

iii *Issues*

Published by the Islamic Institute

Volume IV, Number 1

February 19, 2002

The Hajj pilgrimmage is one of

the world's largest displays of unity

The Spiritual Journey is one of

the five pillars of the Islamic faith

Peace is the Dominant Theme

of the Hajj; peace with God, with one's soul,

with one another, and with all living crea-

tures

Muslims from All Walks of

Life assemble during the Hajj to

commemorate the trials of Abraham, his

wife Hagar, and his son, Ishmael

Hajj Facts

- About 2 million Muslims from more than 70 countries journey to the holy city of Mecca each year to make the spiritual pilgrimage known as the Hajj

- The pilgrimage is one of five Pillars of Islam that form the framework of Islamic life. All Muslims who are physically and financially able are expected to perform the Hajj at least once.

- Muslims trace the origin of the Hajj to the Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismael. The Koran credits them with building the Kaaba, the shrine in Mecca toward which Muslims turn five times each day when praying.

- In the seventh century, the Prophet Mohammed expanded and refined the rituals of the Hajj. The result was the addition of some complexity to the rituals, but also increased flexibility in carrying them out.

- The Hajj begins on the eighth day of Dhu al-Hijjah (month for Hajj), the 12th month of the Islamic year, and lasts for as long as six days.

- Over the course of the Hajj, pilgrims travel the nine miles from Mecca to the Plain of Arafat and back, stopping at the sacred sites of Mina and Muzdalifa to perform prayerful rituals.

Hajj: Journey of Faith

In the month of February this year, Muslims from around the world will journey to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia to make the spiritual pilgrimage known as the Hajj. One of the five pillars of the Islamic faith, all Muslims who are physically and financially able are expected to perform the Hajj at least once in their lifetime. The pilgrimage is performed at a prescribed time of the year, during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th and last month of the Muslim lunar calendar.

The Hajj pilgrimage is perhaps one of the world's largest displays of unity among humans. Over two million people now go to Mecca each year from every corner of the globe, providing a unique opportunity for people from over 70 countries to meet one another. Peace is the dominant theme of the Hajj. Peace with God, with one's soul, with one another, and with all living creatures. To disturb the peace of anyone or any creature in any shape or form during the Hajj is strictly prohibited.

Muslims trace the origin of the Hajj to the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ishmael. The Quran credits them with building the Kaaba, revered as the first mosque and the shrine in Mecca toward which Muslims turn when they pray. As well, it was Ibrahim who established the rituals of the Hajj, which recall events and trials in his life and that of his wife Hagar and their son Ishmael. The local inhabitants of the region surrounding Mecca observed these rituals for many centuries afterwards, but pagan practices had inserted themselves into the rituals by the time that the

Prophet Muhammad received his divine message. He continued the Abrahamic hajj after restoring its original observances.

The Hajj rites begin with the departure from home. Before leaving on the trip, each pilgrim is expected to put his or her affairs in order, provide for those who are staying behind, and make restitution for debts. Pilgrims are also encouraged to travel with virtuous and dependable companions.

Before entering Mecca, each pilgrim performs *Ihram*, the rite of consecration. Stations are set up outside of Mecca for the purpose; of course, in this modern age the rites are as likely to be performed on an airliner or a ship en route to Saudi Arabia. Pilgrims will bath themselves and cut their nails and hair. Women are only required to cut three locks of hair, whereas many of the men shave their heads. Once these rites are performed, the pilgrim is considered spiritually pure and dons the white garments, say special prayers, and enter Mecca. Two rites are then performed which constitute the *Umra*, first being the Arrival Tawaf. A tawaf consists of going to the Haram Mosque and walking seven times around the Kaaba, which is covered in a large black velvet and gold drape in preparation for the Hajj. They also perform the Sa'y, which consists of seven trips between two small hills near the Kaaba, commemorating the story of Hagar's search for water after she and Ishmael were left in the desert. Pilgrims also drink from the holy well of Zamzam, which is near the Kaaba inside the mosque. According to the Quran, God created the well by striking a rock to provide water for Hagar and Ishmael as they were about to die of thirst.

The most important Hajj rights occur on the eighth through the twelfth days of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. On the eighth day the pilgrims depart for Arafat, a wide barren plain about 12 miles from Mecca, where by this time a large tent city has been constructed to house the many pilgrims. On the ninth day the climax occurs, when each pilgrim

must be standing on Arafat at sunset, most saying prayers. If a pilgrim is not standing on Arafat at this time, then the entire Hajj is forfeited. After sunset prayers, the pilgrims walk or ride several miles (causing a massive jam of people and vehicles) to the town of Muzdalifa, where they pray and collect stones to be used for rites the next day. After midnight on the tenth day, the pilgrims leave for another small town about five miles east called Mina. There they find three stone pillars, called *jamaras*, which represent devils. On that day, seven stones are cast at one of the pillars, and on the following three days stones are cast at all three.

From the tenth through the twelfth days, pilgrims at the Hajj and Muslims around the world celebrate the *Eid al-Adha*, the Feast of the Sacrifice. This commemorates Abrahams' sacrifice of a ram in place of his son, according to God's will. The Eid is a joyous celebration, and is characterized by visits from friends during the holiday. Each family also sacrifices an unblemished animal – normally a sheep or goat. Small fowl such as chickens are also permissible.

After completing the remaining rites of the pilgrimage, each pilgrim is qualified to use the formal title "Hajj" in their name. After that, most of these "Hajjis" go on to visit the city of Medina, which has become an integral part of the entire Hajj experience. The central attraction is the Prophet's Mosque, where the prophet Muhammad is buried, and the second holiest site in Islam.

The Islamic Institute
1920 L Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 955-7174 Tel.
(202) 785-0261 Fax
editor@IslamicInstitute.org
www.IslamicInstitute.org