

Arafat

Upon wearing your Ihram garments and leaving Mecca, you will start traveling toward the east (Arafat) where you must remain until the sunset of the ninth day. On your way back you will make a brief stop in Mashar and then in Mina. Why? We will know shortly!

In contrast to what you were told previously – that is, to go gradually and in a step-by-step manner – now you are to go restlessly and thirstily, like a true lover, all the way to Arafat without a pause! From the morning of the tenth day until the twelfth day (or thirteenth day if you wish) you must remain in Mina.

There are no signs to distinguish these three areas from each other. A narrow pass about fifteen miles long joins the valley of Mecca. Along this strait, there are no natural, historical or religious monuments nor indicators which separate one area from the other. The borders are only hypothetical stages of your actions.

Another important factor is the emphasis placed upon "staying" at these three "stages". The reason for this recommendation is beyond a simple pause in Arafat on all of the ninth day or remaining in Mashar only to collect seventy pebbles!

You must stay at Mina on the eleventh and twelfth days; these are the two days following the day of sacrifice (the tenth day). Even though you are almost finished by noon time of the tenth day after offering your sacrifice followed by the stoning of Satan (Ramy: to throw or cast), yet you are to stay at Mina.

As you can see, it is not to remain to reside but it is a short stop on your way traveling with the caravan. Along this pass, you stop when they stop and you start to move when they go from one stage to the other. At every stage you enter, stop for a short period and then move one stage! Since Mina is the last stage you will stay there for 3 days. Remember, it is NOT the destination! When do you finish this journey? Where is the caravan's destination? Never! And, nowhere! So, where are you going? The answer is to eternity, toward Allah! Allah is the Absolute; He is "the eternal". Therefore, your journey is a movement toward the absolute beauty, the absolute knowledge, the absolute power, eternity and perfection! It is a restless and eternal movement.

On this journey, Allah is not the "destination", but He is the "direction". For man, everything is temporary, changing, perishing and dying; yet, this eternal movement is continuous and the direction is always there!

Everything will perish save His countenance. Qur'an 29: 88

You started from Mecca and came directly to Arafat. Now you move from stage to stage back to "Kaaba".

Lo we are Allah's and Lo' unto Him we are returning. Qur'an 2: 56

All that is discussed is "movement", a going movement (turn) and a coming movement (return). There is always a movement "toward" something and not "in" something! This is why Hajj is an absolute move. It is not a journey since every journey comes to an end. Hajj is an absolute goal and external movement toward that goal. Therefore, it is not a destination that one may reach, but a goal that one tries to approach! This is why on your return from Arafat you are left in Mina behind the wall of Kaaba and not inside the Kaaba. This is what "to approach" not "to reach" means.

In returning to Allah, there are three stages (Arafat, Mashar, and Mina) through which you must pass. They are NOT three places that you visit. It is important to be aware of the emphasis placed upon the periods of stopping at each stage as well as the decision to pursue these stages. What do these three stages signify? Allah Himself has already given them their heavenly names:

Arafat means: "Knowledge" and "science"! Mashar means: "Consciousness" and "understanding"! Mina means: "love" and "faith"!

Go from Mecca to Arafat (Lo' we are Allah's) and then return from Arafat to Kaaba (Lo' unto Him we are returning). Arafat represents the beginning of man's creation. In the story of Adam (creation of mankind on earth), it is said: After Adam's descent onto earth, he met Eve at Arafat, it was there that they were acquainted with each other". The descent was when Adam was instructed to leave heaven (after he rebelled). That heaven was not the one which is promised for the hereafter (paradise). It was the heaven on earth as well as Adam's birthplace. Covered with shrubbery and trees, Adam ate drank, enjoyed himself, lived without any responsibilities and had no Job obligations. He was quite satisfied until Eblis, the angel who also rebelled by not prostrating to mankind, started to inspire evil suggestions to him. Man inspired by Allah, both the righteous and debauched, was persuaded by Eblis to transgress his "limitations", to rebel and eat "the forbidden fruit". Eblis told man that by doing so he would live a longer and more enlightened life.

"Wisdom" alone did not affect man; Adam refused to, eat the forbidden fruit. Satan met with Eve who symbolized "love!" And then, Adam agreed to eat "the forbidden fruit". Both "wisdom and love" influenced the Angel and converted him into "Adam" !

Adam was the only Angel who could commit "sin" and then "repent". He could "rebel" or "obey". In this

case to "rebel" meant to have freedom, it included the ability to make decisions contrary to Allah's will. Concomitant with this liberty to decide was the notion of "responsibility" and "consciousness". As a result, Adam's state of satisfaction, joy and comfort was replaced by the land of "needs, greed and pains ... or DESCENT.

It was the beginning of a new life for the conscious, rebellious and responsible individual (Adam) who was the victim of pains, needs and greed. An exile and feeling lonely, he was in the prison of this earth. Experiencing apprehension over the separation, Adam expressed his complaints in the language of faith, knowledge Gnosticism, art, literature ... and life! He accepted the burden of rebelling, the "natural apprehension of sin and the "instinctive desire for repentance" ... How does Hajj relate to this? It is a living example of man's creation or his repentance. It encompasses self consciousness which includes the feeling of being a stranger and exiled. Consequently, what emerges is a decision to "return"!

The conversion of the "Adam in heaven" to the Adam on this earth" exemplified the character and behavior of mankind today. It was a portrayal of the rebellious, aggressive and sinful man who was swayed by Satan and Eve. Although he was expelled from heaven, exiled onto earth and subdued by nature, Adam nevertheless ate from the fruit of "the forbidden tree" What was the outcome? Adam acquired the wisdom, consciousness and insight of a rebel! Opening his eyes and finding himself naked, Adam entered the state of "knowing" himself.

As was said previously, the descent from "Kaaba" to "Arafat" represents the beginning of Man's creation. The time of man's creation was simultaneous to the creation of "knowledge"! The first spark of love emitted during the meeting of Adam and Eve promoted their mutual understanding of one another. It was the first sign of knowledge! Adam knew his wife of the opposite sex who was of the same origin and nature that he was from.

Consequently, from a philosophical point of view, man's existence was contemporaneous with the existence of knowledge; from a scientific point of view, man's history started with knowledge! How strange! During Hajj, the first move is initiated from "Arafat". The "stop at Arafat" occurs in the daytime beginning at noon of the ninth day when the sun is shining at its most. This time is designated so that you may gain consciousness, insight, freedom, knowledge and love in the sunlight! At sunset, the stop at Arafat is over. Nothing can be seen in the dark. As a result, neither acquaintances nor knowledge prevail! With the setting of the sun in the plain of Arafat, people migrate to the west along with the sun. They continue on until they reach Mashar, the land of consciousness". They stop there too.

The stage following "knowledge" is that of "consciousness". How strange, first "knowledge" and then "consciousness"?? People take it for granted that consciousness precedes knowledge; but the creator of these two states of mind demonstrates the opposite sequence! Adam met Eve (who was of the opposite sex). They shared their views, communicated their thoughts and attained mutual understanding. Their "individual" life was terminated by the establishment of a family (which introduced social life) and the creation of a "conscious love"! Furthermore, the unity of two human beings began with knowledge; the

evolution of knowledge contributed to man's consciousness. This gave birth to science which increased the understanding and in turn, enhanced man's consciousness. Where did this lead? To more scientific progress!

When "objectivity" and the relation of an "idea" to the external world is based on "reality", then wisdom will grow comprehension will improve and man's spiritual power will flourish Mina (love)!

– It would have been theological and metaphysical idealism had Arafat (knowledge) been preceded by Mashar (consciousness)!

– It would have been a materialistic and scientific life but idle with a spiritless civilization and aimless progress had Arafat (knowledge) been the only stage!

– And, it would have meant the lack of our present understanding of our faith had it been only Mashar (consciousness) and Mina (love) without Arafat (knowledge)!!!

But in this religion of Islam, man, a creature who was made of the meanest material of earth and who came to power by being the trustee of Allah, commenced his actions with knowledge. He comprehended the facts of this world by an objective method. Following this, he gained his consciousness. During the last stage, he created love. These stages are enacted by going from Arafat to Mashar and from there ascending to the peak of human qualities and perfection (i.e. to Mina) or to ... Allah!

Realism? Yes, but as the principle not the aim! It is a foundation from which you strive for the ideal and metaphysical! Since according to the Islamic concept man is made partly from mud and partly from the spirit of Allah, YOUR will and decision help you to migrate from "mud" to the "spirit of Allah". This is what you will exercise when you pass the three stages of Arafat, Mashar and Mina!

In light of the concept which was just discussed, the meaning and beauty of the following words may be expressed:

Faith: Way! Knowledge: Awareness! Prophecy: Guidance! Umma: A decided group! Imam: Leader and guide! Shaheed and Shahid): The traffic signs! Ibadat: Acts of devotion or to pound and smooth the way! Righteousness: To train yourself as a responsible rebel, to avoid things that remind you of yourself and the causes of your stagnation! The way of Allah: The way to sacrifice yourself and your world for the people! Prayer: To present yourself to Allah, to call Him, to ask Him, to tell Him your needs, wishes, loves and hates, to suggest to yourself and the others Dikr: To bear in mind, to think Hajj: To decide!

You have arrived at Arafat which is the farthest distance from Mecca. It is a dry plain all covered by smooth sands. In its center you can view the small rocky hill of Jabal-al-Rahmah from which the prophet Muhammad (S) gave his last message (farewell speech) to his followers during his final journey to Mecca. Arafat is a wonderful city which you visit for one day; it is gone with the wind after sunset prayers. There you will encounter a society of all the races so united as one nation without borders. It is as if the whole world is gathered at this plain under the white tents that extend from one horizon to the other – where distinctions are minimum, aristocracy is too mean and manmade beauties are ugly!

You ask yourself – What am I supposed to see here? What am I supposed to see here? What work is to be done? The answer – NOTHING! You are free to do whatever you want! You may spend the day swimming in this great ocean of mankind or you may even sleep all day! But "remember" that you are at Arafat! There is nothing to "see" here. As Andre Gide' has said, "The glory should be in your look and not in what you are looking at". Let your instincts and nature blossom under the clear sun of Arafat. Lastly, in contrast to what man has done throughout history, do not run away from the sunshine, the light, the freedom and the crowd. Always appear with the people ...

In the past, you lived under oppression and were kept ignorant as moss in stagnated waters ...! Now, Oh "man", come out of your tent, draw yourself into this deep ocean of people and let your "ego" burn under the glowing sun of Arafat! Only for one day, Oh "man", be as a candle, burning and illuminating the hearts of these people! Do not be like wax and melt in the hands of the oppressors. Do not be a puppet.

In any case, you are entitled to spend this day as you wish. What you are requested to do is only to stop and then leave the plain (Arafat) at sunset!

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/hajj-pilgrimage-ali-shariati/arafat#comment-0>