

Qhutbah, Insha Allah, Friday, Nov 27, 2009

Alhamdu lillah, wa ash hadu ala ila ha ill lallah

Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim

Insha Allah, this Qhutbah is on Hajj – an application of spiritual discipline. Several thousand years ago, the Prophet Abraham felt a profound disappointment seeing the idolatry of his people. He observed that his people manufactured “gods” from wood, stone and ivory etc. [7:195] *Do they have legs on which they walk? Do they have hands with which they defend themselves? Do they have eyes with which they see? Do they have ears with which they hear? Say, "Call upon your idols, and ask them to smite me without delay."*

These idols could not defend their worshippers in their hour of need much less even create a fly. This led him to approach the idea of a One, True God from a rational point of view. God had blessed him with a logical mind and he was in search of a Lord who was eternally besought by all. It was a patient search of instinct and reflection. God helped him to perceive the light. Thus he established the effectiveness of intellect and meditation as a means to the discovery of the Absolute. This earned him the elevated status of Hanif, or one who is upright, intellectually honest and seeks the eternal truth. *Submission (Islam): Abraham's Religion [2:135] They said, "You have to be Jewish or Christian, to be guided." Say, "We follow the religion of Abraham - monotheism - he never was an idol worshiper."* He was richly rewarded for this. *Abraham: Original Messenger of Islam [22:78]- the religion of your father Abraham. He is the one who named you "Submitters" originally.....*

Hajj is a physical as well as a spiritual journey. God is the focus of all our pious aspirations and Hajj is an answer to His call. Abraham prayed that a peaceful town should grow around the structure of the Ka`bah, the Sacred Masjid, which he and his son Ishmael had constructed as a result of Revelation and where pilgrims from all over the world would congregate as part of their religious rites. God granted this prayer and the Hajj pilgrimage and rites is mandatory for all Muslims who can afford it. *Pilgrimage, Like All Duties in Islam, Decreed Through Abraham [22:26] We appointed Abraham to establish the Shrine: "You shall not idolize any other god beside Me, and purify My shrine for those who visit it, those who live near it, and those who bow and prostrate. [22:27] "And proclaim that the people shall observe Hajj pilgrimage. They will come to you walking or riding on various exhausted (means of transportation). They will come from the farthest locations." [2:125] We have rendered the shrine (the Ka`bah) a focal point for the people, and a safe sanctuary. You may use Abraham's shrine as a prayer house. We commissioned Abraham and Ismail: "You shall purify My house for those who visit, those who live there, and those who bow and prostrate." Abraham Delivered All the Practices of Submission (Islam) [2:127] As Abraham raised the foundations of the shrine, together with Ismail (they prayed): "Our Lord, accept this from us. You are the Hearer, the Omniscient."*

It is an indicator to the universality of Islam and this is our Qiblah - the direction we face when we perform our Salat prayer. [2:150] *Wherever you go, you shall turn your face (during Salat) towards the Sacred Masjid; wherever you might be, you shall turn your faces (during Salat) towards it. ... [3:97] In it are clear signs: the station of Abraham. Anyone who enters it shall be granted safe passage. The people owe it to GOD that they shall observe Hajj to this shrine, when they can afford it. As for those who disbelieve, GOD does not need anyone.* Hajj is mandatory on every adult only once in his or her lifetime. The ability to undertake a journey can be constrained by some major factors viz. financial capacity, physical disability, emotional problems or psychological disorders. God does not wish to burden any soul, hence any individual falling in the above categories may not perform Hajj and there is no consequential transgression or sin.

Abraham left Ishmael in the wilderness of Arabia under a Divine Commandment. [14:37] *“Our Lord, I have settled part of my family in this plantless valley, at Your Sacred House. Our Lord, they are to observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), so let throngs of people converge upon them, and provide for them all kinds of fruits, that they may be appreciative.*

Islam was the religion of Abraham. His status is described in [2:130], *Who would forsake the religion of Abraham, except one who fools his own soul? We have chosen him in this world, and in the Hereafter he will be with the righteous.* The heritage he left for his descendants was to uphold the doctrine of monotheism. His unflinching faith in God is in [2:131] *When his Lord said to him, "Submit," he said, "I submit to the Lord of the universe."*

Many people used to take their own idols to the Ka`bah and they crowned them there instead of dethroning them. Prophet Muhammad came as the last Prophet of Islam. He banished 360 “gods” from inside the Ka`bah, all of which were thrown out at the conquest of Mecca. Now we have and invent new forms of idolatry. *Common Form of Idolatry: The Ego As A god [45:23] Have you noted the one whose god is his ego? Consequently, GOD sends him astray, despite his knowledge, seals his hearing and his mind, and places a veil on his eyes. Who then can guide him, after such a decision by GOD? Would you not take heed?*

The Four Months of Hajj (Zul-Hijjah, Muharram, Safar, & Rabi I) [2:197] Hajj shall be observed in the specified months. Whoever sets out to observe Hajj shall refrain from sexual intercourse, misconduct, and arguments throughout Hajj. Whatever good you do, GOD is fully aware thereof. As you prepare your provisions for the journey, the best provision is righteousness. You shall observe Me, O you who possess intelligence. The purpose of Hajj is to answer God’s call and not just to attain pseudo-spiritual snobbishness. Of course, we have to carry or have means of our provisions or we would have to resort to begging. God almost immediately reminds us that we need to move from the physical to the metaphysical. We all need requirements for the final journey and the best of spiritual prerequisite is righteous conduct and an undeniable fear of the Hereafter.

Like all other forms of worship it demands an external as well as internal loyalty to God. While the external performances like physical ceremonies and oral recitations are with the pilgrimage for a few days only, its spiritual aspects continue for the rest of our life. The spiritual contents of Hajj include not only the pre-Hajj attitude, the rites and symbolic expressions of it at Mecca, Mena, Arafat and Muzdalifah, but the post-Hajj effects is an experience to be maintained. It has to be incorporated as a living Hajj.

The Hajj is anticipated to change our thought system and adopt piety. No where in the Quran does it say that Hajj absolves us of our previous sins. It is repentance and reform that "cleans our slate". The resolve should be to adopt the Hajj attitude in life through reconditioning of the mind. We have to be on guard against any relapse into a lower level of the soul in which case it would be a losing bargain. Hajj is an achievement, under conditions of humility and a desire of service to humankind in all situations of life.

It is a pursuit for shaping and reshaping our life in virtue. It is a craving of our soul in quest of the Radiance of God, the enhanced consciousness of the presence of the Divine, the illumination in the dark recesses of our mind.

Hajj is an occasion to cross the barriers of the self. Umrah could be individual while Hajj is a collective phenomenon. At this stage, humans are profoundly ignorant of the benefits of the collective mind. It is always great to pray in a congregation. We can encourage one another, Insha Allah. Hajj maximizes our sympathies. The objective fails if it is merely a crowding together of humans. *[8:35] Their Contact Prayers (Salat) at the shrine (Ka`bah) were no more than a mockery and a means of repelling the people (by crowding them out). Therefore, suffer the retribution for your disbelief.*

The Quran emphasizes modesty. Thus a Hajji who takes pleasure in arrogant ostentation and exhibition of his piety is a victim of ruinous pride and gains only negatively for this Hajj. *Major Commandments [4:36] You shall worship GOD alone - do not associate anything with Him. You shall regard the parents, the relatives, the orphans, the poor, the related neighbor, the unrelated neighbor, the close associate, the traveling alien, and your servants. GOD does not like the arrogant show-offs.*

Humility then is the defensive weapon to face the onslaught of conceit. The challenge of pretended self-righteousness can be met only by cultivating a humble mind. It is a prolonged struggle. Hajj is a life in devotion. It involves duties to God, to yourself and to society. In our daily business our vision encompasses ourselves only. We tend to go out of synch with the real life. Excessive self-seeking destroys higher values imperceptibly. Questionable conduct corrodes spirituality and an evil of character may spring out. Godliness and fellow feeling go out of focus. This is what God means when He says minds are closed. *[2:7] GOD seals their minds and their hearing, and their eyes are veiled. They have incurred severe retribution.*

The (*neeyat*) intention and will for Hajj is the starting point for the pilgrim. The idea is emphasised that the most readily acceptable offer to Allah is an uncontaminated mind is more important than just a healthy body.

Mecca is the cradle of Islam and all roads should lead to it at some point of time or the other. The unevolved and immature are content with the symbolic Hajj and do not experience the blissful progress. The Ka`bah is like a magnet. It attracts what can be attracted and repels what can be repelled. Our mind is touched with an awareness of a higher destiny. This does not come by itself but needs a process of preparation to precede it. After a ceaseless struggle we have a breakthrough, Insha Allah and there is a victory of the self over the lower self.

Hajj is the best leveller of all distinctions of class, creed, race and origin. All Pilgrims are dressed alike or should be dressed alike and no one is better than the other in the physical sense. There is a collective usual chant - *Labbaik, Allah Humma Labbaik, Labbaik, La Shareeka Laka Labbaik, Innal Hamda, Wan Neyamata, Laka Wal Mulk, La Shareeka Lak. Here we come, O Allah, here we come. Here we come. You have no partner. Here we come, Praise indeed, and Blessings are yours – the Kingdom too. You have no partner.* This is known as the *Talbiyah* and it is repeated incessantly with eagerness and commitment. The biggest leveller is Death. Hajj, allows a Muslim to experience once in his life what leveling truly is. A pilgrim may travel first class in a jet or on the upper deck of a ship and another may be in economy or the lower deck. They are both one and the same. Only the more righteous among them has a higher elevation and honour in the sight of God. The vulgar worldly embellishments of class and colour dilute the high spiritual value of Hajj.

The ceremonial aspect is no less important. It is a necessary operational counterpart of the spiritual. The two aspects are complementary and reinforce each other. The mind conducts the body and other expressions of Hajj are not superimposed on one another. In any form of worship our whole self is in action – mind, body and soul.

In Sura 2: 196-203, the various rites of Hajj are described for the pilgrim to complete. The Ihraam is worn from certain fixed points on all roads leading to Mecca. Once this garment is worn, it becomes a state of Ihraam (sanctity) and prohibitive conditions come into operation and the pilgrim is now committed to perform the pilgrimage. The Ka`bah is circumambulated 7 times, the 7 traverses between the knolls of Safa and Marwah, symbolizing the patience and perseverance of Hagar, the wife of Abraham, the stay in the valley of Mina, the plain of Arafat and the night at Muzdalifah under the stars, the symbolic stoning of the Shaitan and the sacrifice of an animal at Mina culminating in a farewell circumambulation of the Ka`bah, all the while worshipping and invoking the blessings of God alone.

Hajj is an impact on the mind which is the nerve centre of both good and bad. The freedom gifted by God to it can help towards soul maturity or towards soul degeneration. Conceit is the biggest stumbling block in the path of our spiritual march. It starts with a charming desire for self glorification. The love for pride, wealth, power and intellect

deprives one of the capacities for soul growth. Self advertisement and enhancement devalues us. The greater the outward show the greater the inner poverty.

The Quran narrates the story of Pharaoh who was intoxicated with power and pride and this led him to his ultimate ruin. *[4:49] Have you noted those who exalt themselves? Instead, GOD is the One who exalts whomever He wills, without the least injustice. [17:37] You shall not walk proudly on earth - you cannot bore through the earth, nor can you be as tall as the mountains. [17:38] All bad behavior is condemned by your Lord.*

God warns us about conceit. Conceit with a pretentious outwardness stealthily corrodes and ultimately corrupts the personality. A vanishing regards for moral values sets in. Everyone wants to get a title of Hajji or Hajjiani (Hajjan). But the living Hajj cannot be frozen down to a mere mechanical ritual. The Quran which is anxious to build human character on the basis of equality warns over and over again against conceit and vain gloriousness. *Major Commandments [16:23] Absolutely, GOD knows everything they conceal and everything they declare. He does not love those who are arrogant.*

Conceit is bad because the afflicted person not only feels himself superior to others but there is an inner scorn against all those who are regarded as inferior. Arrogance breeds loathing of others.

[39:60] On the Day of Resurrection you will see the faces of those who lied about GOD covered with misery. Is Hell not the right retribution for the arrogant ones? [40:72] In the Inferno, then in the Fire, they will burn. [40:35] They argue against GOD's revelations, without any basis. This is a trait that is most abhorred by GOD and by those who believe. GOD thus seals the hearts of every arrogant tyrant.

There is no concept of monasticism in Islam, which perhaps is the other extreme of lavishness and flamboyance. *Do Not Prohibit Lawful Things [5:87] O you who believe, do not prohibit good things that are made lawful by GOD, and do not aggress; GOD dislikes the aggressors.* The commandment clearly directs that we should not go to the extreme of depriving ourselves of the pleasure and bounties of God which have been made lawful for us. At the same time we have been forbidden from wastage and extravagance which is the other extreme. The path ordered by God is the path of moderation.

God be glorified! Thank you God!