Sacred Mosque is equal to one hundred thousand prayers."²³

Overall, Makkah holds a tremendous spiritual meaning for all Muslims, regardless of time and place. This meaning is deeply rooted in their hearts and highlighted in all of their sacred texts, namely the Quran and Sunnah. The high ranking of this Holy City and its deeply rooted spiritual significance explains why millions upon millions assemble there every year. It is also why they all speak of a very special and unique spiritual experience, where their prayers are answered and where tranquility descends upon them during every ritual they perform. It is where they become so engrossed in their spiritual experience that they can neither err nor sin. For they are in Makkah – the Mountains of Light; the Valley of Lamentation! **E**

Millions flock to Makkah yearly to follow in the same footsteps as the Prophet Muhammad and to fulfil their religious duty as prescribed in the Quran



20. Ibrahim (Abraham) 14:37

21. Another name of the Ka'ba

22. Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 25, Āadith 9

23. Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 5, Hadith 1478