

The Majesty of Makkah al-Mukarramah

By

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If you gaze long enough at the Ka'bah, you will come to realise that there is much more than meets the eye about this elegantly-draped, empty, cubed-shaped building. There are no neon lights on it to seize your imagination, no intricate architecture to marvel at, and certainly no attractions directly around it, besides endless lines of marble tiles, to interest one. Yet, it's very difficult to tear one's gaze away from it without a feeling of guilt. So what keeps your eyes glued to the Ka'bah?

There are few things that can *NOT* be put into words, and the electric feeling one experiences when setting one's gaze on the Ka'bah, when lovingly touching the

Hajr-e-Aswad

(Heavenly Stone), and when performing salaah in the

Hateem

(area demarcated by a low wall, which is technically, within the Ka'bah itself), are included in them. A wave of awe overpowers one, and you no more see with your physical sight, nor hear with your physical ears or think with your physical brain. The light of spirituality takes over as your soul starts communicating with the soul of the Ka'bah. The feeling is beyond description. You come to realise that you have just honoured your "

labbaik

"(I am present) when you responded to Prophet Abraham's (may peace be upon him) call over 3000 years ago, when he stood atop Mount Abu Qubais, calling out to everyone till the Last Day, to visit the Ka'bah. Suddenly, the world ceases to exist and everything around you vanishes. It is just yourself and your Lord, the Almighty, in sacred communion - just as millions of angels are doing directly above the worldly Ka'bah, in the seventh heaven, around a sacred house called

Baitul Ma'moor

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This climax of meeting with your Lord is not only spiritually significant, but geographically

important too. For those, like myself, who forgot our geography taught to us in school, we learnt that millions of years ago, long before the Ice Age or even the Dinosaur Age, the entire world was submerged in water. Suddenly, a mysterious bubble appeared, and from there a piece of dry land made its appearance. This dry land then rose 277 meters above sea level and spread out to take the form of what we know today as the continents. The Ka'bah, also known as the "Navel of the Earth," is built upon the exact spot of this bubble.

This geographically significant spot is situated on a 0° line of magnetic declination, making it in perfect alignment with magnetic north. In simple language, the Ka'bah is situated at an equal distance to the earth's circumference in all directions. The Golden Ratio Point (1.618) of the earth, thus, is right at the spot of the Ka'bah. About 2 billion Muslims honour the Ka'bah by facing it in their prayers five times a day.

Modernisation of Makkah

There is no doubt that the landscape of Makkah has changed to such an extent that almost all the signs of the last day have appeared therein. These include the "belly of the mountains being ripped up," - an allusion to all the underground motorways, many high-rise buildings that would be higher than the mountains and would dwarf the Ka'bah, and the desert becoming a place of greenery and entertainment. The magnificent "Makkah Clock" which is visible from all four directions, is 2000 feet high (the Big Ben Clock of London is only 316 feet high) and when fully lit, is visible from a distance of 35 kms. Twenty years ago, a *ziyaret* (visit) of the landmarks of Islam in Makkah would be a spiritually refreshing experience whence one could "feel" the past coming alive; sadly today, it's just a few minutes' drive past a few remaining spots of what was the previous glory of Islam. If the Afrikaaners of South Africa have preserved the Voortrekker Monument to remember their shameful Apartheid legacy, why are we tearing down our beautiful legacy of justice, love and peace?

Makkah is perhaps today the fastest Muslim city to be modernised. The new expansion to the Grand Mosque has been designed by Atkins to resemble a huge pavilion or stadium, subliminally implanting the message that the Ka'bah is nothing more than a "holy attraction." A photo or a video of one posing in front of the Ka'bah is more significant than touching it or crying in prayers facing it. In order to feed the ever-growing number of pilgrims, chickens are imported from Brazil and other countries, the *halaal* status of which has also been questioned by the local 'Ulema. Even the Zam Zam water has not been spared from "modernisation." According to recent tests, the inviolable Holy Water which was originally quite thick, is being mixed with chemicals to "purify and preserve" it by western standards. This is the reason why no one has direct access to the underground well itself. The Muslim

ummah

is paying dearly for this “purification” as in Makkah, a 10L bottle of Zam Zam would cost you Rs25- (about R79-), and a gallon of fuel (also about 10L), only Rs5- (about R18-). Indeed nothing reminds one of this sacred city, except the Ka’bah itself.

Many will take the opportunity of cursing the King for all this modernisation; but the truth is that the King, just like all other shrewd businessmen, simply seen an opportunity, and seized it. He knows how the pilgrims have abandoned simplicity for luxury, pomp and show, so he is making most of marketing ‘Umrah and Hajj as “the ideal holiday and shopping destination,” just in case his oil fields run dry tomorrow. It’s a case of supply and demand, and at the moment, he has many customers! However, if the *ummah* returns to simplicity, then the Almighty will appoint such rulers who will love their sword more than their wine and music.

Don’t be Distracted

If only the Ka’bah reminds you of this Holy City, then the Ka’bah is the place where you should be at for most of your stay in Makkah - not in the luxurious malls with all its western designer stores. Every second is prime time at the Ka’bah. Do not lift your eyes off the Ka’bah, or gaze in admiration at the other buildings (especially the Clock Tower) whilst in the Grand Mosque. This is the highest form of disrespect. As you throw yourself at the mercy of the Almighty or if you are engaged in doing *tawaaf* (circling the Ka’bah seven times to complete one circuit) and if such *tawaaf* is done with due decorum and humility, then it is in these conditions that you will experience certain life-altering realities. These realities are many and experienced differently by people, but can be briefly enumerated as follows:

1. Your *tawaaf* starts at the point of *Hajr-e-Aswad*, or the Heavenly Stone. This stone looks normal, but it is far from normal. It’s so valuable that if all the kings of the world were to purchase it with all the gold they own, it will still not be for sale. It is truly a Stone that belongs to the Muslim nation. It signifies our origin in paradise, and our ultimate end to be in paradise too;

2. Whilst lost in the huge crowds, dressed in those two simple pieces of cloth, you realise that you are just a number, helplessly flowing with the endless tide of humanity. As you diminish in significance, so does the greatness of the Almighty grow in proportion in your heart. You are so helpless in the state of *ihram* (consecration), that the many flies can even sense it. They will

sit on you and taunt you, knowing that they cannot be killed. If a life of fly is sacred, isn't the life, honour and dignity of your fellow brothers and sisters more sacred?

3. As you begin to experience tiredness in your *tawaaf*, and think of taking a break, you realise that the Majesty of the Almighty didn't increase a bit by your extra devotions. In fact, you will tire yourself completely in devotions to Him, but it will not benefit the Almighty the least. He is independent and Supreme. You need to follow His rules and regulations for your own benefit. If you do not, you are simply pushed out of the line;

4. You realise that the greatest form of worship is in MOVEMENT – continuous movement until death overtakes you. You can ask the Almighty as much as you want, but you have to work according to a certain system to achieve your goals. This system is to be found in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. In addition, our enemies are not afraid of our worship sitting on one place, but they are afraid of our actions;

5. *Tawaaf* teaches you not to be distracted from your true goal in life. Why is this? Because you see many people from all over the world – white, black, tall, short, thin, fat – all in the same motion as you. If you begin to admire how the Arabs tie their scarves in 100 different ways, how the Turks form a huge chain, and how lovely the Indonesians chant their *zikrs*, you will lose focus, but others will reach their destination;

6. Lastly, everyone finds a place in the Grand Mosque, no matter how crowded it is. Likewise, the Almighty has given us all a role to play in life, no matter how insignificant we may think it to be. Let us identify our strengths, stop our bickering and divisions, and reach our destination before it's too late.

The greatest consolation when leaving Makkah is that, although the mercy of the Almighty is at its peak here, but the Almighty Himself is everywhere. He is aware of all of our movements, wherever we are – even at the tip of the North Pole. We leave his House with great sorrow, having captured its essence in our heart, and cherishing those sacred moments for ever.

To all those embarking on the journey to this Ancient House, I bid you 'Umrah and Hajj Mabroor in advance.

