

continues the purification of his inward self. The day is also celebrated in Muslim communities in other parts of the world with festivities and the exchange of gifts.

8. Sacrificing an animal: In the practice of Abraham, the pilgrims sacrifice an animal. A portion of the meat is used by the pilgrim himself, some is shared by his friends and the rest is used to feed the hungry and poor.
9. Shaving the hair of the head. This act is performed by men only and symbolizes renewal and a departure from old habits and practices.
10. A return to the Sacred House: Once more the pilgrim goes around the Ka'ba and walks between Safa and Marwa. It is a confirmation of his commitment to God and his pledge to reform his ways.

3. What are the benefits of Hajj?

The rituals of Hajj are meant to inspire a Muslim and make him aware of the spiritual dimension of his existence. Indeed, pilgrims who complete the Hajj consider it one of the greatest

spiritual experiences of their lives. Moreover, in this remarkable annual convention, the pilgrim gets to meet people from every corner of the world, whose only common factor is that they are all Muslims.

F.A.Q.

About

HAJJ

FREQUENCY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HAJJ

1. What is the Hajj?

The Hajj is a pilgrimage made by Muslims to the holy city of Makka. It is an important practice of Islam, which every adult Muslim must undertake at least once in their life if they can afford it and are physically able.

God has ordained the Hajj for the Muslims in the Qur'an by saying:

"It is incumbent on every person - for the sake of God - to go for the pilgrimage to the Sacred House ... if they can afford the journey." (3/97)

Every year, in the last month of the lunar calendar, about two million Muslims go to Makka for the Hajj. In the two weeks that they are in and around the holy city, they collectively perform the rites of the pilgrimage. These rites are closely associated with the historical practices of Abraham, the father of the three great monotheistic religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

This provides a unique opportunity for Muslims of different nations and diverse backgrounds to meet one another, and jointly worship God.

2. What does the Hajj involve?

The Hajj involves special rituals that all have an underlying spiritual message. A brief summary of some of these acts is:

1. Wearing simple and uniform clothing: When the pilgrims come to Makka, the men exchange their normal attire for two plain white cloths which they wrap around the body. The women wear a white over-garment over their own clothes. This austere manner of dressing removes all the signs of social status and wealth; through this act the Muslims learn the important lesson of humility in front of God.
2. Going around the Ka'ba or the Sacred House: As the pilgrims circumambulate around this simple structure, they glorify God and thank Him for His numerous blessings. This act is followed by a short prayer some distance from the Ka'ba.
3. Walking between the small mountains of Safa and Marwa: Here, the pilgrim retraces the steps of Abraham's wife Hajira.

- She ran from one hill to the other in search for water for her thirsty infant, before God granted her desire from the spring which is today called Zamzam. The pilgrim realises that God expects him to struggle in life to achieve his sustenance, but He is ever-waiting to help His creatures when they turn to Him in need.
4. Cutting some hair from the head: This act symbolizes that a Muslim will sacrifice his own comfort to attain God's pleasure.
 5. The stay in the plains of Arafat: This is a rendezvous with God. Here the pilgrim meditates over his lifelong actions and seeks God's forgiveness for his many trespasses. At the end of this stay the Muslim is guaranteed God's absolution and forgiveness; he is allowed to start his life afresh.
 6. Stoning the Pillars: These pillars represent Satan, the enemy of God. By casting stones at these pillars, the Muslim symbolically distances himself from everything that displeases God.
 7. Celebrating the *Eid al-Adha*, a day of great joy and blessings. It is marked with prayers and other rituals through which the pilgrim