Saturday, October 18, 2014
Topic: Meaning of Hajj (part 3)

There are two ways of understanding Hadith:

1/ A ritual is permissible because the Prophet endorsed it. This way is more geared towards following Islamic jurisprudence (i.e. get rulings which are legitimate).
2/ Getting the actual meaning behind a ritual and making an assessment of how it applies to me here and now.

Here are some narrations of the Prophets related to Hajj:

**Hadith #1
(*Sahi Bukhari, book 2 volume 8, Mohsin Khan’s translation hadith #659*)**

*Ibn Abbas narrates:* A man said to the Prophet (PBUH) while he was delivering a sermon on the day of *Nahar* (slaughtering day in Minaa): I have performed the *tawaf* (circumambulation of the Ka’ba) before Rami (throwing pebbles) at the *Jamrah* (where symbolic Satans are). Prophet (PBUH) said: “It’s alright.” (*la haraj*). Another man came to the Prophet and said: “I have shaved my head before slaughtering”. Prophet said: “It’s alright; there is no harm in it”. A third man came by and said I have slaughtered the sacrifice before the *Rami* at the *Jamrah*. Prophet said: “it’s alright, take it easy”.

*Lesson:* The way of doing a ritual is not really important, practicing it/doing it is more important.

 -The spirit of the hadith narration has to do more with following a methodology consciously i.e. you ought to be aware of what you are doing and why you are doing it.

**Hadith#2
*(Sahi Bukhari, book 2 volume 8, Mohsin Khan’s translation hadith #86)***

(**Note:** We have to pay attention to the context here and not get lost with comparing different rituals such as deeds on Ramadan days are also important…)

The Prophet said: “No good deeds on other days are superior to those done in the first 10 days of zulhijja.” Then, some companions of the Prophets said: “Not even jihad?”. Prophet (PBUH) replied: “Not even jihad, except that of a man who does it (jihad) by putting himself and his property in danger and does not return any of those things (lose yourself). This jihad is maybe more valuable than the first ten days of zulhijja”.
Before understanding this Hadith, let us briefly touch base on the meaning of the speech of God and Prophethood. The chronological history of the Prophet as depicted in the *seerah* books are filled with killing and expeditions, but actually only 150 people were killed. The *seerah* books present Muhammad (PBUH) as a person busy with wars and not teaching the Quran. The fact of the matter is that between wars, the Prophet and his companions were actually preparing for how to teach the Quran i.e. how to renew themselves, their mind and their world view.
 -Quran was being revealed according to the life conditions of people together with the Prophet. It is just an instruction of how to live in this world under the teachings of God.
 -We have to undergo this training along with the Quran. We have to let the Quran reveal to ourselves but first, we have to “Read”.
 -“Read” (*iqraa*) was addressed to a person who did not know how to read. We have to learn how to read. If you do not “read”, it means you are not in the word of the Quran yet.
 -Step by step try to make the Quran your live book. We have to go through the teachings of the Quran throughout our “real lives”, not only the Prophet’s life. Then the Quran will speak to you to organize your lives.

* Quran was revealed to human kind in order to organize their lives.
* After 23 years of this training, you can then say that I have been training myself in Islam.

*Lesson:* The first ten days of zulhijja, you prepare yourself for Hajj. In order to prepare yourself for Hajj, you have to prepare yourself for jihad. *Which kind of jihad is it?* It is a jihad where you lose yourself, your property and everything. Property is: all your senses, mind and human faculties.
 -If you are not ready to lose yourself and your property, you are not ready for Hajj.

***How do we understand jihad?***
“God likes to purchase yourself and your property so that you will get paradise in return” **(*Bukhari*)**.
This is a wonderful interpretation as it emphasizes on the following:
a/ you must get ready to understand your reality and lose it.
b/ you must acknowledge that you are solely dependent on God alone.
c/ you must surrender all your property. They must be given back to its real owner by using them only in His name.

Chapter on Pilgrimage *(surah Hajj)*
This chapter of the Quran has one verse talking about the conditions of Hajj and another verse talking about jihaad. It keeps jumping in between the two, so there must be some kind of relationship between the two.
 -The essence of these verses is that you have to prepare yourself to admit that you are absolutely dependent on the One who gave you your existence. This means that we should be mindful that everything I own (my property) does not belong to me. For example: As a student studying Biology or Math, I have to acknowledge that all the content of the subjects I am studying belongs to the Creator of the universe.
We are investigating and learning what he is teaching us.

* We have to use our given abilities only in His name in order to get to know Him.

 -God wants us to become acquainted with Him. He is giving us the opportunity to become closer to Him (***muqarraboon***).
 -Using your property and selling it back to the Owner is losing yourself in jihad. This action determines the crux of performing Hajj. If you are not ready to experience this jihaad, do not bother going for Hajj. The first 10 days of *zulhija* are a dense preparation for Hajj. This means that you have to renounce your ownership and become aware of the reality that things do not belong to you.

We must try to understand the mission of the Prophet and the core of the matter. For example: Some people would fast during the 10 days of zulhija because it is Sunnah. However, we have to bear in mind that fasting is easy but not owning the fast is not easy.

Another hadith says: “And this person puts himself and his properties in danger and does not return with any of those things”. That is the definition of the ihram i.e. I am nothing and I am getting rid of all sorts of identities and becoming just one single “unidentified” individual in the crowd.
 -We have to prepare our minds and understand our reality before going to pilgrimage.

* We have to realize that our life is a trust and it does not belong to us. We have to be honest to the trust given by the owner.

**Hadith #3
(*Sahi Bukhari, book 2 volume 8, Mohsin Khan’s translation hadith #659*)**
While the Prophet (PBUH) was delivering a sermon, he saw a man standing. He asked about that man. People said: “It is Abu Israeel who has vowed that he will stand, he will never sit down, he will never come under the shade nor speak to anybody and he will fast”. Prophet said: “Order him to speak, let him come in the shade and have him sit but let him complete his fast.”

These are not sacrifice he is doing.
 *Lesson:* Torturing yourself does not give you any value, let alone make you closer to God. Becoming aware of who your Lord is (acknowledgment, sincere relationship with God) makes you get closer to God.
 -If we just pay attention to the rules of Hajj and never understand what it means, then we will not be benefitting any virtue from these rituals.

From these narrations we learn that: “**Actions themselves have no value**; going all the way from one country to another, does not give you any virtue either.” The real virtue is this: Are you aware and prepared for what Hajj actually entails?

 We hear through the Islamic legacy about some traditions that the Prophet (PBUH) used to practice. For example there are some verses in the Quran that has “*sujud*” (prostration) marked on them and so you prostrate. These verses are called *Ayaatu’l sujud* i.e. when you read them, you prostrate. Let us look into Surah Alaq *(Chapter 96 verse 19*). This verse is an *Ayaatu’l sujud* and the word ***fasjud waqtarib*** itself means prostrate and get closer to God.
 -Making prostration (*sajdah*) should mean getting closer to God. *How?* When you prostrate, this prostration must have a meaning that can get you closer to God. It means that you are putting your most honorable head on the ground.
 - Prostration means disowning yourself i.e. I do not own myself. You are completely declaring the disownership of your own dignity which is regarded as an independent entity. This is jihad.
 -This has nothing to do with rituals being *fard (mandatory)* or *wajib (non-mandatory)*. The important thing is the realization that when I am doing something, it must make sense to me. For example: *Fasjud waqtarib* explains what the hadith says. The hadith explains what jihad means. Jihad explains how to prepare yourself for Hajj.

Our realization process to get meaning out of something must include the essence of *tawhid*.
 -Unless you really realize that nothing can create itself (*la ilaha*), you cannot say that the one who gave existence to the universe owns the universe (*illallah*).

* We have to understand that *Hajj is jihaad* and *jihaad is Hajj*.

***The processes of Hajj (continuation):***

Analogy: When a seed falls into the soil, a tree will grow. My soul is the seed. Similarly, when Adam is sent from Paradise to Earth, the human soul grows into the body.
 -If we do not use our body i.e. utilize our given faculties, the seed does not grow into a tree.
 -By going to Arafat, you are commemorating this event again i.e. the seed is in the soil. Now, in Arafat, we have to use our freewill to know and realize what our reality is.

*In Muzdalifah, we should bear in mind what the significance of throwing pebbles to Satan is.* It is the place where you contemplate on your weak points. You pick one pebble for each weak point. While you are collecting pebbles, you have to think of yourself that I will throw these pebbles to Satan.
 -Prophet Abraham dreamt of slaughtering his most beloved son. We have to think about what it signifies for me. There is a diligent theological matter involved in this symbolic teaching. Satan comes from outside and whispers to Abraham: “How can you slaughter a man, let alone your own son?” Abraham was struggling with the whispering of Satan because it sounded very reasonable. By describing satanic whisperings to you, the Quran externalizes the source of evil to you.

* There is no evil in my creation. It is coming from other sources within my reality and I ought to reject it.

***Analogy-*** *Let’s say, you are presented with two claims.*
claim A: 2+2= 4
claim B: 2+2=5
Claim A absolutely fits your nature, you approve it/confirm it. The idea of claim B may come to you but you reject it. If you endorse Claim B, you are contradicting your nature (fitra) and it is your mistake to be doing so.
That is why you throw pebbles. You realize that this weak point is not innate in you, it is external.
 -Original sin is not human; this may sound contradictory to certain religious tradition.

* Human Beings are created perfect. We acquire some mistakes but at the same time, we are potent to shedding off these mistakes.

 -Trust yourself, not with your ego which claims to be independent but with your soul: “My God did not create me with this weak point. I acquired it. It is not within me (fitra)”. That is what practicing of stoning means i.e. I SHOULD BE AWARE THAT EVIL IS EXTERNAL TO ME.
 -We can repel satanic whisperings away. We have to establish our trust within ourselves that we can overcome all our mistakes.
 -If sinning and evil was within us, it means our Creator made a mistake. It is important to know that we are not originally sinful creation. Evil can never penetrate into our existence.
 -It gives us hope i.e. I am sinful but I can get rid of it, just like taking off a layer of clothing.

That’s why in the Quranic description, Satan asks permission from God to get closer to human beings from right, left, top and bottom but never from inside.

*What does* ***Iblees*** *signify?* He is the one who is the source of despair. *Iblees* makes us believe that all the weaknesses we are experiencing are internal and so we can never get rid of them.

Quran speaks to you as a guide. If your Creator says that He made you in the perfect way and whatever He creates is perfect. This implies that Satan’s whispering or anything that comes to your mind is His creation and it is perfect as well. What are you going to do with these whisperings? You are given the ability to recognize claim A or claim B (from above analogy). You confirm the Quran after experiencing it yourself.

***What does slaughtering symbolizes?***
Every day when we eat vegetable or meat, we give an end to a living being. The sense to not slaughter an animal arbitrarily is given to us. The Creator of these animals and plants say: “these are for you for your nourishment”.
 -The purpose of the existence of the plant is to be used as nourishment for the animal. The purpose of the existence of the animal is to be used as nourishment for human beings or other animal. This is the circle established in the universe and now you acknowledge it: “this is the present from my Creator and I have to use it”.
 -“Don’t eat on which the name of God has not been remembered”. You cannot eat anything or benefit form anything unless you remember that: “this is provided to me by my Creator”. This also symbolizes Abraham’s slaughtering i.e. I acknowledge that I am not the owner of anything.
 -Slaughtering your most beloved one means not consuming anything on which God’s ownership has not been acknowledged. WE HAVE TO PRACTICE: that nothing belongs to me but everything belongs to the owner of the universe.
 -Why are we being tested here? To acknowledge the real owner of the universe.

* The slaughtering is just a ritual that depicts the acknowledgment that I do not own anything.

**5/ Ka’ba:** The Ka’ba represents the Oneness of God. Abraham is the Patriarch of the Oneness of God.
*How can I establish the symbol of Oneness of God with the new generation?* By declaring *la ilaha*, nothing in this world has any deity quality. By doing so, I declare the Oneness of God.
Black stone (an altar representing the slaughtering of Abraham and his son) symbolizes your resolution, your definite conclusion: “**In and of itself, nothing has any importance**”.
 - As a ritual, we circumambulate around the Ka’ba seven times as recommended by the Prophet but we should not miss the meaning of this ritual. Seven times actually mean several times in Arabic. We need to reassure our decision not to swerve from our conviction that nothing apart from God has any deity.
*Analogy*: Tying a bunch of knot to make sure that the rope does not break. This is what you are doing when circumambulating seven times around the Ka’ba, you are confirming *la ilaha ilallah* and making your resolution firm.
 -In and of itself, Ka’ba represents no value and it should be kept as simple as possible because it can be mistaken for being an idol i.e. attributing deity qualities to an object itself.

**6/ Safa & Marwa:** Historically, it is known that Hagar, Prophet Abraham’s wife was in a desperate situation as she kept running between the two hills of *Safa* and *Marwa*. ***SA*’Y** means to run, to pursue something seriously. Just because Hagar was hopeless, she could not let her son die of thirst.
 -The running symbolizes that we should never give up on our search. We should pursue our goals, God or the eternal life seriously. Help may not come from our effort. As a result of our effort, God sends help as He did through the baby (the innocent and needy one).
 -You do your duties and God will respond. You have to experience the struggle. You can never imagine how results come.

This dense journey ends up with cutting our hair. It means that now we are ready to go back to our life with our resolutions. While I am interacting with my worldly responsibilities, I have to do it with the utmost consciousness i.e. all actions belong to God.
 -I am going to experience my God through the interaction of the world I am in. For example: I will interact with people as created being or as a trust by God. I will never say that I am smart but on the contrary I will say God enabled me with these abilities and I am using it in the name of its Owner i.e. the right way.

In conclusion, Hajj is a practice where you establish your fundamental principles and then interact with the world with these principles. You will put into practice resolutions that what you have developed in Hajj and keep the consciousness of your reality alive through this training.