

STUDIES OF RELIGION

“Hajj allows the Muslim adherent every opportunity to embrace the principal beliefs of Islam.”

With reference to the above quote and your own knowledge, assess Islam as a living religious tradition.

For all Muslim adherents, the Hajj embodies the essence of the Islamic faith by offering a symbolic, spiritual and physical path through which individuals learn to fully submit to the will of Allah, the ultimate destination of Islam. By emulating the rituals first practised by the Prophet Muhammad, and placing these within a modern context, the Islamic faith can be identified as a living religious tradition as it awards adherents with a means of consolidating their individual relationship with Allah, drawing on the historical authenticity and scriptures of Islam. The ability of the Hajj to allow adherents to ‘embrace the principle beliefs of Islam’ lies within the rituals drawn from the journey first taken by the Prophet Ibrahim to Mecca. During the pilgrimage of the Hajj, the principal beliefs of the Tawhid, The Books of Allah, and Akhirah can be distinguished within these rituals therefore nourishing an adherent’s relationship with Allah and maintaining the ancient tradition’s recognition as a living religious tradition.

The belief in the Books of Allah is the foundation upon which the rituals and practises of the Hajj and further, the Islamic way of life, are drawn. In implementing the ancient scriptures of both the Hadith and the Qur’an, Muslims form a mystifying yet highly relevant relationship with Allah within the contemporary context. The Holy Qur’an is the most literal word of Allah and is the purest source of guidance for pilgrims preparing for the Hajj as it details the proper processes including Ghusl (showering) and Ihram (mental and physical preparation), allowing individuals to mirror the original pilgrimage taken by Ibrahim. This guidance, specifically in relation to the state of Ihram is made evident in the Qur’an which quotes “During the normal Hajj, if you break the state of Ihram between Umrah and Hajj, you shall expiate by offering an animal sacrifice.”(Qur’an 2:196) This is one example of the detail offered by the Books of Allah in preparing and carrying out the rituals of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

The belief in the Books of Allah is embodied within the Hajj ritual of the stoning of Jamrat Al-Aqabah (Devil) as pilgrims call Allah to accept their Hajj and reject the temptation of Satan. The details of this ritual are drawn from the experiences of Ibrahim in the Qur’an as he threw stones at the Devil in an attempt to reject temptation. By recreating this experience, adherents continue in a living relationship with the Islamic faith as they seek guidance in submitting to the will of Allah within a contemporary context using the ancient scripture offered to them. This in turn, reinforces its status as a living religious tradition.

Tawhid can be identified as one of the most fundamental aspects of the Islamic faith and is embedded within the rituals of the Hajj, linking adherents to the religion’s historical origins. Tawhid refers to the monotheistic understanding of Allah as the sole creator and disperser of the universe as reflected in the Holy Qur’an which states “Say (O Muhammad): He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.” (Qur’an, Sura 112) This shows the inextricable connection between the scripture of the Qur’an and the principal belief of Tawhid, the guidance of which constructs rituals of the Hajj including Tawaf. The ritual of Tawaf refers to the circling of the Kaaba and has the effect of centralising the unity of Allah as One God within the Hajj community therefore enforcing the image of Allah as the only and divine creator. This is reflected in the statement:

“Verily! As-Safa and Al-Marwah are of the Symbols of Allah. So it is not a sin on him who performs Hajj or 'Umrah of the House to perform the Tawaf between them. And whoever does good voluntarily, then verily, Allah is All-Recogniser, All-Knower. (Al-Baqara, Chapter 2, Verse 158)”

This quote is symbolic of the Muslim adherent's devotion to the oneness of Allah and willingness to surrender to the will of God during the ritual of Tawaf. The historical significance of this ritual can be traced to the construction of the Kaaba by Ibrahim and Isma'il which is considered to be the first human construction of all time as again shown in the Qur'an stating:

"...and We commanded Ibraaheem and Ismaa'eel that they should purify My House for those who are circumambulating it, or staying, or bowing or prostrating themselves" [al-Baqarah 2:125]

This reinforces the historical legacy and authenticity of the ritual of Tawaf for Muslim adherents as they form a personal connection with the scripture of Islam with which they are able to physically interact with in order to further consolidate their inextricable connection with Allah.

The ritual of sacrificing an animal also reflects the principal belief of Tawhid as it draws upon the adherent's devotion to the will of Allah and reflects Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Isma'il. Individuals are required to place their faith in the oneness of Allah as they re-interpret the stories articulated in the Qur'an within a contemporary context showing Islam to be a living religious tradition which can be dynamically applied within modern society and maintain the sacredness of ancient rituals.

Akhira is the central Islamic belief in a world to come or accountability. Muslims believe that on a Day of Judgment, every adherent will face the judgement of God on the basis of their moral responsibility and submission to his will. This belief is embodied within the quote "**On the Day when every person will be confronted with all the good he has done, and all the evil he has done, he will wish that there were a great distance between him and his evil.**" (*Surat Al-Imran*, Verse 30)

During the Hajj, the fundamental belief in Akhira is enacted during the praying on Mt Arafat whereby Muslims seek forgiveness through self-examination and if successful, are reborn "pure and free from sin" (Prophet Muhammad). This ritual allows individuals to pray in a personal, relevant and meaningful manner ultimately bringing them closer to God as they continue to relive the historic interactions between God and humankind. This shows Islam to be a religion of enduring relevance as it is continually reinterpreted within contemporary contexts, living in a symbiotic relationship with its adherents.

In conclusion, the Islamic faith can be identified as a living religious tradition due to its dynamic ability to exist within modern contexts whilst maintaining the historical authenticity used as a foundation upon which adherents consolidate a personally rewarding spiritual connection with Allah. Specifically, the Hajj can be seen to encompass many of the principal beliefs of Islam in both a mentally and physically challenging way that allows individuals to embrace the ancient scriptures and rituals on a personal level and establishing a living relationship with God.