

Wisdom and Benefits from Stories Related to the Hajj

Hajj is the fifth and final pillar of Islam and much like the other four pillars it has not only very practical implications and purposes, but also a very practical and profound history. The ritual is commemoration of the lives of those who were true to their faith and were thus honored by their Lord, Who immortalized their struggle till the end of times.

Synopsis of a Great Life

Hajj revolves around the life of Ibrahim AS, one of the five great Messengers of Allah. From a very young age, Ibrahim AS rejected the commonly held pagan custom of worshipping idols and false deities. At the time, this beloved messenger was the only monotheistic and true believer on earth who committed himself to worship none other than the one true God, Allah SWT. Later, Ibrahim AS was married to a woman named Sarah, who left a legacy of faith and devotion towards her husband and towards his mission of spreading the message of Allah to humanity.

Ibrahim AS and Sarah were married for an extensive period of time but due to Allah's ultimate wisdom, the noble couple had not been blessed with any children. Although Ibrahim AS wished to have children who would carry his legacy and continue his mission of spreading the message of God to humanity, he remained content with the decree of Allah SWT. Sarah loved and respected her husband deeply and realized his wish. Since she was unable to bear any children, she decided to offer her slave girl, Hajar in marriage to Ibrahim AS in hopes that she would be able to bear him children.

Hajar did conceive and gave birth to a boy named Ismail. Ibrahim AS was in his waning years (according to some reports he was in his eighties) when Allah SWT blessed him with his first child. Sarah's emotions overcame her at this point and she felt a tug of jealousy in her heart. Her devotion to her husband and her attempt to sacrifice her love for him in order to fulfill his wish was so high in the eyes of Allah SWT that He ordered Ibrahim AS to take Hajar and Ismail to the barren land of Makkah and leave them there.

Try to imagine yourself in this situation. Your only child, your hope for the future of Islam, the one you were blessed with in your old age and you can't even keep him within your eyesight. And not only that, you are to leave him in a barren desert land where odds of survival are very limited.

Why did Allah SWT ask for this from one of his most beloved prophets? Allah SWT had already given Ibrahim AS the honor of being *Khaleelullah* (intimate friend of Allah); He SWT did not want his intimate friend to develop attachment for anyone else in his heart. He SWT wanted to test the obedience of Ibrahim as it is only through passing the tests of Allah that one is elevated in the spiritual realm. Also, Allah SWT wanted to protect Sarah from developing any jealousy, as that is a disease that eats away faith and good deeds just as fire eats away wood. Sarah had protected the message of Allah and His love in her heart and when the time came, Allah protected her heart.

Allah SWT had chosen Ibrahim AS and had granted him his wish of a child; of course, He SWT was not going to destroy the child. When Ibrahim AS was leaving Hajar and baby Ismail on the spot he was ordered to by Allah SWT, there was nothing there except a pile of rocks.

Imagine the heart of a father and husband and the emotional pull that Ibrahim AS must have felt; but the order of Allah had to be fulfilled. The story is told by Prophet Muhammad SAW in these beautiful words and can be found in Sahih Al-Bukhari:

Abdullah Ibn Abbas RA narrates that the Prophet SAW said:

Prophet Ibrahim AS brought Hajar and their infant son Ismaeel AS while she was suckling him, to a place near the Ka'ba under a tree on the spot of Zam-Zam. During those days there was nobody in Makkah, nor was there any water. So he made them sit over there and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates, and a small water-skin containing some water, and set out homeward (towards Jerusalem). Hajar followed Ibrahim AS saying, "O Ibrahim! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything (to eat or drink)?" She repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him, "Has Allah ordered you to do so?" He said, "Yes." She said, "Then He will not neglect us," and returned while Prophet Ibrahim AS proceeded onwards, and on reaching the Thaniya where they could not see him, he faced the direction of the Ka'ba, and raising both hands, invoked Allah saying the following prayers:

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ
رَبَّنَا لِتَقِيْمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِّنَ
الْثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

"Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful." (Al-Quran 14:37)

Ismail's mother went on suckling Ismail and drinking from the water (she had).

When all the water in the water-skin had been used up, she became thirsty and her child also became thirsty. She started looking at him (i.e. Ismail) tossing in agony. She left him, for she could not endure looking at him, and found that the mountain of Safa was the nearest mountain to her on that land. She stood on it and started looking at the valley keenly so that she might see somebody, but she could not see anybody. Then she descended from Safa and when she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and trouble, till she crossed the valley and reached the Marwa mountain where she stood and started looking, expecting to see somebody, but she could not see anybody. She repeated that (running between Safa and Marwa) seven times.

When she reached the mount Marwa (for the last time), she saw an Angel at the place of Zam-zam, digging the earth with his heel (or his wing), till water flowed from that place. She started to make something like a basin around it, using her hand in this way, and started filling her water-skin with water with her hands, and the water was flowing out after she had scooped some of it."

The Prophet (saws) added, "May Allah bestow Mercy on Ismail's mother! Had she let the Zam-Zam (flow without trying to control it), Zam-Zam would have been a stream flowing on the

surface of the earth." The Prophet further added, "Then she drank (water) and suckled her child. The Angel said to her, 'Don't be afraid of being neglected, for this is the House of Allah which will be built by this boy and his father, and Allah never neglects His slaves.'

She lived in that way till some people from the tribe of Jurhum or a family from Jurhum passed by her and her child, as they (i.e. the Jurhum people) were coming through the way of Kada. They landed in the lower part of Makkah where they saw a bird that had the habit of flying around water and not leaving it. They said, 'This bird must be flying around water, though we know that there is no water in this valley.' They sent one or two messengers who discovered the source of water, and returned to inform them of the water. So, they all came (towards the water)." The Prophet added, "Ismail's mother was sitting near the water. They asked her, 'Do you allow us to stay with you?' She replied, 'Yes, but you will have no right to possess the water.' They agreed to that." The Prophet further said, "Ismail's mother was pleased with the whole situation. So, they settled there, and later on they sent for their families who came and settled with them so that some families became permanent residents there.

Us vs. Them

Just try to place yourself in the position of a mother who is carrying a limited supply of food and water; she is going to settle in a barren desert valley where there is no shade or any other person and is about to be left alone there with her infant son.

What would you do?

What kind of anger and doubts would you feel in your heart?

What kind of words would not escape your mouth?

And then compare yourself to this woman, whose faith resonates through these words:

"Has Allah ordered you to do so?" He said, "Yes." She said, "Then He will not neglect us."

How grounded was her faith and what level of decency did it give her that she neither questioned her husband's sanity nor her fate, rather relied entirely on Allah SWT.

The ritual of S'ae—run between Safa and Marwa—is symbolic to Hajar's search for help for her child; and the help only came when she realized her inability and completely surrendered to the will of Allah SWT. Allah wants us to re-live those moments of agony and desperation of Hajar. He SWT wants us to remember that His help is right there and all we need to do is realize our weakness and His strength and surrender to His will. If this understanding is not developed in us, then the wisdom of this ritual is lost and it will have no resonance in our souls.

The Test Continues

The struggle of the entire family to remain faithful and surrender to Allah was again tested when Ismail AS reached boyhood. Ibrahim AS had occasionally visited his family in Makkah and had begun to develop attachment for Ismail as he became a young man. It is very natural for a father to develop a sense of belonging and pride as his son reaches adulthood and begins to share his responsibilities and understandings. What was not normal in this case was the status of Ibrahim AS with Allah SWT.

Allah SWT had chosen Ibrahim to be His friend and one of the qualities of Allah SWT is *Al-Ghayyur* (jealous). When He SWT loves someone, He does not like to share that person's heart with anyone else. Therefore came the order of sacrifice of Ismail AS!

This event leaves our minds and hearts baffled because we are so far away from the concept of utter and absolute surrender to Allah SWT. We do not know how to detach our emotions from our rationality and accept the reality. The absolute reality being the fact that Allah SWT knows what is best and our knowledge is nothing compared to His.

Ibrahim AS and his family taught humanity a lesson on self sacrifice and surrender to God through their behavior. Ibrahim AS saw multiple dreams which all meant that he was to offer Ismail as a sacrifice to Allah SWT. Ibrahim approached his son and discussed the matter with him who despite his youth, showed remarkable character and obedience to his father by agreeing to the sacrifice. When Hajar found out, she relived those earlier moments of spiritual glory and dazzled humanity again by her resolve and trust in God.

When Ibrahim AS was on his way to sacrifice his son, Shaytaan appeared to him and questioned his decision, at which Ibrahim AS picked up a handful of dust and threw it at him to dissuade his attempts. Shaytaan repeated the same trick twice more with Hajar and Ismail who both did what Ibrahim AS had done. And this is the origin of the practice of stoning of Shaytaan called *Rami-Jamarat* during Hajj.

Allah SWT wants us to relive that resolve while performing the ritual—to do the right thing despite the temptations and difficulties! Allah SWT wants us to make *du'a* for strength and the zeal to stand up to our weaknesses and the shortcomings in our lives.

Ibrahim AS actually went on to slaughter his son who was replaced at the last moment by a ram from the heaven as Allah SWT did not want Ismail AS to be slaughtered, rather He SWT wanted to slaughter the attachment for Ismail in his father's heart.

We are much lower than Ibrahim AS in our spiritual ranking and Allah SWT by His mercy never tests a person more than he can bear. Allah SWT will surely give us tests which will require us to sacrifice something that is dear to us. It is the ability to sacrifice for the pleasure of Allah that secures guidance for a believer.

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ عَابَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ
وَأَمْوَالٌ أُقْتِرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِينُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا
أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ
اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Say, [O Muhammad], "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have obtained, commerce wherein you fear decline, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and jihad in His cause, then wait until Allah executes His command. And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people." (At-Tauba 9: 24)

Everyone is Responsible for His Own Actions

Something noteworthy in the story of Ibrahim AS and his family is that every member of the family played his/her own role instead of questioning the other. This is the manifestation of reality of *Iman*—the understanding that you are responsible for your own deeds, not someone else's. This is something that is missing from the ummah today.

Real Love

Let's examine ourselves and see where we are from these celebrated believers. One of the questions that I am often asked is how to keep one's spouse happy and how to keep their love? Of course, just like everything else, the situation varies from person to person but the general rule is very simple: one should marry for a goal; and once married they need to believe in their spouse, to merge their thinking into their spouse's, to be the supporter and comfort for them, and be a cause of their achievements instead of being a hindrance.

Isn't that what Sarah and Hajar did for their husband Ibrahim AS? Wasn't this the cause of Prophet SAW's love for Khadija RA, even long after her death? When questioned about this love, Prophet SAW summed up the secret of it for generations to come in the following words:

"She believed in me when no one else did; she accepted Islam when people rejected me; and she helped and comforted me when there was no one else to lend me a helping hand."

There is no reason that anyone following this example will not be able to achieve the same results.

Message to the Youth

My message to the young people is to seriously ponder these following questions:

- What are you looking for?
- What kind of spouse do you want to support in your life?
- What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind?
- Whose pleasure are you seeking and for what purpose?

Message to the Parents

As for the parents, it is about time they stop treating their children as possessions and start seeing them as trusts from Allah, like Ibrahim and Hajar did!

All parents should consider these questions:

- What do you want from your children?
- What kind of life and legacy do you want them to have? And for whose benefit?

Before anyone can really answer these questions, they need to ask themselves the most important of all questions: *How do I gain the love and pleasure of Allah SWT?*

How to Gain the Love and Pleasure of Allah SWT

The answer to this is very simple! You go to Qur'an and Hadith and see what Allah loves. There are many characteristics and actions that Allah SWT loves and if you try to achieve or inculcate even a few of these *InshaAllah*, by the will of Allah, you will achieve the love and pleasure of Allah.

The ultimate legacy is to leave this *duniya* with the love of Allah and a message for the benefit of mankind. This message is to believe in the Creator, to worship Him, and try to love and please Him with all our actions. He in turn will love and please us in this life, at the moment of death and life after death. This is the ultimate success and the ultimate legacy!