

The Hajj, the Eid and the Sacrifice

With Eid al-Adha observed by Muslims yesterday, our focus today shifts to exploring the significance of the Hajj pilgrimage, the Eid and their meanings.

While often seen as uniquely Islamic, the concept of pilgrimage — a sacred journey to a special place — is a near-universal thread woven through the fabric of almost every major religion. Far from being an isolated practice, the Hajj in Islam stands as one prominent example within a global tradition. From ancient spiritual sites to modern shrines, countless faiths ask their adherents to undertake specific forms of travel to sacred destinations. These pilgrimages typically involve a physical and spiritual quest to a place imbued with profound meaning, whether it's the birthplace of a prophet, a site of divine revelation, or a location tied to foundational religious events. This shared human impulse to journey to holy ground highlights a common desire across diverse belief systems to deepen faith, seek purification, and connect with a sacred past.

For Muslims, the Hajj is one of the five foundational pillars of Islam, an obligatory act of worship that must be performed once in a lifetime by those who are physically and financially capable. This profound spiritual journey takes place annually during the first half of Dhul-Hijjah, the final month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Its significance is rooted in a divine call, as stated in the Quran: **"And**

proclaim to the people the Hajj [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass" (Quran 22:27). It's this reliance on the lunar cycle for religious observances that has led to the international adoption of the crescent moon as a widely recognized symbol for the Islamic faith. It is crucial to note, however, that Muslims emphatically do not worship the moon or any created entity; their devotion is directed solely towards God (Allah), the Creator of all.

Central to the Hajj rituals is a visit to the sacred city of Mecca, where pilgrims circumambulate the Kaaba, the ancient cube-shaped building considered the first house of worship built for the sole purpose of worshiping God. Another key ritual involves walking back and forth seven times between the two small mountains of Safa and Marwa. Remarkably, these profound rituals were originally taught and exemplified by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), his son Prophet Ismael (Ishmael), and Ismael's mother Hajar. The compelling story of Hajar's perseverance and Ismael's miraculous sustenance, which forms the basis for these acts, will be explored in greater detail when we recount the narrative of Prophet Ismael.

Pilgrims performing Hajj wear special garments known as ihram, which symbolize purity, equality, and humility before God. For men, the ihram consists of two simple white, unstitched pieces of cloth—one wrapped around the waist to cover



Guest
Column

HATIM HEGAB

the lower body, and the other draped over the shoulders to cover the upper body. Women, on the other hand, wear modest clothing that fully covers their bodies, following Islamic guidelines. However, they are not permitted to cover their faces or the palms of their hands during the state of ihram. When one gazes upon the multitude of pilgrims, a sea of white garments stretches as far as the eye can see. In that scene, it becomes impossible to distinguish between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak. All are equal before God — united in worship, stripped of worldly distinctions, and bound by a shared sense of humility and devotion.

A pivotal ritual within the Hajj season is the act of sacrifice. Pilgrims are required to offer a sacrifice, typically a sheep or goat, though a cow or camel is also permissible. This profound practice stems directly from the timeless narrative of Prophet Ibrahim, who was divinely commanded to sacrifice his beloved son, Ismael. When Ibrahim demonstrated his absolute obedience to this immense test of faith, God intervened, miraculously replacing Ismael with a magnificent ram. This act of substitution allowed Ibrahim to fulfill the divine order, cementing the

sacrifice as a profound symbol of submission, devotion, and gratitude that continues to be re-enacted by pilgrims to this day. Indeed, the Quran further elaborates on the purpose of Hajj: **"That they may witness benefits for themselves and mention the name of Allah on known days over what He has provided for them of [sacrificial] animals. So eat from them and feed the miserable and poor"** (Quran 22:28). Sacrifice holds profound significance in Islam, symbolizing devotion, obedience, and gratitude to Allah. This ultimate act of faith is commemorated annually during Eid al-Adha, when Muslims around the world offer animals in sacrifice, reflecting their readiness to give up what they love for the sake of their Creator. This ritual not only honors a great prophetic legacy but also serves as a reminder of the spiritual value of selflessness and unwavering trust in God's wisdom.

Beyond the physical act, sacrifice in Islam extends to everyday life, encouraging Muslims to give of their time, wealth, and comfort for the welfare of others and the sake of Allah. It fosters a sense of social responsibility, community cohesion, and empathy for those in need. Whether through charitable giving, enduring hardships with patience, or prioritizing faith over personal desires, sacrifice nurtures sincerity in worship and strengthens the believer's relationship with Allah. In essence, it is through sacrifice that Muslims demonstrate the

depth of their iman (faith) and their commitment to a higher moral and spiritual purpose.

The season culminates in the joyous occasion of Eid al-Adha, where "Eid" is an Arabic term meaning a day of celebration. Muslims mark these festive days by commencing with a special congregational prayer, typically performed early in the morning, around eight o'clock. While children often find particular delight in Eid, receiving money for treats and toys, adults generally dedicate these special days to visiting extended family, with a particular emphasis on sisters, aunts, and other relatives, reinforcing communal bonds and kinship.

Integral to the spirit of Eid and the broader Islamic ethos is a profound emphasis on charity. Before the celebratory days, the welfare of the less fortunate is paramount, with Muslims strongly encouraged to contribute generously to those in need. This commitment to giving is so central that many sins in Islam can be expiated through providing charity. Notably, Islam advocates for direct charity from those who can give to those who need it, rather than accumulating wealth for religious ceremonies. The teachings prioritize discretion in giving, often favoring secret or in-person donations to preserve the dignity of the recipients. Furthermore, a high standard for charitable offerings is encouraged, especially towards families with children, ensuring the quality of the donation is on par with what the giver uses for themselves.

Within Islam, Hajj is

more than a mere ritual; it's a comprehensive spiritual and communal experience that encapsulates the very essence of devotion and submission. It's a journey from the outer self to the inner self, reminding pilgrims of their shared humanity and their singular purpose of worshiping God. The meticulous rituals, from circumambulating the Kaaba to pacing between Safa and Marwa, are not arbitrary acts but profound reenactments of ancient devotion, connecting contemporary believers to the foundational narratives of prophets like Ibrahim, Ismael, and Hajar. Each step, every prayer, and every moment spent in the sacred precincts serve to strip away worldly attachments and foster a profound sense of humility and absolute reliance on the Creator. This intense focus on devotion during Hajj also serves as a potent reminder of the fragility of human existence and the ultimate accountability to a higher power, shaping the believer's perspective on life's true priorities.

Ultimately, the Hajj, along with its associated values, offers a compelling insight into the comprehensive nature of Islam. It reveals a faith that seamlessly weaves together individual religious growth with collective social responsibility, historical reverence with contemporary practice, and joyous celebration with profound contemplation.

Author: hatim.hegab@gmail.com

Information: <https://icstillwater.org>