

The Internal Dimensions of Hajj

The ultimate destination

You are the luckiest person in the world. Allah has invited you personally to His House.

What is Hajj? Hajj in the Arabic language means aim, destination or purpose (qasd). The reason is clear: Hajj is the ultimate journey of loving submission ('ubudiyah) and conscious surrender (riq) to Allah. Its ultimate destination is your encounter with the House of Allah (Bayt al-Allah) – the Ka'bah – with both your physical body and, more importantly, your heart (qalb).

Ibn al-Jawzi (rahimah al-Allah) relates a story of an old, blind woman who was journeying to Hajj years ago with a caravan. Throughout the journey, she keeps asking: "Are we at the house of my Lord?" Time and again, she is told, "No, mother, we are not there yet." As the caravan nears Makkah, she is informed that they are almost there. Finally, they enter Masjid al-Haram. She is led to the Ka'bah. Touching the Ka'bah, she cries, "Baytu rabbi? The House of my Lord?" Weeping, she clings to the cloth of the Ka'bah – and dies.

The woman realized with her heart (qalb) the true significance of visiting the House of her Lord.

Allah has invited you to His House, which He has called the al-Bayt al-'Atiq – the ancient, liberated and liberating house. Your journey is one of freedom and liberation. For as your body leaves its material house to journey to Allah's House, your heart is meant to disengage from the lower self (nafs), the shaytan, and the world (dunya) and journey to Allah.

The ultimate reward for a Hajj mabrur is to return home with the purity of a newborn child. What could be a greater incentive! But beware, for Hajj is a selective process. Only a few will attain a Hajj mabrur, which is a Hajj performed correctly, without any disobedience to Allah and without indulging in any argumentation. Be prepared. Be vigilant. Be focused. This will be one of the greatest – and sweetest – struggles of your life. And though you will long and dream for the rest of your life to come back, you may never return again.

May Allah allow our bodies to journey to His House; may He permit our hearts to find Him, the Lord of the House. Ameen.

The most sacred space

You will be journeying from your earthly house to Makkah, your spiritual home, the most beloved place to Allah in all of space and time. Allah himself has decreed it to be so since the beginning of creation. There is no place more blessed, more beautiful, more virtuous, more exalted than Makkah. Every inch and every corner of Makkah is a haram, a sanctuary made sacred by Allah. The more you revere Makkah, the more you will be ennobled by Allah. We must take the greatest of care to never think casually of our sojourn in Makkah or live within its precincts in disobedience or negligence.

Some reports teach that it was in Makkah that our father adam ('alayhi al-salam) longed to go back to paradise and be in the presence of Allah. To console his loneliness, Allah commanded him to do tawaf around the space of the current Ka'bah. And adam did, and felt whole again.

Other texts teach that Nuh ('alayhi al-salam), Ibrahim ('alayhi al-salam), and many Prophets before them ('alayhim al-salam), all did tawaf around Allah's sacred House. Their spiritual energy and legacy fills the air. You will be walking in the footsteps and the heart-steps of Rasulullah (sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) and his noble companions.

Shelter, solace and sight

Hajj and its rites are described in various and powerful ways by Allah and his Rasul (sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam). Through these descriptions, we gain insight into the deeper meanings of Hajj. The rites of hajj are described, for example, as manasik, masha'ir and mashahid.

Mansak (plural manasik), usually translated as ritual, connotes shelter (maskan) and tranquility (sukun). The rites of Hajj are residences of shelter and tranquility for the heart.

Mash'ar (plural masha'ir) connotes feeling and experience. The rites of Hajj cause the heart to feel and experience the sweetness of nearness to Allah.

Mashad (plural mashahid) is to witness with the heart the blessings of Allah at every station – to see, with one's inner sight, Allah's will as the Decreeer of decrees and the Causer of causes.

Each word connotes a different inner dimension of Hajj, as the movement, not only of your body or limbs, but of your heart. For as your body journeys from one place to another, so too must your heart travel through various stations (maqamat), each of which will provide it with shelter, solace and inner sight.

Become angelic

Hajj is your chance to become an angel and to live with the delight of an angel.

In tawaf, you will be mirroring the worship of the angels, the mala'ikah, those heavenly creatures created of pure light and enveloped in the worship of Allah. Texts teach that the Ka'bah is connected in an imperceptible way to the Bayt al-Ma'mur, the heavenly Ka'bah of the angels, around which they are constantly in tawaf. Seventy thousand angels perform tawaf around this house and are replaced with others, never to return.

Around the Ka'bah, we are in a heavenly dimension. Near the Ka'bah are the Hajar Aswad, or black stone, and the Maqam Ibrahim, both gems from jannah. We are taught that the hajar was darkened by the sins and transgressions of man. Its heavenly light is now folded from us. The hajar will be rendered into a person in the afterlife by Allah and will witness on behalf of those who approached it with truth and sincerity. The hajar can be said to take a picture recording of your heart as you stand before it. Kissing the hajar is the most profound renewal of your covenant with Allah and a pledge of love, dedicated obedience and soulful allegiance to Him.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Entering into Ihram

As you near the miqat, your heart will tremble and tremor. Is this really happening? Is my heart getting closer and closer to His House? Soon you will enter Allah's haram. It is only fitting that you

enter into a state, both externally and internally, that justly corresponds to this honour. Beyond the miqat, there is only talbiyah.

The essence of Hajj is the journey of our hearts away from the house of our lower selves (nufus) with its passions (shahawat), inclinations (ahwa') and attachment to the created world (khalq) to the haram and, ultimately, the House of Allah. We must leave our attachments to receive the greatest connection. We must leave to arrive.

Ihram is from haram. Both meanings, to be sacred and to be forbidden, are carried in it. Through the ihram, the heart is meant to leave the temporary and the finite – to make it, in a sense, “forbidden” – and to prepare for the sacred audience of Allah’s presence.

The muhrim has disengaged from everything and anything that distracts him or her from Allah and, consequently, from remembrance, peace and stillness. The muhrim has left his or her home taking taqwa or Allah-consciousness, the best sustenance, as a provision.

Beginning Talbiyah

One enters into ihram with talbiyah. Talbiyah is the heart’s most profound surrender to the invitation and call of Allah: Here I come to You, my Lord, here I come – fully and forever.

With the talbiyah, we proclaim that no associate (sharik) or attachment will distract us from seeking Allah. Our hearts will not see, hear, obey, or be lured to another, besides Him. The recitation of this talbiyah is to be said with constancy and conviction, and not intermittently and infrequently. Talbiyah is essential to focusing our hearts. It will remind us of the purpose of our journey; it will facilitate us in foregoing our rights, demands and expectations while yet rendering fully the major and minor rights of others; it will dispel distractions; and it will make all obstacles easy, even pleasurable.

There is no praise (hamd) and no dominion and power (mulk) except that Allah owns it. Everything, whether tangible or intangible, belongs to Him. In fact, we are in praise of Him by Him.

Mina

Mina, or Muna, means desire, hope, longing.

Some texts teach that it was in Muna that adam (‘alayhi al-salam) longed and desired to journey back home to paradise and to be, once again, in Allah’s presence.

It is in Muna that the journey begins. The day spent in Muna, termed the day of tarwiyah (meaning, in part, to quench, to drink to one’s fill), is meant for our heart to focus on the aim of their journey, to gather in resolution and focus, and to begin our inner momentum towards the House of Allah.

‘Arafat

‘Arafat means to know, to understand. Another verb scale conveys the meaning of perfuming, making fragrant, scenting. ‘Arafat is the essential pillar (rukun), of Hajj; without ‘Arafat there is no Hajj.

'Arafat is the cleansing station outside the haram where we stand and seek forgiveness for all that we've committed in our lives. We beg and implore Allah to make us worthy of entering into His haram, visiting His House and being in His presence.

Here, on 'Arafat, we learn two things. As we acknowledge our disobedience, our sins, our rebelliousness and our forgetfulness, we know our unworthiness as true servants. We reveal everything to Allah, minor or major, Who knows already but simply wants us to admit with true transparency and sincerity what we are inside of our selves. Moreover, we begin to know the all-enveloping knowledge, the inestimable mercy, the boundless generosity and the limitless grace of Allah in forgiving and effacing our sins. Who is it, beside Him, that can forgive and that does forgive? There is no refuge or flight from Allah except to Him.

Allah celebrates, in the presence of the angels, the hujjaj on 'Arafat asking for forgiveness. And He affirms to the angels that, yes, He has forgiven them.

Now, as the sun begins to set, you continue, perfumed and scented with the purity of Allah's grace and forgiveness, ever closer to His haram.

Muzdalifa

Muzdalifa, from the Arabic root *izdilaf*, means to approach, to get closer.

Muzdalifa is a second station of cleansing and purification. The pilgrim is now closer to the Ka'bah. We remain in supplication (*du'a'*) after fajr, imploring Allah again for pardon and guidance. Some scholars have said that in Muzdalifa, Allah also forgives our violations against the rights of others. Such violations are not usually forgiven unless, in addition to seeking forgiveness, we remedy what has been violated.

Muna and the casting of the pebbles

During the Hajj of Ibrahim ('alayhi al-salam), he was commanded to sacrifice his son. Allah, of course, never intended that the slaughter take place. Allah wanted, instead, to purify and free Ibrahim ('alayhi al-salam) from every love and every attachment besides Him.

It was in Muna that the shaytan attempted to waylay Ibrahim ('alayhi al-salam) from sacrificing his son. Ibrahim ('alayhi al-salam) casted pebbles at the shaytan to reject his designs and prompting.

In casting the pebbles, the pilgrim affirms Allah's greatness over everything and covenants with Allah that he or she will never regress to anything which displeases Him.

Casting the pebbles is the casting away of shaytan, the lower self (*nafs*) with its desires, inclinations and evil, and, ultimately, casting away everything besides Allah. The pebble is meant, not to hit the pillar, but to fall inside the container, or *majmar*, where it will remain. The fire of the *nafs*, its impetus to evil, must be cast out, contained and confined. Our *nafs* must be jailed for us to become free.

After the *nafs* is jailed by the casting of the pebbles, it is slaughtered. The sacrifice of the animal signifies the slaughter of the *nafs* by Ibrahim ('alayhi al-salam). Ibrahim's ('alayhi al-salam) sacrifice

was momentous: he sacrificed his very will. Ibrahim was named the Khalil (cherished friend) of Allah because his love for Allah pierced and consumed his entire heart.

The hair – signifying status, station and pride – is now shaved. Whatever remaining trace and residue of the disobedient nafs is now completely cleansed.

Now, the pilgrim is welcomed by Allah to visit His Haram and His House. He or she is now freed from ihram, but not completely. Washing and the use of perfume are now permitted; intimate relations are not. Approaching one's spouse is unbecoming considering that now the pilgrim is going to visit the Host.

Tawaf al-Ifadah

Ifadah means to flood, to rush, to move.

The movement from 'Arafat to the haram is called ifadah. The rite of tawaf that takes place after the casting of the pebbles, the sacrifice and the shaving of the head is likewise termed Tawaaf al-Ifadah.

The heart (qalb), cleansed and purified from its attachments, inundated with love, desire and longing, floods to the haram, to the House, and to its Lord. There, it circumambulates the House and renews its pledge of complete and loving submission.

Sa'i between Safa and Marwa

Sa'i means to work, to strive, to act.

We remember in sa'i the actions of Hajar ('alayha al-salam) as she climbed, walked and ran up both Safa and Marwa looking for sustenance for her starving child. The miracle of Zam zam was gifted to Hajar for her efforts and sincere reliance. Rasulullah (sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) teaches that if we drink zam zam with firm faith and certainty, Allah will most definitely answer our supplication.

As servants of Allah, we are embedded in time and space. We must act, all the while cognizant that it is Allah who creates both cause and effect. To see waves upon waves of pilgrims walking and running between Safa and Marwa is to recognize that the reality of our life is constant sa'i between struggle and reward, struggle and reward. On the hills of Safa and Marwa, where the pilgrim alights in reflection and supplication, the heart exalts, seeing Allah's power in all matters, yours and others, large or small.

The days and nights of Muna

During our stay in Muna, we re-affirm and re-declare our desire and hope for spiritual freedom by casting pebbles for three days. Each casting of the pebbles cements our resolution to contain and confine both the lower self (nafs) and shaytan.

You remain in Muna as Allah's guest. Here, we must eat and drink with the consciousness of a guest in front of a Most-Magnanimous Host. The greatest nourishment during these days, as Allah himself indicates, is His dhikr, or remembrance. We are destined to leave but Allah intends we leave gradually, in gratitude to Him, remembrance of Him and gathering a firm resolution for permanent change when we depart.

Then the last pebble is cast. Our final farewell is imminent.

The farewell

Most have waited their entire lives for the encounter with the House of Allah. Many will never return. In truth, there is no certainty that any of us will ever gaze on the Ka'bah again.

Whether we return or not, we will never forget. It is said – and it is true – that the Ka'bah beckons you from afar, then haunts you forever.

It is related that Ibn 'Abbas prayed this as his final farewell, clinging with his entire being to the multazam, the wall of the Ka'bah between the hajar and the door:

"O Allah This House is Your House And this servant is Your servant, and the son of Your servants You have carried me here on what You have made accessible to me of Your creation Until You have made me reach, by Your grace, Your House And You have helped me fulfill my rites of Hajj (O Allah) If You have been pleased with me, then be more pleased with me And if You are not pleased with me, then I implore you to be generous to me now – Before my house becomes distant from Your house For now it is time for my departure, if You permit me – Never to exchange You for anything else, nor Your House for any other house Not being desirous of others instead of You, nor of any other house besides Your House O Allah, Grant me safety and good health in my body, protection in my religion and allow me a beautiful return And provide me with deeds and acts of Your obedience for as long as You grant me life And gather for me the best of this world and the next For truly You have power over all things."

A mother once told her son that the Ka'bah says: The one who does not see me will never rest; and the one who sees me will never rest.

May our hearts find their ultimate rest by journeying to Allah long after our bodies have returned from Hajj. May we always be in Hajj.

Hajj mabrur, my beloved brother and sister.

* This work is a general summary of a series of lectures by Shaykh Mukhtar Maghraoui on the internal dimensions of Hajj. The audio series may be ordered at www.zawiyah.net. I ask for your indulgence regarding any errors in this summary. I would request that readers please remember Shaykh Mukhtar Maghraoui in their supplications during Hajj – as well as the summarizer).