

God, in His Glory, has revealed in His Glorious Book two chapters that describe to mankind how *Hajj*, the pilgrimage, is to be performed to His Sanctified House. These two chapters are *Sūrat al-Hajj* and *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. As for *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, the second of the two to be revealed, it is a chapter of commands and prohibitions. That is why emphasis is placed in it about statements, actions, and legislative rulings in regards to completing the performance of *Hajj*, as well as forbidden acts and their expiations. The chapter starts its discussion of *Hajj* by speaking about the time of *Hajj*, [through the sighting of] the new moons, and concludes the passages about *Hajj* with the remembrance of God in specific, numbered days. It also brings forth attention to *taqwā* (the state of being mindful of God) to remind us all of the importance of this great principle.

As for *Sūrat al-Hajj*, it is a chapter related to the heart. Most of the verses in it are speaking about another aspect of *Hajj* which focuses on the presence of the heart, where the verses speak about the pilgrimage of the heart. God says, speaking of the sacrificial animals, “It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God but your piety.” (Hajj: 37) “Anyone who honors the sacred ordinances of God will have good rewards from his Lord.” (Hajj: 30) He also says, “All this [is ordained by God]: those who honor God’s rites show the piety of their hearts.” (Hajj: 32)

Whoever can combine both of these facets in their *Hajj* has combined all forms of goodness. And whoever has some type of deficiency in one of them or both, their *Hajj* will decrease in its quality and rewards in accordance to the degree of deficiency. In fact, if one analyzes the verses and texts in revelation, it clearly demonstrates that the degree of perfection or deficiency of *Hajj* of the heart is more important and has a greater effect upon whether one’s *Hajj* being accepted or rejected in comparison to the actions of the limbs even though both are important. Nevertheless, “God has set a due measure for everything.” (Talāq: 3) The perfection of the heart in glorifying God’s rites is not equivalent to the perfection in the recommended acts of *Tawāf*⁽¹⁾, *Sa’ī*⁽²⁾, throwing pebbles [at the *Jamarāt*⁽³⁾], and so forth. Similarly, the deficiency in the pilgrims’ garment of sincerity, dedication and devotion to God is not equivalent to the deficiency in their garment of *ihrām*⁽⁴⁾. Cleansing the hearts from showing off, arrogance, and pride is not equivalent to purifying the tongue from idle talk, the body from filth and the clothing from dirt. Both concepts (the spiritual and physical) are a part of this religion that we worship God with. Yet the former—the actions of the heart—is the very foundation while the latter—the actions of the body—is a branch of that foundation. There is a great correlation between these two (the spiritual and physical), except when one makes their external appearance upright whereas their internal condition is corrupted. How excellent are the poet’s words when speaking of the path to God:

Traveling a distance by hearts to Him is not equivalent to traveling physically.

A Profound Chapter

Many scholars of the Qur’ān have agreed that *Sūrat al-Hajj* is one of the most profound chapters of the Qur’ān.

I have reflected over it for quite some time and have looked at the explanations of the scholars of the past and of latter days, and I have derived a unique description specifically for it: Chapter of Expert Scholars. Indeed, it is a chapter for those who are firm in knowledge because of its deep meanings, difficulty in correlating its different verses with each other and the various conflicting interpretations amongst the scholars.

Some of the Unique Characteristics of this Chapter:

1- There is no other chapter throughout the Qur’ān that combines between the Meccan revelation and the Medinan revelation, revelation during the day and night, revelation during travel and residence, revelation during war and peacetime, revelation of passages that are precise and those that are not specific, revelation in the wintertime and summertime, and revelation that was abrogated and abrogates except in this chapter.

2- The Companions differed as to whether the verses were revealed before or after the emigration of the Prophet, may God’s peace and blessings be upon him, to Medina.

3- No other chapter was named after the five pillars of Islām. It is not known by any other name.

4- No other chapter has two prostrations of recitation. One of the scholars narrated that ‘Umar said, “*Sūrat al-Hajj* has been made special with two prostrations [of recitation].”

1) The ritual act of circumambulation around the Ka’bah

2) The ritual act of walking between the al-Safā and al-Marwah hills

3) The three stone pillars in Minā

4) The state of ritual purity and physical/mental preparation that every Muslim must enter before performing the pilgrimage to Mecca.

5- No other chapter in the latter half of the Qurʾān starts off with the call “O people”.

6- In the Qurʾān there are more than sixty parables, none of which God says before presenting it, “So listen to it”(Hajj: 73), except in this chapter.

7- In this chapter, four types of hearts are mentioned: the blind heart, the sick heart, the rough heart, and the heart that is living, tranquil, and seeking God. These four types of hearts were only mentioned together in this chapter.

It has a verse that includes all forms of good where God says, “Believers, bow down, prostrate yourselves, worship your Lord, and do good so that you may succeed.”(Hajj: 77)

Thus, these eight unique characteristics distinguish this chapter from other chapters of the Qurʾān.

The Objective of this Chapter

The prominent scholar ibn Taymiyyah commented on the chapter’s objective by saying, “It includes the different stages in the path towards God all together.” This scholar’s statement verifies as to why this chapter was named *al- Hajj*. Linguistically, *al-Hajj* means “to seek something that is venerated” and verily, there is nothing that deserves more veneration than God, glorified be He. Everybody is walking in their path towards The Great One in His Magnificence, His Beauty, His Mercy, and His Punishment, may He be exalted.

Thus, this chapter is full of guideposts and milestones for the one who is traversing this path in order to shed light upon questions such as: which path should one take? How should they walk? What is their provision? What should they be aware of?

The first of these signs is the proper etiquette in addressing others, even if they are disbelievers. The address of “O people” is intended for polytheists/idolaters as mentioned by ibn ʿAbbās. This interpretation is very clear when we look at all the different types of addresses in the Qurʾān. The calls of “O you who have associated partners with God” or “O idol worshippers/idolaters” are never used. There is, though, a verse that says “Say: O you who disbelieve” and another one that says, “You who disbelieve, make no excuses today: you are only being repaid for what you used to do.” However, the address that is consistent throughout the Qurʾān is “O you who believe” and that is mentioned 89 times. Additionally, the calls of “O People of the Book” and “O Children of Israel” are mentioned many times as well. The Qurʾān is addressed to those who associate partners with God as well as others, yet the only call addressed towards them is “O people”. Certainly, this supports the statement of ibn ʿAbbās.

I have counted ten rules of thumb from merely the first page of this chapter for those who seek to walk towards their Lord: to be kind when addressing others... to be strong while doing so... to be more concerned about the heart first... to use and utilize fear from what is expected in the Hereafter... to explain that in detail... to warn against those perceived to be intelligent and clever with words when they argue, especially when they give beauty to falsehood through their intelligence and their eloquence because they are the followers of “every rebellious devil”(Hajj:3)... to have utmost conviction that removes the least of doubt about resurrection... to use the proof of physical sight for insight... to mention the proofs of the strength of the Compeller in His Creation... and to mention the weakness of man in his physical makeup.. If one were to continue to reflect, they would find many other remarkable sources of guidance in this chapter.

The Pilgrim and His/Her Relationship with this Chapter

The one who is performing the *Hajj* is seeking the Kaʿbah. In their journey, they need signs that will guide them until they reach their final destination. There are signs and evidences in the Qurʾān for the pilgrim throughout this chapter. So, I’m informing every pilgrim: how strange is the situation of the pilgrim who is seeking to perform *Hajj* yet has not reflected over this chapter!

This chapter combines between the journey of the pilgrim to the Kaʿbah with their feet as well as their hearts. It combines between the *talbiyah*⁽¹⁾ of the heart as well as the *talbiyah* of the tongue. It combines between the throwing of pebbles with one’s hand as well as the internalization of that very rite. Similarly, it combines between the sacrificing of the animal with one’s hand and the internalization of the rite of sacrifice.

So, if one were to ask: how can we perform *Hajj* physically with the presence of our hearts?

The answer—while all knowledge is with God—is that this whole chapter and its different verses revolve around the concept of reverence. Therefore, whoever wishes to achieve that must revere in their heart what God has ordered to be revered. This can be obtained through studying the verses and pondering over the matters which this chapter orders for us to respect and revere. One has to struggle greatly to achieve this goal through patience and perseverance. Furthermore, days and nights must be spent in deep reflection and weeping in solitude until the doors of guidance are opened for them. These are affairs of the heart that are unattainable except through constant spiritual struggle.

1) A response and supplication that a Muslim recites throughout Hajj

This Chapter Emphasizes Having Reverence for Three Matters:

Firstly: to have reverence of God as a Lord and as the only deity worthy of worship; to be sincerely dedicated to Him and to trust in Him completely without any deficiency in this trust. We must reflect over certain verses that were mentioned in the chapter such as:

•“People, be mindful of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing.”(Ḥajj:1)
•“This is because God is the Truth; He brings the dead back to life; He has power over everything.”(Ḥajj:6)

•“Do you not realize [Prophet] that everything in the heavens and earth submits to God: the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the animals? So do many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved. Anyone disgraced by God will have no one to honor him: God does whatever He will.”(Ḥajj:18)

•“Devote yourselves to God and assign Him no partners, for the person who does so is like someone who has been hurled down from the skies and snatched up by the birds or flung to a distant place by the wind.”(Ḥajj:31)

•“So it will be, because it is God alone who is the Truth, and whatever else they invoke is sheer falsehood: it is God who is the Most High, the Most Great.”(Ḥajj:62)

•“Are you [Prophet] not aware that God knows all that is in the heavens and earth? All this is written in a Record; this is easy for God. Yet beside God they serve that for which He has sent no authority and of which they have no knowledge the evildoers will have no one to help them.”(Ḥajj:70-71)

And in the conclusion of this chapter is a remarkable analogy where God says, “People, here is an illustration, so listen carefully: those you call on beside God could not, even if they combined all their forces, create a fly, and if a fly took something away from them, they would not be able to retrieve it. How feeble are the petitioners and how feeble are those they petition! They have no grasp of God’s true measure: God is truly most strong and mighty.”(Ḥajj:73-74) The aforementioned petitioners include those who call upon other than God as well as those who ask a fly to return what it took from them. As for those they petition, it includes those being called upon other than God as well as the fly itself. Thus, even if the petitioner or those they petition were an angel, a messenger, or a king, or anyone else, verily they are all weak in comparison to the Mighty and the Dominant, glorified be He.

I remember that in a past pilgrimage season, there was a lady pilgrim who was stuck at the Black Stone so she was afraid for herself, and she shouted and screamed loudly. While there were only a few inches between her and the House of God, she was shouting, “O Badawī, save me! O Badawī, save me! O Badawī*, save me!” Has this woman not read in the chapter of *Ḥajj* where God says, “Instead of God, they call upon what can neither harm nor help them— that is straying far away”(Ḥajj:12)?

Some people call upon God right in front of the Ka`bah, in between *al-Ṣafā* and *al-Marwah*, in *ʿArafah*, *Muzdalifah*, and *Minā*. These individuals are, in reality, testing their Lord as they do not trust Him and they have no certainty in God responding to anyone calling Him. This chapter addresses these people by saying:

•“There are also some who serve God with unsteady faith: if something good comes their way, they are satisfied, but if they are tested, they revert to their old ways, losing both this world and the next— that is the clearest loss.”(Ḥajj:11)

Secondly: to have reverence of the Hereafter. The verses of this chapter cause the heart to tremble severely. In the beginning of it God says, “People, be mindful of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing: on the Day you see it, every nursing mother will think no more of her baby, every pregnant female will miscarry, you will think people are drunk when they are not, so severe will be God’s torment.”(Ḥajj:1-2)

The nursing mother here is currently nursing her child, but she will throw him as he is suckling. Glorified is He, a tree that is not going to be judged, a mosquito that is not going to be questioned, an ant that will not be weighed, a cat that will not be given the option of Paradise or Hell—why would all these things miscarry what they were pregnant of? “Every pregnant female will miscarry”(Ḥajj:2) is inclusive of every female in the creation.

In the middle of this chapter God says, “These two kinds of people disagree about their Lord. Garments of fire will be tailored for those who disbelieve; scalding water will be poured over their heads, melting their insides as well as their skins; there will be iron crooks to restrain them.”(Ḥajj:19-21)

One should ponder as to why God put forth the punishment of the bellies before the skin. The righteous predecessors, may God be pleased with them, explained this. It was narrated by ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of al-Suddī that he said, “The angel will come to him carrying with him a container of a fiery drink. When he brings it close to his face, the individual will show hatred towards it. (The angel) would then take out an iron crook and strike his head causing for his brains to explode. Then, the angel would empty the container into his brain and it would enter into his stomach straight from his brain.”

Thus, the fiery drink will reach the stomach before it reaches the skin. We seek God’s refuge from such a fate.

As for the Believers, they have a great promise awaiting them as God says, “But God will admit those who believe and do good deeds to Gardens graced with flowing streams; there they will be adorned with golden bracelets and pearls; there they will have silken garments.”(Ḥajj:23)

There are so many of these types of verses throughout the chapter.

Thirdly: to give reverence to that which God expects us to revere, which are His rites as well as the pillars of action of the religion such as the prayer, the obligatory charity, *Ḥajj*, the struggle in spreading/defending Islām, etc.

This has been repeated in this chapter to remind us of the reverence that we must have in regards to the rites of *Ḥajj* itself. God says:

- “All this [is ordained by God]: those who honor God’s rites show the piety of their hearts.”(Ḥajj:32)
- “All this [is ordained by God]: anyone who honors the sacred ordinances of God will have good rewards from his Lord.”(Ḥajj:30)

• To clarify that this type of reverence should be felt in the heart God says:

- “It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God but your piety. He has subjected them to you in this way so that you may glorify God for having guided you. Give good news to those who do good.”(Ḥajj:37)

- “We appointed acts of devotion for every community, for them to celebrate God’s name over the livestock He provided for them: your God is One, so devote yourselves to Him. [Prophet], ive good news to the humble.”(Ḥajj:34)

One of the greatest factors that will sever the human being’s journey towards the Most Merciful as well as the journey of those who are answering call to the sanctified House, is the lack of reverence of the rites of God. Therefore, in this great chapter, God repeats and makes it very clear how important it is to have reverence of the Grand Mosque, and to the House within it—the Ka’bah—as well as the Black Stone, the Yemeni Corner, the Standing Station of Abraham, *al-Ṣafā* and *al-Marwah*, in *Arafah*, *Muzdalifah*, and *Minā*, and to the location where the stones are to be thrown, in addition to the sacrificial animals of whose blood is spilled solely for the Sake of God. What is meant by having reverence of these matters is not to seek blessings from them, or to think that they will bring benefit or harm independent of God. Instead, people must realize that this House of God has been attributed to Him out of reverence and honor.

God has made for this House a mosque and He made this mosque a sanctuary. He made it protected where humans, animals, and even plants feel that type of protection and security. In the authentic collection of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, it is reported that, “God has made Mecca a sanctuary since the day He created the Heavens and the Earth. So, it is a sanctuary by God’s Decree till the Day of Resurrection. Fighting in it was not legal for anyone before me, and it was made legal for me only for an hour by daytime. Its thorny bushes should not be cut, and its game should not be chased, its fallen property should not be picked up except by one who will announce it publicly; and its grass should not be uprooted.”⁽¹⁾

God made for this sanctuary different stations wherein a person who intends to visit this holy place should not pass through except that they take off their regular clothing, uncover their head, and answer the call in a loud voice proclaiming their sincere and complete submission to their Lord. All of this is for the purpose of venerating and having reverence for the House of God as narrated in the collection of Aḥmad and others that, “This community—the Muslim community—will remain to be in a good state as long as they continue to give reverence to this sanctuary the way it deserves. Once they lose that reverence, they will be destroyed.”

1) al-Bukhārī #3189, Muslim #3139

The Companions knew this statement very well, the statement of God where He says, “All this [is ordained by God]: those who honor God’s rites show the piety of their hearts.” (Hajj:32) One of the profound commentaries of this verse is the statement of ibn `Abbās when he said, “If the people do not perform *Hajj* and do not visit His House, then God will bring the heavens upon the earth.” He derived this from the verse where God says, “God has made the Ka`bah—the Sacred House—a means of support for people”.⁽¹⁾ So, ibn `Abbās speaks about this verse in the sense that this is what protects people in their spiritual and material well-being.

Furthermore, even the animals realize this fact. In the authentic collection of al-Bukhārī, al-Miswar b. Makhrama said, “The Messenger of God, may God bless him and raise his rank, set out at the time of al-Hudaibiya, he went on advancing till he reached the Thaniya i.e. the mountain pass by which one descends (to Mecca), his riding-beast knelt down, and the people said twice: Go on, go on, “Al-Qaṣwā’ (i.e. the she-camel’s name) has become jaded. The Prophet (May peace be upon him) said: She has not become jaded and that is not a characteristic of hers, but He Who restrained the elephant has restrained her. Then he said, “By the Name of the One in Whose Hands my soul is, if they (i.e. the disbelievers of Quraish) ask me anything with which they will respect the ordinances of God, I will grant it to them.” The Prophet then urged the she-camel and she got up.⁽²⁾

So, it is ironic that some people do not recognize the importance of these rites while an animal, a she-camel, recognized it.

God has warned in this chapter sternly when He says, “As for the disbelievers, who bar others from God’s path and from the Sacred Mosque—which We made for all people, residents and visitors alike—and who try to violate it with wrongdoing, We shall make them taste a painful punishment.” (Hajj:25) Therefore, whoever tries to violate it—by merely having the intention and resolve to do so—would deserve punishment even if they are not able to physically carry out their wrongdoing.

If a pilgrim was to reflect over this chapter and tread this path of *Hajj* with his heart and physical body, we would see a great spiritual journey full of tranquility, respect, love, concern, and mercy. The beautiful aroma emanating from the statements glorifying God, exalting His mention, and seeking Him alone would be all around. Hearts would find reverence of God and eyes would find tears. We would thus not witness the deficiencies, major and small, that we are accustomed to.

How many nullifiers and deficiencies of worshipping God alone do we see during *Hajj*? How many people do we see neglecting the obligatory prayer? How much oppression, theft, cheating, lying, cursing, swearing, backbiting, slandering, mockery of others, etc. do we see around the House of God, and around the rites of the pilgrimage? How many people do we see not dressing properly and exposing their bodies to others? How much smoking and throwing of filth and disturbance of other pilgrims do we see?

All of this takes place because of our weakness and deficiency in showing the proper respect and reverence of God, the Great and the Mighty, and to His great rites.

I remind you, my dear pilgrim, that God honored the father of all prophets, Abraham, by making him a caretaker of the Ka`bah. He was responsible for cleaning the House from the filth of associating partners with God as well as material filth. God says, “Purify My House for those who circle around it, those who stand to pray, and those who bow and prostrate themselves.” (Hajj:26)

Should we not tread the same path and walk in the footsteps of our father, a close friend of God, where we can cleanse the House of God, and all the different rites, whether it’s *‘Arafah*, *Mina*, etc. from every type of association of partners with God in worship, and every type of filth?

These are just some of the highlights of this great and profound chapter. Carry them with you throughout your *Hajj* and throughout your life. I ask God to make me and you from those who fulfill these teachings and make them an argument for us and not against us. In conclusion, we beseech God to bless the Messenger Muḥammad and raise his rank because, in fact, he was the best of all who had reverence and respect to these great rites.

1) *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*: 97. The Ka`bah is the center of the pilgrimage, bringing in people from all over the world, where Muslims are allowed to trade—the Sacred Months ensured their safety. The offerings provide a means of livelihood to the poor and needy, and the custom of garlanding an animal gives it special protection. In addition to all these material benefits, there are the spiritual benefits of worshipping God. This is an example of bringing people together in peace.

2) al-Bukhārī #2731



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How to Read and Understand *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*

For those who wish to perform *Hajj* with their heart and emotions

Author/ Sheikh: Esam bin Saleh al Owaid

