

Hajj



Hajj from the point of view of a Muslim

I think a lot of people would be interested in going on Hajj. Everyone has seen pictures of masses of people dressed in white under the sun moving slowly around the *ka'aba*. It is probably the image most commonly associated with Islam.

Hajj is known as the perfection of religion. It is with the completion of this pillar that Muslims feel that they are truly now practising as Allah has instructed and as the Prophet Muhammad demonstrated.

Muslims spend their lives trying to live according to the *sunnah*; the way of the Prophet. To be able to walk in the same place and exactly the same way with the same rites as he did (may the blessings of Allah be upon him) does something to you that is difficult to explain. I suppose it could be compared to following a recipe of Jamie Oliver and then actually eating the same meal actually made by Jamie. There is a completion in it, and understanding that is beyond words and can only be known when it is actually experienced.

Before I went on Hajj, I made sure that I took the trip to Mecca to complete Umrah first. This is the 'lesser pilgrimage' and something that carries great benefit but can be done at any time during the year. There are fewer people, less pressure and fewer rites of passage as well so it isn't as tiring. It's good to go on umrah first because then you feel more prepared for your Hajj and you will get more benefit from your Hajj.

Mecca is scorching hot. You need to be prepared for that. It is also not spiritually ideal to take smaller children along. I learned that with the Umrah; they do benefit but they also get very tired and hot and it is difficult to reflect truly on your own spiritual journey. That is why many women especially choose to go later in life when the children are grown up as they feel that they can comfortably engage on their own spiritual journey without letting anyone down.

The other consideration is your own patience. There are millions of people all trying to do the same thing. It can take several hours to just do *tawaf*. You have to be prepared for the lack of sleep and toilets that are not to the standard you would usually like. You have to be prepared that the food is mainly fast food and so it is difficult to eat healthily. You also have to be aware of how much walking there is involved. If you prepare yourself for these difficulties, you will be able to manage them and actually benefit from them. We know that the Prophet used to sleep very little and spend his nights in prayer and it is nurturing to not have all the luxuries that we are used to. Difficulty and hardship for the sake of Allah is something that Allah recognises and rewards you for in this life and the next. It also teaches you gratefulness, patience and forbearance.

I was called to go on Hajj four years ago. It was a journey without compare. It is my 'happy place' now and I love to remember the smell, the heat and most importantly the feeling of

cleansing that happened. It felt like I had no past, that all was forgiven. The empty space of openness and light that this left in my heart is something that I cannot explain, but something that I now struggle to keep clean at all times. It can be difficult when you come home. After a few weeks, old habits and negativity have the tendency to creep back in. We are only human after all. Islam is the constant trying to be better and to keep your spiritual centre as clean as you can through worship and good action.

Task: Read the account of Hajj

All: Write down a list of benefits and hardships of hajj

Most: Do you think hajj can improve a person? If so why?

Some: Do you think people should go on Hajj as often as possible? Why/why not?

Extension: Which other virtues do you think could be stimulated by Hajj. Write each down and give an explanation.