

## Comparing Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and Elija's Coming to the Mount Horeb

### INTRODUCTION

This essay investigates the elements of rituals that are performed when followers of Islam make their pilgrimage to Mecca and the rituals that take place when God appears to Elijah in the mount of Horeb after which Elijah had fled away to escape the wrath of Jezebel. The study is focused on the meaning of elements in the two rituals and on the way they are physically conducted and symbolically conveyed. The meanings are then discussed in the perspective of transformation and with regards to how they relate to my personal experiences. Finally, similarities and differences in ritual elements that are witnessed in the two rituals are analyzed.

Muslims are obligated to make at least one trip to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia during their lifetime. This trip is called Hajj; it takes its origin in the time of Abraham (Ibrahim), a prophet and the forefather of many ethnicities who is respected by Christianity, Islam and Judaism, when he had to live in wilderness with his wife Hagar and child Ishmael. Prophet Mohammed used to take part in the pilgrimage in the 7th century.

When the Prophets of Baal died, Jezebel was disgusted and wanted Prophet Elijah to be killed. Elijah fled and hid; he wished death could come upon him. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and gave him food; he reminded Elijah about the long journey to the mount Horeb he still had to do. Elijah arose, ate the food and begun his 40-day journey to Horeb where he hid himself in a hole in the mountain.

#### RITUALS PERFORMED DURING MUSLIMS' PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA

The rituals begin with performance of tawaaf when pilgrims enter the sacred mosque – Masjid Al Haram. Every Muslim has to walk counter-clockwise around a cube-shaped construction called Kabah, which is the object a prayer is directed to. The movements are supposed to be repeated seven times. Each time a pilgrim walks around Kabah, he has to say that God is great and that all praises are to Him. Pilgrims kiss the black stone in the corner of the Kabah known as Hajr Al Aswad. Those who are not able to approach the stone are supposed just to point to it with their right hand. After kissing the stone, pilgrims are supposed to run back and forth between Al-Safa and Al-Marwa; an obligatory drink from the well of Zam Zam then ensues. After approaching the well, pilgrims go to the plains of the Mount Arafat where they stand in vigil; after that, they come to Muzdalifah and throw stones as a mark of defiance to devil. Animal sacrifice is finally conducted. The pilgrimage finishes with the celebration of the Eid al-Adha (Shariati 3).

#### RITUALS PERFORMED WHEN GOD APPEARS TO ELIJAH AT THE MOUNTAIN OF HOREB

On the mount Horeb/Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments that were to guide the Israelites in their everyday lives. When Elijah hid in the cave, a strong wind that rent the mountains and broke the rocks suddenly started to blow. But God did not manifest Himself in these strong winds; there are the signs of the earthquake beginning. Fire burns, but God is not in it. Finally a weak voice is heard, and it is certainly God's revelation. By wrapping his face with a mantel, Elijah took place at the cave's entrance. By hiding his face from God, Elijah showed readiness for whatever God was to give.

The instructions from God to Elijah are that he is supposed to ensure that Elisha is installed as a prophet; Jehu recaptures his seat as the Israelites' king while the kingdom of Syria goes to Hazael. With these instructions, Elijah's mission seems to come to the end, as these three individuals are expected to carry on with his mandate (Provan 145).

#### ELEMENTS OF RITUALS THAT FEATURE IN THE HAJJ

Counter-clockwise walking is fulfilled because Muslims consider it to be a kind of worship. Running between Safa and Marwah seven times symbolizes the effort that Hagar made when looking for water for her son Ishmael. Eventually, in her frantic search of water, an angel came to her and showed her the Zam Zam well. The angel hit the ground with his heel, and the water gashed out. Running can be done in the open air or in tunnels. Pilgrims are strongly advised to do the circuit between the green pillars: they mark the shortest section they are supposed to run. At the Mount Arafat, pilgrims are expected to stand in contemplation. During this time, they are expected to pray and recite the Koran. This is the hill where Muhammad gave his last sermon, and it is also known as the Hill of Forgiveness. Pilgrims are obliged to spend at least one afternoon in the area around Mount Arafat till dusk. They are expected to reflect on the lives when praying in the plains of the mountain. In other words, it is useless to conduct pilgrimage without spending an afternoon around Arafat. From Arafat, pilgrims set out for Muzdalifah where they collect stones used in stoning of the devil-Shaitan. Throwing stones is a symbol of the pilgrims' defiance to the devil: it symbolizes the tribulations of Abraham when he was demanded to sacrifice his son by Allah. The devil tempted Abraham three times, but Abraham never gave in to the demands of the devil. The

pillars symbolize the number of times Abraham was tested by the devil. The biggest pillar is placed first and is followed by the other two remaining pillars. Each individual has to throw seven pebbles. The last ritual involves animal sacrifice that refers to God's mercy to Abraham when he finally gave Him a ram to offer instead of his son. Pilgrims slaughter the animal to be sacrificed by themselves. The meat from the sacrifice is then given to those who are suffering from poverty. Pilgrims then walk around Kaaba to show their love to God (Shariati 3).

#### ELIJAH AND MOUNT HOREB AND THE RITUALISTIC FEATURES INVOLVED

God uses the destructive powers of nature, such as the earthquake, wind and fire. However, unfortunately, God is never found in these destructive powers. In Old Testament, earthquake, wind and fire are commonly used to show God's coming to judge the evil. Elijah expected God to do the same to his enemies, but God never does that. The blowing wind is a sign of a change of strategy that God uses to treat the evil. This is why God asks Elijah to anoint Elisha, Hazael and Jehu to continue with God's mission of eradicating the worship of Baal (DeVries 237).

#### HAJJ AND TRANSFORMATION

Hajj is capable to transform one spiritually: it brings pilgrims closer to God. It marks the end of confusion and fallacies that take place in people's lives. People get the opportunity to correct the mistakes that they have made before. One acquires impeccable moral standards, as he/she keeps thinking about the Lord and His doctrines. When one raises his/her hand towards *Hajr-i-Aswad*, they touch God's hands

and make a solemn promise. Magnitude of Abraham's devotion is only realized when one is blessed with a son (Rizwan 1).

#### ELIJAH'S PILGRIMAGE TO HOREB AND TRANSFORMATION

Elijah certainly suffers from spiritual and physical exhaustion. God transforms him by sending an angel who gives him food and water to support his ability to continue his journey to Horeb. God then reassures him in still voice, which completes his transformation. Elijah thereby retraces his steps and embarks on his ministry (Epp-Tiessen 33).

#### SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA AND ELIJAH'S JOURNEY TO HOREB

The Hajj and Elijah's journey to Horeb are both pilgrimages which are geared towards establishing the relationship with God. From these pilgrimages, Elijah gets the renewed strength to carry out his prophetic duties while pilgrims who come to Mecca also revise their life and feel closer to God.

The significant difference is witnessed when sacrifice is offered during Hajj; during Elijah's pilgrimage, the outstanding elements are the earthquake, strong wind, fire and the small voice.

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