

Haj and Eid-ul-Adha

(1) Haj: Pilgrimage to Makkah

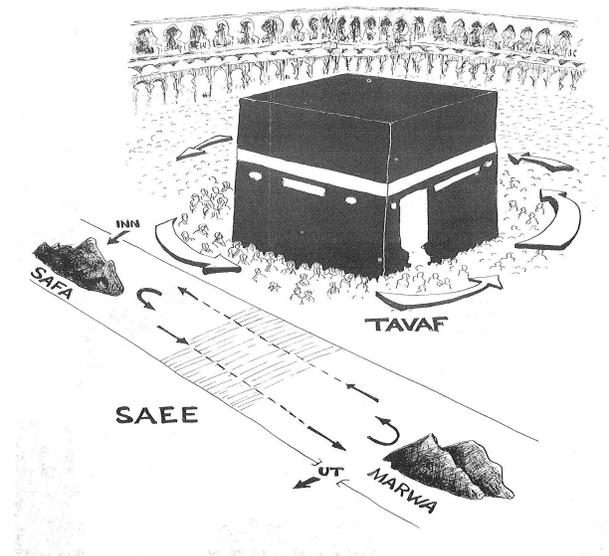
“And call to mind when We assigned to Abraham the site of the House and said, 'Associate not anything with Me and keep My House clean for those who perform the circuits, and those who stand up and those who bow and prostrate themselves in Prayer; And call mankind to the Pilgrimage. They will come to thee on foot, and on every lean camel, coming by every distant, deep, track.” (The Holy Quran, Sura Al Hajj 22:27-28)

In Islam, the Haj is the pilgrimage to the holy sites of Mecca (Makkah) in Saudi Arabia, the most important being the “House” referred to in the verse cited above, namely, the Holy Ka’aba. The Haj is the “fifth pillar” of the religion of Islam and is an obligation that must be fulfilled by each and every Muslim at least once in his or her lifetime provided he or she is able, either financially, physically or otherwise. During the Haj, Muslims perform certain religious rites and demonstrate their faith in and submission to Allah.

Each year, the Haj takes place from the 8th to 12th day of Dhul-Hijah, the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The Haj pilgrimage pre-dates the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as it is a practice that dates back to the time of the Prophet Abraham and his son Prophet Ishmael (peace be upon them both). Indeed, many of the Haj rites are associated with the Prophet Abraham and his family. For example, the word Haj is derived from the name of the mother of the Prophet Ishmael, Hajira. When her and the Prophet Ishmael were alone and abandoned in the Arabian desert next to the then ruins of the Holy Ka’aba, after placing the extremely thirsty baby Ishmael on the ground, she proceeded to run back and forth between Mounts Marwah and Sarwah in the hopes of flagging a caravan that might happen to be passing by. When she returned to the baby Ishmael, she discovered that his repeated little kicks in the sand had unearthed the Well of Zamzam which lay directly underneath him. Today, the Well of Zamzam, located next to the Holy Ka’aba, continues to provide water to pilgrims.

The Holy Ka’aba is the cube-shaped building which resides within the precincts of the Masjid-al-Haram. Historically, it is also known as the Temple of Abraham. While having been rebuilt many times, its foundations remain those which were laid by the Prophet Abraham and the Prophet Ishmael. Each Muslim faces in the direction (*qibla*) of the Holy Ka’aba when performing ritual prayers anywhere in the world.

One of the rites performed during the Haj is the visit to the Holy Ka’aba. Upon entering the hallowed precincts of the Masjid Al-Haram, each pilgrim performs circuits (*tawaf*) around the Holy Ka’aba counter-clockwise 7 times. Afterwards, each pilgrim runs back and forth between Mount Safah and Mount Marwah, drinks water from the Well of Zamzam, stands in vigil on the plains of Mount Arafat, and performs a symbolic stoning of the devil upon the site where he known to have stood. Then, to resemble a sinless newborn child, each pilgrim shaves his head or trims his or her hair. The final rite is the ritual animal sacrifice. This ritual animal sacrifice links the Haj pilgrimage rites with the celebrations of Eid-ul-Adha.



(2) Eid-ul-Adha

Eid-ul-Adha is the celebration which commemorates the devotion and sacrifice exemplified by the Prophet Abraham, the Prophet Ishmael and his mother, Hajira. In particular, Eid-ul-Adha marks the anniversary of the Prophet Abraham’s beholding of a vision in which he saw himself sacrificing his only begotten son, the Prophet Ishmael, and the two of them demonstrating their complete willingness to do so out of obedience to God. Although God never intended for the sacrifice to actually take place and only offered the vision as a test, the incident continues to stand as evidence of the complete devotion of both the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael. Muslims who

gather in Makkah, as well as around the world, commemorate the devotion and sacrifice of the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael by sacrificing animals and then distributing food to the poor and the needy.

On Eid-ul-Adha, Muslim families throughout the world gather to remember the sacrifice and devotion of the Prophet Abraham and his family. On this day, tens of millions of Muslims are inspired to serve humanity. The gathering of pilgrims during and at the conclusion of the Haj for Eid-ul-Adha as well as throughout the world, all in remembrance of God in a spirit of sacrifice and devotion, serves to remind all Muslims of the unity of the human race, regardless of race or gender.

