

The Hajj - The Pilgrimage

(part 1 of 2)



It's that time of the year, Muslims all over the world are getting restless. Their Home in the heart of the planet beckons them. It's time to pay homage to the Beloved God in the House. It's time to come Home. It's time to come Home to the Holy Sanctuary of Kaaba. It's time to leave all and follow Him. It's time to abandon this illusory world and come to the House of God. It's time for Hajj--the Pilgrimage. Those who can go will head to Mecca, those who can't will join in the festivities of Homecoming wherever they may be by celebrating the Eid of Sacrifice.

Hajj is a commemoration of love and celebration of faith. We commemorate Abraham's Supreme Sacrifice in love of his Beloved in Mina. We celebrate his wife Hagar's display of unprecedented love for the infant Ishmael and her unflinching trust in the Providence in the lonely desert around Safa and Marwa. We venerate God's Greatest Gift, the Quran by spending a day in Arafat where the final revelation was sent. We celebrate faith by coming face-to-face to the Qiblah of our prayers.

Hajj is also an act of renunciation. Muslims from every corner of the globe don their coffins--two cotton sheets--to represent their deaths to this life and head to their Primordial Home. They pay their debts, ask forgiveness of everyone, bid farewell to one and all and prepare to die to this world to live in Him. We are now ready for Hajj to the Kaaba very special place.

The Kaaba is a special place. It was the first house of worship built by the first man. God commanded Adam to make a journey. He walked umpteen months until he arrived guided by God to Mecca. Here, he was instructed to build Him a House. This was mankind's first House of Worship. This is where we first learned to

mourn our separation from our Beloved. This is where Adam shed countless tears to lament loss of paradisiacal glory. This is where we sought to seek His nearness. This is where we sought to experience His intimacy. This House is the Archetype which basks under another House situated far beyond the realm of the Visible Universe and the prison of space and serial time. This is the first act of reconciliation with our Paradisiacal Destiny in the Home of our Beloved in spite of our terrestrial sojourn.

The Kaaba is a special place. It was once lost to us but our Beloved led His Friend Abraham (may God shower him with praise) to this Sanctuary and gave him the task of restoring this House. Our father recruited his son Ishmael for the Holy Task. For months at end, father and son toiled under the searing desert sun sustained only by their burning love for the Eternal God. This choice was no random choice. Abraham was the man for the job. Every year, when men and women were to come to this blessed House, they were to come on 10th of the month of Dhul-Hijjah. This auspicious day God asked Abraham to make the Supreme Sacrifice and Abraham delivered. Allah asked His Friend to sacrifice his son Ishmael and he obliged.

Kaaba is a special place. Its foundations have been fortified by love and faith of Abraham's family. We go there to commemorate love. We go there to celebrate faith. Abraham lived the true meaning of Surrender. He loved God, his Friend, above all. God gave him a dream where he saw himself sacrificing his son. Persistence of the dream convinced him that it wasn't just a dream but an allusion from the Infinite. He intimated the dream to his son who readily concurred. Once it was known to be God's Will, the son didn't offer any excuses. It was a foregone conclusion that His Will be done. Father and son set off to the designated place. When they reached their destination, son suggested that the father cover his eyes so his love does not overwhelm him into disobeying His master. At the very moment that Abraham let loose his knife, the son was substituted with a lamb. This time and this day was made sacred. Every year, millions come this very day. Millions retrace the steps of these two in the valley of Mina, they stop where they stopped, walk where they walked and finally arrive where the Supreme Sacrifice was offered. Here, everyone offers a sacrifice in His Love and then gives it to the impoverished people of the land all the while marveling at Abraham's burning love and faith in God that he was willing to sacrifice his most precious love. Those who can't be here, celebrate this wonderful sacrifice wherever they may be in any part of the world. For indeed, the love of God must be celebrated.

(part 2 of 2)

The Kaaba is a special place. We commemorate Abraham and his son's faith and surrender. We also celebrate Mother Hagar's love. Mother's love is the highest form of selfless human love. Hagar typified this love so well. She combined this

love with her unshakable trust in God. Abraham was instructed to bring her and her infant son Ishmael near the mound that was once the Kaaba. In this desolate place with nary a single soul and nary a water source, he left them with a leather bag containing some dates, and a small water-skin containing some water, and set out homeward. Ishmael's mother followed him saying, "O Abraham! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything (to enjoy)?"

She repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him, "Has Allah ordered you to do so?"

He said, "Yes."

She said, "Then He will not neglect us."

What an exemplary Trust in their Beloved God! They knew that the Causer of all Causes will provide. He is Eminently Resourceful. Ishmael's mother went on suckling Ishmael and drinking from the water (she had). When all water ran out, she became thirsty and her child also became thirsty. She started looking at Ishmael tossing in agony; she left him, for she could not endure looking at him, and found that the mountain of Safa was the nearest mountain to her on that land. She stood on it and started looking at the valley keenly so that she might see somebody, but she could not see anybody. Then she descended from Safa and when she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and trouble, till she crossed the valley and reached the Marwa mountain where she stood and started looking, expecting to see somebody, but she could not see anybody. She repeated that (running between Safa and Marwa) seven times. God loved this selfless display of motherly love so much that every pilgrim to His Holy House must proceed 7 times between the Twin Peaks of Safa and Marwa.

When she reached Marwa (for the last time) she heard a voice and she asked herself to be quiet and listened attentively. She heard the voice again and said, "O, (whoever you may be)! You have made me hear your voice; have you got something to help me?" And behold! She saw an angel at the place of Zamzam, digging the earth with his heel till water flowed from that place. She started to make something like a basin around it, using her hand in this way, and started filling her water-skin with water with her hands, and the water was flowing out after she had scooped some of it. This wonderful gift of God hasn't stopped yet. Hundreds of Millions come every year and take gallons and gallons of the Holy Water with them and still the small well never goes dry. Mecca is a special place.

In celebration of the two momentous events in Abraham's family, we are reminded that Allah's Will always work for our highest good. In the end, it all worked out for Abraham's family and in the end if we trust Him everything will work out for us too. From Him have we come and to Him shall we return!

Kaaba is a special place. It is overwhelming to be in company of 3 million brothers and sisters in faith, all enshrouded in humble whites. The highest kings to the humblest of laborers are dressed alike. They stand shoulder to shoulder, they run side by side and they greet each other the greeting of peace. People of all races intermingle as co-equals. Black, white, yellow and brown all come together in harmony before their Beloved. In this searing passion for the Loved One, there is no distraction. He Alone Matters! It is wonderful to lift one's face and see one's Qiblah face-to-face. All their lives 5 times a day they turned their faces to their Qiblah, the Holy Kaaba, and now they see it right in front of them in all its majesty and glory. They savor the sweetness of coming Home all the while exclaiming *Labbaik Allahuma labbaik, la sharika laka labbaik, Labbaik Allahuma labbaik*: I have come, my Lord, I have come. No one participates in Your Divinity (so I have nowhere to come but You). I have come." I have come, my Beloved. I have come.

We circulate around the Holy Kaaba proclaiming all the while our Arrival. Circling around the earthly shadow of the Pole, we are reminded to keep our Beloved at the Center of our lives. We are reminded to keep Him in front of our lives and in center of our existence.

Accept the Hajj of all our blessed Muslim brothers and sisters who are given the grace of your Presence in Your Exalted House. Give us the Grace to one day be able to come visit You. O Allah, there is no one worthy of Love, Worship and Surrender but You. Allow us to love you, worship You and submit to Your Presence and to Your Wish and Will. Amen!