

## *Hajj* (Pilgrimage)

PILGRIMAGE is the last of the five pillars of Islam, the religious duties which constitute the fundamental duties of Islam. Whereas the first, the *shahādah* is the “entrance ticket” to Islam, salah and fasting are incumbent upon all Muslims unless they are physically incapable. Zakat is a “must” on all wealth whether it is possessed by a minor or an adult. Pilgrimage to Makkah is incumbent only upon the adult Muslim who has earned the wealth needed for the trip, has paid the zakah due on it, has fulfilled all his debts to his fellowmen, and has provided adequately for all his dependents during his projected absence.

Once the decision to undertake it is reached, pilgrimage begins with many celebrations and preparations at home. When the time comes for travel, the whole community goes out to bid the pilgrim farewell and wish him a pilgrimage acceptable to God. Upon arrival in the Hijaz and before entering Makkah al-Mukarramah (the blessed), the pilgrim sheds all his clothes and ornaments, takes a purifying ablution, and declares to God his *niyyah* or intention to perform the pilgrimage. He dons two pieces of unsewn white linen or cotton, one to cover his body from the waist down, the other from the waist up leaving the head bare. Henceforth he is not to shave or cut his hair, not to clip his finger nails, not to wear anything to distinguish him from the rest. He can, of course, change his wraps for clean ones whenever he

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wishes. Women wear normal dress in form of long robe, covering the body from head to foot, leaving face and hands exposed.

This clothing requirement is charged with religious meaning. The pilgrim is here to meet his Creator. He does so as a creature on par with all other human creatures of God. His wealth and social class, his political power as aristocrat, governor or king, his knowledge, wisdom and previous piety – none of these qualifications is allowed to show itself. All men are creatures, equally creaturely before God. The distinctions of history are wiped out. God is equally the Master of all, the merciful Benefactor of all, and the absolutely just Judge of all.

Pilgrims begin their ritual with a visit to *al-Haram al-Sharīf*, “the noble sanctuary.” They have to do so immediately upon arrival, taking no more time than what is necessary to settle down somewhere and deposit their belongings. At this first visit, they circumambulate the Ka‘bah seven times reciting a *du‘ā*’ (invocation) taught to them by the Prophet, and perform a short salah. They then proceed to Safa, whence they cover the distance to Marwah at trotting pace seven times (*al-Sa‘y*), reenacting the experience of Hājar (Hagar), mother of Ismail, in her search for water after she was deposited there with her infant by Ibrāhīm, as he was bound for another migration. Hājar did eventually find water which tradition tells had sprung miraculously under Ismail’s little feet. The fountain, called *Zamzam*, still gives its water to the pilgrims, many of whom take it in bottles to their distant relatives. On the second day, the pilgrims begin their journey to Arafat, a plain a few miles N.E. of Makkah where they camp. On the day of Arafat, the pilgrims stand together in prayer from the noon to the sunset salah, gathering around the very spot where Muhammad stood to deliver his farewell sermon on his last pilgrimage in the year 10 AH (632 CE).

The pilgrims then proceed to Mina where they sacrifice an animal and give its meat to the poor. They return to Makkah, stopping en route at Jamrah where they throw pebbles at a pillar symbolically representing their condemnation of the devil and his ways and reaffirming their resolution not to fall to temptation. At the sanctuary in Makkah, they repeat *al-Sa‘y*, circumambulate the Ka‘bah seven times as they did at the beginning, and shed their *ihrām*, or sacral condition by clipping their nails and hair and putting on their usual clothes. They join one

another in the greatest celebration, the *‘Id al-Adha* (feast of the sacrifice) and prepare to visit al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah (the illuminated city of the Prophet) to pay their respects to the Prophet, buried within its mosque, who conveyed the message of God to them and led them to the life of Islam. At this time they prepare to return home. Their relatives and communities would be waiting for them with wishes of welcome and prayers that their pilgrimage has been accepted.

Failure to perform any of the rituals of pilgrimage because of sickness, accident or death, would not vitiate it; but failure to attend the standing at Arafat would. Obviously then, that ritual is the core and essence of the pilgrimage. Its meaning is simple, and is evident in the invocation which the pilgrim recites then, as well as throughout the pilgrimage. Its refrain is *Labbayka Allāhumma, Labbayka!* (At your call, O God, Here I come). God has called man to recognize God as his One Creator and Lord, to obey His commandments and serve Him. The whole ritual is nothing but the pilgrim’s affirmative response to the divine call.

Since the pilgrim’s affirmation of his recognition of God’s Creatorship is at once his affirmation of all men’s creatureliness and hence equality before God, the pilgrimage is the greatest and most eloquent embodiment of Islam’s egalitarianism and universalism. Presently, every year nearly 2 million Muslims perform the pilgrimage. 1432 times since Muhammad’s farewell pilgrimage, Muslims have gathered for the same rituals from the four corners of the earth. Here, in their naked human creatureliness before God, Muslims come from all races, classes, cultures, peoples, ways of life to reaffirm and renew their obedient and affirmative response to God’s call. No religious event anywhere, has ever been so spectacular as Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah. None has attracted as many people; and none has expressed its religious meanings so obviously and so successfully. It was this sight that convinced Malcolm X that his black racialism was not the answer to white racialism; that a black identity asserting itself in contradistinction from Anglo-Saxon Christianity remained empty until it included the positive submission to God and to His will, to the Shari‘ah (Law).