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The Ka'aba, The House Of Allah

In the province of Hejaz in the western part of Arabia, not far from the Red Sea, there lies the town of Makka. In the center of this town there is a small square building made of stones, about 60 feet long, 60 feet wide and 60 feet high. Since time immemorial this town and this stone built house has been known to world travelers. This is Baitullah, the House of Allah. Its sanctity and antiquity is older than history itself.

Tradition goes that the Kaaba was ordained by Allah to be built in the shape of the House in Heaven called Baitul Ma'amoor. Allah in his infinite Mercy ordained a similar place on earth and Prophet Adam was the first to build this place.

The Bible, in the Chapter of Genesis describes its building when God ordained Abraham to erect a Shrine for worship when Abraham was ordered to go to the Southern desert with his wife Hagera and infant son Ismael.

The Old Testament describes this building as the Shrine of God at several places, but the one built at Ma'amoor is very much similar to the one at Makka. There is no doubt that it was referring to the stone built house at Makka.

Qur'an brought this story into the full light of history. In Sura 3:95 Qur'an says

“Allah has spoken the Truth, therefore follow the creed of Ibrahim, a man of pure faith and no idolater”. (3:95)

The first house established for the people was at Makka, a Holy place and guidance to all beings. Qur'an firmly establishes the fact that Ibrahim was the real founder of the Holy Shrine. When Prophet Ibrahim built the Holy Shrine in Makka, his prayers were that this place should remain a center of worship for all good and pious people; that Allah should keep his family the custodians of the Holy place.

Ever since Ismael the son of Ibrahim who helped his father to build this place and his descendants remained the custodians of the Holy Shrine. History tells us that centuries passed and the guardianship

of the Kaaba remained in the family of Ismael until the name of Abde Manaf came into the limelight. He inherited this service and made it much more prominent.

His son Hashim took this leadership and extended it to many other towns of Hejaz so much so that many pilgrims flocked annually to this place and enjoyed Hashim's hospitality. A feast was given in honor of the pilgrims, food and water were served to all guests by the family of Hashim. This prominence created jealousy and his brother Abdu sham's adopted son Ummayya tried to create trouble.

There was a dispute in which Ummayya failed and left Makka to settle down in the Northern provinces of Syria(Sham) currently known as Syria. After Hashim his brother Muttalib and after him Hashim's son Shyba who became known as Abdul Muttalib assumed the leadership of the family. He organized feasts and supplies of water to the pilgrims during the annual festival of Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine.

Prophet Ibrahim built this House for devout worship to one God. But within his lifetime people disobeyed his orders and began to put idols inside the Kaaba. Ibrahim had to clean the House of these idols and of idol worshippers.

He told the people that this was a symbolic house of God. God does not live there for He is everywhere. People did not understand this logic and no sooner had Ibrahim died the people, out of reverence, filled the place with idols again.

They thronged to this place annually and worshipped their personal gods, It was over Four Thousand years later that the last of the line of prophet (S), Muhammad Ibne Abdullah entered Makka triumphantly, went inside the Ka'aba and, with the help of his cousin and son in law 'Ali Ibne Abi Talib, (as) destroyed all the idols of Ka'aba with their own hands.

At one stage of this destruction of idols, the tallest of the idol Hubbol was brought down after 'Ali had to stand on the shoulders of the Prophet to carry out God's orders. The Prophet of Islam was reciting the Verse from the Qur'an:

"Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished." (17:81)

This was done in the 8th year of Hijra, January 630 AD after the bloodless victory at Makka by the Prophet of Islam.

Historically when Ibrahim was ordered by Allah to build the Shrine for worship over a small he uncovered the original foundations of the Kaaba built by Adam. Ibrahim with the help of his son Ismael erected the new shrine on the same foundations. Originally it contained only four walls without a roof.

Centuries later during the time of Kusayi who was the leader of the Tribe of Quraish in Makka a taller building was completed with a roof and a quadrangle wall around it to give it the shape of a sanctuary and doors all around the sanctuary walls. People entered through these doors to come to the Ka'aba for worship.

It is now about 60 feet high, 60 feet wide from east to west and 60 feet from north to south. A door is fixed about 7 feet above ground level facing North East. A Black stone (Hajar al Aswad) was fixed into its eastern corner. In front of the building was Maqame Ibrahim, the arch shape gate known as that of Banu Shayba and the Zamzam Well.

Just outside are the Hills called Safa and Merwa and the distance between the hills is about 500 yards. These days both of the hills are enclosed into the sanctuary walls with a roof over it.

The whole building is built of the layers of grey blue stone from the hills surrounding Makka. The four corners roughly face the four points of the compass. At the East is the Black stone (Rukn el Aswad), at the North is el Rukn el Iraqi, at the west al Rukne el Shami and at the south al Rukne el Yamani.

The four walls are covered with a curtain (Kiswa). The kiswa is usually of black brocade with the Shahada outlined in the weave of the fabric. About 2/3rd's of the way up runs a gold embroidered band covered with Qur'anic text.

In the Eastern corner about 5 feet above ground the Hajar el Aswad (the blackstone) is fixed into the wall. Its real nature is difficult to determine, its visible shape is worn smooth by hand touching and kissing. Its diameter is around 12 inches.

Opposite the North west wall but not connected with it, is a semicircular wall of white marble. It is 3 feet high and about 5 feet thick. This semicircular space enjoys an especial consideration and pilgrims wait in queue to find a place to pray there.

The graves of Ismael and his mother Hajera are within this semicircular wall. Between the archway and the facade (N.E.) is a little building with a small dome, the Maqame Ibrahim. Inside it is kept a stone bearing the prints of two human feet. Prophet Ibrahim is said to have stood on this stone when building the Ka'aba and marks of his feet are miraculously preserved.

On the outskirts of the building to the North East is the 'Zamzam Well' (this is now put under ground).

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Qur'an in Surah Baqara Verses 121 to 127 described it clearly that Allah had ordained his servant Ibrahim to build the Shrine there for worship of One God. During Kusayi's time it was rebuilt and fortified. During the early years of Prophet Muhammad (S) before he announced his ministry, the Ka'aba was damaged by floods and it was rebuilt again.

When the Black stone was to be put in its place the Makkans quarreled among themselves as to who should have the honor to place it there. They had just decided that the first comer to the quadrangle should be given the task of deciding as to who should have the honor. Muhammad (S) came in and was assigned this task.

He advised them to place the stone in a cloak and ordered the heads of each Tribe each to take an end and bring the cloak nearer the corner on the eastern side. He himself then took out the stone and placed it in its position. It has been fixed there ever since.

After the martyrdom of the family of the Prophet at Karbala in 61 Hijri (681 AD), the Ummayyad Caliph Yazid Ibne Moawiya did not stop there in the pursuit of his destruction. He sent a large contingent under the command of Haseen Ibne Namir to Madina which destroyed the Mosque of the Prophet.

They did not stop there but proceeded to Makka and demolished the four walls of the Ka'aba and killed thousands of Muslims who protested. Yazid died and Ibne Namir returned to Damascus, Ka'aba was rebuilt by Abdullah Ibne Zubayr and his associates.

Umawi forces came back to Makka and killed Abdullah Ibne Zubayr, hung his body on the gates of the Ka'aba for three months for all to see the Umawi power. But eventually this arrogance of power brought its own consequences and Mukhtar became the ruler in Iraq. Under his guidance the Ka'aba was refurbished and pilgrims began to arrive in safety to perform Hajj.

The Ka'aba successfully withstood the Karamatian invasion of 317/929, only the Blackstone was carried away which was returned some twenty years later. In the year 1981 the Wahhabis brought tanks inside the Ka'aba to crush the kahtani revolution against the Saudi regime and almost demolished the South Eastern Wall. This was later restored with the help of the Makkan people.

Every man living in Makka in the 6th and 7th century must out of necessity have had some relationship with the Ka'aba. On the Muhammad (S), the Prophet of Islam, the Qur'an is silent during the Makkans period in this respect. All that is known is that the Muslim community of the period turned towards Jerusalem in prayers.

Subsequently about a year and a half after the Hijra the Muslims were ordered during prayers which were led by the Prophet of Islam himself to turn towards Makka. The particular mosque in Madina where this happened is called Masjid al-Qiblatain, meaning the mosque with two Qiblas. The Qur'an tells the Muslims,

“Turn then thy face towards the sacred mosque and wherever ye be turn your faces towards that part ” (2: 139-144)

At this same period the Qur'an began to lay stress on the religion of Ibrahim, presenting Islam as a return to the purity of the religion of Ibrahim which, obscured by Judaism and Christianity, shone forth in its original brightness in the Qur'an.

The pilgrimages to the Ka'aba and ritual progressions around the building were continued, but were now for the glorification of One God. The Abrahamic vision of the Ka'aba created a means of discerning an orthodox origin buried in the midst of pagan malpractices to which the first Muslims pointed the way.

Every year after the Hajj ceremony the place is closed for one month and on the Day of Ashura the Ka'aba is washed from inside by the Water from the well of Zamzam and a new Kiswa is brought to cover the Ka'aba for the next year.

This is the story of the Ka'aba and the persons who protected it and remained its custodians and protectors from the satanic and evil forces throughout history. Muhammad (S) and the people of his household (Ahlul Bayt) were the protectors of the Ka'aba, and currently the 12th Imam from the direct descent of the Prophet of Islam is the real protector, its custodian and guardian and shall remain as such while in concealment. In the following pages we shall unfold the lives and times of these 14 Ma'sumeen Alaihimussalam.

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