

Hajj

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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Introduction

The foundation of Islam rests on five pillars - *Imaan, Namaz, Roza, Zakat and Hajj*. The first four activities are not place-bound. But Hajj is different; it is performed at Mecca-Medina where Muslims from all over the world gather together to perform the pilgrimage. Unfortunately, Hajj has been reduced to an excursion and a shopping exercise. The real spirit of Hajj is no where to be seen even amongst those who perform it. But why is this so? What has led to the erosion of the real spirit of Hajj?

A person once said, *"Every religion begins with an ideology and after a few generations, it turns into a culture."* This happens with every religion. For example, Diwali (actually Deepawali), is a *festival of lights*, but today it has turned in to *festival of crackers* which leaves behind a trail of noise and air pollution. This is an example of reduced form of religion. Same has been the case of Islam. Muslims think that mere recitation of the *kalimah* is enough or that *Roza* is merely to experience thirst and hunger. Such acts are reduced forms of religion and are of no use. It is for this reason that though the number of *hajjis* or pilgrims has increased tremendously, Hajj has been reduced to a mere outing.

Importance of performing Hajj

Imam Hanifa said that Hajj is the most sacred worship, but it must be done with spirit. Explaining the attributes of a pilgrim, a tradition says,

"He (pilgrim) returns like a new born child." (Bukhari)

Every man is born with the right human nature. Each person enters the world with a divine personality but this transforms and his true nature is subdued due to the conditioning of the environment.

This tradition explains the transformation that a pilgrim undergoes during Hajj. Comparing a returning pilgrim to a new born child connotes that Hajj leads to a complete de-conditioning or overhauling of his being. Hajj is therefore, global de-conditioning because the man who goes as Mr. Conditioned, returns as Mr. De-conditioned. Hence, only those who have become de-conditioned after Hajj, are the ones who have truly performed the Hajj.

Spirit of Hajj

According to Quran,

“Whoever intends to perform it (Hajj) must abstain from indecent speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarrelling.” (2:197)

It is a fact that when a person is alone or with his family, he does not indulge in wicked acts. But when a person interacts in the society, differences arise. Failing to manage these differences, he often picks a fight or takes to indecent speech. While on Hajj, the pilgrim has to interact or come across people from different cultures and traditions, therefore, the above verse of the Quran, stresses on making the pilgrim super-sensitive about demonstrating any wrong behaviour. **His alertness or sensitivity regarding quarrelling, indecent behaviour etc. must therefore be increased manifold while on Hajj.**

Post-hajj, it is this heightened consciousness in a pilgrim that saves him from demonstrating any negative behaviour/s as this will amount to his Hajj being rendered as wasteful. This leads to de-conditioning or self-correctness. **Only when an individual is alert about the right behaviours, does the process of de-conditioning commences.** The above Hadith therefore, attempts to clarify that not merely the ritual but the real spirit of Hajj and the deconditioning that follows is what gives meaning to the pilgrimage performed.

Dawah Aspect of Hajj

A few days back, I met some people from Kashmir University. They told about their meeting with a lady who visited the university and was ready to embrace Islam, but Islam *without violence*. This example suggests the general nature of man. Man abhors violence and is desirous of peace around and within him. Through Hajj, God seeks to demonstrate at a global level, that Islam is a religion of peace. A person who undertakes Hajj must bear in mind that he must not quarrel with anyone and will have to strive to maintain peace at all times. If each one of those million visiting pilgrims arrives for Hajj with a prepared mind and having imbibed this spirit, it then will be a global demonstration of Islam being a religion of peace and Muslims being peaceful people.

If such Islam were to be presented to the lady who visited the University, she would accept it because it is the same peaceful Islam that her soul has been looking for. **This is the Dawah aspect of Hajj. It implies that Islam be presented in a manner that its peaceful face becomes known to all.**

What comprises Hajj?

Hajj is not only the performance of certain rituals or principles described in Fiqh. Drawing from the life of Prophet Muhammad, when he did his first (and only) Hajj, companions tried to emulate his acts in the exact manner. But because it was the first time, some of them differed on account of the form of performing a particular ritual. When Prophet Muhammad was asked questions regarding the form, he is recorded to have said:

“Do it, it’s alright.” (Abu Dawud)

This means that it is not the erosion in the form that makes the difference. It is solely the erosion in spirit that renders the Hajj futile. To behave arrogantly, to treat people as inferior and to treat them badly – these are unpardonable acts and must not be resorted to.

According to another tradition (**Musnad Ahmad**), the Companions asked, “What is Hajj?” The Prophet replied “It is the *sunnah* of your forefather, Abraham.” This is because all the acts performed in the Hajj were a part of the life of Prophet Abraham; it is reliving those times in a symbolic manner. In other words, **Hajj takes the pilgrim to a time, where several points of reference become instruments of taqwa. These historical points of references become a reminder for our lives.**

Point of Reference: Some Examples

Hajj commences with the **wearing of an ihram** (two untailored pieces of cloth). This is symbolic of the life led by Prophet Abraham almost 4000 years ago, when neither tailoring machine, nor mills existed. There was no culture of wearing coloured or stitched clothes. Barring the King, all others wore two unstitched clothes covering the upper and lower parts of the body. **Ihram is symbolic of simplicity and serves as a point of reference to remind that the life of Prophet Abraham was on such simple lines.**

Next, the pilgrim reaches Mecca and does **circumambulation (tawaaf) of the Kabah** – this is a point of reference as it reminds the pilgrim that Prophets Abraham, Ismail, Muhammad and his companions performed circumambulation there – **avowing that their life will revolve around the commandment of God – it will not be upon their whims and fancies.** This *tawaaf* therefore tethers you to a spiritual rope around which you must live just as a horse is restricted to the circle to the centre of which it is tethered. (*Characteristic of a believer as per a tradition in Musnad Ahmad.*)

The next rite of Hajj is called **Sai**. Pilgrims undertake a brisk walk between the two hillocks of Safa and Marwah, seven times. It was between these hillocks that Hajra, wife of Prophet Abraham, ran in search of water. As ordained, Prophet Abraham took Hajra and Ishmael to a desert land. When he was about to leave and go, Hajra said to him, *"Why are you going, has God commanded you to do so?"* When Prophet Abraham said, "Yes," she replied, *"Then God will not let us get wasted."* This was an unprecedented sacrifice. Despite being devoid of everything – even food, water and shelter – she had the courage to utter these words. **Sai is a point of reference to bring to mind this sacrifice of Hajra, which was so precious that God ordained the entire humanity to walk in her footsteps and remember her dedication and trust in God almighty.**

The **act of sacrificing the animal is symbolic of sacrificing your own self for the cause of God.** The sacrifice made by Hajra and Prophet Ishmael was actually to set off a process of de-conditioning and raise a generation that would be free from the conditioning of the culture of cities. After a long toil, Banu Ishmael were raised who were completely free from conditioning. It is this spirit that makes **the act of sacrifice, a point of reference that is reminiscent of the entire history of Abraham, Hagar (Hajra) and Ishmael and their dedication to the cause of God.**

Another rite during Hajj is the **stoning of the Satan, called Rami-e-Jamarat**. This is a symbolic practice which reminds of the incident which according to tradition took place when Abraham, Hagar (Hajra) and Ishmael were on their way to the desert land. Satan tried to lure them away from making such a sacrifice. It was then that Prophet Abraham stoned him. **This is also a point of reference, a place where Abraham casted Satan away.** While doing so we vow that whenever Satan would try to lure us away from our cause, we shall stone him away from our lives. Satan is man's avowed enemy and is there to misguide man at all times. This misleading/ deviation is done in a *"beautiful"* way and man must remain cognizant of this and stone him away whenever he feels touched by Satan. **At Hajj we do the symbolic stoning but the real stoning is to be done in our lives where Satan is present and tries to mislead us from the right path.**

Towards the end, all the pilgrims are required to **assemble at Mount Arafat**. Hordes of men and women, clad in white, chant on their mouth, congregate in that area. It is **reminiscent of the assembly on the Day of Judgement. This is the point of reference of that time which shall come to pass after death.** On that day, when men will stand before their Lord, on one side will be their Creator and on the other side, will be His creations. It will be then that man's fate for eternity will be decided. According to a Hadith,

"Paradise is so precious, yet man is asleep, no one runs towards it. Hell is the worst place and man must try to rescue himself from it but he is asleep still, not trying to save himself from it." (Tirmidhi)

On the Day of Judgement, man will realize these words. He will realize that he got the opportunity in his pre-death period to secure a place in paradise and save himself from Hell but he lost his chance. **Each will say that mine was a case of missed opportunities.** The scene at Arafat is so overwhelming that it appears that the entire mankind is present before God. Hajj therefore, is a set of unique and extraordinary points of reference of Prophets – Abraham, Ishmael and Muhammad and his Companions. Muslims go there with only the knowledge of the rituals and not these points of reference which may serve as a reminder of that period.

Last Sermon of Prophet

In his last sermon, Prophet Muhammad enjoined the believers to do the following:

*“I have been sent for the whole mankind so you must spread
God’s message to people on my behalf.”(Ibn Hisham)*

He told his Companions that the real work (*Hajj-e-Akbar*) begins now when you must transmit the message of God to rest of the mankind. Therefore, this responsibility got transferred from the Prophet to his Companions. According to traditions, Companions became so overwhelmed by becoming the proponents of this mission that they moved forth in the direction their horses faced, leaving behind their home, their hearth. That is why graves of very few Companions are found in Mecca and Medina. They reached the far ends of the distances they could traverse. For example, a group of companions even reached Cyprus. There exists grave of pious lady, Rumaysa in Cyprus, who must have undertaken great hardships to travel all the way from Medina to spread the word of God. The Companions did this in the age when both the population and the knowledge of geography were not much. These were the times where neither any proper means of communication, nor any amenities were available. Against all odds, they strove to achieve their cause unlike most men today who remain thankless.

God has made all necessary provisions – from advanced multimedia techniques of communication to religious freedom, democracy and a scientific bent of mind – all this so that the following Hadith may reach fruition:

*“No house on Earth – big or small – will remain but God’s Word shall enter into it”
(Musnad Ahmad)*

May God guide us and help us in disseminating His message to mankind!