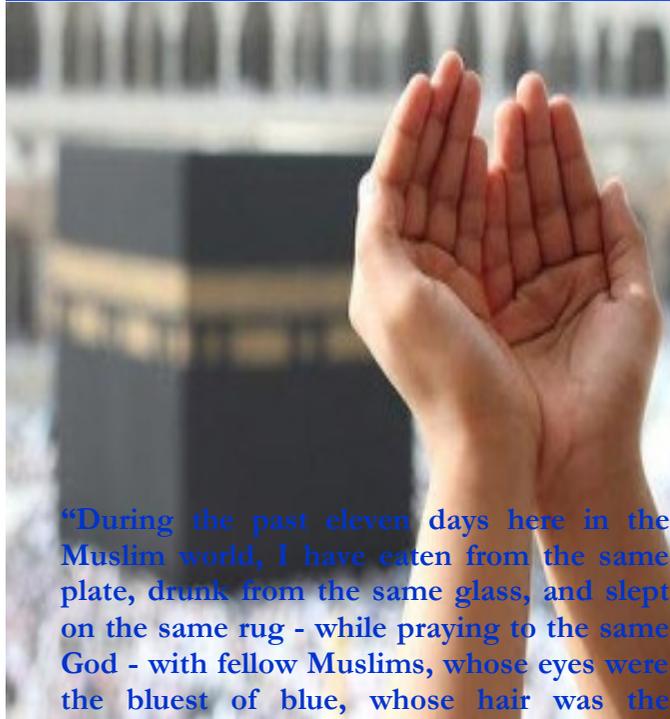


Pilgrimage to Mecca

Here I am at Your service O God, here I am



"During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept on the same rug - while praying to the same God - with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the

blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the deeds of the white Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan and Ghana. We were truly all the same (brothers) - because their belief in one God had removed the white from their minds, the white from their behavior, and the white from their attitude."
Malcom X

Ahlan



A h l a n

Primary Business Address
Your Address Line 2
Your Address Line 3
Your Address Line 4

Phone: 555-555-5555
Fax: 555-555-5555
E-mail: someone@example.com

In the midst of the boisterous commotion of life, and people running after their long- and short-term goals, are people who free themselves and travel



to answer the Call of God. *"And proclaim to mankind (the duty of) Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca); they shall come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path."* (Qur'an 22: 27)

Having left behind worldly concerns, the busy multitude of pilgrims flow on to their destination with untiring voices, mindful of nothing except declaring their undivided faithfulness to God Whose House they come to visit, ceaselessly chanting *Talbiyah* (devotional response to God's Call to perform Hajj): *"Here I am at Your service O God, here I am. Here I am at Your service. You have no partner, here I am. Yours alone is all praise and all bounty, and Yours alone is the sovereignty. You have no partner."*

An uncultivable valley in the hot desert of Mecca, surrounded by rows of rocky mountain ranges, was the location in which God ordered His House - the Ka'bah - be built. Built first by Adam (peace be upon him) and destroyed by floods, God subsequently ordered Abraham and his son Ishmael (peace be upon them) to rebuild and purify it. *"Do not associate anything with Me and purify My House for those who circumambulate it, and those who stand in prayer, and those who bow and prostrate."* (Qur'an 22: 26)

Tawaf (circumambulating) the first House of worship of God alone, Muslims thus glorify

every part of it and feel connected to the birthplace of Islam and its long chain of Prophets from Adam to Muhammad (peace be upon them). *"Indeed, the first House (of worship) established for mankind*



was that at Mecca, full of blessing, and a guidance for all beings." (Qur'an 3: 96) It is the direction toward which Muslims around the world turn in their five daily obligatory prayers. *"From wherever you go out (for prayer), turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque."* (Qur'an 2: 150)

Performing Hajj, with the ceremonies it entails, constitutes the fifth pillar of Islam, which God enjoins once in a lifetime on every sane adult Muslim who is physically and financially able. It is the ritual of Islam most representative of unity; one God, one direction (*Qiblah* - Ka'bah - the direction faced in prayer), one mode of dress, one cry, and the awesome assembly on the Day of 'Arafah (9th of Dhul-Hijjah).

The purpose of the journey is both emotional and mental growth. People do not live by theoretical concepts alone. They are powerfully influenced by their feelings. Islam strives to transform faith from thoughts in the mind to feelings that overflow from the heart and direct the body.

The different ceremonies of Hajj powerfully develop the emotions of Muslims toward their God and religion, their past and present, as different nationalities from all over the world gather on a single patch of land. Their modest, unadorned appearance eliminates any difference between a

king and a peasant, or between one race and another, and is a reminder of the only valid measure of superiority among people which Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared during the Farewell Hajj, "O people, verily your Lord is One and your father is one (i.e. Adam). Behold, there is no superiority of the Arab over the non-Arab, or of the non-Arab over the Arab, or of the red over the black, or of the black over the red – except by piety. Have I informed you?" (Musnad Ahmad)



Pilgrims put the world behind them, with just a seamless piece of cloth covering their body, like the shroud we shall be wrapped in when exiting this world. The life of this world is a back and forth journey to God. This is strongly reflected in Hajj, which starts with *Ihram*. This is the ritual state of practicing great self-denial into which a Muslim must enter before performing Hajj. During this state certain physical actions are forbidden, such as having marital relations, applying perfume, shaving the hair, clipping the nails, hunting, and cutting down trees. Any behavioral offense can jeopardize the integrity of Hajj. In this ritual state the dress of male pilgrims consists of two lengths of white cotton, one wrapped around the loins, and the other thrown over the left shoulder. *Ihram* clothes for women should be loose-fitting and fully cover the body except the face and hands.

The rituals are designed not only to be performed, but lived out. During *Sa'y* (going between As-Safa and Al-Marwah hills during Hajj), the pilgrims live through the parable of Hajar (peace be upon her) and her son Ishmael in which Abraham left them in this place devoid of any means of survival.

As Abraham turned to depart, Hajar held the reins of his mount and asked, "To whom are you leaving us?" Abraham did not answer. Hajar asked, "God ordered you to do so?" He nodded affirmatively. She said, "Then He will never leave us be lost."

She trustingly submitted to the Decree of God, and her trial of faith started; her baby became very thirsty. She knew she must look for a spring, a well, or a caravan that had water. She climbed As-Safa hill to get a better view of her surroundings. Finding nothing, she hurried to Al-Marwah hill but found not a trace of life. She returned again to As-Safa hill then back to Al-Marwah. She ran between the two hills seven times, until she could run no more, but found nothing. Exhausted, she sat beside her crying infant. While writhing with thirst, her little infant's leg hit the ground and water gushed forth abundantly. It became the well-known Zamzam Well whose blessed water continues to flow today.

Every pilgrim returns home with this principle settled in their heart: if earthly means end, do not despair, keep on trying, God will never abandon you, as happened with Hajar and her infant son Ishmael. It helps a believer cope with all the hardships of life firmly and hopefully. "Is not He Who responds to the distressed one, when he calls on Him, and Who removes the evil?" (Qur'an 27: 62)

During Hajj, the futile patterns of life are replaced with fervent *Salah* (prayer), *Sa'y*, *Tawaf* (circumambulation of the Ka'bah), *Talbiyah*, and *Dhikr* (remembrance of God) and culminate on the 9th of Dhul-Hijjah in a multinational demonstration on the mount of 'Arafah, which is the essence of Hajj. Each pilgrim is calling on God alone, trusting in Him alone, glorifying His Name alone, and supplicating to Him alone. From before sunrise until after sunset, only God is mentioned, only God is prayed to. It is a scene of man's evident poverty versus God's Splendid Richness. On that day, the Messenger of God narrated that the Almighty draws near and boasts of the pilgrims before His angels, saying, "Look at my servants. They have come to Me disheveled and covered with dust." (Musnad Ahmad)



Soon after sunset on the Day of 'Arafah, throngs of pilgrims, glorifying and praising God, leave for Muzdalifah to collect pebbles to throw at *Jamarat* (stone pillars marking three pebble-throwing areas) in Mina. This is a reenactment of Prophet Abraham's firm stand against the whispers of Satan, who strove to impede him from fulfilling a vision he had of sacrificing his son Ishmael in obedience to God. Certain situations in life may force us to make a choice between God and something else; no matter how cherished, do as Abraham and Ishmael did – choose God.

Walking with resolute steps, Satan appeared to hinder him three times on his path. Abraham re-

sisted by stoning him each time with seven pebbles. This is a physical ritual that teaches us we should always stone the devil in a nonphysical sense, barring all his gateways to us, by our refusal to yield to his temptations.

However hard the Decree of God may be, the moment the heart is at peace with it, God sends relief. When both Abraham and Ishmael resigned themselves to the Will of God and were ready for the sacrifice, God told Abraham he had fulfilled the vision, and sent down a ram to be sacrificed instead.

The submission of Abraham and his son is celebrated and commemorated by Muslims on the days of *'Eid-ul-Adha* (the Festival of the Sacrifice). During the festival, non-pilgrim Muslims who can afford it and Hajj pilgrims offer a sacrificial animal. The festival marks the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca, which is concluded by the ritual of *Tawaf-ul-Wada`* (farewell circumambulation of the Ka'bah on leaving Mecca).

Impatient and full of longing, most pilgrims, upon finishing Hajj, travel to visit the Prophet's City, Madinah, pray in the Prophet's Mosque, and visit his grave and Baqi` cemetery to feel near to those martyrs who strived and sacrificed their lives for Islam.



Pilgrims do not return home the same as they left. Hajj sincerely performed is a life-changing experience; amid the troubling surges of life, it offers a chance to return home as pure as a newborn. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Anyone who comes on pilgrimage to this House and neither says nor does something bad will return (as sinless) as on the day their mother gave birth to them." (Sahih Al-Bukhary)