

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

By Allah's Grace the Hajj ceremonies started this morning. About 1.5 million foreigners will be performing Hajj this year excluding the Saudis. Among them are 200 relatives of the 49 victims of the terrorist shooting who died in Christchurch, New Zealand in March this year. They have been invited by the Saudi king under a sponsorship program.

As we have been saying in our previous sermons, the Saudis are doing their best to provide all sorts of facilities to the pilgrims to have an excellent Hajj. On Sunday last in a forum they spoke about how they are using advanced technology to help the pilgrims. Among items discussed were latest advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and their applications to health, security, entertainment, traffic and other fields in order to enhance the whole Hajj experience for worshippers. They report that despite the fact that Makkah will have received some 1.2 million Hajj pilgrims by the first day of the Dhu Al-Hijjah, the daily life of the 1.6 million residents of the holy city went smoothly and unaffectedly. By Sunday last there were more than 1.5 million pilgrims in Makkah and around 300,000 others in Madinah. Even so, the city (Makkah) has not been disordered and residents have not noticed the big number of visitors that have entered the city. Everything is going smoothly, thanks to the efforts being exerted by the Saudi government to make the pilgrims perform their rituals in ease and comfort. From the feedback that they have received, about 86 percent of the pilgrims last year were satisfied with the services provided. All pilgrim buses are equipped with tracking devices, so it is known who the driver is and how much time is needed to transport pilgrims from one point to another. They also know when a bus has stopped due to a technical problem. Technology is also used to monitor accommodation units. They have information about all the companies that provide pilgrims with meals and who the workers in those companies are.

Furthermore, they have plans in the pipeline to recycle pilgrims' waste, especially plastics, into useful materials, and develop archeological sites in Makkah and Madinah to improve the Hajj experience.

As far as Artificial Intelligence is concerned, they said that based on the data gathered to date, new smart apps were being developed to serve pilgrims. They can create applications in all fields, like health, security, entertainment, traffic,

movement of people, etc. AI can be utilized in everything one can imagine. One technology being operated by the Ministry of Health during this season's Hajj was a robot that could remotely provide medical consultations and checks.

A physician in Riyadh, for instance, can provide medical assistance through a robot in the holy sites. The physician can monitor the robot and make it take the patient's temperature and check his pulse with a stethoscope. The doctor can also give the robot an order to find a specific patient at a specific ward in a hospital in order to examine him.

These are some of the new developments that have been put in place to help the Haajis. But there are many others.

We talk about Saudi Arabia and its developments especially with regard to Hajj because Mecca and Madinah are dear to our heart as they are to all Muslims around the world. The Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw) lived over there. Mecca is further known as a sacred place of worship since the very beginning of civilization.

From hadiths we learn that when Muslims migrated to Medina, Hazrat Abu Bakr (ra) and Hazrat Bilal (ra) fell sick and they expressed their dislike for being away from Mecca. Hazrat Bilal (ra) would say: 'O Allah! Curse Shaybah bin Rabe'e'ah and 'Utbah bin Rabe'e'ah and Umayyah bin Khalaf as they forced us from our land to a land full of diseases'. Then the Prophet ﷺ said: "O Allah! Make Al-Madinah dear to our hearts just like you made Makkah dear to our hearts, and even more so. O Allah! Bless our *Saa'* and our *Mudd* [Measures of weight for food] and make it a healthy place for us and move its fever to the area of Al-Juhfah."

Ibn 'Abbas ؓ narrated: "The Prophet ﷺ said, addressing Makkah: "How good you are as a land and how dear you are to my heart! Had your people not forced me out of you, I would have never come out and left you and would have never resided in any other city but you." [At-Tirmizi & Ibn Hibban]

Ibn 'Abbas ؓ narrated: "When the Prophet ﷺ was forced to leave Makkah he headed out to a cave, turned around, and said, addressing Makkah: "You are the most beloved land to Allah, and you are the most beloved land to me. Had the polytheists not forced me out of you, I would never have come out and left you. The worst enemy is the one who transgresses the sanctities of Allah or kills a soul without due right or kills a soul as revenge from the era of pre-Islamic ignorance." Then Allah revealed the following verse (which means): "And how many a city was stronger than your city [i.e. Makkah]

which drove you out? We destroyed them; and there was no helper for them.” [Quran 47:13]” [Ibn Jareer At-Tabari]. Imam Al-Qurtubi رحمه الله said: “This is an authentic narration.”

So, this place was dear to the Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw) and so it is to us and we follow assiduously all the development that take place over there especially for the pilgrimage and we are concerned about what happens over there.

Tomorrow insha Allah will be the day of Arafat and there is no hajj without the stop at Arafat. **Mount Arafat** reaches about 70 m (230 ft) in height and is also known as the **Mount of Mercy** (*Jabal-ar-Rahmah*). According to Islamic tradition, the hill is the place where the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) stood and delivered the Farewell Sermon to the Muslims who had accompanied him for the Hajj towards the end of his life. Mount Arafat is a nearby hillside situated in the Plain of Arafat, which is located about 12.5 miles (20 kilometers) from Mecca, the final destination for the pilgrimage. These days, new trains have been provided; they will carry about 360,000 pilgrims between Makka, Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifa. It will ease traffic by eliminating many buses from the road.

The stop at Arafat is the essence of the Hajj. If one misses it there is no Hajj for him. I will share with you some hadiths about the day of Arafat.

Amr ibn Shu'ayb reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**The best supplication is that which is made on the day of Arafat. The best of it is what was said by myself and the prophets before me:**

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

There is no god but Allah alone without any partners, unto him belong the dominion and all praise and he has power over all things.” Tirmizi3585

Another Hadith also mentions that “**whoever says these words with a sincere heart, attesting to the truth of that with his tongue, then Allah will surely tear open the sky until He looks at the person from amongst the people of the earth who said it. And the right of the servant whom Allah looks at is that He grants him whatever he asked for.**” (An-Nisai)

-Abdu Rahman ibn Ya'mar reported: **The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said:**

الْحَجُّ عَرَفَةَ فَمَنْ أَدْرَكَ لَيْلَةَ عَرَفَةَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الْفَجْرِ مِنْ لَيْلَةٍ جَمَعَ فَقَدْ تَمَّ حَجُّهُ

“The Hajj is itself Arafat. Whoever reaches the night of Arafat before the rising of the sun at dawn the next day, he has completed his pilgrimage.” Sunan al-Nasā’ī 3016

Umar ibn al-Khattab reported: A man from the Jews said, “O leader of the believers, there is a verse you recite in your book and, had it been revealed to us as Jews, we would have taken that day as a celebration.” Umar said, “Which verse is it?” The man recited the verse, “Today I have completed your religion for you, perfected My favor upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion.” (5:3)

Umar said, “I know the day and place in which this verse was revealed to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. It was while he was standing on the day of Arafat on Friday.” Şaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 45, Şaḥīḥ Muslim 3017

Aisha reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “There is no day upon which Allah frees more of his servants from the Hellfire than the day of Arafat. He draws near and then he boasts of them to the angels, saying: What do these want?” Şaḥīḥ Muslim 1348

Jabir reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “No days are better to Allah than the first ten days of Dhul-Hijjah.” A man said, “O Messenger of Allah, are they better or time spent waging jihad in the way of Allah?” The Prophet said, “They are better than time spent waging jihad in the way of Allah. No day is better to Allah than the day of Arafat. Allah descends to the lowest heaven and he boasts to the inhabitants of the heavens about the inhabitants of the earth, saying: Look at my servants, appearing disheveled and dusty. They came from every mountain pass hoping for my mercy. They do not see my punishment, yet they do not see that on no day are more saved from Hellfire than the day of Arafat.”

‘Uqbah ibn ‘Amir reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “The day of Arafat, the day of sacrifice, and the three following days of al-Tashriq are celebrations for the people of Islam. They are days of eating and drinking.” Sunan al-Tirmidhī 773

The Takbir of Tashreeq begins after the Fajr of the 9th Zulhijjah (i.e 10th Aug) up to the ‘Asr prayer of the 13th (Wednesday 14th Aug), and it is obligatory on each Muslim to recite the Takbir of Tashreeq after every Fard prayer in the following words:

*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar,
La Ilaha Illallahu, Wallahu Akbar,
Allahu Akbar wa lillahilhamd.*

(There is no god but Allah and Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest and to Allah belongs all praise.)

For women also, it is commendable though not obligatory. Whether you are performing Salah with *Jama'ah* (collectively) or on your own (individually) makes no difference. You must recite the Takbir. However, male Muslims should recite it in a loud voice, while females should recite it in a low voice.

So, to summarize all these Hadiths we may say that although we cannot go for Hajj we should still try to make the most of today as well and the coming five days to show greater devotion to Allah. Especially for tomorrow since it is a special day for the acceptance of prayers we should do our best to engage in prayers in remembrance of Allah, reading the Holy Quran and pondering the significance of the Hajj for each one amongst us and those who wish and can fast they may do so. These are not days to be wasted in frivolities but rather a special opportunity to show to Allah that we truly in our actions give Him preference over everything else. May Allah help each one amongst us to use the time that we are given to prove ourselves to be among the true servants of Allah, incha Allah. Ameen.