

Significance of Hajj: The Nigerian Experience

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This paper examines the significance of Hajj, with particular reference to the Nigerian experience. Hajj is not only one of the fundamental pillars of Islam, but it also reinforces the religion's spiritual and communal relevance. The paper posits that Hajj provides an avenue for both communion and communication among Muslim worshippers and between them and Allah. Furthermore, Hajj enhances and renews the spiritual and moral lives of the faithful, invigorating them with a deep sense of social solidarity and religious obligation. Using historical and phenomenological approaches, the paper traces the origin of Hajj and interprets its associated rituals. Findings reveal that Hajj fosters unity among Muslims and provides an opportunity for the renewal of faith and fellowship. The paper recommends that the rites of Hajj should be taken seriously as they enrich the spiritual and moral lives of Muslims.

Keywords: Hajj, Allah, Worship, Piety, Good Life.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is one of the major monotheistic religions of the world, professed across the globe, with Indonesia recognized as the largest Muslim nation. This global presence emphasizes that Islam is not confined to any particular individual, tribe, or nation. The term *Islam* itself means submission, surrender, and obedience to the will of Allah. A person who wholeheartedly submits to the belief in the existence and oneness of Allah is referred to as a Muslim.

In Islamic understanding, Hajj refers to the performance of specific rites of worship in and around the holy city of Makkah during the month of Dhul-Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The observance of Hajj is rooted in the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an (2:196–203; 3:96–97) and the Sunnah, which represents the practices of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

The institution of Hajj and its rituals commemorate significant events in the lives of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), his wife Hagar, and their son Prophet Ismail

(Ishmael) (peace be upon them). Hajj symbolizes the submission of Muslims to Allah, and it nourishes the spirit with deep spiritual joy. It calls for a complete sacrifice of personal comfort, worldly possessions, relationships, and pride in one's lineage, status, achievements, or social standing. Hajj is the fifth and final pillar of the Islamic faith. It is considered highly significant because the Qur'an commands that every Muslim who has the financial and physical means should undertake the pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime. The Qur'an states:

"Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all who can afford the journey. But if anyone denies this duty, Allah is indeed free from all needs of His creatures." (Qur'an 3:97)

This paper explores the importance of Hajj, its rituals, historical development in Nigeria, and its contemporary relevance.

History of Pilgrimage (Hajj) in Nigeria

The practice of Hajj (pilgrimage) in Nigeria dates back to around 1920, when His Majesty, Alhaji Muhammad Dikko, the Emir of Katsina, successfully performed the

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pilgrimage. He traveled from Lagos through London and Cairo by means of a British steamship. His safe return inspired other Nigerian Muslims to consider the journey, recognizing it as a spiritually rewarding act that attracts barakah (divine blessings).

In 1927, a notable Kano-based businessman, Alhaji Alhassan Dantata, also performed the Hajj via steamship, passing through Morocco and Egypt with a group of fifteen people. His successful pilgrimage further encouraged others, including leaders such as Alhaji Ibrahim Ringim, another Emir of Katsina, to embark on the sacred journey. From that period onward, pilgrimage to Makkah began to grow into an annual religious endeavor for many Nigerian Muslims.

At the time, Hajj travel was primarily self-sponsored and lacked formal organization. However, by 1944, the process became more coordinated with the formation of the West African Pilgrims Association (WAPA). This association facilitated transportation by providing buses and lorries to assist pilgrims in reaching the Holy Land. About a decade later, air travel was introduced, significantly easing the pilgrimage process. Despite this, both air and land transportation continued concurrently for some years. According to Kabiru, the introduction of air travel contributed to a noticeable increase in pilgrim turnout, though a number of pilgrims still chose the traditional land routes. This dual mode of transportation led to a dramatic rise in the number of pilgrims arriving in Saudi Arabia.

In 1958, the Federal Government of Nigeria officially began participating in Hajj operations, with a primary focus on safeguarding the welfare of Nigerian pilgrims. The government appointed a private company, Alharmaini, to oversee the transportation of pilgrims to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This development resulted in a significant rise in the number of participants. For instance, in 1979, approximately 50,580 Nigerian Muslims performed the Hajj, and in 1980, the number rose to 66,000 (Hanga, 1999).

To further streamline and formalize the Hajj process, the Federal Government enacted Decree No. 16 in July 1975, granting full regulatory authority over pilgrimage affairs. Under this decree, the government was responsible for:

- Organizing aircraft for transporting pilgrims,
- Maintaining transit camps for accommodation and screening,
- Deploying medical personnel, welfare officers, and guides,
- Issuing travel documents, facilitating foreign exchange,
- And keeping official records of the number of pilgrims annually.

As a result of these structured efforts, Hajj operations in Nigeria became more organized, efficient, and

significantly more accessible to the wider Muslim population (Hanga, 1999).

Rites Associated with Hajj

The Hajj is performed during the first twelve days of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar, Dhul-Hijjah. It is the fifth and final pillar of Islam. Upon arrival at the miqāt (a designated station where a pilgrim must assume the state of ihrām), pilgrims don the ihrām garments and make the intention to perform either 'Umrah (lesser pilgrimage) or Hajj.

The lesser pilgrimage begins with ṭawāf—circling the Ka'bah seven times in awe, humility, and devotion to Allah. After completing the ṭawāf, pilgrims perform the Sa'y, which involves walking briskly seven times between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwah, invoking and glorifying Allah throughout. Upon completion of the Sa'y, male pilgrims shave their heads, while female pilgrims trim a small portion of their hair, marking the conclusion of 'Umrah.

THE DAYS OF HAJJ

8th Day of Dhul-Hijjah (Yawm at-Tarwiyah)

Pilgrims proceed from Makkah to the camp at Minā, where they prepare for the next day's journey. They spend the night in prayer and reflection.

9th Day of Dhul-Hijjah (Yawm 'Arafah)

- Early in the morning, pilgrims depart from Minā to the Plain of 'Arafāt, located east of Makkah.
- This day is regarded as the culmination of the Hajj, during which pilgrims stand in solemn devotion, offering supplications, glorifications, and prayers to Allah. A sermon is delivered to all gathered pilgrims, who represent diverse nationalities and ethnicities, symbolizing the unity of humankind before God.
- The standing at 'Arafāt (wuqūf 'Arafah) continues from just after noon until sunset.
- At sunset, pilgrims proceed to Muzdalifah, a desert area between 'Arafāt and Minā, where they spend the night under the open sky, praying and collecting pebbles for the next day's ritual.

10th Day of Dhul-Hijjah (Yawm an-Nahr)

- After Fajr (morning prayer) in Muzdalifah, pilgrims return to Minā to perform the ritual stoning (Jamrat al-'Aqabah)—symbolically rejecting Satan by throwing seven pebbles at the largest pillar.
- Pilgrims then participate in the sacrifice (Qurbān) of an animal—sheep, goat, or camel—in remembrance of Prophet Ibrāhīm's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. This also marks the beginning of the Eid al-Adhā celebration for Muslims worldwide.
- The meat is distributed among family, friends, and the

poor.

11th Day of Dhul-Hijjah

- Pilgrims shave or trim their hair again (shaving is preferred for men; women cut a fingertip-length portion of hair).
- They return to Makkah to perform Ṭawāf al-Ifāḍah and Sa'y, essential rites of Hajj distinct from the earlier 'Umrah.
- Pilgrims then return to Minā to spend the night and complete the ritual stoning at all three Jamrāt (pillars) on the 11th, 12th, and optionally the 13th days.

Visit to Madinah (Optional)

Many pilgrims conclude their journey by traveling to Madinah to visit the Prophet's Mosque (Al-Masjid an-Nabawī). Although not a required component of Hajj, it is a highly recommended spiritual practice.

Eligibility Conditions for Performing Hajj

There are specific conditions that govern the performance of Hajj for Muslims. The first and foremost requirement is that the individual must be a Muslim. This is a prerequisite for all acts of worship, as worship performed by a *kāfir* (non-believer) is not accepted. As stated in the Qur'an:

"And nothing prevents their contributions from being accepted from them except that they disbelieved in Allah and in His Messenger." (Qur'an 9:54)

Secondly, the pilgrim must be free, as Hajj is not obligatory for a slave who may be preoccupied with obligations to a master. Furthermore, the individual must be physically and financially capable of undertaking the pilgrimage.

As emphasized in the Qur'an:

"And Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) to the House (Ka'bah) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah—for those who can afford the expenses (for conveyance, provision, and residence)." (Qur'an 3:97)

Physical capability implies that the individual is in good health and able to withstand the rigors of travel and the performance of rituals. Financial capability means having sufficient funds to cover the journey to and from the sacred House of Allah, along with provisions for dependents during the period of absence.

For women, an additional condition applies: they must be accompanied by a husband or a *mahram* (a close male relative). In the case of someone in debt, if the available funds are not sufficient to both repay the debt

and perform Hajj, the debt should be paid off first. In such a case, Hajj is not yet obligatory for that individual.

In accordance with this spiritual obligation, Muslims in Nigeria—as well as others around the world—strive to fulfill the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime, as noted by Abdalati.

Objectives of Hajj

- It represents the largest annual religious gathering and the most consistent global convention of peace known in human history. Muslims from around the world congregate to foster mutual understanding, discuss shared concerns, and promote collective welfare.
- It serves as a powerful demonstration of the universality of Islam and the unity, equality, and brotherhood of all Muslims. Pilgrims wear identical simple garments, follow the same rituals, recite the same supplications, and perform acts of worship in unison—eliminating distinctions of class, nationality, or status. There is no royalty, only loyalty to Allah.
- It affirms the commitment of Muslims to Allah and their willingness to renounce material interests in devotion to His service.
- It commemorates the divine rituals performed by Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Prophet Isma'il (Ishmael), who are believed to have been the first pilgrims to the original House of God on earth—the Ka'bah in Makkah.
- It provides an opportunity for pilgrims to immerse themselves in the spiritual and historical environment of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), drawing inspiration from his legacy and deepening their faith.
- It serves as a symbolic reminder of the Grand Assembly on the Day of Judgment, when all people will stand equally before Allah, awaiting their final fate, with no distinction based on race, ethnicity, or social background.
- It reinforces the unique spiritual status of Makkah, the only city divinely honored as the cradle of monotheism since the time of Prophet Ibrahim and continuing until the end of time.

Spiritual and Moral Significance of Hajj

• Attaining Piety:

One of the foremost purposes of Hajj is the cultivation of *taqwa* (piety). Piety is explicitly linked to Hajj in the Qur'an:

"And complete the Hajj and 'Umrah for Allah... And be pious to Allah." (Qur'an 2:196)

"And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is piety." (Qur'an 2:197)

• Affirming Islamic Monotheism:

Hajj centers on sincere devotion and intention directed solely to Allah. The Qur'an affirms:

"And complete the Hajj and 'Umrah for Allah..." (Qur'an 2:196)

"So avoid the uncleanness of idols and avoid false speech—inclining [only] to Allah, not associating anything with Him..." (Qur'an 22:30–31)

• **Honoring the Symbols of Allah:**

A vital purpose of Hajj is to instill reverence for Allah's sacred symbols. The Qur'an states:

"That [is so]. And whoever honors the symbols of Allah—indeed, it is from the piety of hearts." (Qur'an 22:32)

• **Teaching Noble Morals and Character Development:**

Hajj provides a framework for spiritual discipline and moral refinement through:

○ **Chastity:**

"Hajj is [during] well-known months, so whoever has made Hajj obligatory upon himself therein, there is to be no sexual relations..." (Qur'an 2:197)

○ **Restraint from anger and arguments:**

"...and no disputing during Hajj..." (Qur'an 2:197)

○ **Gentleness and calmness:**

The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised at Muzdalifah:

"O people, be tranquil, because it is not hastiness that indicates righteousness."

○ **Self-denial and unity with others:**

Pilgrims abandon distinctions of wealth, nationality, and status. They wear identical garments, recite the *Talbiyah*, and perform rituals together in humility and submission.

○ **Modesty and Equality:**

In the Prophet's farewell sermon, he declared:

"O people, your Lord is One and your father (Adam) is one. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab over an Arab; a red person has no superiority over a black, nor a black over a red—except by piety."

○ **Patience:**

Pilgrims endure physical hardship and crowded conditions, learning patience and endurance.

○ **Generosity:**

Hajj often requires significant financial sacrifice, which reflects the pilgrim's willingness to give in the path of Allah.

○ **Reflection on the Hereafter:**

The immense gathering of pilgrims from around the world serves as a symbolic reminder of the Day of Judgment:

"Allah—there is no deity except Him. He will surely assemble you for [account on] the Day of Resurrection..." (Qur'an 4:87)

• **Stoning of the Devil (Jamrat):**

Often misunderstood, this ritual commemorates Prophet Ibrahim's rejection of Shayṭān's temptation to disobey Allah. By throwing stones, pilgrims reaffirm their commitment to reject evil and submit wholly to Allah.

• **Prayers at the Sacred Mosque:**

Praying in the sanctuary of Makkah symbolizes total submission to the Creator, as pilgrims acknowledge their shortcomings and seek divine mercy.

• **Animal Sacrifice (Qurbani):**

This act recalls the story of Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son, and Allah's provision of a ram in his place. The helplessness of the animal serves as a humbling reminder of human helplessness before Allah on the Day of Judgment.

CONCLUSION

Hajj encapsulates the perfection of faith, merging all obligatory acts into one profound experience. It inspires Muslims to detach from worldly distractions and draw closer to God. Hajj emphasizes human equality before Allah, fostering unity, humility, and renewed devotion. For Nigerian Muslims, the experience is both a religious obligation and a spiritually transformative journey.

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