

### Fast 25: Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

- The *hajj* was a recognized institution in Islam in the first and second years of *Hijrah* **before** the commencement of the battles with 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 injunction to accomplish the *hajj* in the following 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, and earlier in 2:158 and 2:189. The earliest verses giving Muslims permission to fight in self-defence are 2:190–193. 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, or cutting yourself off from the world for religious purposes, in all its aspects. Yet it lays the greatest stress upon 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 is quite in keeping with the practical side of life.
- The five daily prayers require the sacrifice of a small part of a person’s time and, without in any way interfering with his everyday life, enable him to realize the Divine that is within him. The institution of *zakāt* demands the giving up of a small portion of his wealth without interfering with his right to property. Fasting requires the giving up of food and drink but not in such a manner as to make one 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 clad in one dress — in 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 but one word to speak, *labbaika Allāhumma labbaika*, meaning *here are we, O Allah! here are we in Your august presence*.
- The descriptions of *hajj* usually given take notice only of its outward actions, without trying to discover 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 man feels that all those veils which keep him away from God are entirely removed and he is standing in the Divine presence.
- 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 hold communion with God in a 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 object 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 privations entailed by 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 adversary, yet he is not allowed to have any quarrel with him; and all this that he may have a higher spiritual experience, the spiritual experience not of the hermit who is cut off from the world, not of the devotee holding communion with God in the corner of solitude, but of the man living in the world, in the company of his wife, his friends and his foes.