

Transcript: Practices, Pilgrimage to Makka

The Hajj

The annual pilgrimage to Makka or the Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam [Q. 22:25-30].¹

The events of the Hajj are connected with Abraham, Hagar and Isma'il and are located in and around the holy city of Makka. They were given a definite shape by the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad but they uniquely tie in the faith of Islam and Muslims with the earlier tradition going back through Abraham and Isma'il to Adam and Eve.

Abraham, according to both Bible and Qur'an, was married to Sarah but she was unable to have children. Abraham took a second wife, Hagar, an Egyptian, and together they had Isma'il. Later, Sarah was also blessed with a son in her old age, Isaac. According to the Bible, Sarah wanted Hagar and Isma'il sent away and Abraham finally agreed to do this after receiving a message from God, which said that God would protect them and raise up a mighty nation from Isma'il.

When Abraham, Hagar and Isma'il went into the desert, they were guided by God to the site of the present day city of Makka, where Abraham left them. They grew short of water. Hagar left the young Isma'il to go in search of it. She ran to the top of each of two small hills, *al-Safa* and *al-Marwa*, to look for any sign of water. Finding none, she became more frantic and ran backwards and forwards between the two hills. She returned to Isma'il, only to find that he had dug his heels into the ground and God had caused a spring of water to well-up in that place. This was named *Zamzam* and flows to this day in the same place, which has now been incorporated into the Sacred Mosque.

Abraham (Ibrahim) continued to visit his family in Makka and on one of these visits he and Isma'il rebuilt the Ka'ba, the building that stands to this day at the centre of Makka [Q. 2:126-127].² After they had completed the building, they walked around it

¹ **Q. 22:25-30** Indeed those who reject faith and who bar from the way of God and the Sacred Mosque, which We have assigned for all the people, the native and the visitor being equal therein - whoever seeks to do something profane there with the intent of wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful punishment. When we settled for Abraham the site of the House [saying], Do not associate anything with Me, and purify my house for those who go around it, and those who stand [in prayer], and those who bow and prostrate. And proclaim the Hajj to people: they shall come to you on foot and on lean camels coming from every deep pass, that they may witness things beneficial to them, and mention God's name during well-known days over the livestock he has provided them. So eat thereof and feed the distressed poor. Then let them do away with their dirt, and fulfil their vows, and go around the Ancient House.

² **Q. 2:126-127** And when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a safe city, and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in God and the Last Day." He said, "And such as reject faith, for a while I will grant them their pleasure, but soon I will drive them to the

giving thanks and praise to God. The Ka'ba is held by Muslims to be the first building on earth built for the worship of God [Q. 3:96].³ A white stone was brought by Angel Jibril from heaven and was incorporated into a corner of the Ka'ba. Over the centuries that followed, during which the Ka'ba became a place for idol worship before the time of Muhammad, this stone turned black. This black stone is revered by visitors to the Ka'ba today.

The Bible and Qur'an agree that Ibrahim was put to the test by God. He was asked to sacrifice his son. The Bible names him as Isaac. The Qur'an is not explicit about which son was to be sacrificed. Muslim tradition has overwhelmingly understood this to be Isma'il [Q. 37:102-109].⁴

According to the Qur'an, this was a double test of obedience. Isma'il knew that he had been called by God to be sacrificed by his father and he submitted to the will of God. When they were on their way to make the sacrifice, they were tempted by the Devil to rebel against God's command and not go through with it.

They threw stones at the Devil to resist his temptation and drive him away. They arrived at the place of sacrifice but God stopped them just before the act was committed. They had proved their obedience in this ultimate test. They sacrificed a ram instead.

This is the sequence of events that is re-enacted and commemorated at the annual pilgrimage of the Hajj. The fact that the Hajj is part of a tradition that goes back through Muhammad, through Ibrahim, to be linked with Adam and Eve demonstrates that Islam is part of the Abrahamic family of faiths, of which Muhammad is held by Muslims to be the Last and the Seal of the Prophets [Q. 33:40].⁵

The Hajj takes place only once each year on five days in the 12th month of the Islamic calendar, *Dhu 'l-Hijja*. Every adult Muslim should make the Hajj once in his or her

torment of fire, an evil destination!" And when Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House [with this prayer], "Our Lord! Accept this from us, for you are the All-hearing, the All-knowing".

³ Q. **3:96** Indeed the first house to be set up for humankind is the one at Bakka, blessed and a guidance for all nations.

⁴ Q. **37:102-109** When he [Isma'il] was old enough to assist in his endeavour, he [Abraham] said, "My son! I see myself in a dream sacrificing you. See what you think." He said, "Father! Do whatever you have been commanded. If God wishes, you will find me to be among the patient." So when they had both submitted [to God's will], and he had laid him down on his forehead, We called out to him, "O Abraham! You have indeed fulfilled the vision! Thus indeed do We reward the virtuous! This was indeed a manifest test." Then We ransomed him with a great sacrifice, and left for him a good name in posterity: "Peace be to Abraham!"

⁵ Q. **33:40** Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets, and God has knowledge of all things.

lifetime, provided that they have the money and health to do so [Q. 3:97].⁶ Having enough money means being able to afford to travel without compromising the wellbeing of one's family. Many millions of Muslims are too poor and will never be in a position to make the journey. Many can only afford it when they are older and their families can fend for themselves. Some of those who die before they can perform the Hajj have children who are able to perform it later in their name.

Before the pilgrims enter the area surrounding Makka, they are required to enter the state of *ihram*, they put on special clothes (often also referred to as *ihram*) and ordinary physical pleasures and acts are forbidden. For men, *ihram* comprises two plain white sheets of unsewn cloth wrapped around the body. For women, it is a simple dress. This symbolises the absolute equality of human beings as our ordinary clothes often say a lot about how rich we are or which culture we come from. As the 1960s American civil rights activist Malcolm X put it, "Islam is colour-blind". From this time on, the pilgrims have entered into a state of purity and peace, dedicated only to the service and worship of God.

The first rite of the Hajj is the *tawaf*. Pilgrims walk around the Ka'ba seven times in an anticlockwise direction, praising God. The Ka'ba is generally covered by a black cloth on which verses from the Qur'an have been embroidered with gold thread. This is raised during the Hajj to reveal the stone walls beneath.

When they pass the Black Stone, it is recommended that pilgrims kiss it, but due to the large numbers most pilgrims salute it by raising their right hands as was the practice of Muhammad. Beside the Ka'ba, another stone marks the Station of Ibrahim, where tradition has it that Ibrahim used to pray. If possible, pilgrims will try to pray at this special place.

Next, pilgrims walk or jog seven times between the two small hills of *al-Safa* and *al-Marwa*, as Hagar did. Then they can drink the water of *Zamzam* and fill bottles to take home. For those pilgrims who can arrive in Makka earlier, they can perform these two rites in advance and then resume their Hajj with all the other pilgrims.

The high point of the Hajj comes when pilgrims travel to the Plain of Arafat, about twelve miles from Makka. By tradition, this was the site where Adam and Eve were reconciled to God. Rising above the plain is a small hill, "the Mount of Mercy", from which Muhammad preached his Farewell Sermon, during the Hajj a few months before his death [Hadith].⁷ The keynote of this stage is forgiveness. Pilgrims seek

⁶ **Q. 3:97** In it are manifest signs [for example] Abraham's Station, and whoever enters it shall be secure. And it is the duty of humankind toward God to make pilgrimage to the House - for those who can afford the journey to it - and should anyone reject [this obligation], God is indeed without need of the worlds.

⁷ Shortly before his death, the Prophet (pbuh) made the Hajj and preached from the Mount of Mercy, his 'Farewell Sermon':

forgiveness of their sins from God, the All-Merciful [Q. 6:13].⁸ This will be granted if they fulfil four conditions. They must in sincerity acknowledge their sins, cease those sinful practices and resolve not to sin again. Finally they must seek to make good whatever harm has been caused by their sin, e.g., by restoring to the rightful owner something that has been stolen.

The pilgrims stand in prayer for a long time. It is an intensely powerful period of humility before God during which many pilgrims describe having a profound experience of peace, forgiveness and being intimately in the presence of God. They are anticipating the awesome Day of Judgement and the *ihram* will later become the shroud in which their dead bodies are wrapped for burial. As moreover it was at Arafat that Adam and Eve were reconciled to God, the standing at Arafat is symbolically linked to both the beginning of history and the End of Time.

The last rite takes place in Mina and is the stoning of the pillars in remembrance of the way that Ibrahim and Isma'il threw stones to drive away the temptations of the Devil. This takes place over three separate days.

The day of the first stoning is also the Festival of Sacrifice or *'Id al-Adha*, which is celebrated not just in Makka but throughout the world, wherever there are Muslims.

On the Hajj, pilgrims commemorate the sacrifice of the ram by Ibrahim and Isma'il by making their own sacrifice of a sheep, goat or camel. Nowadays, many pilgrims pay for an animal to be slaughtered humanely. The vast amounts of meat produced are sent for distribution to the poor in different countries. Away from the Hajj, Muslims also sacrifice an animal and distribute some of the meat to the poor and needy as *qurban*, thus carrying out their duty to give help to others.

Both on the Hajj and in the wider world, this festival is the most important in the Muslim year.

At the end of the Hajj, pilgrims trim their hair or shave their heads and change out of their symbolic clothing [Q. 2:196].⁹ They now have the right to add al-Hajj, for men, or al-Hajjah, for women, in front of their names.

“O men, listen to my words. I do not know whether I shall ever meet you in this place again after this year. Your blood and your property are holy until you meet your Lord, as this day and this month are holy. You will surely meet your Lord and he will ask you about your works. I have told you, he who has a pledge, let him return it to him who entrusted him with it; all usury is abolished, but you have your capital. Wrong not and you shall not be wronged.”

⁸ **Q. 6:13** To God belongs whatever abides in the night and the day, and he is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.

⁹ **Q. 2:196** And complete the Hajj and *umra* for God. But if you are prevented [from completing it], send an offering for sacrifice, such as you may find, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice. And whoever amongst you is ill, or has

Today, in excess of three million people gather for the Hajj each year. The pilgrimage, travelling and being in the heat of the Arabian desert is gruelling. Not surprisingly, with so many people, often elderly, gathered in Makka from around the world, some die during the Hajj. To die in this way is considered by some a great blessing and to be buried in Makka or Madina is a great privilege. Some pilgrims return over the years to repeat the experience but most do it once only. It has a major impact which remains with them for the rest of their lives.

For those who are able to visit Makka at other times of the year, it is possible to make the Minor Pilgrimage or *umra*, which consists only of the first two parts: the circling the Ka'ba and running between the two hills. The remaining rites are only performed once a year during the Hajj. Huge crowds gather to make *umra* during Ramadan.

After they have completed their Hajj (or *umra*) most Muslims will go on to make a *ziyara* or visitation of the Prophet's grave in Madina. Here they will pray to God and ask the Prophet to add his prayers to theirs. Many will go on to visit the tombs in the graveyards in Madina, especially those of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, Hasan, his grandson, and those of his other wives. Based on a Hadith, many try to remain eight days in Madina and pray the prayers that occur on those days in the Prophet's Mosque. By so doing they hope for the Prophet's intercession on the Day of Judgement. Traditionally pilgrims on their way home went via Jerusalem and Hebron to visit sites associated with Prophet Muhammad and the earlier Prophets, especially Abraham and his family. In addition, traditionally Shi'a pilgrims visited holy sites in Damascus and Iraq.

Three of our Muslim scholars give personal reflections on making the Hajj. First, Professor Michot says:

The Hajj is a fantastic experience because you have there very pure, very simple rituals. It is to walk, it is to go in a procession around the Ka'ba, it is just to stand in total humility in front of God among other Muslims, it is to drink a bit of water, *Zamzam*, it is to throw pebbles at those columns representing the devil. So, all things that are accessible to every human being whatever his background, his level of culture. So you could say the ritual investment is very limited, it's very simple, it's very pure; but the spiritual benefit is enormous. It is enormous because you are brought back to the essential and you are brought back to Muslim history. It relates you to Abraham, who built the Ka'ba, but it also projects you into your own future and shows the end of the whole story,

an ailment in his scalp [necessitating shaving], [he should] in compensation either fast, or give in charity, or offer sacrifice. And when you are in peaceful conditions [again], if any one wishes to continue the *umra* on to the Hajj, he must make an offering, such as he can afford, but if he cannot afford it, he should fast three days during the Hajj and seven days on his return; making ten days in all. This is for those who leave the Sacred Mosque. And fear God, and know that God is strict in punishment.

which is the Day of Resurrection. Because when we are all in Arafat, it is like a rehearsal for the Day of Judgement and it transcends history from this point of view. You are in another dimension of reality, it's not just being in Makka relating to past history, Abraham, or being with the rest of the community there; it is also making you think of what you will have to go through one day with the Judgement, with all the other Muslims.

Maulana Raza reflects:

I am lucky that I have performed the Hajj more than one time, and for me, Hajj is a journey of regeneration of my spirituality, and it is a journey of piety and devotion towards God. At the same time, I personally felt when I was performing Hajj, that it is a great international festival of brotherhood and equality. Also, I think that Hajj is a great experience that has forced many of us to rearrange our thought patterns and our lifestyles.

Shaykh Bahmanpour focuses on the Day of Arafat:

There is a Hadith from the Prophet (peace be upon him), who says the whole Hajj is summarised in Arafat. And the reason is that in Arafat you feel [you are] standing before God without any mediation. You feel you are anticipating the Day of Judgement. Everyone there, with all their different cultures, different ranks, different positions, are standing in simple white clothes, calling their Lord, talking to their Lord, asking forgiveness, asking whatever they want, and you really feel that there is no-one on this earth that can help you, on whom you can rely, except the one Lord to whom everyone is turning. It gives a collective sense of turning towards the Lord which is very, very pleasant. You feel that you are not alone in this respect. Although faith is a private thing in your heart but suddenly you see that it's not private, it's something which is in the heart of everyone around you. Everyone is calling upon one thing, which is loved by everyone, there on that one plain. And that is really, really a nice experience.