

One Hajj, Many Journeys

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Acts of worship are symbols that keep alive our awareness of being Muslim, as well as increasing our closeness to the Divine. The religious duty of the Hajj, described in the Holy Quran as "A duty to Allah" (Ali Imran, 97), is indeed a map of symbols. Containing many symbols in every stage, Hajj means deciding by knowing the meaning in these symbols and turning those decisions into action. In that sense, Hajj is different from other religious duties; in fact, it incorporates other religious duties. Being a Hajji is not an ordinary thing.

Hajj is getting to know one another, but perhaps more importantly getting to know oneself. "Hajj is Arafat." And Arafat is the experience of finding and knowing oneself before everything. Based on the notion "One who knows himself knows Allah," it means getting to know oneself first and then Allah ﷻ. So the deeper meaning of Hajj is essentially to know, recognise, understand and comprehend the Truth. Hajj means becoming wise and reaching Ma'rifatullah (knowledge of God). It means being conscious of the resurrection, the Last Judgement, the wait before the Greater Court, the death before death and the ultimate accountability before Allah.

Hajj is an education in *Tawhid* (Oneness of God), an education in morals and an education of the social kind. It is knowing why we do what we do. It means reaching the shores of an unprecedented witnessing, having gone through a great test, a big ordeal. The purpose of the Hajj is to undergo a process of moralisation. The Almighty enjoins that there is to be no lewdness, no anger, no disobedience, and no quarrel during the Hajj, even if it is otherwise justified (Al Baqarah, 197). These are traits Islam asks from us also in daily life.

The Hajj duty is a journey awaited for a lifetime. It is the name of beginning a journey to reaching our qibla (central direction of prayer), the Kaaba which we face five times a day; to discovering ourselves; and to arriving at the place of oneness. From that perspective, we can go on to defining Hajj duty as five journeys in one.

Firstly, Hajj is a spiritual journey into our self, to our inner world, our spiritual realm, our heart – the 'Sultan of our body'. It is a great journey we make to free ourselves from the captivity of hubris, pride, ambition, passion, greed, jealousy, hatred, anger, revenge, shirk, sin, passion for power, passion for wealth and lust, passion for fortune, office, and rank. It is the biggest commitment a servant makes to Allah. It is the ultimate pact, the greatest agreement with the Creator. Every obligation, element, move, custom and ritual in Hajj is a spiritual, sincere, verbal, and physical commitment we have made to the Almighty. When we look at the Hajj duty from that viewpoint, we see that every act of worship, every ritual we perform from the moment we leave our home to the moment we go back to our country has a unique meaning in its own right. Therefore Ihram, Miqat, Talbiyah, Tawaf, Sa'y, Maqam-e-Ibrahim, Arafat, Waqfa, Muzdalifah, Mina, Jamarat, and the stoning of the devil each have a specific spiritual aspect that reminds us of ourselves and takes us to our inner world, to our heart.

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Secondly, Hajj is a journey to our destiny – our afterlife, our eternal life, the intermediate realm, the day of the scale and the gathering place. It is virtually the rehearsal for resurrection and gathering. A prospective Hajji who puts on his Ihram is as if he has put on his shroud while still in this world. Everything he has known as the criteria for value such as wealth, office, rank and so on melts away in the colour of Ihram; this colourless, seamless, badgeless, flagless dress isolates him from all earthly power and means. It changes his world at Miqat. After that, he will appear before Allah at Arafat, then he will go to the gathering and will be interrogated. Then he will go to the House of Allah again, and come back to life as – in the words of our Prophet ﷺ – purified like a new-born, cleansed and conscious.

Thirdly, Hajj is a journey and a Hijrah to our brothers, to the brotherhood of faith in Islam. From that perspective, the Hajj duty is a universal congress where all the Muslims in the world come together, meet, and get to know each other. It is a 'global Muslims summit' attended by not only those from countries with Muslim nations but also by Muslims from other countries. It is the most unique gathering in the world, one that involves delegations representing all the Muslims of the world. In that sense, Hajj is the most meaningful journey in a Muslim's life; it is also a turning point, a revival, an invigoration and a rebirth. Millions of Muslims who speak different languages, belong to different races, come from different regions but are one in faith, spirit, goal, prayer, wish and supplication come together in the Holy Land and move in unison together. All Muslims, from Africans to Asians, Americans to Europeans, Indians to Malaysians, Australians to Iranians perform the ritual of Hajj altogether. They joyfully sing in harmony "Labbayka Allāhumma Labbayk" (Here I am at Your service O Allah, here I am). As such, each one becomes a drop in the river of Tawhid.

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Fourth, Hajj is a journey to our history, the history of Tawhid, and therefore of Islam. We make a magnificent journey to the history of Islamic monotheism which began with the Prophet Adam, had its rules renewed with Prophet Abraham and Prophet

Ishmael, and became continuous until eternity with our Beloved Prophet. We experience Islam's live history in Makkah where Allah's Messenger was born and raised and fought for Tawhid. We take a journey to the Prophet's ways and morals, the traces of Ashab al-Kiram, Makkah and Madinah, and civilisation. From that perspective, Hajj is an education in Tawhid.

Fifth, Hajj duty is a journey to the Almighty, the Rabb (Lord) of the House. In a sense, Hajj is turning to divine love. It is the lovers turning to the loved. In our culture, all attributions used for the Kaaba in the Quran and Hadith are also used for the human heart. The heart is called the House of Allah – which is the name of Kaaba – as the most beautiful place where Allah is manifested is the heart of the perfect human being. Mawlana Rumi says: "Kaaba is a building made by Abraham, son of Terah. But the human heart is made by Allah the Exalted, it was made by Him." It is thus very important to preserve the love for the small building in that greater one.

The Hajj duty must be performed by taking into consideration of all the journeys, by comprehending the meaning of every symbol and ritual in them. It should also be performed with the awareness of how modernity – modernisation of symbolic places, the change of means of transportation, for example – have impacted the nature of the Hajj. Indeed, the biggest challenge we face in Hajj today is the impact of modernity on the spirituality of the Hajj.

In conclusion, Hajj is one of the most meaningful journeys a person takes in their lifetime. That is why the Hajj duty must be a turning point in our lives. As people who have experienced the gathering, we must preserve for life what we have gained during our Hajj. Mistakes and sins of the past must be left behind as forgiven. The pre-Hajj and post-Hajj life must be clearly separated. In that sense, the Hajj duty must be an invigoration, a revival and a spiritual rebirth for every Hajji. **E**

The spiritual journey of a Muslim starts at their homes and culminates at the Kaaba, the House of God



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