

Hajj Advice -Shaheda Bassier

Written by Shaheda Bassier

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Majedi and Shaheda have been married for many years, they have a daughter Khadeeja (22) and two sons, Naasir (19) and Ihsaan (15).

Year Hajj performed : 2009

Accompanied by : Husband, Mohamed Majedi, and son, Naasir

Travel Group : Flywell (Usman Ahmed)

Hajj classes attended : Imam Dr Rashied Omar, Claremont Main Road Mosque

HAJJ PREPARATION SPIRITUAL

The Hajj classes by Imam Rashied were excellent, in that they provided a balanced ideological, spiritual and practical context in which to approach the Hajj. The lectures took place weekly over a three-month period, and were informative and interesting. There was prescribed reading and guest lecturers included Dr Hoosein Ebrahim, Imam Noor Salie, and writer/ journalist Shafiq Morton. We also had regular tests to check our progress, followed by a written exam and a short oral. This was done in a relaxed atmosphere with emphasis on the tests being a tool for personal learning .

The Hajj reading list included Hajj by Dr Ali Shariati, Alleviating the difficulties of the Hajj by Sheikh Salman b. Fahd Al-Qadah, The Difficult Journey by Ahmad Thomson, Journey of Discovery – A South African Hajj by Na'eem Jeenah and Shamima Shaikh, The Road to Mecca by Muhammad Asad, and Inner Dimensions of Worship by Al-Ghazali.

I found the book Key to the Treasures of Jannah, given to me by my cousin's wife, extremely useful in that it provided many duahs that one could recite when one was at the Ka'bah, Masjidun-Nabawee, on Arafat and in Mina. The books Hajj and Umrah by Yusuf da Costa and Haj Umrah Made Easy by Sheikh A Najaar were also very helpful. We read the prayers from Sheikh Najaar's book when we circumambulated the Ka'bah as he listed seven duahs that may be recited for each circuit so helping us to keep track of the number of Tawaafs we performed.

I also took with The Doe'aas of Makkah al-Mukar'ramah ,The Doe'aas of Al-Madinah Al-Munow'warah and the Doe'aas of Arafah, Muzdulifah and Mina by Sheikh M A Fakier, which included prayers to recite during Tawaaf and Sa'ie and at the Ziyaarah places. The Cape Hajj Tradition written by Dr Hoosein Ebrahim provided us with a good local historical background.

I made a list of all the neighbours, relatives and friends who had visited us before we left on Hajj and requested we make duah for them, so that I would be able to fulfil this duty. I also made duah for my parents and mother-in-law and all the Muslims. I beseeched Allah (swt) to bestow peace, justice and success on the Ummah. I made duah for my father-in-law Imam Bassier, and all those who had passed away, that Allah (swt) must grant them Jannatul Firdous, Insha-Allah.

TRAVEL

One needs to prepare for visitors who come to greet you when you go on Hajj. I am very grateful for all the assistance of my family, friends and neighbours.

We decided to go with Flywell travel as Usman Ahmed is a highly reputable travel agent. We wanted to focus on the spiritual benefits of the Hajj and we knew that Flywell would provide a hassle-free trip. We were well briefed on each stage of the journey.

We travelled by EgyptAir as this airline was recommended for more convenient connecting flights. We were advised by Flywell agents on the many stringent regulations that govern travel for Hujjaaj; the agents were present at the airports in Medina and Mecca. They also collected our luggage the night before departure in both Medina and Mecca, ensuring that the luggage was as safe as possible. The Flywell team fully catered for all the logistics and was always helpful and accessible as they stayed with our group at the same hotels.

ACTUAL HAJJ EXPERIENCE

PERFORMANCE OF RITUALS

Alhamdulillah the performance of the Tawaaf and Sa'ie was an amazing experience. It combined the physical exertion of walking long distances with the spiritual utterances of duahs, creating a resonating pulse between body and soul. The best time for Tawaaf was about 9.15am or after 10pm in the evening before the Hajj period.

It was incredible to see so many people from different nations all fervently chanting praise to Allah (swt). Some were smiling, some had tears streaming from their faces, some moved in groups, while others urgently pushed forward, all eager to imbibe the magnificent spirit of the Hajj.

Our motivational talks during the Hajj were posted on hotel foyer notice boards. Three prominent Aleems were on the Flywell team: Mufti A K Hoosen, Maulana Moosa Akoodie and Imam Abdul Gakiem Raban. Imam Raban was always available to give advice for those of the Shafie mutherhub. We were privileged to have Imam Raban accompanying our group throughout the five days of Hajj. He was always available to respond to any questions, providing humble and knowledgeable answers.

I tried to recite for most of the time that I was in the Haram and I also tried to do this with an understanding of the meaning. It was wonderful sometimes just to sit near the Ka'bah and reflect on Allah's (swt) blessings - to just be still and grateful for Allah's (swt) favours.

Gender issues:

At the Masjidun-Nabawee, I was concerned that women were not allowed to go nearer to the precincts of the Kabr but had to make their prayers behind a screen. This had changed from when I went on Umrah in 1999; then the women were given special times but were able to get as close to the outside of the Kabr as the men. This time, the women were given different times to the men and lectured by appointed Aalimah before going forward. These lectures seemed to be rather conservative, often portraying women as inferior to men, relegated to the domain of uncontrollable emotion and lack of restraint. Surely men and women should be allowed equal access to this holy place and those who display unacceptable behaviour be restrained, regardless of gender.

In Medina prayer areas were separated for males and females, but in Mecca we prayed together, which I preferred as this was the way it had always been done.

Destruction of Holy Sites:

I was saddened to hear that holy places such as the Prophet's (sws) wife Khadijah's house had been flattened. This had apparently also happened to other holy sites for fear of Muslims "worshipping these places and so creating Shirk". Some say as few as twenty structures were left in Mecca and Medina that date back to the Prophet's (sws) time. Shafiq Morton's book Notebooks from Makkah and Madinah discusses this in further detail.

PHYSICAL

Alhamdulillah, on a physical level we were very well catered for in Medina, Mecca, Mina and Arafat. We would try to limit food and drink intake at Mina and Arafat in order to strike a balance between maximizing energy and minimizing going to the toilet!

On our first day in Mina we experienced flooding, apparently for the first time in 30 years. The men and women were in separate tents, but the women improvised by putting up washing lines and hanging out their wet clothes. We put mattresses against the tent walls to stop the rain water flooding in. Later in the evening the Saudi authorities kindly replaced the mattresses with new dry ones.

ACCOMMODATION

Alhamdulillah, the accommodation was very good. Our hotel in Medina was a five-minute walk away from Masjidun-Nabuwee, and the hotel in Mecca led directly into the precincts of the Ka'bah. We were fortunate to have our own apartment at the hotel in Azizia on the borders of Mina. In Mina and Arafat we stayed in the tents provided .

ARAFAT AND MUZDALLIFAH

We took Special Services on Mina, Arafah and Muzdallifah. Alhamdulillah, our tent in Mina was very near to the building where we pelted the Jamaraat and it took us just about twenty minutes to get there.

We took the bus arranged by Flywell from Mina to Arafat, and then from Arafat to Muzdullifah. Arafat was indeed a serene experience. I could feel my heart opening up and at midday a breeze filled the air seemingly rich with blessings. It was a moment in time that seemed suspended between this world and the next, filled with souls yearning for forgiveness.

From Muzdallifah we collected our pebbles, and proceeded by bus to the place where we pelted the Jamaraat. We went in the early hours of the morning to the Jamaraat, when it was still dark, and so were fortunate to get only a small crowd. We then took the bus back to Mecca to do our Tawaaf and Sa'ie. Finally, we returned to Azizia, worn out but so satisfied over what we had accomplished.

REFLECTION

Alhamdulillah, the Hajj was such a wonderful experience. From the moment we landed in Medina, I felt as if I had left the material world behind and was embarking on a spiritual journey. On entering the Masjidun-Nabawee I could almost feel the presence of the Nabi (sws), and I felt so exhilarated to know that this was his final resting place on earth. I felt most honoured to be able to convey my salaams near the grave of our beloved Nabi (sws).

When we went to Mecca and I prayed near the Ka'bah for the first time, it was as if the air was clearer and an imperceptible brilliance permeated the atmosphere. My heart filled with happiness and I felt as if I was indeed the privileged guest of Allah (swt). I was so very grateful to be engulfed by the sea of people all praising Allah (swt) experiencing this majestic journey. I think this has helped to reinforce my belief in life after death and the power of Allah (swt) to make all things possible.

Now when I recite the verses of Surah Yasin, I reflect on the feelings of wonderment and ease I had experienced on Hajj, through the blessings of Allah (swt). I marvel at these beautiful words

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in the Quran so generously provided for us by Almighty Allah (swt).

I conclude by quoting a few verses from the translation of the Holy Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Surah Yasin Surah: 36, verses 78-83:

78. And he (humankind) makes comparisons for us and forgets his own (Origin and) Creation: He says, "Who can give Life to (dry) bones and decomposed ones (at that)?"

79. Say, "He will give them life Who created them for the first time for He fully knows all creation.

80. The same Who produces for you fire out of the green tree, when behold ye kindle therewith (your own fires).

81. Is not He who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? - Yes, indeed for He is the Creator Supreme of skill and knowledge (infinite).

82. Verily, when He intends a thing, His Command is, "Be" and it is!

83. So glory to Him In Whose Hands is the dominion of all things and to Him will ye all be brought back.