

Notes from a German Pilgrim

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Murad Hofmann, who accepted Islam in 1980, was born a Catholic in Germany, in 1931. He graduated from Union College in New York, completed his legal studies at Munich University, where he received a Doctorate in Jurisprudence and then, in 1960, received an LLM from Harvard Law School. He was Director of Information for NATO

in Brussels and subsequently German ambassador to Algeria and then to Morocco. He performed Umrah in 1982 and Hajj in 1992. In 2009, Hofmann was chosen by the committee of Dubai International Holy Quran Award (DIHQA) as the Islamic Personality of 2009 for his countless contributions to Islam.

Like all Muslims, I was looking forward to visiting Makkah and extremely happy when this finally did happen, altogether seven times. It is a wonderful feeling to be embedded there in the friendship of thousands of fellow Muslims. Even better: after performing the rites one feels like being newly born and destined for eternal happiness.

It is, of course, quite a physical strain to fulfil all the requirements of *Hajj*. The climate alone may be tough, not only for pilgrims from the Northern hemisphere. It can also feel quite strenuous and disorientating to navigate through those fellow Muslims coming from all around the world, although one does feel a brotherhood with them.

Long before leaving Germany on my way to Jeddah, I tried to prepare for all requirements of a successful pilgrimage and therefore established a list of necessary items to take along, including effective sun cream, slippers, a tiny Arab dictionary, and an equally tiny copy of the Quran. The next necessary step was obtaining a hajj-visa from the consular section of the nearest Saudi embassy. The requirement was that my passport should be valid for one more year. I took a Lufthansa plane directly from Frankfurt to Jeddah and put on my pilgrims garb already during the flight – to the astonishment of some fellow travellers. The Saudi airport officials were seemingly touched when they discovered this blond-haired, white-skinned pilgrim. I remember even one who had tears in his eyes while checking my passport.

I checked into a huge hotel from which I could overlook the mosque and its yard. This fascinated me and made me feel like a pilgrim already. When I came down, mingling with the crowd, I was astonished by the courtesy shown by all pilgrims and I knew, of course, that they did not wish to risk a fault in their good manners. All pilgrims try to touch the Kaaba. This might lead to quarrels. But not so among pilgrims eager to protect the validity of their endeavour. When I had finally made my way to the Kaaba I was immediately seized by the feeling that, having achieved this highest aim of Muslims, I could now die safely.

I remained dumb, mute, silent, speechless, but most of all grateful – conscious of the fact that as a hajji I had achieved the most important aim and endeavour of my religious life.

Slowly walking out of the court I almost felt dizzy because my dreams, dreamt for years on end, had finally come true, Alhamdulillah! As dreams have to end, so too do pilgrimages to Makkah. Sitting again in my hotel room with a view of the Mosque, I tried to photograph mentally as much as possible of this unique event, bound to change and dominate my future life. Taking my seat back in the plane to Frankfurt, I would not have minded if it had crashed – were it not for my fellow travellers. I remained dumb, mute, silent, speechless, but most of all grateful – conscious of the fact that as a *hajji* I had achieved the most important aim and endeavour of my religious life.

The plane did not crash. Rather I found myself back in Germany again, among “normal” people leading their “normal” life. For a while I was astonished that life seemed to go on as normal because my mind was still fixed on the glory of Makkah and Madinah. But, then, life imposes on all of us its version of reality, and gradually we re-enter our usual way of life – In my case, however, with a great new vision, the vision of a world in Allah’s ﷻ hand. **F**