

Fast 26: Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) — Its various ceremonies

- *Ihrām*: This is the name of the state into which the pilgrims are required to put themselves on the occasion of *hajj* (and also the lesser pilgrimage known as *umrah*). Male pilgrims wear two seamless sheets, covering the lower and the upper parts of the body. Women can wear their ordinary clothes, but they must be simple. Covering the face and wearing a veil is not allowed. The purpose is to remove all distinctions of wealth and social class. In the state of *ihrām*, all cares of the body are disallowed, such as shaving, trimming nails, and also sexual activity and amorous talk between husband and wife. Quarreling and disputing with others is disallowed. The cares of the body are sacrificed for a few days to devote greater attention to the cares of the soul.
- The most prominent act of the pilgrimage is the *tawāf*, or going around the Ka‘bah. The command to perform it is contained in the Holy Quran in a Makkah revelation:

“...and let them go round the
Ancient House.” (22:29)

... وَلْيَطَّوَّفُوا بِالْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ ﴿٢٩﴾

In this act, a Muslim feels himself in the presence of the One God, and says aloud: *labbaika Allāhumma labbaika, lā sharīka la-ka, labbaika* — “Here am I, O Allah! here am I in Your presence, there is no associate with You, here am I”. The Ka‘bah is an emblem of belief in One God, it is the place from which sprang the idea of the oneness of God, the place which would always be the centre for all believers in the one God. All ideas of the pilgrim at that time are concentrated upon this theme. The pilgrim forgets everything and remembers only the One God. That is the *tawāf*. Prayers or supplications may be addressed to God in the course of *tawāf*.

- There is a corner-stone at one corner of the Ka‘bah known as the Black Stone. This stone is kissed during the *tawāf*, although just making a sign over it is sufficient. It seems to have been there from the time of Abraham, if not earlier. It stands there only as an emblem, a token that that part of the progeny of Abraham which was rejected by the Israelites was to become the corner-stone of the Kingdom of God. The Psalms in the Bible contain a clear reference to it:

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner-stone.”
(Psalms, 118:22)

The Israelites, descended from Abraham’s son Isaac, believed that his older son Ishmael was rejected by God, and this is why he was settled in the desert of Arabia. But it was prophesied to them in the Bible that the Last Prophet, the “chief corner-

stone” of the building of prophethood, would arise from the descendants of Ishmael. This prophecy was worded in terms of a stone rejected by builders which in the end becomes the main stone of the building. The Black Stone is a reminder of this prophecy. Jesus repeated this prophecy very clearly to the Israelites when he said:

“Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone....’ ... Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”
(Matthew, 21:42, 43)

He meant that, after him, no more prophets would appear among the Israelites, among whom numerous prophets had appeared before, but that prophethood would be transferred to the “rejected stone”.

- It is alleged by critics of Islam that the practice of *tawāf* and kissing the Black Stone is a remnant of the idolatrous practices of pre-Islamic Arabs and that Islam incorporated these into its acts of worship. The fact is that although, before the coming of Islam, the Ka‘bah had 360 idols within its walls, the Black Stone was never regarded as an idol by the pre-Islamic Arabs, nor was it ever worshipped by them like the idols of the Ka‘bah. Among the numerous objects which were taken for gods by the pre-Islamic Arabs, the Ka‘bah and the Black Stone are the only two which are conspicuous by their absence, despite the fact that they were revered by the Arabs before Islam.
- Among other acts of the Pilgrimage we may mention the running of the pilgrims between two little hills situated near Makkah, called the Safa and the Marwah. It is next in importance to the *tawāf*. These two hills were the scene of Hagar’s running between them in search of water for her baby Ishmael, when she was left there by Abraham. They have thus become monuments of patience under the hardest trials. The pilgrims learn that one must struggle hard to find and learn the truths which give us spiritual life.
- At the end of the Pilgrimage, there takes place the well-known practice of the throwing of stones or pebbles by the pilgrims at three pillars (which are now walls) which represent the temptations of the devil. During the Pilgrimage the temptations of real life must not be forgotten, and the throwing of stones draws attention to the temptations of the Evil one. It teaches the lesson that we must learn to hate evil and that the Evil one should be kept at a distance of a stone’s throw. The nearer a person gets to temptations, the more likely he is to give in to them, and the best way of avoiding them is to keep them at a distance. The throwing of stones is, moreover, a reminder of the spiritual fight which we must wage against evil.