

Fast 24: Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

- As an institution *hajj*, or the pilgrimage to Makkah, existed before the advent of Islam from a very remote antiquity. Belief in the sacredness of the territory around Makkah, and the fact of the Ka‘bah being the centre of pilgrimage, existed from time immemorial, for there is no record showing that it was introduced at any time within historical memory. Among Arabs before Islam, the Ka‘bah was known by the name *Bait Allah* or House of God, and there was a belief prevalent among them that no enemy could destroy it.
- All the main features and ceremonies of the pilgrimage in Islam existed before the advent of Prophet Muhammad and were based on the authority of the prophet Abraham. However, before the time of the Prophet Muhammad, people had added various idolatrous practices to it. Idols had been placed in the Ka‘bah and other important places. The Ka‘bah itself had within it 360 idols which were worshipped. Some tribes considered themselves as too high to mix with others during the pilgrimage.
- Even before Islam had adopted the pilgrimage as a duty of Muslims, and reformed it, it recognized the sacredness of Makkah and that the pilgrimage to it was a practice established by Abraham. While the Holy Prophet was still at Makkah, he was told in his revelation:

“I am commanded only to serve the Lord of this city, Who has made it sacred, and His are all things”.
(27:91)

إِنَّمَا أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ رَبَّ هَذِهِ الْبَلَدَةِ الَّذِي
حَرَّمَهَا وَلَهُ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ

And:

“And when Abraham said: My Lord, make this city secure, and save me and my sons from worshipping idols. ... Our Lord, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Your Sacred House, our Lord, that they may keep up prayer; so make the hearts of some people yearn towards them, and provide them with fruits; perhaps they may be grateful.”
(14:35, 37)

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَ
اجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ ۗ
رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي
زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا
الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي
إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ

- It is important to emphasize the above facts because critics of Islam allege that it was after the Holy Prophet had migrated to Madinah, and subsequently won the battle of Badr, that he began to look forward to conquering Makkah, and therefore to create a basis for this he thought of declaring Makkah as a sacred city and a place of pilgrimage.
- The pilgrimage was declared a part of Islam while the Holy Prophet was still at Makkah, very shortly before his departure for Madinah. The Quran stated:

“And when We pointed to Abraham the place of the House, saying: Do not set up any partner with Me, and purify My House for those who make circuits and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim to mankind the Pilgrimage: they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path”. (22:26-27)

وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ
 فِي شَيْءٍ وَأَظْهِرْ بَيْتِي لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَ
 الرُّكْعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿٢٦﴾
 وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَى كُلِّ
 ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

Abraham had been commanded to establish the practice of pilgrimage to Makkah to the House known as the Ka‘bah, as stated above. The command “proclaim to mankind the Pilgrimage” was addressed to Abraham and also repeated to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It contains a mighty prophecy that Makkah will become the centre to which people will come for pilgrimage. It was announced just at the time when the Holy Prophet was being driven away from Makkah by his enemies, who were the sole masters of the place. Just when Makkah seemed to have lost every chance of becoming a Muslim centre, and when the Muslims themselves were in danger of being entirely destroyed, a mighty prophecy is announced in the most forcible words that Islam will spread to all countries of the world, and Makkah will become the universal centre to which pilgrims from all nations will come.

- This was also prophesied in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah said:

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it” (Isaiah, 2:2).

Being the “highest” and “raised above the hills” means, of course, the highest in dignity and honour in the hearts of mankind.