

# The Most Sacred Places



*The most Sacred Places: Spiritual Dimensions of Pilgrimage*

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*[Opening du'ā']*

Al-hamd lillah, it's by the blessing of Allah (swt) that the season of Hajj is coming close. And as the season of Hajj draws closes, many of us and many of our community will be heading forth on this sacred journey of Hajj. And many of us will not be going on that journey but we will know people who are going and will realize that the sacred month is upon us, and we may recall some of the great things that will happen during Hajj as it passes by. And Hajj is something tremendous, and our beloved Prophet (saw) told us that an excepted Hajj as no reward but Paradise. That if the Hajj is mabrūr then the reward is paradise and that the person who returns from Hajj - and that the Hajj is accepted - then they return as the day their mother gave birth to them. Absolutely pure, absolutely free of sin. In a state of absolute innocence and radiance. Yet if this is what Allah's Messenger (saw) tells us about Hajj and he (saw) is Al-sādiq Al-masdūq, the true and trustworthy, we find that we see people go to Hajj and return from Hajj but not in this manner.

Some people are obviously affected and they have benefited, but so many return as they left. Not like when they were born. Their Hajj was not like an act of re-birth. And the reason for this is that they forget what they are making Hajj to. That Hajj has an outward form and a reality. And a very simple starting point to consider the reality of Hajj is a hadīth we are all familiar with. This is the hadīth of intention. And we know the beginning of the hadīth. But at the end of the hadīth, the Prophet (saw) tell us about two different types of people who migrate. We know about the migration of the Prophet (saw) and the saḥābah from Medina to Yathrib, which became Medina Al-Munawara, Medīnat Al-Nabī (saw) yet that migration, that Hijra, at a form which it was, from Medina to Makkah and the Prophet (saw) tells us in the hadīth of intention about the reality of the Hijra - that it wasn't a Hijra to Medīna. What was it a Hijra to? The Prophet said that 'If your Hijra is for Allah and His Messenger then it is indeed for Allah and His Messenger. And if the Hijra was for some worldly matter they sought or for a woman they sought to marry, then their Hijra was for whatever they performed hijra for.'

So the Hijra had this form, but what was the reality of this Hijra? It was to Allah! And His Messenger (saw). The same applies to our Hajj when we consider the Hajj. When we are setting forth with the Hajj we concern ourselves with the preparations and the planning and where we will stay and the actions of the Hajj, and these are important but we forget what the Hajj is to. The Hajj is not to Makkah. The Hajj in reality is not even to Medīna. Our Hajj our entire life is to Allah and His Messenger (saw). And then when we consider our intentions. We consider our intentions what we seek in life, is we seek the pleasure of Allah. But no, our seeking is not only for Allah Himself, our seeking in life is for Allah and His Messenger. Allah is the one who is sought. But we seek in our actions Allah and His Messenger. Because the only way you can seek Allah is by seeking the Messenger (saw). Whoever's migration is to Allah and His Messenger, then his Migration indeed is to Allah and His Messenger. Allah is our goal, but the Prophet (saw) is the means and the door to Allah (swt). There is no reaching Allah except through the Prophet (saw) and this is something we forget when we head out for Hajj. This is something we forget even when we go to Medīna. When we go to Medīna, we are not visiting Medīna; we are seeking Allah and His Messenger. Every action of Hajj is a seeking of Allah and His Messenger.

And this applies to those who go on Hajj but those who don't have lessons to learn as we shall see.

Before we go out on Hajj and we prepare, the most important preparation to make is to prepare our hearts for the sacred journey. To prepare our hearts - to consider why it is we are going on Hajj. Otherwise we have failed. And when we are on Hajj we have to remember why we are there. So that those things that are going on around us don't distract us away from what we are seeking. And if we realize that when we return from Hajj, we have to live the lessons learned during the Hajj and make that the purpose of our life. Because what is Hajj? Hajj is 'directing one's self to something which is tremendous.' So when you go on hajj you are directing yourself to Allah (swt) and if you are not going to Hajj yourself, as many of us won't be, you have to make an inward Hajj to Allah and his messenger (saw) and yet we know so much poetry of the great poets of Islām who lived the Hajj even though they were far. And one of the great Awliyā' was told that people are now going – day by day people

used to live the vents of Hajj. Even from afar. And people said that people are now visiting the Prophet (saw) and he said are they visiting the Prophet (saw) and he said people think that they are visiting Muhammad (saw), but he lives in my heart. And he was in North Africa at that time. Why? Because he had made the Hajj to Allah and His Messenger. He was living the reality of Hajj, he was directing himself to Allah and His Messenger (saw).

So many people are there at 'Arafat yet there hearts are elsewhere.

Ibn 'Arabī (ra) said that one of the strangest things he ever saw in his life was that he was performing tawāf around the Ka'ba and he saw an old man close to death, hanging to the draping of the ka'ba yet where was his heart? His heart was not with Allah, he was asking Allah just for the dunyā. And then he came out from the Haram Al-Sharīf (may Allah grant us to go there if not this year then as soon as possible) he stepped out, ibn 'Arabī (ra) and went into the market place and saw a youth, in the very fullness of youth buying and selling, it seems, in worldly activity. Yet this young person, would not cease in the remembrance of Allah (swt). So who was the one performing tawāf? Who was the one in the state of directness to Allah? In the state of Hajj? Was it that old man hanging on to the Ka'ba?

It was that youth in the market place.

And this is the challenge for the one who comes on Hajj and for the one who does not. And we have to direct ourselves to Allah and His Messenger (saw) this is the reality of Hajj. For the one who does it, and for the one who isn't given tawfīq. And in the actions of Hajj are so many signs for the believer. Because if you direct yourself to something, if you perform Hajj to something, if your Hajj is to Allah and His Messenger then how must your life be?

It is indicative that the central action of Hajj is tawāf. You go around the house of Allah. You are not going around a physical house. What is the reality of your tawāf? You're affirming your very existence is revolving around Allah (swt) and on the Prophet (saw).

This is what we must live. That our entire life must be built around Allah and His Messenger. Our hearts must beat for the yearning of Allah and His Messenger. Where ever we maybe we may be in a state of Hajj. In a state of ihrām. And at the same time we have to have yearning. If you do not find in your heart a yearning for Mekkah, a yearning for Medīna, then where is your imān. Yearning is not for some stones. Is it for Allah (swt) it is for the Messenger (saw).

This is something to reflect on, that we have to make our journey for the sake of Allah (swt) and His Messenger (saw) and we have to reflect on this. For so many of us when we go on Hajj we go without any passion we have to reflect what does it mean to go on Hajj for the sake of Allah and His Messenger (saw) and you have to stir your yearning for Allah and His Messenger. Consider the blessings of Allah on you. Consider the favour of the Prophet (saw) upon you. So when you go on Hajj, when you go to the Haram, when you go to Al-Rawda Al-Sherīfa your are not just going to a place. You are re-uniting; you are seeking union with

the one you love and the beloved of your beloved. This is the yearning you have to stir up but this yearning requires reflection. You have to consider what am I performing Hajj for and to. So that when you go to the Rawda, you are not just going there because you have to. You're going there because you can't do anything else.

One of the great scholars of Halab, from the generation before our generation, I heard one of his students he went to the Rawda, he went to Masjid of the Prophet (saw) and standing at the doors, and the first day he couldn't even go in because every time he would take the next step, he would be crying, because he had been yearning for this for so long. That his heart was filled with a sense of attachment to the Prophet (saw). He thought to himself where am I from the Prophet (as in to say, what am I compared to him (saw)) where am I from his example? How can I present myself to him (saw). And what does it mean for me to be standing in front of the prophet (saw)? And he just couldn't take that next step. He would just melt away in his crying he'd stand hours just crying. Why? Because this was someone who had already made Hajj to Allah (swt) and His messenger (saw) and that next expression, it took days for him to take that next step and go in.

This is people whose hearts are alive with conciseness for Allah and His Messenger (saw) and just like the person who goes on Hajj, we need to make our lives revolve around Allah and His Messenger (saw) this is the lesson of Hajj. And if you do not go on Hajj, reflect on what the hujāj are doing. The people performing the Hajj, and live that and consider what the hajj should be teaching you in your day to day life. And the central message of course is to make your life revolve around Allah and the Messenger (saw) and if you do that, your life will change and if you perform Hajj on this basis, then you will find that the day you return will be like the day your mother gave birth to you. And before we go on Hajj, we have to be sincere.

If you are going to visit your beloved the first thing you do is clean up. You have to clean up. You have to realize there are proper manners of presenting yourself before the one you love, before the one worthy of respect. You're presenting yourself before Allah (swt) you're going into the presence of the Prophet (saw) and the way you prepare yourself for that, the way you cleanse yourself for that before you go on Hajj is to rectify the wrongs you've engaged in life, to repent. From the sins, to repent from your wrong doing. If you have family relationships you have broken, mend them before you go on Hajj. If you have debt, either re-pay them or take the means to rectify those wrongs. Because if you are not able to pay the debt, then make arrangements to say 'yes I owe this money. I don't have it right now, I will repay, but please forgive me.' Take the means to address those wrongs. You have a friend whom you hurt in world, indeed seek their forgiveness so that you prepare yourself for that journey. But if you are not going on Hajj physically you have to realize that your entire life is a journey to Allah (swt) and prepare yourself for the journeying to Allah, to the journeying to the Prophet (saw) journeying to rasūl Allah (saw).

How? By repentance and addressing of wrongs. And when you go forth on Hajj, make the commitment to go on Hajj in the footsteps of the Prophet (saw). And there are two keys to that; one is to concern yourself during Hajj in things that you believe the Messenger concerns himself with. Don't concern yourself with the fact that they serve prawn cocktail at the hotel

you are staying at go there with a desire to perform your Hajj like the Messenger (saw) performed his Hajj, and we know (saw) performed his Hajj, both in his turning to Allah (swt) and in the trials of Hajj, it's one of the great wisdoms of Hajj. That Hajj is difficult. In the old days the 'ulamā' used to say that before going go and bid farewell to all that you know because there is a high chance that you will not return. And in the lands of central Asia it used to be so dangerous to perform Hajj. If you look at the books of Hanafi Fiqh the mention for example that Hajj is no longer obligatory for the people of Samarkand. Why? Not because in its self it's not obligatory, but because it was so dangerous to go on Hajj. It was so difficult to get there because people will be looted it would take months of journeying to get there. Now the journey has been made easy for us, we just fly there. And there maybe a couple hours of delays in Jeddah. We complain about those few hours. But the Hajj itself has many difficulties, many trials, and that is from the wisdom of Allah (swt). Because if you are sincere in directing yourself to Allah (swt) in seeking Allah and His messenger, then He will test your sincerity. In how you deal with people, because when you go on Hajj, the actions of Hajj, anyone who's got the least of intelligence realizes these are to my advantage. You will incline towards those actions.

But it can become selfish. The test of your Hajj is how you deal with other people. When they annoy you, when they push you, when they shove you, they do all sorts of things. This is exactly how Allah wants it to be. To test are we really performing our Hajj to Allah and His Messenger and if we are, then our dealing with this stuff, our dealing with these ignorant people, who would forbid us from following the ways of proper adab. In standing before the Ka'ba, in standing before the Rawda these ignorant people who were harsh and rude and who tell us not to commit bid'a and shirk and act in rude ways in front of the rasūl Allah (saw) how do we deal with these situations? Do we deal with them as the Prophet (saw) would have dealt with them? This is the key to having a Hajj for the sake of Allah and His Messenger (saw) to busy ourselves during the Hajj, to turn to Allah but also to uphold the Sunnah of (saw) in dealing with the trials and challenges of Hajj this is part of that Hajj, a test of your sincerity of directing yourself to Allah (swt) and if you fail, hasten to repent, because everyone who has gone on hajj is a guest of Allah and His messenger. Regardless of how ever they may be acting. And somebody who is a guest of Allah and the Messenger you have to maintain adab with them regardless of how they are acting.

If you are staying at home and someone is your father's guest and they are a bit rude to you, or very rude to you, you wouldn't be rude back to them why? Because they are not your guests, you say please can you go away, (implying you wouldn't say that) they are the guests of your father. Imagine the guests of Allah and His Messenger (swt) so we have to be very very careful on Hajj – the way we act. And when you return we have to strive to live those lessons of Hajj and continue towards Allah and His Messenger (saw) for the rest of our lives. And for those who are not going this year for Hajj, to reflect on what people are going through to make our own life journey to Allah and His Messenger (saw) , to begin now and not say one day I will go on Hajj and change things. Because you don't know if your next breath is your last. So begin your Hajj now. And if you can't go on Hajj now, make the intention to go as soon as you can (and say) Yā Allah I have never gone on Hajj but I intend to perform Hajj as soon as I can. Yā Allah I have never visited the Messenger (saw) I've never gone to Medīna Al-Munawara, I've never gone to Medīnet Al-Nabī (saw). Yā Allah I have made that intention to go now, and I'm living my intention in my daily life I am seeking the way of the Messenger (saw) and I'm going to make tawāf in my life, around Allah and

His Messenger (saw) I'm going to make my entire life revolve around Allah and His Messenger.

And if we do this, then indeed our Hajj is for Allah and His Messenger. And we will find benefit in our lives. May Allah (swt) make us of those with an excepted Hajj, a Hajj mubrūr, a Hajj that makes us of those of reach Allah (swt).

Who reach the Messenger (saw) not just in body but in spirit, so we can be like so many of those who say, the great awliā' said that even if the Messenger of Allah was veiled from me for even a moment I will no longer consider myself a believer.

Oh Allah make us of those who seek the Messenger of Allah, such that our every step is taken on the footsteps of Allah's beloved (saw).

Oh Allah if we ever fall short, make us of those who repent and hasten to return to the Prophetic example (saw) in our both in our worship if we fall short in it, also in our dealings and conduct that we make our entire lives revolve around the light of the example Allah's beloved Messenger.

*[Closing du'ā']*