

# **Umrah or Holy Picnic?**

**People shun their duty towards the poor, the destitute and orphans and divert their resources on naf'l (optional) Hajj and Umrahs. They are deluding themselves, not Allah.**

**By Aleem Khan Falki**

Go through this narrative reported from Maulana Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi, the noted scholar from Lucknow, who narrated it to a gathering:

Basheer bin Abdul Harris was a great scholar. Once a disciple of his approached him and said: "O my mentor! I want to perform Hajj yet again. Should I be doing this? Would you permit me to undertake the pilgrimage?"

Basheer asked: "What is your intention? Is it seeking the pleasure of Allah, or just seeing and going round Makkah and Madinah or attaining piety?"

The disciple replied that he wanted just to seek the pleasure of Allah.

Basheer told him he would tell him something that would fetch him the reward equivalent to performance of a Hajj without actually undertaking the journey and would also gain for him the acceptance of God, besides offering him the satisfaction of performing the Hajj a second time.

Disciple: "Yes, wonderful, tell me the thing that would fetch me all of these."

Basheer: "If you could distribute the funds you have set aside for Hajj pilgrimage on the destitute, poor and orphans in your neighbourhood, or spend it on someone who is sick or is in debt or provide this as a seed capital to one who is in need of funds for starting a business and has no source for this kind of money, it will not merely fetch you divine rewards but would also be accepted in lieu of Naf'l (optional) Hajj, and Allah would accept this gesture too."

The disciple began to ponder over the option placed by his mentor and very reluctantly began to speak: "O my Master! I am more inclined towards undertaking the pilgrimage".

Basheer replied: "Satan tries to overwhelm man only through the routes of virtues and lets them engage in those virtues which bring them enjoyment."

Just look at the ironical situation in the entire Muslim world. There is no socio-economic and political stability anywhere in the Muslim world. Hunger, illiteracy, ignorance and disease are all pervasive. But millions of Muslims are rushing to Makkah and Madinah to perform Hajj and Umrah. (Mind it, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issued 46 lakh Umrah visas this year.). How could their prayers for imparting stability to the Muslim societies be answered when Allah finds the Muslims shirking their essential duties towards society?

## **Excuses Aplenty**

This is all because today we undertake only those forms of worship that thrills us, that provides some entertainment. We avoid doing all that Allah would like us to do otherwise but which does not conform to our mood or appeal to our logic. We make excuses for not doing that. We even secure fatwas for spurning what we should do. For instance, ask a Muslim individual as to why he does not engage in dawah, he would say, one should himself be practicing Islam completely before beginning to preach it.

Ask someone taking dowry from the bride's family. He would deny demanding it and would say all that was being voluntarily, without his asking. Ask anyone indulging in backbiting, fraud, suspicion or envy. He would flatly refuse to accept this, and would say that his heart was transparent and that Allah knows what is in his heart.

Even though people may say their prayers regularly, go on Hajj, keep the fast and grow a beard, they catch hold of only those rituals that are easy on their conscience and convenient to follow while offering a sense of satisfaction. They would not do what is urgent or imperative in a particular context and would keep repeating rituals and clone excuses for avoiding the call of the hour or situation. The Quran talks about this in the following verse of chapter Al-Hujarat, verse 14:

The Bedouins say, "We have believed." Say, "You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], 'We have submitted,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts. And if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not deprive you from your deeds of anything. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

### **Seeking Pleasure**

This means that some people are contented with carrying out all the rituals, but avoid undertaking rigorous assignments warranted by situations and necessary to make a forward push. They rather take up easy things and think that they are on the right path by following rituals. This is self-delusion. What needs to be understood is that a person demanding dowry will be held accountable before Allah for dowry extortion. Allah will not ask if he was doing his namaz or fasting. A rich man will have to account for the kind of money he spends on noble causes, rather than naf'l Hajj and umrah. People remember that they would emerge pure after they have performed the Hajj, but easily forget that they would have to account for five things on a priority basis on the Day of judgment and they would not be able to move a step without this. The five things are: How they spent their time; their energy and capability they had during their youth; the sources of their earning (halal or haram); where they spent their resources, and how they acted on the knowledge they had acquired.

How is it that we do not feel any pain while shelling out a couple of lakh of rupees for flights that take us for Umrah but think twice before handing out just 200 rupees to a person who is sick, hungry, or asking money for education or treatment of his wards? Unless we are convinced that he would be obliged to us all through his life for the gesture, not even ten rupees will come out of our pocket.

### **Self-Delusion**

The money spent on our own worship and pilgrimage delights us as it is spent on the selves. It gets spent on the flights, transport, comfortable star hotels, sumptuous food and some shopping. One could attribute all these to the expenditure in the way of Allah, but Allah knows how the individual is deluding himself and how his personal instincts persuade him to divert his resources from relieving the pain of the society to rituals that bring him delight and enjoyment. Will these 'holy picnics' be ever acceptable to Allah?

(The author is a businessman hailing from Hyderabad, India and is resident in Jeddah where he is engaged in business. He has initiated several initiatives in Hyderabad for socio-economic upliftment of the community. The article appeared in Urdu journals and has been translated by Maqbool Ahmed Siraj for Islamic Voice in English for the English-reading audiences).

