

The Hajj

The following is an excerpt from 'Introduction to Islam' by Dr. M. Hamidullah (paragraphs 177 to 184)

Hajj literally means to travel (i.e., towards God) and it also means an effort to dominate something (the self, in this connection). Conventionally this term is translated as pilgrimage, although this far from gives the exact significance of the word *Hajj*. This is the third of the religious duties of a Muslim. It is obligatory on every adult, man or woman, to go once in his or her life-time to Mecca in order to perform there the great Effort for annihilating the ego (*fana*), i.e., assimilating one's self with the will of God. Those who do not possess the material means of travel, are exempted from it. But which Muslim would not collect, little by little, the necessary amount for being able one day to visit the centre of his religion, the Ka'bah or the House of God? The Qur'an (3:96) does not exaggerate when it says that this is the oldest House in the World dedicated by mankind to God and to the cult of monotheism. If one were to think only of Abraham – who according to the Islamic tradition, was but the restorer of the edifice erected originally by Adam – it would still be older than the temple of Jerusalem, constructed by Solomon. No other place of worship older than the Ka'bah of Mecca, is known to be still functioning.

The Rites of Hajj

At the borders of the sacred territory, around Mecca, one puts off the ordinary dress, and puts on by way of a religious uniform, two sheets of cloth—a loin cloth and a shoulder cover, a dress required only of men, not of women. He is bare-headed, and one tries to forget one's self during the several days of the *Hajj*. He goes to 'Arafat, in the suburbs of Mecca, to pass there the day in meditation. Towards evening, he returns, passes the night at Muzdalifah, and early next morning arrives in Mina which is on the outskirts of Mecca. There he passes three days, during which he lapidates Satan every morning, sacrifices a goat, pays a short visit to Ka'bah for performing the ritual sevenfold circumambulation and running between the hills of Safa and Marwah in front of the Ka'bah. (???)

The Symbolic Background

When coming down from Paradise, Adam and Eve were separated and lost. They searched for each other, and by the grace of God met together at 'Arafat. In gratitude to God, the descendants of Adam and Eve turn to Him, make an effort to forget themselves and be assimilated with the Divine Presence,

with a view to entreat His pardon for their shortcomings in the past and His help for the future.

The Stoning of Satan

As to the lapidation of Satan, it may be recalled that when Abraham claimed to love God above everything else, God demanded of him as a proof the immolation of his beloved son. To add to this trial, Satan went first to Abraham to dissuade him from his resolution – and they say that this happened at Mina – but Abraham chased Satan away by pelting stones at him. Then he went to Hagar, and lastly to Ishmael himself and each one of them did the same. So one repeats the acts symbolically, and resolves to fight diabolic temptation.

Circumambulation

The visit of the "House of God" is self explanatory. To give evidence of obedience, one goes there with respect and in humility. It is a very old custom to circumambulate a thing for showing one's readiness to sacrifice one's self for the object of devotion and care and love. It is like mounting the guard.

The Black Stone

The Black Stone requires a particular mention on account of the many misunderstandings on its score. It is not a meteorite, but a black stone. Its practical importance is to show the starting point of the circumambulation, and by its colour it is conspicuous in the building. Secondly, this stone is not worshiped, nor do Muslims even prostrate in the direction of this stone, prostration being done towards any and every part of the building of the Ka'bah, and more often than not one turns to directions other than the Black Stone (*al-Hajar al-Aswad*). It may be recalled that when the Qaramitah ravaged Mecca in 318 H./930, they carried the Black Stone to their country as booty and it remained there for 21 long years. In the course of this absence of the Black Stone, no Muslim turned to the place where it was kept (in 'Uman), but continued to turn towards the Ka'bah in Mecca. Even the building of the Ka'bah is not essential: if it is demolished, for instance for repairs and new construction, Muslims turn to the same spot, whether the Ka'bah with its Black Stone is there or not. As said, the practical importance of the Black Stone is that it indicates the point from which the circumambulation begins and at which it

ends; but it has a symbolical significance too. In the Hadith, the Prophet has named it the "right hand of God" (*yamin-Allah*) and for a purpose. In fact one poses there one's hand to conclude the pact, and God obtains there our pact of allegiance and submission. In the ~uranic terminology, God is the king, and He has not only His treasures and His armies, but also His realm; in the realm there is a metropolis (*Umm al-qura*), and in the metropolis naturally a palace (*Bait-Allah*, house of God). If a subject wants to testify to his loyalty, he has to go to the royal palace and conclude personally the pact of allegiance. The right hand of the invisible God must be visible symbolically. And that is the *al-Hajar al-Asward*, the Black Stone in the Ka'bah.

Running between Safa and Marwah

As to the act of covering the ground between Safa and Marwah seven times, it is related that when Abraham left his wife Hagar and the suckling Ishmael in the desolate and uninhabited site of Mecca, the provision of water was soon exhausted. So Hagar ran hither and thither, driven by maternal affection, to search for some water for the thirst-stricken baby. Then the spring Zamzam gushed forth. So one repeats this act in the same place where Hagar did it, to pay homage to maternal love and in thanksgiving for the mercy of God.

Social Aspects

The social aspect is not less striking. The world brotherhood of Muslims manifests itself there in the most vivid manner. The believers, without distinction of race, language, birthplace or even class, feel the obligation to go there and to mix with one another in a spirit of fraternal equality. They camp together in the desert, and perform their religious duties in common. For several days, at fixed hours, they march, make a halt, pass the night under tents or in bivouac -- all this, to a greater extent than the five daily prayer-services, trains the soldier of God for a life of discipline.

The Last Sermon

When the Prophet Muhammad performed his own *Hajj*, a few months before his demise, he then uttered from above the Hill of Mercy (Jabal ar-Rahmah) a sermon which constitutes the Charter of Humanity in Islam. Some 140,000 Muslims had come that year, from all parts of Arabia, to listen to this testament of their Prophet, which may be analyzed as follows: (i) he recalled the basic elements of Islam, *viz.*, belief in the One God with no icons or other material representation; (ii) equality of all Muslims without discrimination on account of race or class, and there being no superiority to one over any other except by the individual excellence in the matter of piety and fear of God;

(iii) sacrosanct character of the three fundamental rights of each and every human being concerning his person, his property and his honour;

(iv) prohibition of transactions involving interest – big or small;

(v) prohibition of vendetta and private justice, obligation of treating the womenfolk well;

(vi) constant redistribution and circulation of the private wealth to avoid accumulation in the hands of a few (by means of the Law of obligatory inheritance, restrictions on wills and prohibition of interest, etc.);

(vii) emphatic restatement that the Divine Revelation alone should be the source of law for our conduct in all walks of life.

The pilgrims are made to hear this same sermon every year, [on the Day of Arafat, 9th Zul-Hijjah, and it is] recited from above this same sacred Hill of Mercy, at 'Arafat.

Spiritual and Temporal Aspects

There is a reason to believe that a pre-Islamic practice was continued, at least in the early generations of Muslims, during the *Hajj* festivities: Profiting by the occasion provided by such a vast assembly, an annual literary congress was organized, where poets "published" their new compositions, orators made harangues before the spell-struck masses to demonstrate their talents, professional wrestlers fascinated the spectators, and traders brought merchandises of all sorts. That happened in the near-by 'Ukaz. Caliph 'Umar gave it a most salutary administrative character. For this was an occasion for him to hold the sessions of an appeal court against his governors and commanders as also of public consultation on important projects in view. Let us recall once again, that in Islam the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the temporal co-exist in harmonious collaboration.

Inner Fitness and Purpose of Spiritual Preparation

The following is an excerpt from 'Islamic Faith and Practice' by M. Manzoor Nomani, Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Lucknow – India. © 1973 – pgs. 98-102 from the chapter entitled 'Practical Law'.

The basic purpose of the Haj pilgrimage is the same as that of any other mode of worship – propitiation of the Lord – and yet, there is also something unique about it.

There exists a special relationship, a peculiar affinity, between the Prophet – and, through him between his *Ummat* – and Hazrat Ibrahim. The Haj, in truth, constitutes both in its form and essence, the symbolization of the Will of God, and the idea underlying its ordainment is that every Muslim who can afford to undertake the pilgrimage should, at least, once in his

life, betake himself to the place where he most glorious episode of Hazrat Ibrahim's life of utter dedication to his Creator had taken place, and cast himself, for the time being, in the role of that superbly self-effacing, all sacrificing Friend of the Lord. He should give a practical proof of his attachment to the path of that true friend, slave and devotee of the Divine and of his respectful devotion to the distinctive practices the Lord has ordained for the occasion and create within himself the sincere urge to dye his entire existence, inwardly as well as outwardly, in the hue of that august patriarch and give his soul a chance to take in its share of the magnificent spiritual glories of the place.

I shall dwell no further on the essential beauty and richness of the Haj because these can be understood properly only when one experiences them personally during the course of the pilgrimage. This much, however, I will certainly say that when, by the Grace of God, you may decide to undertake the pilgrimage, concentrate more on preparing yourself inwardly and spiritually for it than on anything else. Sadly enough, people bestow the greatest thought on the material comforts of the journey, they even want to take with them such trivial articles as salt, pepper and pickles and to equip themselves with as many as ten suits of clothes ; they get occupied with these preparations for months in advance but do nothing by way of making themselves fit spiritually for the great occasion. The result is that they gain nothing from it and come back as they had gone. It is not that a pilgrim is not allowed to furnish himself with material necessities before he sets out for the pilgrimage – within a proper limit, it is essential to do so – but these things do not make the real equipment for the Haj. The real equipment lies in getting oneself ready with all the information needed for the carrying out of the duty and in the acquirement of the inner fitness which enables one to receive the rich spiritual benefits accruing from it. An important part of the endeavour to establish Haj must be to create in the people's minds an awareness of this fact. Without it, the *Hajj* will remain a soulless form and an empty ceremony.

[Earlier in this chapter] we have examined the four fundamental duties of *Namaz* [*Salat* = Service of Worship], *Zakat*, *Roza* [fasting] and *Hajj* in the course of our study of worship in Islam. After the affirmation of faith, these duties constitute the four pillars of the Islamic religion. This is so, in our view, because like the affirmation of faith, they constitute an end in themselves and are to be carried out in their prescribed forms. They provide the practical evidence of a Muslim being really a one.

There are many things occupying a place of importance in religion for which no definite procedure has been prescribed by the *Shariat* – only the principles governing them have been laid down – nor do they make an end in themselves. They are a means to an end. For instance, it is a religious obligation to learn the faith and to teach it to others, and to serve and to defend it to the best of one's ability, but, as you

know, no precise method has been formulated for these as in the case of *Namaz*, *Zakat* etc. These duties are also not an end in themselves – the study of faith is necessary because without it, people will not be able to discharge their religious obligations properly and, so on. They possess, as we have pointed out a few lines earlier, a definite, unalterable form and are also their own end.

Finally, the word 'Islam,' denotes submission. It is another name for surrendering oneself entirely to God. No other act of religion expresses this condition more eloquently than the four fundamental duties. This may be another reason why these have been made the basic ingredients of Islam. One more reason that suggests itself to the mind is that these duties, if performed in the right spirit, exert their influence on all the spheres of existence and are capable of transforming the whole life into one of faith and submission. The stipulation, of course, is that they retain some inner resemblance with the *Namaz*, *Zakat*, *Roza* and *Hajj* of the Prophet and do not slip into a dead formality. It is without a trace of a doubt that these foundational duties are endowed to tremendous potentialities. If our prayers and our fasts and *Zakat* and *Hajj* are not making themselves felt in our lives to any noteworthy degree, it is because they no longer pulsate with life.

One of the changes that come over the followers of the Prophets with the passage of time is that their acts of worship degenerate into rituals. The Muslims have not proved themselves to be above this rule. Such of them as have shut their eyes completely to the need of abiding by the compulsory items of worship and are, for practical purposes, leading a life of infidelity are outside the purview of our discussion at the moment. What they are going to end up in will come before them on the Day of Reckoning. The mournful truth is that even with Muslims like us who observe the basic obligation of worship regularly, the case is that we are simply hugging their skeletons from which the spirit has departed. Very few of us can truthfully claim that the generalization we have just indulged in, does not apply to them. Or, at least those sections off the *Ummat* which still adhere to the fundamental obligations would be finding themselves in an entirely different state today. They would be their own example in the world for moral integrity, for social uprightness and for the excellence of their conduct in the practical and material walks of life. The lives of these men would be the most striking models of piety and goodness. Whoever came to know them would notice in them a peculiar charm and a unique fragrance. This is not a flight of fancy but truth. The few deep-hearted men of genuine faith and endeavour that provide an exception to the general gloom – men whose merit and substance, with those offered up by the Prophet – even today make the finest specimens of humanity and people are struck by an inexplicable magnetism of spirit, and undefinable pervasive quality, as they come into contact with them. The tragedy of our times is that extremely rare as

such men have become, the desire to seek them out and to profit by their company has become rarer. Should Allah grant one the good fortune to dedicate oneself to the task of Islamic regeneration, one's chief work would then lie in injecting fresh life and vitality into the foundational duties by bringing the *Namaz, Zakat, Roza* and *Hajj* of the *Ummat* in line with the *Namaz, Zakat, Roza* and *Hajj* of the sacred Prophet.