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Dialogue on Hajj

My father spoke of his experience of his first pilgrimage in a way akin to someone who had remembered a true love. I could see his true feeling in the twinkle of his eyes, the smile on his face, and the reverence of his words.

When I told him what I had noticed of his state, when he recalled that experience, he said to me:

Yes, son, "Haven't you recited the words of The Sublime,

"And when We made the House a pilgrimage for men and a (place of) security..". (2/125).

And His words, quoting His Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.),

"O our Lord! surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, our Lord! that they may keep up prayer; therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful". (14/37).

My heart longs for that Sacred House.

My father cast his eyes down and, in a soft and melodious voice, recited poetry in praise of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and remembrance of the Holy places he had visited on his first pilgrimage. Raising his eyes, and addressing me, he said, "My maiden hajj left an indelible mark in my heart, the memory of which is rekindled every year, especially, at the time of hajj. I always pray to the Almighty to grace me with the favour of making the trip to Mekkah time and again.

There I interjected and asked him:

- * Is it obligatory that you go to hajj more than once?
- No, it is obligatory to do hajj once, provided you can afford it. Allah says in His Holy Book,
- ".. and pilgrimage is incumbent on men for the sake of Allah, (on) every one who is able to undertake the journey to it.." (3/97).

Any number of pilgrimages made after the first one is mustahab.

- * Would you tell me the story of your first pilgrimage, which is so close to your heart?
- I went to "al–Juhfa", one of the mawaqeet (sites appointed by Islamic sharia law for pilgrims to wear their ihram). After I took off my clothes, I made niyyah for umrah tamatu', leading to hajj, seeking the pleasure of and closeness to Allah, I put on my ihram (special two–piece seamless attire worn by pilgrims. Also, the state of consecration during which the pilgrim refrains from certain acts, such as not combing, not shaving, and observing sexual continence). One of these two white garments is worn like a sarong, and the other used to cover the shoulder and the upper body. I, then, chanted the talbiya.

No sooner had I uttered the word "Labbayk", shivers went down my spine. I was in a serene state of mind that was triggered by a kind of devotion I never experienced before. It was an experience of fear and submission to the Creator.

The other acts you are forbidden from, once you enter the state of consecration are: a) looking into the mirror for dressing, b) protecting oneself against the sun [and rain], c) covering one's head, d) wearing sewn clothes and socks, and e) some other acts, as detailed in the books of jurisprudence.

- * And after ihram, what did you do?
- I headed towards Holy Mekkah, in a state of tahara, to do seven rounds of tawaf around the Old House (Ka'ba), starting each round from the Black Stone. Having completed tawaf, I said a two-ruku' prayer behind the station of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.).

I then went for Sa'y (seven laps of brisk walking between the mounds of Safa and Marwah – an obligatory part of hajj rituals), starting from Safa.

On completing the seventh lap, I made taqseer, by cutting some of my hair. By this act, I completed the Umrah of Hajj. Thereafter, I took off my ihram and waited for the 8th day of Thil Hijja "Yawmut Tarwiyah – Lit. satisfying thirst or giving attention, i.e. when Ibrahim (a.s.) gave attention to the vision wherein he was instructed to sacrifice his son Ismael". On that day, I wore my ihram, in Mekkah this time, after making niyyah for hajj, said the talbiyah, and headed for Arafat, aboard an open top vehicle. I had to do wuquf (devotional stay at Arafat, Mash'ar and Mina as part of hajj rituals). This was performed at the start of noon of the 9th of Thil Hijja till sunset.

Leaving Arafat, after sunset, I set out for "Muzdalifa" and stayed overnight, for I had to be there at the sunrise of the 10th of Thil Hijja. After sunrise, I set out for "Mina". With me were stones I gathered during my stay at Muzdalifa. In Mina, I had to perform three types of obligations:

1. Throwing seven stones successively at Jamarah of al-Aqabah (Pl. Jamarat: Places of the three stone slabs representing the devil, at Mina).

- 2. Slaughtering sacrificial offering at Mina.
- 3. Shaving my head at Mina.

On completing these acts, I came out of the state of ihram, whereby I could do certain acts that were forbidden to me before, except seeking lawful pleasure with women, wearing perfume, [and hunting]. Thereafter, I headed for Mekkah for the second time to do tawaf of hajj, say tawaf prayer, and do sa'y between Safa and Marwah, in exactly the same way I did, on my arrival at Mekkah. Having completed that, I performed tawafun nisa' (lit. women's circumambulation: an integral part of hajj devotion, after which and its prayer, sexual relations between man and wife returns to normal).

I, then, returned to Mina to stay the overnight of the 11th and the 12th of Thil Hijja till the afternoon of the 12th. On each of these two days, I performed the ritual of throwing stones at the three Jamarat, the first, the one in the middle, and al-Aqaba, in this order.

Come midday of the twelfth of Thil Hijja, while still at Mina, I said Dhuhr prayer and left for Mekkah. Thus, I performed all the prescribed duties of hajj.

Despite the crowds and sweltering heat, which took their toll on me, I ensured that I executed all the obligations called for correctly. Hajj is a solemn occasion for seeking closeness to Allah Almighty through prayer, devotion and sincere rectitude.

Afterwards, I left Mekkah for Madina where I paid homage to the holy shrine of Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w.) and the tombs of Fatima az–Zahra' and Imams al–Hassan, Ali bin al–Hussain, Mohammad al–Bagir, and Ja'far as–Sadig (a.s.) at al–Bagi' cemetery.

I, also, visited historic mosques, the tomb of al-Hamza, the Prophet's uncle, and other sacred sites around Madina.

This, in short, was the story of my first pilgrimage. When the time comes that you can afford the journey to Mekkah after you have paid zakat and khums that render your property and other worldly possessions pure, I'll explain to you, in some detail, every step you should take. May Providence grace you with making pilgrimage to His House.

- * Before we end this dialogue, could I ask you about those religious dues that, as you put it, purify one's property.
- Not now, for talking of zakat and khums could take some time. However, I'm going to dedicate separate dialogues for each one of them, Inshallah (God Willing).
- * Very well, father. Do I take it that you are going to talk to me about zakat next time round, then about khums?

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* Inshallah.
- If you so choose. Inshallah .

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