

The Ka'aba

Made of dark rough stones laid in a very simple manner with white chalk filling the fissures, the Kaaba is an empty cube – nothing else. You cannot but shiver and wonder about what you see here ... There is no one! There is nothing to view! An empty room (cube) is visible. Is that all?! Is this the center of our faith, prayers, love, life and death?

Questions and doubts arise in your mind. Where am I? What is here? What you see is the antithesis of your visual imaginations of the Kaaba. You might have perceived it as an architectural beauty (like a palace) whose ceilings covered a spiritual silence. Another possible portrayal was that of a high tomb housing the grave of an important human being – a hero, genius, imam or prophet! No – instead it is an open square, an empty room. It reflects no architectural skill, beauty, art, inscription, nor quality; and no graves are found there. There is nothing and nobody there to whom you can direct your attention, feelings and memories.

You will realize that there is nothing and nobody there to disturb your thoughts and feelings about God. The Kaaba, which you want to fly over to come into contact with the "absolute" and "eternal", is the roof for your feelings. This is something you were unable to achieve in your world of fragmentation and relativity. You could only be philosophical, but now you can see the "absolute", the one who has no direction – Allah! He is everywhere.

How good it is to see the Kaaba empty! It reminds you that your presence is for the sake of performing Hajj. It is not your destination. Moreover, it is a guide to show the direction.

Kaaba is only a cornerstone, a sign to show the road.

Having decided to move toward eternity, you begin the Hajj. It is an eternal movement toward Allah not toward the Kaaba. The Kaaba is the beginning and not the end – when no more can be done. It is the place where Allah, Ibrahim, Muhammad and people will meet. You will be present there only if your mind is not preoccupied with self-centered thoughts. You must be one of the people! Everyone is dressed in special garments. Being Allah's chastity and family you are honored by him. He has more enthusiasm toward this family than anyone else. However, the Kaaba, His property and His house is called the "house of people".

Lo! The first sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Bekka (Mecca), a blessed place, guidance to the people. Qur'an 3:96

You are not allowed to enter this sacred house if you are still self attached, that is, thinking of yourself.

Mecca is called "Baite-Atiq". Atiq represents being free! Mecca belongs to nobody. It is free from the reign of rulers and oppressors; therefore, no one controls it. Allah is the owner of Mecca while the people are its residents.

Under the provisions of, the Muslim is allowed to shorten his prayers if traveling at least forty miles away from his home. But at Mecca, regardless of where you are from or how far you have traveled, your prayer is complete. It is your land, your community and you are safe. You are not a visitor, but you are at home.

Before coming to Mecca, you were a stranger, exiled in your own land. But now, you are invited to join Allah's family. Mankind, the dearest family of the world, is invited to this house. If you as an individual are "self centered", you will feel like a homeless stranger lost with no shelter and no relatives. Therefore, shed the self distinctive tendencies. You are now prepared to enter the house and join this family. You will be welcomed as a friend and close relative of Allah's family.

The Prophet Ibrahim (as) who was the oldest and most rebellious man of history, may be visualized. Denying all the idols on earth, he greatly loved and obeyed Allah alone. With his own hands, he built the Kaaba. This structure symbolizes Allah in the world.

The building is very simple. Black rocks of "Ajoon" are laid on top of each other. There is no design or decoration involved. Its name, Kaabah, means a "cube" in terms of architectural design – but why a "cube"?

Why is it so simple lacking color and ornamentation? It is because Almighty Allah has no "shape", no color and none is similar to Him. No pattern or visualization of Allah that man imagines can represent Him. Being omnipotent and omnipresent, Allah is "absolute".

Although Kaaba has no direction (because of its cubic shape), by facing Kaaba when performing the prayers, you choose Allah's direction and face Him. Kaaba's absence of direction may seem difficult to comprehend. However, universality and absoluteness prevails. Having six sides, the appropriate structure is a cube! It encompasses all directions and simultaneously their sum symbolizes no direction! The original symbol of this is the Kaaba!

Unto Allah belongs the east and west, and whither so-ever you will be facing Allah. Qur'an 2:115

When praying outside of Kaaba you must face it. Any structure except Kaaba directs north, south, east, and west, up or down. Kaaba, an exception, is facing all directions while it is facing none. Truly a symbol of Allah, it has many directions yet it has no particular direction.

Toward the west of Kaaba there is a semi-circular short wall which faces Kaaba. It is called Ismail's Hajar. Hajar signifies lap or skirt. The semi lunar wall resembles a skirt.

Sarah, the wife of Ibrahim had a black maid (Ethiopian) called Hajar. She was extremely poor and humbled to the degree that Sarah did not object to her becoming a bed-mate of her husband, Ibrahim, in order to bear him a child. Here was a woman who was not honored enough to become a second wife to Ibrahim yet Allah connected the symbol of Hajar's skirt to His symbol, Kaaba.

The skirt of Hajar was the area in which Ismail was raised. The house of Hajar is there. Her grave is near the third column of Kaaba.

What a surprise since no one, not even prophets, is supposed to be buried in mosques but in this case, the house of a black maid is located to Allah's house! Hajar, the mother of Ismail is buried there. Kaaba extends toward her grave. As a result, Allah's house is directed toward her skirt!

There is a narrow passage between the wall (Hajar's skirt) and Kaaba. When circumambulating around Kaaba, Allah commanded that you must go around the wall (not through the passage) otherwise your Hajj will not be accepted.

Those who believe in monotheism and those who have accepted Allah's invitation to go to Hajj must touch this skirt when circumambulating the Kaaba. The grave of a black African maid and a good mother is now a part of Kaaba; it will be circumambulated by man forever!

Allah, the Almighty, in His great and glorious Divinity is all alone by Himself. He needs nobody and nothing. Nevertheless, among all His countless and eternal creatures, He has chosen one, mankind, the noblest of them.

From among all humanity: a woman, From among all women: a slave, and from among all slaves: a black maid!

The weakest and most humiliated one of His creatures was given a place at His side and a room in His house. He has come to her house and become her neighbor and roommate. So now, there are two, Allah and Hajar, under the ceiling of this "house"!

In the Islamic Community, the "Unknown Soldier" is so Elected!

The rituals of Hajj are a memory of Hajar. The word Higrāh (migration) has its root in her name as does the word Mahajir (immigrant). "The ideal immigrant is the one who behaved like Hajar." Muhammad (S)

Higrāh is what Hajar did. It is also a transition from savagery to becoming civilized and from Kofr to Islam.

In Hajars mother language her name means "the city". Even the name of this black Ethiopian slave is symbolic of civilization. Furthermore, any migration like hers is a move toward civilization!

Hajar's grave is in the midst of man's circumambulation of Kaaba. You, the mohajir (immigrant), who has divorced himself from everything and accepted Allah's invitation to go to Hajj, you will circumambulate Hajar's grave and the Kaaba of Allah simultaneously.

What is being said in these paragraphs? It is difficult to realize. But for those who think they live in freedom and defend humanism, the significance of these incidents transgresses the scope of their understanding!

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