

The Purpose of Hajj

The word Hajj means “to set out”, “to make pilgrimage”, and “journey to a high destination.” Performance of Hajj is to reach the high destination which in this case is Allah SWT Himself.

Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam and it is incumbent upon every able Muslim to carry out this journey in order to purify himself for Allah.

Every action and ritual in Islam has a *maqsad* or a purpose. If we lose the essence and purpose of a ritual, then it becomes an empty shell with no fruit inside—meaning the benefit of the action is lost. Hajj like any other pillar of Islam has purpose, manners, virtues, values, rewards and benefits.

Glimpse at the Pillars of Islam

Below we will briefly mention the purposes of five pillars of Islam.

1. *Shahadah* (Embracing Islam):

Shahadah is to declare the oneness of Allah SWT and the prophethood of Muhammad SAW. It is a mandatory act incumbent upon anyone wishing to embrace Islam and it is supposed to be done in the presence of other Muslims. The purpose of *shahadah* is to recognize the Creator and to enter the fold of Islam in order to attain the pleasure and mercy of Allah.

2. *Salah* (Obligatory prayers):

Allah SWT has prescribed five daily prayers for Muslims.

أَنْتَلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى
عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do. (29:45)

This Qur'anic verse establishes the purpose of Salah for us which is to restrain the believers from committing evil deeds.

3. Fasting:

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is compulsory on every healthy adult Muslim. Allah SWT said:

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous. (2:183)

4. Zakah (Mandatory charity):

Just like fasting cleanses the soul and body of the person from harmful elements, *zakah* cleanses the wealth of the person. It purifies the hearts of believers from stinginess and selfishness and trains them to adopt the qualities of Allah SWT which are kindness and generosity.

5. Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah):

Pilgrimage to Makkah is the fifth pillar of Islam and it combines the attributes of all other pillars. It is the only pillar of Islam that has a chapter named after it. The purpose and wisdom of *hajj* are great.

Salah is the first level of purification and elevation and a reminder to us of our slavery and our eventual standing in front of Allah SWT. Fasting is the second level of purification for those who might get rusty through the year and need an intensive routine of devotion and self sacrifice in order to renew their spiritual drive. *Zakah* is an even higher level of purification by cutting off the love of material wealth from the heart by giving a portion of it to the needy. *Hajj* is the culmination of all these. The main purpose of *Hajj* is to go back to Allah SWT, to detach one's heart from everything and devote oneself completely to Allah.

The magnitude of this journey can only be understood when one realizes what he is going to visit: The house of Allah SWT on this earth.

Surat-ul-Hajj is the twenty second chapter of the Qur'an. It was revealed in Medina though it is very much like a Makkan *surah* in its structure and message. Some of the topics this *surah* talks about are:

- Allah SWT—His qualities and greatness;
- Meaning of pure submission to Allah;
- The importance of building the faith in Him SWT;
- To remind one of the Day of Judgment, grave, and the experiences of the afterlife.

Enveloped in the middle of this talk of the hereafter there are a few verses about Hajj.

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ آتِفُوا رَبُّكُمْ إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

يَوْمَ تَرُؤْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ وَتَضَعُ كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَمْلٍ
حَمْلَهَا وَتَرَى النَّاسَ سُكَرَىٰ وَمَا هُمْ بِسُكَرَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّ عَذَابَ اللَّهِ شَدِيدٌ

﴿٢﴾

O mankind, fear your Lord. Indeed, the convulsion of the [final] Hour is a terrible thing. On the Day you see it every nursing mother will be distracted from that [child] she was nursing, and every pregnant woman will abort her pregnancy, and you will see the people [appearing] intoxicated while they are not intoxicated; but the punishment of Allah is severe. (22: 1—2)

Allah SWT opens the *surah* about Hajj with a terrifying image of the Day of Judgment whose duration will be equal to 50,000 years of our time as told to us by Prophet Muhammad SAW. Prophet went on to stress the immensity of the Day by telling us how close the sun will be to us—one and a half fingertip away, or according to another interpretation about a mile away. Right now the sun is 93,000,000 miles away from us and if it was any closer, the earth wouldn't be able to bear the heat.

We have to start living with the warning of Allah and review our priorities in life.

Luqman Al- Hakeem summarized the message of Allah in these precise words for his son:

“Serve this world according to the time you are going to spend in it, and work for the akhirah according to the time you are going to spend in it.”

Thus, the main purpose of Hajj is to remind us of the Day of Judgment, of death, and our meeting with Allah SWT.

The beauty of the Qur’an is such that every *surah* starts with the headlines of the theme and message that Allah SWT wants to talk to us about, and it ends with the summary of the topic. In this case, Allah SWT wraps up the matter of Day of Judgment with following advices for the believers:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا اٰرْكَعُوْا وَاَسْجُدُوْا وَاَعْبُدُوْا رَبَّكُمْ وَاَفْعَلُوْا الْخَيْرَ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُوْنَ ﴿٧٧﴾

O you who have believed, bow and prostrate and worship your Lord and do good - that you may succeed. (22:77)

وَجَاهِدُوْا فِىْ سَبِيْلِ اللّٰهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهٖۭ هُوَ اٰجْتَبٰكُمْ وَاَمَّا جَعَلَكُمْ فِى الدِّيْنِ
مِنْ حَرَجٍ مِّلَّةَ اٰبِيكُمْ اِبْرٰهِيْمَ هُوَ سَمَّكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِيْنَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِى هٰذَا
لِيَكُوْنَ الرَّسُوْلُ شَهِيدًا عَلَیْكُمْ وَتَكُوْنُوْا شُهَدَاءَ عَلٰى النَّاسِ فَاَقِيْمُوْا
الصَّلٰوةَ وَاَتُوْا الزَّكٰوةَ وَاَعْتَصِمُوْا بِاللّٰهِ هُوَ مَوْلٰكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلٰى وَنِعْمَ
النَّصِيْرُ ﴿٧٨﴾

And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Abraham. Allah named you "Muslims" before [in former scriptures] and in this [revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people. So establish prayer and give

zakah and hold fast to Allah. He is your protector; and excellent is the protector, and excellent is the helper. (22:78)

Notice the underlined parts; it is Allah SWT who has chosen us, we didn't choose ourselves for this bounty of guidance. Along with guidance, the ability to perform the rituals prescribed by Allah SWT is also a bounty from Him SWT. Notice on what note Allah SWT ends this *surah* which is the very crux of the message of Islam and the token of salvation: *utter and complete submission and reliance on Allah SWT.*

Hajj is a very emotional experience with a very emotional history. It revolves around the life story of Ibrahim AS and his family who gave a whole new dimension to feelings like love, devotion, and sacrifice. Hajj is supposed to be a journey full of promises, sacrifices, obedience, love and devotion from the slave to His master Allah SWT. From the onset of the journey, a pilgrim starts to recite *talbiyah* which is the declaration of slave's love and obedience to His Lord and affirms his commitment to serve Him SWT.

'Here I am O Allah, (in response to Your call), here I am. Here I am, You have no partner, here I am. Verily all praise, grace and sovereignty belong to You. You have no partner.'

These words should be uttered in the same manner that expressions of devotion and promises are uttered by a lover to his beloved!

The constant recitation of *talbiyah* helps you to remain focused on the service you are supposed to be providing to Allah SWT instead of what your travel agent is providing you. If you are busy with the package Allah SWT has promised you instead of the travel agent, you will not be able to stop thanking Him SWT. From the moment of welcome to the farewell, this package contains all that is great—it offers deals such as mercy and ultimate forgiveness. The moment your eyes touch the *Ka'bah*, your *du'a* is accepted. That is the welcome from *Akram-ul-Akrameen*—the owner of generosity.

Journey of Hajj is a Reminder of the Journey of the Hereafter

Journey of the hereafter begins with death which is referred to as "*qiyamat-us-sughra*" or minor day of judgment. A person is wrapped in coffin before being sent to his place of residence for as long as Allah has ordained. Just like the coffin symbolizes the beginning of the last journey, *Ihraam* symbolizes the abandonment of material life by removing ordinary clothes and donning two un-sewn pieces of cloth (for men); as we would when being placed in our coffin. Its purpose is to help us enter a state of humbleness and humility, awareness, and a state of alertness and warning.

It is Allah's mercy to give us this chance of remembering Him and the Day of Judgment by allowing us to experience this symbolic state of afterlife. It is to remind us that we will stand in front of Him SWT on the land of Arafah on the Day of Judgment, the way we gather at the time of Hajj. What higher mercy can Allah bestow on His believers than to have them attain the level of purity of new born babies?

RasulAllah SAW said:

"Whoever performs Hajj and stays away from lewdness, wrangling, and obscenities will return home like a newborn." (Al-Bukhari)

Purpose of Hajj: An Inward Journey

In Islam there is a wisdom and purpose behind every ritual. Some of these wisdoms we know and some we don't. The rituals we don't understand or are unclear to us are a mere test of our obedience to the Omnipotent Lord. It is just like a corporation where a boss might give the worker a task which he doesn't understand. This doesn't mean that the task is not important; there might be many reasons behind assigning such a task, one of which could be test of obedience and loyalty. The boss might want to know the level of obedience of the worker before promoting him to a higher position in the company.

Some of the rituals of Hajj we will understand and some we won't. But one thing is for sure that the purpose behind all the rituals is the obedience of Allah SWT. It is through obedience to his Lord that a believer is spiritually elevated.

Once this understanding of obedience to the Lord is inculcated in the heart, it closes the door to the doubts and whispers of *Shaytaan*.

Since Hajj is the accumulation of all other pillars of Islam, the attacks from *Shaytaan* and trials from Allah are sure to occur in order to separate the believers from the hypocrites. There will be many inconveniences and annoyances during the journey but if the believer is focused on the *purpose*, all these will not be of any importance.

Once you intend to go on Hajj worry about your dealings with Allah and your service to Him SWT, not about the service of the travel agent or the problems you might face during the journey. Know that the difficulties will be there regardless of how much you try to avoid them, as it is through hardships that Allah SWT checks the status of our faith and our sincerity to Him.

If you remember the gifts and services that Allah SWT has offered you throughout your life, you will be able to remain focused on what kind of service you are offering Him SWT and what attitude you are showing Him.

1. First purpose of Hajj is to capture our desire and nafs in order to fully enslave ourselves to Allah SWT. Our temptations and desires should never exceed a limit where they become the driving force of our actions. Unless we capture our ego, arrogance, and temptations, and surrender them to the will of Allah SWT, we will never be able to attain salvation and true success on the Day of Judgment.

2. To remember the Day of Judgment and affairs of the afterlife as we have been discussing.

3. Third purpose of Hajj is to remember the mercy of Allah SWT and to acknowledge how many chances of repentance and purification He SWT has bestowed upon us. It is one of our duties to inculcate this quality of mercy of in our own personalities and to deal with others accordingly.

Hajj is supposed to bring out this trait in a believer as he gets a chance to view the state of many Muslims who are inferior to him in health, wealth and ability. Prophet SAW was sent as a mercy to mankind and he said:

“Allah shows mercy to those who show mercy. Show mercy to those on earth, and Allah will be merciful to you.” (Abu Dawood & Tirmidhi)

4. To gain the level of absolute purity toward Allah SWT. The restrictions such as prohibition of sexual intercourse, of contracting marriage, of being a witness in marriage, or even intending marriage while in the state of *Ihraam* are to be observed or they can break the state of *Ihraam* and nullify Hajj.

These are all *halal* acts but at this time they become prohibited because they are dealing with the affairs of this world and Allah wants us to leave off worldly matters entirely and be purely for Him SWT. This is the true essence of the call of pilgrimage:

‘Here I am O Allah, (in response to Your call), here I am.

Here I am, You have no partner, here I am.

Verily all praise, grace and sovereignty belong to You.

You have no partner.’

This call of *labbaik* or saying ‘Here I am’ is to be done with humbleness, humility, service and devotion to Allah SWT enveloped by absolute love for Him.

5. Humble ourselves to Allah and His creation by not causing any oppression. Any oppression even toward animals, let alone other Muslims, can nullify Hajj. This heightened state of consciousness during Hajj is to remind us of the etiquettes that we have forgotten, and to revert back to these lost teachings of Islam.

6. To try to build the habit of obedience to Allah SWT during this journey. Once this habit of doing everything according to the will and teachings of Allah and His Prophet is established, maybe when the person returns, he/she will continue to obey Allah in their daily lives.

7. To remove the love of duniya and material possessions from our hearts. We are so occupied with our work, business, family, friends, education etc. in this life that the affairs of the hereafter go in the background. The purpose of Hajj is to remove all of these ties from our hearts and reset our priorities according to Allah and His Prophet SAW.

While going on Hajj, we leave everything behind us just like we will when we die. While we are on Hajj the world continues to function without us, which is a reminder for us to refocus our energies to where they really matter. This is why one of the manners when you leave your house with the intention of Hajj is to forget about all your obligations except what you owe to your Creator and Owner Allah SWT.

8. The journey of Hajj is symbolic of our life's journey to the hereafter. No place on earth is our permanent residence. We are all here to spend a designated amount of time according to the will of Allah and will leave sooner or later, and then spend some time in transit until the Day of Judgment is established. That is when our final residence will be determined: the best of residence being *jannah* and the worst being hell fire.

9. To remind us of the brotherhood and equality in Islam. Irrespective of race, ethnic affiliation, skin color, material wealth, educational level—we are all same in the eyes of Allah SWT. We follow the same rituals and customs and are encouraged to be generous and kind to each other. We are supposed to take care of the needy Muslims during this time as it is not only worship but our responsibility.

Abdullah Ibn Mubarak was a wealthy *taba'ee* (follower of the companions) who was known for his generosity. Every year at the time of Hajj, he used to equip a large caravan for Hajj and distribute all his money in the way of Allah to the point that after Hajj he had nothing left.

Why would he do that? To get the ultimate benefit from this journey and to devote all he had for the sake of Allah SWT.

Once Abdullah Ibn Mubarak headed out with his caravan to Hajj and on the way he saw a woman collecting a dead bird from the side of the road. His curiosity was intrigued so he followed the woman and inquired about her actions. She said that she was going to cook it to feed her hungry children. He was shocked and asked her if she didn't know of the prohibition of eating dead animals? She in turn asked him if he was not aware of the permissibility of it for those who are at the brink of starvation.

He was so moved by her ordeal that he gave all his Hajj money to this lady, went back to home and locked himself indoors. He forbade his family to inquire the reason of his return or to tell anyone that he had come back, as he wanted to keep his deed purely for Allah. He stayed indoors until the Hajj season passed entirely and caravans started to return from Makkah.

He began to go outdoors and started meeting the returning pilgrims who would thank him for his assistance that he provided them in Makkah, Medina, or other places that they had visited. He was shocked; he returned to his room and started crying to Allah SWT asking Him to explain what was going on. Abdullah Ibn Mubarak saw RasulAllah SAW in his dream who gave him the good news that Allah was so pleased with his action towards this woman that He created an angel in the form and look of Abdullah to do the Hajj on his behalf along with the good deeds that Abdullah regularly used to do. He SAW went on to inform Abdullah that Allah had rewarded him for ten Hajj and had accepted the Hajj of all others because of him. All because Abdullah had helped a needy woman!

RasulAllah SAW said:

"Whosoever relieves from a believer some grief pertaining to this world, Allah will relieve from him some grief pertaining to the Hereafter. Whosoever alleviates the difficulties of a needy person who cannot pay his debt, Allah will alleviate his difficulties in both this world and the Hereafter. Whosoever conceals the faults of a Muslim, Allah will conceal his faults in this world and the Hereafter. Allah will aid a servant (of His) so long as the servant aids his brother." (Muslim)

Hajj is supposed to remind us of the needs of the Muslim ummah either financial or spiritual; to discuss these matters and return home with the intention to fulfill these needs. During the early days of Islam, scholars used to have a designated meeting place during Hajj where they would regularly meet to discuss the affairs of the ummah and pool their resources to come to common understanding and goals.

10. This leads us to the next purpose of Hajj which is inculcating and adhering to good behavior and manners. It is not the amount of prayers that we do but rather our behavior, our humility and our willingness to be of assistance to others that elevates our ranking with Allah SWT.

Allah SWT explains to us in *Surah Al-Baqarah*:

الْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَاتٌ فَمَنْ فَرَضَ فِيهِنَّ الْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ وَلَا
جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمُهُ اللَّهُ وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ
الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُونِ يَا أُولِيَ الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿١٩٧﴾

Hajj is [during] well-known months, so whoever has made Hajj obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of ihram], there is [to be for him] no sexual relations and no disobedience and no disputing during Hajj. And whatever good you do - Allah knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah. And fear Me, O you of understanding. (2:197)

Conclusion

The real preparation for Hajj is not the knowledge of the rituals...that is secondary. The matter of primary concern is the preparation of the heart so you go in a state that is acceptable to Allah SWT. Most important luggage to take with you on this journey is conscientiousness of Allah, the awareness that Allah is watching you at any given time and is with you whenever you need Him SWT.

Status of the heart matters more than the rituals. Angels descend according to the status of the heart of the slave, not the amount of his deeds. If the status of one's heart is acceptable to Allah then even if the person makes minor errors in carrying out his rituals, Allah SWT is an All-Merciful and Pardoning Lord. But if the heart is full of *shirk* (association with Allah) and arrogance, then even if all the rituals are carried out perfectly, the purpose of Hajj will be lost.