Saturday, October 4, 2014
Topic: Meaning of Hajj

Eid-ul-Adha is important because of pilgrimage. What is the condition of going to pilgrimage or who can go for pilgrimage? Common answers we hear are:
 -Muslims
 -People who have the financial ability and are in good health.

But these are traditional understandings and I actually want to know what pilgrimage means to me.
***What are we going to receive by going on a pilgrimage?*** For example: In order to receive sunlight, you have to pull the curtain back and expose the window. Similarly, we have to first prepare ourselves to understand the meaning of pilgrimage and then we can be “ready” to perform.

***Note****:* We are not going to study the verses related to pilgrimage. We will concentrate on what pilgrimage should mean to us under the guidelines of those verses.

In principle, we know that pilgrimage happens once and so we have to be ready to receive something.

* The first thing that we ought to feel is the need for “renewing” ourselves.
* Acknowledgments of our shortcomings and pollutedness.
* Decision to start life again from scratch.

Let us take our own developmental stage. From a baby, we grew into an adult. Through trials and tribulations of our life, societal influence and culture, we started polluting ourselves.
 -As a baby, we were pure, everybody was serving us and when we did something wrong, nobody was blaming us because we were so perfectly innocent.

**Pilgrimage is the opportunity to restart our life.**Just like we set up a device to factory settings, pilgrimage is the opportunity to set our life to “factory settings”. In order to be able to do so, all the previous programs need to be erased.
 -We need to wipe out all our previous conceptions and perceptions.

 However, if you are happy with your current program (state of mind), then do not bother going to pilgrimage. You will just waste your money and time because you will go back to your previous indigenous understanding. Furthermore if you think that you are perfect, then there is no need to go.
(*From the previous class on Saturday 09/27/2014, we found out that we are not perfect by ourselves but we, human beings can attain perfection by observing and acknowledging that the One, who has created us and the universe, has perfect qualities.)*

Narration from the Prophet says: “If you properly perform your pilgrimage, you will be like a newborn baby.”
 -If I am yearning to achieve a “newborn” state, it means that I recognize that there is something missing in my understanding of life. If only I had another chance, I would start my life from scratch like this. ***If I am ready to change, how am I going to do that?***

* Need for change must be real. We have to accept that we have polluted our lives.

 -If a person who has not reached the age of puberty and goes to perform hajj with his/her parents, do you think this child has performed Hajj according to the rules?

* The real meaning of Hajj is not going to a journey, but the journey must happen inside us.

Traditionally, when we talk about preparation for Hajj, we talk about getting ready financially, getting visa, taking care of logistics…This type of information can be obtained from a book or a community workshop. But what we actually need to focus on is the acknowledgment that we have polluted ourselves and thus, our resolution should be to renew ourselves so we can get back to “factory settings".

In the scriptures, we hear that you can achieve a baby like status by going through certain processes and these processes are called “**s*ha’aer***” (symbols.) You have to find out what “doing a ritual” signifies for you. For Example: To go on pilgrimage, you either get permission from the Saudi Government (practically) or Rabb-ul-bayt (***Ka’ba***). Ka’ba or Arafat does not ask you the purpose of your visit. Ka’ba is just a structure made of stones. What does the stone structure signify for you?
 -If you do not understand what it signifies, you are just wasting your time because you do not know what to get from the rituals that you are doing.

***What is it that we are seeking to change?***
It depends on the person. If you don’t feel the need to change, don’t bother going. The process of going through pilgrimage should consolidate your resolution of renewing yourself and your determination (I am going to follow this way rather than my old way).

* Need for change is the fundamental aspect of pilgrimage.

Historically, pilgrimage is a heritage from the Prophet Abraham (PBUH). In most cultures, Abraham’s persona is known to be a nation by himself. He sacrificed his whole life in order to save humanity and for the sake of declaring the absolute truth. The Absolute truth is: there is no deity in the world but deity belongs to the one who creates the world. To establish this reality into the heart of people, he was ready to be thrown into the fire. *Are you ready to take the responsibility of the nation in your personal life, as an individual?*
 -We have to say that I am going through the experience that Abraham went through. For example: Our parents may want us to follow their tradition but I am going to follow what my human qualities, reasoning, feelings and heart takes me to.

**Pilgrimage is a journey to reach the aim/target.**
I have to have a target in my life so that I can hit the target. I understood that I need to be cleansed and I need to go through a process in order to start my life like a newborn baby. *What do I have to do in order to restart my life?*
 -I have to worship the one who deserves to be worshiped only. I have to search for Him.

***Here are the pilgrimage processes:***

***1/ Miqat:*** Taking off your daily clothes, accessories and just wearing a white cloth, similar to a uniform. Basically, you are leaving aside everything that distinguished you from your society. You become a person with no acquaintances. Similar to a drop of water ready to be plunged into the ocean, you join a big huge crowd.

* A drop of water by itself is a drop of water but by going into the ocean it loses its identity. **Are you ready to lose your identity?**

2/ ***Mina:*** Usually the place where pilgrims get together, it looks like a place of resurrection. The first thing is to become an “unknown man”. This means that you exist but no one knows you in the crowd. You are by yourself. This can also be interpreted as becoming a nation. That’s what *“Abraham as a single nation”* means. He had to do whatever he wanted to do for the whole community.

* Prophet Abraham represents an act of Oneness of God (***tawhid***). That’s why he challenged the whole community by destroying their idols.

If a community does not follow Oneness of God, they invent and produce their own idols. Idols do not mean statues. These idols are mostly values of the society.

* At the individual level, our idols are the things that we attach values to.

If I attach all the values that I have to the Creator, the Owner, the Lord of the heaven and the earth, then that is my idol. But we forget and hold on to our idols. We are experts in making excuses to justify ourselves.

We have to destroy idols at the expense of the whole society and we have to be firmly convinced about it.
 -Abraham’s analysis of idol worshiping started from his own father. His father virtually produced the idols, i.e. the virtues of the society. Abraham started questioning from within himself and he decided that I must not worship the sun, the moon, the stars but the creator of the moon, the stars and the sun. He found his own family in a mess; even his father told him that his view does not sit well in their society. In order to be able to take Abraham’s lead:

* I must be convinced that I must worship my own Owner; I must use my human qualities in the name of my Owner.
* I should not be concerned about my family’s or society’s values.
* I have to decide that I will purify myself and I declare that when I come back: I will not go back to my previous way of life or tradition.

These are the preparations I must undertake in order to go to pilgrimage.

Upon my return as a Hajji (pilgrim) if my family expects a present, I should share with them what I learnt and experienced as far as the Oneness of the Creator is concerned. However, what most of us tend to do is that we bring a present from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, but not from Ka’ba, house of God, baitullah.
 -In order to bring a present from Ka’ba, you have to come back with a purified mind which you just attained through the process of worshiping God only.

It is easy to be patient with people but it is hard to make a decisive decision that I will not go back to my previous way of life or tradition.
 -I have to be very patient while undergoing this surgery of change as it is not easy to unlearn.

***Umrah is for* *Ka’ba*** (it is easy to go to Ka’ba); ***Hajj is for Arafat***

We have to spiritually and mentally get ready for what pilgrimage actually means. You can go to Saudi Arabia or Mecca with money but you cannot go on pilgrimage with money. You can go to pilgrimage only if you made a firm decision that I am going to cleanse myself.
 -We have to make an inventory of what is it that we need to get rid of.

Spirit is important when you go to Arafat**.** Purifying yourself from the inside out is also important. For example when we want to give away something for charity, we tend to choose things that we do not like/ things we want to get rid of. Is this what we really understand as charity, ***zakat***?
 ***-Tazkeya*** means purification, that’s the real meaning of charity***, zakat***. By being ready to give the bounty you are bestowed with to those who need it, you are purifying the claim you put on it as “yours.” It is not yours and it belongs to the One who bestowed it on you and it must be used by those who are in need of it.
 -The purification is to realize through being ready to give it to the needy ones in recognition of the Real Owner. Our false claim of ownership is to be cleansed.

We have to make a firm decision by following the path of Prophet Abraham and we have to be ready to be thrown into fire. Fire is: human ego, close relatives, your neighbors, what you are known as.
 -Strip yourself from all social status and personal character (arrogant, conceited…) you have developed.

We will commemorate the process that Prophet Adam, our common father went through. That is the commemoration all the Prophets went through. For example: Ka’ba is the aim (for acknowledging Oneness of God.) In Arafat, what are we doing when we are standing and doing nothing? We are actually standing just to concentrate on our reality of existence. Connecting our existence to its real Owner i.e. I turn to God.

This world is the apparent world of causes. For Example: When I take medicine, I know my God is the healer but I do take the medicine because my relationship with Him is through this physical world. In Arafat, I stand with the conviction that there is no deity in things themselves. ***Why do we turn to Ka’ba then?***
 -In order to confirm Oneness of God, my spirit turns to God and my body must accompany my spirit by physically turning to Ka’ba.

Prophet Adam was in Paradise, it means you were in Paradise. **“Adam is you”**. Your spirit represents the condition of Paradise; your soul is in Paradise. After getting into the body, we started polluting the spirit.

* Unification of soul and body is represented by the symbol of Adam being sent from Paradise to earth.

***Who are we?***
 -We are not just flesh and bones. What makes us human beings is our soul. My soul sees the world through the eyes, hears through the ears, smells through the nose and thinks through the mind. Spirit is connected to the rest of the world through my material/ animal side i.e. my body. We are on earth to experience this world physically and connect ourselves to the real Owner.

* I have to see that I am Abraham, representing the whole humanity.

**By joining all the people in the crowd, we experience losing our identity or individuality.
Pilgrimage is the intention of becoming one drop in the ocean, no one knows who you are but you are one of them.**
I want to be confident in my belief of the Oneness of God. In order for me to confirm my belief, I have to utilize all my human qualities. Only then, will I be able to follow the Abrahamic steps and make a nation.

Ocean is the accumulation of drops; every drop has the same quality. If you yourself become aware of your being, you become the ocean. Abraham was the ocean and his concern was humanity. If you are not aware of the ocean as an accumulation of drops of water, you cannot become aware of humanity. When you go to the ocean to lose your identity and become a drop of water in the ocean, there is no distinction between you and the other drops there.
 -You cannot recognize yourself because nobody knows you and you do not know anyone.

If you are travelling with a group or family, leave them and be by yourself. This should not be mistaken with being neglectful. We are making wives, husbands and relatives dependent on ourselves. A relative requiring special aide and care is a different case. At least, let your spouse be himself/herself on pilgrimage. If this is cumbersome, then why did you come to hajj if you are going to repeat yourself? In order to renew yourself, you have to experience your own drama.
 -For example: If you want to cry, you cannot cry next to your wife, you cannot cry or shout to express your emotions next to your wife either when you are in excitement.

Another instance of wisdom in Pilgrimage is not to cover your head and face because you have nothing to hide, you are an unidentified person anyways. If you feel to hide yourself, then it means you have not lost yourself in the ocean. You ought to lose your identity in the ocean in order to gain a new identity through which you will know the community. If I don’t change my worldview, I cannot evaluate the situation of the community with my own lenses. If my lenses are dirty, I will see the world dirty. YOU HAVE TO CHANGE YOURSELF!
 -If you want to help society, help yourself first.

* Only by changing yourself you will know what is wrong with society and only then you will recognize what is needed.

 If Abraham did not really recognize the Oneness of God in his personal life (going through stages of search and really struggling to find out who his Lord is), he could never have recognized what was wrong with his community. He challenged society with the strength of his own conviction.

Although Abraham did not have an army but he was able to rebel Nimrod, the most notorious person in history. Whoever Nimrod was is not important. Since Abraham was at peace with his own existence, he did not get affected by anyone’s torturing or anyone trying to put him in fire. “They can put me in their fire but I am in Paradise”.--That’s the Abrahamic spirit!

* If you are not at peace within yourself, then you cannot bring peace to the society.

**3/** **Safaa *Marwa:*** These are ***sha’aer***, signs. For example: Water is a sign of its creator; Water by itself does not quench my thirst. Similarly, sheep is also a sign and slaughtering it is going through the process of getting meaning out of the signs.
 -We ought to use it as a sign, symbol of God as being the Nourisher.

Every action we do during pilgrimage is heavy because every moment and every step we take must be meaningful. For example: Every time you say ***Labbaik***, it means, “Here I am, I came to your invitation and responding back to you now”.
 -You always have to be in conversation with your Owner, Creator. That’s how the purification process undertakes. If you are going from one point to another point and if you are not connected with the Owner, then you are not going through the process of changing/purification.

We have to always carry God consciousness with us and remind ourselves that I should only be concerned about “myself”. People come to pilgrimage with flags of their nations. If you start judging people according to their tradition and how they perform certain rituals, then rather than purifying yourself, you come back with more pollution (sins).
 -These subjects need awareness. We have to know the real spirit of pilgrimage and refine our minds.

* Every concept has its own ritual. Ritual without concept is like a shell with no kernel in it.

**Hajj is the result of one’s life and life after going on pilgrimage becomes pilgrimage.**
It means you are always in the presence of your God; you are always in conversation with God. In the past, you neglected your awareness with God but now you have decided that you will never repeat this futile way again.
You have to be ready to go through the surgery and become a new being. For example: Let’s say you underwent a surgery to cleanse your lungs after smoking for many years. Now, you should stop smoking so that your lungs do not become polluted again. If you come back with a purified heart, then your life becomes the pilgrimage.

**Pilgrimage is the summary of one’s life.**
You have to revise your previous life and you have to decide what will happen to you in the rest of your life. Your decision has to be in terms of: “I will not break my covenant with Him by associating deity qualities to any object, I will not be going back to my previous way of life, world view…”. The 3-4 days of your pilgrimage is a summary and resolution for the rest of your life.

**Pilgrimage is a preparation to go back to one’s initial status in life on Earth.**
It means that our spirit by default is pure but we polluted it ourselves. Through our soul, we signed a covenant with our Creator that I recognize who I am and I know who my Lord is. The very existence of the soul itself may be regarded as the covenant. The soul by its own qualities acknowledges who its owner is. We believe in God because our soul is capable of acknowledging its Absolute Creator/Owner. Similar to you signing a contract with your landlord, pilgrimage is signing/renewing your covenant/contract with you Lord.

**In our communities, social circle, we notice people’s view about me.**What counts is my Creator’s view about me. I have to take notice of what my Lord thinks of me. My relationship with family, relatives must be through the covenant I have made with my Creator. However, we are mostly confused in our understanding of helping others. Doing a service to someone does not mean that God will reward you as a result of doing a good action. The reward is already given to you in your happiness. The reward is the consciousness that you experience.
 -If you do an action, you have to experience the reward right now.

The happiness you experience from the action is a sign of His acceptance. You will definitely experience signs of acceptance of God in your action. If you do not feel it, then your heart was not at peace.

**In pilgrimage, you don’t have any signs of distinction.**
Getting into a white cloth with no distinction (***ihram***) is similar to making yourself wear a uniform. Only then you can go to ***haraam***, an area prohibited for anything that infringes what house of God should represent.
Ka’ba represents Oneness of God, which means that nothing else can enter it. For example: If you think that you have some power (placing any type of value into your dignity, race, nation or family status…) and at the same time acknowledges that God is one, then you cannot enter ***haraam***. Your body can physically go there but your spirit can not enter it if it is not in a 100% state of Oneness of God, (***tawhid***). Ka’ba is an inviolable place ***(mahram)*** and you cannot go there unless you get into ***ihram***.

***Haraam vs Haram***
Haraam is a place where ideas are prohibited and Haram is an act that is prohibited. Nevertheless, your understanding is more important. **What matters is the place for you and you cannot violate this place with anything that contradicts Oneness of God.** Mahrams are rules but we have to understand what they signify. For example: You will not be considered circumambulating around Ka’ba if your body is just walking around it but your spirit is somewhere else. In this case, the body is there physically but the spirit can never attain the level of satisfaction that it should while performing the circumambulation.

**Pilgrimage is the training for ourselves to prepare ourselves for the day**“*On the day when no friend will ask about his friend, although they maybe next to each other. For everyone who was lost in transgressing his reality (****mujrim****) would desire to ransom himself from suffering at the price of his brother, mother, father, spouse and children…*” (Surah al Maarij (80) verse 10-15)

We have to pay attention to ourselves. You cannot help others with dirty water. You first have to purify yourself so your water becomes free of dirt and only then you can help others. For example: You have to learn Math first in order to teach Math.

* If you don’t know what ***tawhid*** means to you, how can you convey the message of ***tawhid*** to others?

The Prophets represent the Revelations because they educated themselves with the teachings of God. When we read a narration from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we have to understand:

a/ what is being said or narrated as an action
b/ what the action of the Prophet represents.

We have to try to understand the background teaching of the hadiths, which is nothing but teaching the fundamentals of ***Tawhid***. Otherwise, the hadiths becomes stories from heroes and that will contradict Quranic teaching, an essential element of belief.