

The Hajj and the Day of Arafa

Today’s article was supposed to be “The Quran, Part 2,” but I will postpone publishing the second part until next week. Instead, I will discuss “The Hajj,” or the “Pilgrimage,” as today marks the Day of Arafa.

You may have heard about the Day of Arafa on the TV news or the radio, so what is Hajj, and what does the Day of Arafa mean?

Arafa is the name of a mountain near Mecca (Makkah) in modern-day Saudi Arabia. Witnessing Mount Arafat (standing on Arafat and its valley) is the cornerstone of the Hajj. Tomorrow, Muslims will “stone” Satan for three consecutive days.

Don’t these practices raise some questions about monotheism?

Almost all religions have some form of pilgrimage. Before we begin our discussion, it is crucial to understand what a pilgrimage is. A pilgrimage is a journey or trip to a place or region with significant religious importance for a particular faith.

I have often stated that Islam is a purely monotheistic religion. So how is it that Muslims are perceived to “worship” a mountain, consider it sacred, or stone a monument, thinking they are stoning Satan? What is the Ka’aba that Muslims circumambulate? Isn’t this some form of heathen practice?

To address these ques-

tions, it’s essential to understand the context and symbolism behind these practices in Islam.

The answer starts with the concept of monotheism itself. Monotheism is the worship of the One God, Allah. Allah is the name of God in Arabic and Aramaic. The letter “L” in Allah is pronounced as in the word “multiple,” not as in “Al.”

God, Who is All-Knowing, All-Wise, All-Powerful, and possesses many other attributes, is the central figure in Islam. This belief entails that God is the One Who decides our fate and instructs us on how to live our lives. Consequently, He is also the One Who teaches us how to practice our faith.

God sent messengers and prophets to guide us in worshiping the One Who created us and teach us how to worship as God instructed. The central theme of the messengers and prophets was to stop worshiping any partners alongside God. People worshiped idols, trees, stars, and planets. The message of the messengers and prophets was that all these gods were false, and only God—Allah—was to be worshiped.

People accepted the message and abandoned the worship of idols, statues, and other partners they used to associate with God. Then came the command from God Himself: “I asked you not to worship these



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idols, statues, and trees, but I am asking you to dignify this or that of my creation.” It is God’s directive to dignify, not to worship, respect, or sanctify.

Following these directives, Muslims stand on Mount Arafat because they were commanded to do so; it has its roots, but not because it is considered a sacred or holy mountain to be worshiped. That’s why it is only crowded on one day of the year, and for the rest of the year, it remains deserted. The same principle applies to the Ka’aba, the cubical building toward which Muslims direct their faces in prayer five times daily. Muslims do not worship the Ka’aba; they face it because they were instructed to do so. It is true that Muslims visit the Haram (the Great Mosque) and worship there. They cry, asking for forgiveness and repenting their sins, but if you ever listen to them, Muslims always direct their supplications to God (Allah) Himself and not to the Ka’aba itself.

With that clarification, let’s explore the question: What is Hajj?

Hajj, in Islam, is the

pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which every adult Muslim must make at least once in their lifetime. The Hajj is the fifth of the fundamental Muslim practices known as the Five Pillars of Islam (The Statement of Shahada, performing prayers, giving alms, fasting Ramadan, and performing Hajj if one can). The pilgrimage practice begins on the 7th day of Dhū al-ijjah (the last month of the Islamic year, based on the lunar calendar) and ends on the 12th day.

The Hajj is incumbent on all Muslims who are physically and financially able to make the pilgrimage, but only if their absence will not place hardships on their family. A person may perform the Hajj by proxy, appointing a relative or friend going on the pilgrimage to “stand in” for him or her.

The Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) established the pattern of pilgrimage practice right after he was ordered to build the Ka’aba. The Quran says, “*The pilgrimage is in known months. Whoever commits himself to perform the pilgrimage, there should be no intimacy, foul language, and arguments during the pilgrimage. Whatever good you do, Allah is aware of it. And take provisions for the journey, but the best provision is righteousness. So fear Me, O people of understanding.*” [2: 197].

All Hajj practices are in the Quran, “*Indeed, Safa and Marwah [mounts] are among the symbols of Allah. So whoever performs the pilgrimage or ‘Umra, there is no blame upon him to go between them[69]. And whoever does good voluntarily, then Allah is All-Appreciative, All-Knowing.*” [2: 157]. With time, the teachings of the Prophet Abraham (pbuh) were forgotten, and many other practices and illegal rites were added. Then came Muhammad (pbuh) to teach people the teachings of Ibrahim. The call for Hajj is clear in this order to Abraham, “*And proclaim the pilgrimage to all people; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every distant pathway (27) so that they may attain benefits, and pronounce Allah’s name during the appointed days over the sacrificial animals that He has provided for them; then eat from it and feed the desperately poor (28)*” [22: 27-28] and also, “*Such [is the pilgrimage]; whoever honors the sacred rituals of Allah, it is best for him with his Lord. All sacrificial animals have been made lawful for you except what is recited to you[19]. So shun the impurity of idolatry and shun the words of falsehood.*” [22: 30].

When nearing Mecca, pilgrims, adorned in garments symbolizing purity called ihram, enter a state

of holiness. Men wear two seamless white sheets, while women wear sewn attire. Throughout the pilgrimage, neither hair nor nails are trimmed. Upon reaching Mecca, they circumambulate the sacred Kaaba seven times in the Great Mosque, potentially touching the revered Black Stone. Then, they traverse between Mount Safa and Mount Marwah seven times. On the 7th day of Dhul-Hijjah, pilgrims are reminded of their obligations. In the subsequent stage, they journey to holy sites outside Mecca, like Mount Arafat, symbolically sacrificing an animal. Shaving male pilgrims’ heads and trimming a hair lock for females follow. After stoning rituals at Mina, pilgrims return to Mecca for a final circumambulation of the Kaaba before departure.

Around two million individuals annually partake in the Hajj, a ritual that unites Muslims of diverse backgrounds in religious celebration. Upon completion, pilgrims may add the honorific titles Hajj or Hajji (for males) and Hajjah (for females) to their names. Correctly performed, the pilgrimage is believed to absolve sincere believers of past transgressions.

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Alarmed by embryo destruction, Southern Baptists urge caution on IVF by couples and government

INDIANAPOLIS — Southern Baptist delegates expressed alarm Wednesday over the way in vitro fertilization is routinely being practiced, approving a resolution lamenting that the creation of surplus frozen embryos often results in “destruction of embryonic human life.”

They urged members to carefully weigh the ethical implications of the technology while also expressing sympathy with couples “who experience the searing pain of infertility.”

The resolution — approved near the end of the Southern Baptist Convention’s two-day annual meeting — affirms that embryos are human beings from the moment of fertilization, whether in the womb or generated in the laboratory via IVF. That’s the same position held by the Alabama Supreme Court in ruling that frozen embryos have the full rights of people.

In the wake of that decision, Alabama passed a law shielding IVF providers from prosecution

and lawsuits — reflecting that even in a state with strong anti-abortion sentiment, there is support for a technology used by many couples facing infertility.

The resolution also urged couples to adopt surplus frozen embryos that would otherwise be destroyed.

Did the resolution condemn IVF or call for its banning?

Not in a blanket way. What it did was denounce the routine practice of creating multiple

embryos, frozen for potential use but often with surplus embryos destroyed. It also denounced the use of embryos for experiments, as well as “dehumanizing methods for determining suitability for life and genetic sorting, based on notions of genetic fitness and parental preferences.”

Kristen Ferguson, chair of the committee on resolutions, said after the vote that the resolution amounts to the SBC’s first foray into a new ethical

frontier but rooted in their longstanding belief in “the sanctity of the human embryo.”

IVF “is not respecting the sanctity of the human embryo ... in the way it is routinely practiced,” she said. “Right now we’re trying to open the conversation, remind Southern Baptists of our long-held beliefs of the sanctity of human life and allow them to begin to think through the ethical implications.”

— AP

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Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.



Isaiah 46:9

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