

Hajj, Umrah, and Ziyarah

By Aasiya Salyani

Hajj, Umrah, and Ziyarah are special journeys that help Muslims grow closer to Allah (SWT). These trips are not only physical, but also spiritual. They take place in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, and are very important in the life of a Muslim. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, which means it is something every Muslim must do at least once in their lifetime if they are able to afford it and are healthy enough. Umrah is also a blessed act of worship, but it is not required. Ziyarah is the visit to important Islamic places, especially in Madinah, and while it is not a part of Hajj or Umrah, it is a beautiful and recommended thing to do.

Before starting Hajj or Umrah, a Muslim must enter a special state called Ihram. Many people think Ihram is just the clothing you wear, but it is actually a state of mind and heart. It shows that you are entering a time of worship and are focusing on Allah. For men, the clothing is two white, unstitched pieces of cloth with nothing worn underneath. For women, it is usually a long dress (abaya) and a scarf, but they must not cover their faces with anything that touches the skin. To prepare for Ihram, Muslims cut their nails, take a bath, apply perfume (for men), and pray two rak'ahs of Salah. Then, before crossing the miqat (a boundary around Makkah), they make the intention to enter Ihram and begin saying the Talbiyah:

“Labbayk Allahumma Labbayk, Labbayka Laa Shareeka Laka Labbayk, Innal Hamda Wan-Ni'mata Laka Wal-Mulk, Laa Shareeka Lak.”

While in Ihram, there are some things Muslims are not allowed to do. These include using perfume, cutting hair or nails, wearing regular clothes (for men), and covering the head (for men) or face (for women in a way that touches the skin). These rules help the person stay focused on their worship and remind them that they are in a sacred state.

Once in Ihram, the person can begin their Umrah. Umrah has two main parts: Tawaf and Sa'y. Tawaf means walking around the Ka'bah seven times, starting at the Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad). Each time a person reaches the Black Stone, they raise their hands, say "Allahu Akbar," and, if possible, kiss the stone or point toward it. After Tawaf, the person prays two rak'ahs of Salah, usually near Maqam Ibrahim.

Then comes Sa'y, which means walking between the two hills called Safa and Marwah, seven times. This begins at Safa and ends at Marwah. It is a Sunnah for men to run lightly between two green lights on the path. After finishing Sa'y, men shave or trim their hair, and women cut a small amount, about an inch, from the end of their hair. This marks the end of Umrah, and the person is no longer in the state of Ihram.

Hajj is a much longer journey and is required once in a lifetime for those who are able. It starts on the 8th of Dhul-Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. On this day, pilgrims leave Makkah and go to a place called Mina, where they pray and stay overnight. On the 9th of Dhul-Hijjah, which is the most important day of Hajj, they go to Arafah. Here, they make lots of du'a (prayers) and ask Allah (S.W.T) for forgiveness. After sunset, they travel to Muzdalifah, where they collect at least 49 small pebbles and sleep under the open sky. The next day, on Eid al-Adha, pilgrims return to Mina and do three important things: they throw seven pebbles at the largest pillar (Jamarah), they sacrifice an animal, and they shave or cut their hair. Then, they go back to Makkah to do Tawaf and Sa'y again, but this time for Hajj, not Umrah. They return to Mina for a few more days to continue throwing pebbles at the three pillars. After this, the main parts of Hajj are complete.

Another special part of visiting Makkah and Madinah is called Ziyarah, which means visiting special places from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). One of the most important places to visit is Masjid an-Nabawi (the Prophet's Masjid) in Madinah with the Prophet's (SAW) final resting place, along with his close Companions Sayyidina Abu Bakr (RA) and Sayyidina Umar (RA). When visiting the masjid, it is good to wear clean and nice clothes, say lots of salawat (peace and blessings upon the Prophet), and pray two rak'ahs in the area called the Rawdah, which the Prophet (SAW) said is a garden from the gardens of Paradise.

Visitors should send Salams to the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions, then make du'a. Other places to visit in Madinah include Jannatul Baqi' (a cemetery where many Companions are buried), Masjid Quba (the first masjid built in Madinah), and Masjid al-Ghamamah, where the Prophet (SAW) once prayed for rain, and his prayers were obviously answered.

There are many amazing blessings in doing Hajj, Umrah, and Ziyarah. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said that if someone does Hajj properly, they return home free from sin, like a newborn baby. SubhanAllah, what a great gift from Allah! These journeys remind Muslims of the importance of worship, patience, and staying close to Allah. In the end, all Muslims should try their best to visit these holy cities if they can. If someone has already been, they should hope and pray to return again. May Allah (SWT) give all of us the chance to perform Hajj and Umrah, and to visit the grave of the Prophet (SAW). And may He accept our worship and forgive our sins. Ameen.