



Introduction

Pilgrimage to Mecca or "Hajj" was always an opportunity for me to pause and wonder: 'Why would Allah, Almighty God of Abraham, call Muslims to come from all around the world from every race, culture and language with at least one thing in common, "Islam" to a hot, dry and bare land where Hagar and Ishmael were left at and lived, to perform a ritual which Allah guided Abraham to establish and made obligatory to his nation?

Before I performed my first Hajj in 1997, for two years I was seeking the answer to this question. I studied the Hajj from Quran, Prophet Muhammad and his family traditions; I studied historical and sociological perspectives. All these studies made me more knowl-

edgeable and stronger in understanding the Philosophy of Hajj, but not until I found myself as a drop in the ocean of pilgrimage in Mecca, rotating around the axis of one and only one God, and until Almighty Allah led me to taste the sweetness of his invitation, did I comprehend how deep this ocean could be.

Hajj 2006 was another unique experience, which allowed me to dive in the same ocean, like an amateur diver seeking and learning from this spiritual camp of Allah. Is it not amazing: an ocean in the middle of a desert!?

This time I called my Hajj "Hajj An-Nisa" which means "Pilgrimage of Women". My intention to go on this Hajj, was to perform pilgrimage in place of my deceased mother, who was not able to do her Hajj while still alive.

I was also serving my dear wife Maryam and two of our great sisters, Narjis and Rika. Now you know why I called this Hajj, "Pilgrimage of women".

I like to leave you with a thought: It is said that the Hajj Journey begins from migration of people to Allah, from Allah to people, and to be at the service of people in the way of Allah.

Please pray for me on my continuous Journey and good luck with yours.

Ali Moshirsadri
July 4th, 2007

Complex, up close and personal



Tent City at Arafat

Monday, January 9th, 9th of *Dhul-Hajj* (the month of *Hajj*)

We arrive at the tent city of 'Arafat in a short and easy ride, maybe around 3a.m. Our tent fills with our women on one side, men on the other; then we try to nap. I am up before *fajr*; the whole morning is so nice and pleasant and *Hajj Ali* takes some time to go over important points and recommended *dua* with us again, which is very appreciated. We also have time to explore these plains a bit, and find we have a nice hill in our 'backyard' to climb later in the afternoon.

Dhuhr and 'asr are made jointly so as to free the worshipper for the rest of the afternoon until *maghrib*; now the true 'standing' begins and this marks the beginning of the greater *hajj*.

We are actually inside the tent, as there is a visiting *Shaykh* giving some talk in Arabic to the ladies. I remove myself from this stifling and cramped place inside to find a little shade outside the tent.

Almost every tent has started a reading of a *dua* with a loudspeaker: sitting outside I realize there's a lot of noise: the various recitations in different voices and pitch, vigor or gentleness.



Inside the men's tent



From top: *Narjis' "moment"; ladies at prayer; men at prayer; Ali dressed up.*

At some point, our *Shaykh* Ahmed is also hooked up to a loudspeaker, and he begins the reading of the *dua* of *Imam Hussein* for the day of 'Arafat: I brought my copy in English, and follow his Arabic recitation along with my English.

Very quickly, still on the first page, I am suddenly overcome with emotion and overpowered by tears. I mean, I am overwhelmed and awesomely humbled, as thoughts about 'me' flood into my brain. It's not just thoughts, but some physical sensations, too. I can actually feel pressure, strain and ache.

This goes on a while; I keep trying to focus back into the text, but become aware of yet another issue, again and again. By the time our *dua* is over, I am exhausted and drained. I realize there is a silence around me throughout the tents: all recitations have come to an end. It's quiet time, though it's definitely not quiet inside of me. I feel crushed and weighed down.

Through the next hours I am able to sort through thoughts and stuff that had flooded me. It is as if a veil has been lifted somewhere inside and I see clearer now; or as if a trap door in the floor opened and I dropped down to a deep level of truths I had not been aware of:

A consciousness of negative tendencies within me takes on a sharpness and urgency I am not used to. I become thoroughly ashamed of my 'transgressions', or in religious language 'sinfulness'.

ALLAH SWT gives me gifts of self-knowledge today, and like stones they hit me: my weaknesses and sins are such as negligence, arrogance, ignorance, haughtiness, impatience, miserliness, superficiality.

The speed and clarity with which this happens surprises me. Though I am thoroughly ashamed of my 'sinfulness', I am very relieved and grateful to have been shown so clearly and quickly the weapons with which I need to strike *shaytaan* at the *jama'rat*.

The rest of the afternoon I spend off to the side by myself, becoming clearer as to details, trying to formulate the feelings, connecting these to real situations in my life, and then asking forgiveness, giving thanks and praising *ALLAH SWT*. To be in the state of *ihram* and then reflect that I am dressed in my shroud to stand before the Questioning really scares me, when 'sins' are shown this clearly.

Maybe I tasted a bitter/sweet kernel in awesomeness of the second part of the unveiling, 'With the Creator, by Permission of the Creator.' Drained, solemn, as the light slowly changes, the sun will soon be setting. We end this moment of standing at 'Arafat with the *dua* of *Prophet Adam, a.s.*: "Oh Lord, I have transgressed Your Command; I turn to You in repentance, and I seek Your forgiveness" and *maghrib* and 'isha *salaat*.

We board for the short bus ride to *mashad/Muzdalifa*. We pass masses and masses of people walking along the whole stretch. On gravel now we sit outside; it is only that. Darkness. Buses. Noise. Fumes. People. Streetlamps. Nerves. No star studded brilliant night sky, though the crescent moon is straight up ahead and a beautiful, familiar focus once I gingerly lay down.

We are all sitting and waiting for the next step. Leaders of caravans have the 49 pebbles for each individual already collected, and though *Hajj Ali* comes to urge us on to collect the pebbles, I can sense, that if over two million people would have to scoot around looking for pebbles, it would create a terribly dangerous chaos.



From top: Ladies seeking shade in the heat of the day; Maryam at sunset; gathering pebbles

A-Z Glossary

A

Abu Bakr r.a.- he was a life long companion to the *Prophet Muhammed (saw)*; his daughter *Aisha r.a.* was married to the Prophet at a very young age; *Abu Bakr* becomes the first *Khalif* upon the death of the *Prophet*.

'adaab (courteous behavior) – everything is based on *'adaab*, and every moment has its correct and balanced way of behaving, inwardly as well as outwardly; courteous and ethically correct behavior

Adhaan – the call to prayer heard from minarets throughout the Muslim world, alerting the believer to prepare for the next prayer time.

ahlul bayt (people of household) of Prophet – the identity of the *Ahlul Bayt* is to be found in *Qur'an* (ayat-ul Mubahilat 3:60) and *hadith kisa* (see *H*) and are used by *shi'i* to identify the validity of giving *AhlulBayt* due credit, which is interpreted differently by some *sunnis*.

For both *sunni* and *shi'i*, love for *AhlBayt* and following the *sunnah* of the *Prophet* are necessary components to be *Muslim*.

Also: AhlulBayt – people of the House, describes the family of the *Prophet (saw)* whose lineage reaches down twelve generations, each *Imam* imbued with faultless spiritual and political knowledge; they were always denied leadership and every time martyred, except the last and twelve Imam Mehdi. He was 'taken' to *Allah SWT*, and will stay in hiding (occultation) until the end of time, whence he will return with *Prophet 'Isa* (Jesus) (pbuh) to usher in the reign of peace.

ahlul Suffa (people of the bench) – at the time of the *Prophet (saw)*, a number of especially pious and dedicated individuals perpetually gathered in front of *Prophet's* house on a *suffa* (possibly from which comes the word: sofa)

Aisha - daughter of *Abu Bakr (r.a.)* and an important *hadith* transmitter in her own right. She was a woman with strong political opinion and not shy about voicing it. In contention with the family of *Ali Ibn AbuTalib*, which will lead to her being a rare woman taking up arms and instigating to battle against him. This is known as the Battle of the Camel. She later repents her initiative into this conflict.

al-Fatihah – first chapter in the Holy *Qur'an*, translates as 'The Opening' : 1:1-8_

AlHamdulil'Lahi Rabbi'l alameen; Praises be to the One, the Lord of the worlds - Frequent, daily expression of re-centering and praising

AlHamdulil'Lah wa Shukrulil'Lah – Praises and Thanks are due to Allah SWT

Ali ibn Abu Talib - Ali as a young boy is one of the first persons, besides Khadijah and AbuBakr, to join the Prophet as a Muslim.

About him the Prophet (saw) says, among many other hadith:

"I am the city of knowledge, and Ali is its gate."

"You are to me as Haron (Aaron) is to Prophet Musa (Moses), except that after me there will be no more Prophets." "Of whomever I am maula (master), this, Ali is his maula."

Al-Khandaq (the Battle of the Trench) – the third battle (after Badr and Uhud), which happened in Madinah between the Muslims and some Jewish tribes. The tactic was new, in that a trench was dug around the place, and the community stayed at the locale, rather than taking the battle outside the town. In this story the 'democratic' character of Prophet (saw) is discovered, as he asks for and follows council of other persons.

ALLAH – Al – Lah = The One, besides Whom there is no other

Allahs' Rahmah – All-Encompassing Mercy embracing all and everything, unconditionally, as opposed to Ar-Raheem, the Specifically directed Merciful

AllaHuAlim (Allah is He Who Knows Best)- daily, frequent expression

Allschwiler Wald – a forest close to my home in Basel, Switzerland

Angel Jibra'il, Gabriel- the angel designated to transmit messages to the Messengers; same angel for all the Messengers. Other angels have specific functions, such as the 'recording angels', the 'guarding' angels...

a.s. - aleihi salaam – peace be upon him = pbuh: expressing the respect due to persons of Prophecy or holy, spiritually enlightened personalities (saints)

As Salaamu Aleikum wa Rahmatul'Lahi wa barakatu'Hu; Peace be to you, and Mercy and Blessings from Him -

As Salaamu Aleikum – common greeting of peace; in a hadith, Prophet (saw) says to return a greeting with equal (wa aleikum as Salaam) or better; this expression is 'better' because it asks for more (mercy and blessings) for the recipient.

'asr (late afternoon prayer)- third daily, obligatory ritual prayer.

Asma al-Husna (The Most beautiful Attributes/Names of Allah) –

such as: Ar-Rahman – The Overall Merciful; Ar-Raheem – The Specifically Merciful; Ar Razaaq – The Provider; Ya Wadud – Oh Most Loving; Ya Quddus – Oh Most Holy; Al Zahirun wal Batin – The Manifest and The Hidden; Al Azizul'Hakim – The

Mighty, The Wise, etc.

Ninety-nine *Asma al-Husna* are collected from and used in the *Holy Qur'an*, but His Names and Attributes by necessity have to be unlimited and never-ending.

Astaghfirul'Lah - may Allah forgive - daily, frequent expression

'Arafat – location several miles outside of *Makkah*. A *Hajji* has to be there at noon on the day of 'Arafat, and stay in prayer and contemplation until sun-set. It is said, this is the place that *Adam and Hawa* (Eve) (*a.s.*) arrived at, once discrimination and the world of duality was given to them (leaving the paradisaical state of bliss).

It is also said, to be the place where *Prophet Ibrahim* (*a.s.*) was to sacrifice his son.

Ayah – sign; everything created is an *ayah*, a sign from *Allah SWT* for mankind to reflect upon and remember the Creator;

This is also the name for each verse in the *Qur'an*: each verse is an *ayah*, a sign from God, The Wise.

B

Baqi – *al Baqi* is an attribute of Allah: The Ever-Lasting; *Baqi* being the name of the cemetery outside the *Prophets masjid*.

Beyrouth – Beirut – I was surprised to see this spelling of the capital city of Lebanon at the airport.

C

Caravan – travel group whose leader acts as the 'protector', especially to women traveling without a male guardian, which is still not permitted in Saudi Arabia; our *caravan* was an American based, majority Lebanese women, youth and men.

D

Deen, (*din*) - 'perfected and all-embracing life-transaction' named '*Islam*' (usually translated as religion)

dhikr (*vocal or silent reflection*) includes meanings of mention, remembrance, invocation

dhikr beads – a string of beads (various materials and colors; either 33 or 99 beads long plus one more) for purposes of keeping count of the intended number of repetitions in *dhikr*.

DreilaenderEck – german: 'three countries corner' – the exact spot where France, Germany and Switzerland meet together

dua (*supplication*) – individual prayers, outside the obligatory ritual of *salaat*

NARJIS PIERRE

My mother, a British nurse, accompanied her friend on a working trip to Australia; my father, a Swiss typographer, accepted a job in Australia. On a weekend visit to the Island of Tasmania, they on the ferry, fell in love, and soon married.

I was born in 1957 in Melbourne, Australia. I was potty-trained on the long ship voyage back to Europe, detoured by way of South Africa because the Suez Canal was blocked, up to Paris and then on to settle in Basel, Switzerland.

Three younger brothers followed to complete the family; we all started out as English-speakers, but quickly switched to 'Swiss' as we successively entered kindergarten. My mother mostly retained English spoken at home.

Our upbringing did not include a structured religious identification, though Mother definitely had deep faith and love for her church, whereas Dad didn't really mind any. Living right next to a church, and with mandatory religion classes in public school, he probably thought that would give us enough religious guidance.

I entered work force at age 18 with a pre-practicum, working in an institutional home for children and young adults with cerebral palsy. The next three years were spent at pedagogical school, which included a practicum at the home & school for 'Shippers' children (off the barges on the Rhine) and the last practicum at the 'Stationary Psychiatric Department of the Children's hospital', where I stayed on after graduation to work for another three years.

In the early 80s I became involved in the political scene. Environmental challenges, proposed nuclear sites and their unresolved issue of waste discharge, luxury renovations and a overall 'police state' atmosphere heightened by several terrorist incidents around Europe jolted all of us into an ideological debate of whether physical force was necessary, or peaceful methods such as sit-ins and boycotts had enough power to effect change.

Various combinations of communal living situations gave me plenty of opportunities to live and practice conflict resolution, justice and generosity, and forced us to widen all of our horizons.

The restless young mind is quick to criticize, and that we did plenty, and in the course of time I became quite involved in the democratic process. Then disillusionment set in and the time came to search for that better life elsewhere. Friends traveled to far and wonderful places: to Turkey and into North and Central African countries. Possible volunteer opportunities in Nicaragua made me choose to travel to South and Central America.

For one half year I traveled by bus from Lima, Peru up north through Ecuador, south of Colombia, to San Andres Island and Guatemala. There I met an American family and together by train we traveled to the border at Laredo, and then around the southern part of Texas, until I decided to honor an invitation to stay at a rural Muslim community outside Blanco, Texas.

Here, before long, I had to make a most important decision: to continue traveling the world or return to Switzerland. But there opened before me an unexpected alternative: I could embark on a quest for knowledge of God and the purpose of existence, to which the Muslim ladies joyously were challenging and inviting me.

So, I stayed and said *shahada*, metaphorically agreeing to believe that all the beauty of nature was a creation by intelligence – a God – and that I had never heard of a Prophet named Mohammed and knew nothing about him, did not bother me.

A couple months later, I married, and this is what truly made the roots dig deep and firm into the ground of Texas. We raised three children living frugal and healthy in the country and partly home schooling our children. American city life took over when our family moved into San Antonio and the culture of TV and 'fitting in' became dominant.

I became involved in the local Muslim community, co-founding SAMWA (San Antonio Muslim Women's Association), staying pretty stable and committed. Presence in Tri-Faith Dialogue of San Antonio and an invitation to serve on the Board of the peaceCENTER expanded my connections into the non-Muslim communities, and my service there has always helped me to learn more and grow on the Path towards Peace and Light, in a nice balance together with the Islamic/Sufi teachings of Shaykh Fadhlalla-Haeri, my inspiration and guide.