

In the Name of Allah the Compassionate the Merciful

Dear Muslims

Today is the day our Muslim Brother and Sisters in Hajj stand on Arafat. And Tomorrow, they complete all the rites, symbols, and procedures of Hajj.

We take this opportunity to supplicate to Allah that He accept their Hajj, forgive their sins, bring them all to their homes safe, make their Hajj reach their hearts, change them into strong believers, and make them useful to our Islamic Ummah.

We also take this opportunity to supplicate to Allah to make us among those who will be blessed by performing Hajj in future years In'sha'Allah.

And, tomorrow, as our Brothers and Sisters complete their Hajj, we all celebrate Eid, Eidul Adha, the Eid of Sacrifice.

Two aspects of these holy days are worthy of our study and examination: The hardship of Hajj, and the Sacrifice associated with it.

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, it is a must for the adult Muslims who can afford it both physically and financially.

Allah Says in Surat Al Imran (3:97)

The translation of the meaning is "Pilgrimage is a duty people owe to Allah - Those who can afford the way (journey)".

In performing Hajj, a Muslim suffers many hardships. He takes out of his time, his money, his effort, and his health to perform this worship.

It takes at least two weeks or so to travel and do the pilgrimage.

Hajj expenses are costly and are beyond the affordance of most of the Muslims around the world.

Physical effort is required in performing Hajj: travel in itself is a physical hardship, Tawaf, walking and rushing between Safaa and Marwa, the Rajm (stoning) of Iblis, and you do that in an ocean of humans. An unparalleled crowd.

Many other hardships like those resulting from the codes of dress, and other restrictions.

And one wonders: How can a Muslim, in the midst of all these hardships and with all such suffering, devote himself to the worship of Allah and perform pilgrimage?

The answer to this question is simple if we consider the case of the other worships that Allah commanded us to do, also if we were to consider any meaningful action or task that we are to accomplish.

There is always a mission, a goal that we are to attain, yet there are always impeding factors that stand between us and that goal. And, those who are successful, do not let these

impeding elements from preventing them from reaching the goal and accomplishing the mission.

Success never comes easily whichever success we talk about.

In education and studies, one has to spend these long hours of reading, working out practices and exercises, and research to get the knowledge he seeks.

In professional life, it takes tremendous effort, trials and error, and many hardships and disappointments, before one reaches any degree of success.

In raising children, it takes out of parents time, comfort, money, and emotions, to do a sincere effort leading to a successful mission.

This is the way life is, and this is the way Islamic worships are as well. Islam is a way of life that makes worship part of our lives just like eating, studying, and raising our children. An integral part that blends with both aspects of our existence; physical and spiritual.

In our daily prayers, we take out of our time and effort to do them on time under all circumstances and conditions to strengthen our belief and our ties to Allah, as we worship Him.

In fasting, we struggle with hunger and thirst as we strengthen our belief and our ties to Allah, as we worship Him.

In Zakat, we pay out of our wealth, we help others as we help ourselves, and in this way again we worship Allah.

In all these are hardships, but there is a goal, and our objective is the successful achievement of the mission. And, in going through these hardships, we learn how to deal with them and how to overcome them. And that makes us better humans and stronger Muslims.

And, in Hajj, is a greater hardship, if we examine the fact that it is only mandatory for those who can afford it.

In Hajj, we see a great wisdom, as we struggle with all the hardships of Hajj, we are to sincerely worship Allah.

The goal is the worship and the impeding factors are those of our daily lives.

A concentrated dose of hardship we experience in this Hajj yet it is the same kind we have to deal with every day.

And we have to deal with it, overcome it, and successfully accomplish our mission of sincere and devoted attachment to Allah and His way, simply worshipping Him.

Yes, in the midst of all this life hardships like working for income and dealing with people, we have got to remember Allah at all times and worship Him sincerely, worship Him as if we see Him, because if we do not see Him, He sees us.

In Hajj, we live the same circumstances in a comprehensive, concentrated and intensified form.

And as we examine ourselves as we practice the other aspects of our lives and worships. As we achieve our goal and feel the rewards, benefits, and joy of success. We then feel that every effort that was put in the process was worth it.

In our prayer, as we take the time to do it, we feel the rewards of tranquility and humbleness in our soles, we feel the rewards of renewal and strength in our hearts, and we know that the ultimate reward of Allah's Satisfaction is awaiting us.

And we know then that we did not waste our time or our effort in performing this prayer.

And in Hajj, the same happens. Those of us who have been through it know exactly that. Yes there are hardships in Hajj, but there are the rewards as well. Rewards in this life and rewards in the hereafter.

May Allah help us all realize these rewards and enable us to his way and to his satisfaction.

* Ritualistic worships in Islam such as Praying, Alms-giving, Fasting, and Pilgrimage too are to satisfy spiritual and physical needs. Again they are to profit from, and again they are to enjoy.

- Prayers in Islam is a communication between the human and his Creator. A communication in which the human soul submits to and communicates with Allah, at the same time the human body bows and kneels to Allah's Greatness and Might.

- Other ritualistic worships also provide spiritual and physical benefits.

* It is from this perspective that one can see that Islam is a way of life. It honors and respects both sides of the human; and it works for the sake of satisfying these two aspects.

* A Muslim is to always seek the balance in satisfying both aspects, the spiritual and the physical.

* In other words, a Muslim as he worships, he is working for the life in the hereafter as if he dies tomorrow, and for his current life as if he lives forever.

* It is the sincerity of the worship that gives it its effectiveness and usefulness. Islam teaches us to worship Allah as if we see Him, since if we do not see Him, He Sees us.