

Fast 25: Pilgrimage (Hajj) – 2

- The *hajj* was a recognized institution in Islam in the first and second years of *Hijrah* **before** the start of the battles between Muslims and the Quraish. The second chapter of the Quran which was, in the main, revealed in 1–2 A.H., is full of directions relating to *hajj*. The context shows clearly that fighting had not actually taken place, though prospects of a war were in sight. There is a clear command to accomplish the *hajj* in the following words which occur at the beginning of a verse:

“And accomplish the *hajj* and the *‘umrah* (i.e., the visit to the Ka‘bah at any time) for Allah.” (2:196)

وَأَتُوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ ط

- The rules of conduct to be observed when proceeding on *hajj*, and other rules and features, are also mentioned in 2:196–203. *Hajj* and *‘Umrah* are mentioned before this verse in 2:158. Its first part states;

“The Safa and the Marwah are truly among the signs of Allah; so whoever makes a pilgrimage to the House or pays a visit (to it), there is no blame on him if he goes round them.” (2:158)

إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ حَجَّ
الْبَيْتَ أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ
بِهِمَا ط

Some Muslims of Madinah were reluctant to perform the act of running between the Safa and the Marwah, probably because at that time there were idols of stone placed on these two spots by the idol-worshippers of Makkah. But the Quran told Muslims that the presence of idols there did not make it wrong for Muslims to perform this rite.

- The earliest verses giving Muslims permission to fight in self-defence are 2:190–193. But *Hajj* has been mentioned **before** this, in 2:158 and 2:189. This shows that the allegation is false that the Holy Prophet thought of incorporating *hajj* into Islam **after** the Muslims won the battle of Badr because he could then see the prospect of conquering Makkah.
- Islam discourages *asceticism* in all its aspects. This is the practice of cutting yourself off from the world for religious purposes and living a life devoted to worship. But still, Islam lays the greatest stress on the spiritual development of man. In its four main institutions, i.e., prayer, *zakāt*, fasting and *hajj*, it introduces workable ascetic formulae into daily life — an asceticism which fits in with the practical side of life.

- To perform the five daily prayers, we sacrifice of a small part of our time, and the prayers, without in any way interfering with everyday life, enable us to realize that we must develop the Divine qualities that exist within us. To give *zakāt*, we must give up of a small portion of our wealth, but this does not interfere with our right to own property. For fasting, we give up food and drink, but not in such a manner as to make us unfit for carrying on regular work or business.
- It is only in *hajj* that asceticism assumes a marked form, for the pilgrim is required not only to give up his regular work for a number of days for the sake of the journey to Makkah, but he must, in addition, give up many other amenities of life, and live more or less, the life of an ascetic. The *hajj* is, however, a function which generally comes only once in a lifetime, and, therefore, while leading a person through the highest spiritual experience, it does not interfere in any appreciable degree with the regular course of his life.
- No other institution in the world has the wonderful influence of the *hajj* in levelling all distinctions of race, colour and rank. Not only do people of all races and all countries meet together before the Holy House of God as His servants, as members of one Divine family, but they are wearing the same dress —two white sheets — and there remains nothing to distinguish the high from the low. There is a vast concourse of human beings, all clad in one dress, all moving in one way, all having the one word to speak, *labbaika Allāhumma labbaika*, meaning *here are we, O Allah! here are we in Your august presence*.
- *Hajj* is usually described in terms of the outward actions that it involves, without mentioning their real significance and inner value. The deeper value of *hajj* is the higher spiritual experience which is made possible by this unique assemblage of human beings, the experience of drawing nearer and nearer to God till the pilgrim feels that all those veils which keep him away from God are entirely removed and he or she is standing in the presence of God.
- It is true that God does not live in Makkah, nor is the Ka‘bah the House of God in a material sense; true, too, that a Muslim is taught to communicate with God in any remote corner, in solitude, in the dead of nights, and thus all alone he goes through the experience of drawing nearer to God. But there is yet a higher spiritual experience to which he can attain in that vast concourse of people assembled in the plain of Arafat. Every member of this great assemblage sets out from his home with that aim in view. He discards all those comforts of life which act as a veil against the inner sight. He is required to put on the simplest dress, to avoid all talk of an amorous nature and all kinds of disputes, and to undergo all the hardships involved in an arduous journey to a

distant place like Arabia, so that he may be able to concentrate all his meditation on the Divine Being.

- The comforts of life are undoubtedly a veil which shut out the other world from human sight, and sufferings and privations certainly make a person turn to God. To concentrate all one's ideas on God, not in solitude but in the company of others, is thus the object of *hajj*. A man may have the company of his wife and yet he must not have amorous talk with her; he may be in the company of his enemy, yet he is not allowed to have any quarrel with him; and all this that he may have a higher spiritual experience. This is not like the spiritual experience of a hermit who is cut off from the world, not of the devotee worshipping God in the corner of solitude, but of the person living in the world, in the company of his spouse, his friends and his foes.