

Hajj Between the Responsibility of the Khaleefah (Caliph) and the Restrictions Imposed by Contemporary Regimes on the People

(Translated)

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Since the time when Ibrahim (as) raised the foundations of the honored Kaaba and proclaimed the Hajj to mankind, this act of worship has remained one of the greatest unifying manifestations of the Islamic Ummah. In it, Muslims gather despite differences in language, color, and homeland, united in a single devotional purpose. They cast aside the symbols of worldly distinction and stand before Allah (swt) with hearts stripped of the adornments and pride of this world.

In its essence, Hajj is not merely a journey within the Deen in which specific Shariah rituals are performed. Instead, it is a renewed declaration of the unity of the Ummah and its submission to Allah (swt) alone. For this reason, throughout Islamic history, the care and administration of Hajj were considered an integral part of the Khaleefah's (Caliph's) responsibility toward the people under his care.

The early Khulafaa' (Caliphs) understood this meaning profoundly. They did not view Hajj as an administrative burden or an economic opportunity. Instead, they regarded it as a sacred trust for which they would be accountable before Allah (swt) before being accountable before the people. Consequently, the prestige of the Khilafah (Caliphate) throughout Islamic history was closely linked to its ability to protect the Two Sacred Masjids, secure the Hajj routes, and serve the Hajj pilgrims (hujjaj).

Classical works on Islamic ruling governance and political jurisprudence considered the establishment of Hajj to be among the greatest responsibilities of the Imam (Caliph). Indeed, Al-Mawardi stated in his book Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah that among the duties of the Khaleefah are, (من أعظم وظائف الإمام، حتى ذكر الماوردي في كتابه الأحكام السلطانية أن من واجبات الخليفة: تسيير (من أعظم وظائف الإمام، حتى ذكر الماوردي في كتابه الأحكام السلطانية أن من واجبات الخليفة: تسيير (من أعظم وظائف الإمام، حتى ذكر الماوردي في كتابه الأحكام السلطانية أن من واجبات الخليفة: تسيير) "dispatching and overseeing the Hajj pilgrims, protecting the roads, organizing the Hajj season, and preventing injustice against the people."

This was not merely a theoretical concept. Instead, it was reflected in the conduct of the Khulafaa' themselves. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (ra) served as the Imam of the Hajj during the lifetime of the Prophet (saw), and the Khulafaa' after him continued to give the Hajj the utmost attention. Umar ibn al-Khattab (ra) was especially concerned with the welfare of the hujjaj. He inspected the roads, supervised the governors, and feared that any Muslim might be subjected to injustice or hardship on the journey to the House of Allah (swt).

Umar (ra) became renowned for his profound sense of responsibility, to the extent that he (ra) said, (لو عثرت بغلة في العراق لسألني الله عنها لِمَ لَمْ تَمهّد لها الطريق يا عمر) "If a mule were to stumble in Iraq, Allah (swt) would ask me about it: 'Why did you not pave the road for it, O Umar?'"

If this was his concern for an animal traveling on a road, then how much greater would his concern have been for those journeying to the Sacred House of Allah (swt) through arduous deserts and perilous routes?

Whoever studies the history of the Khilafah realizes that the issue of Hajj was never a marginal matter. The state spent vast sums on constructing and maintaining roads, building

rest stations, digging wells, and providing military protection for the Hajj pilgrims' caravans. The major Hajj caravans from Iraq, Al Sham, Egypt, and Yemen traveled under the protection and care of the state, because any attack on hujjaj or leaving them vulnerable to fear, hunger, and thirst was considered a political disgrace for the ruler himself.

Indeed, some Khulafaa' would personally perform Hajj alongside the people, not as a display of power or authority, but as a means of sharing in the sacred Shariah rite with their subjects and demonstrating that the Imam was not separate from the Ummah, but a part of it.

During the Abbasid era, care for Hajj reached a remarkable level of organization and patronage. Rest houses and stations were established along the Hajj routes, guide markers were erected to assist travelers, and water facilities were built to serve the hujjaj. Some women from prominent families even competed in charitable works related to the service of the hujjaj. Among the most famous was Zubaydah bint Jafar, who spent immense wealth on the construction of the "Ayn Zubaydah" project, which supplied water to hujjaj in Makkah and the sacred sites.

None of these efforts were undertaken for economic gain or political publicity. Instead, they stemmed from a deep conviction that serving the hujjaj was among the greatest acts of devotion and one of the most noble responsibilities of governance.

The Khulafaa' understood that the pilgrim is a guest of Allah (swt), and that the state is not the owner of the Two Sacred Masjids but their servant and guardian. For this reason, the language of service, care, and responsibility characterized the state's approach to Hajj, rather than a language of privilege, sovereignty, or control.

Despite the hardships of travel and the dangers of the roads in earlier times, people felt that the state was striving to facilitate their journey to the Sacred House of Allah (swt), not to place obstacles in their path or make the Hajj more difficult. The administration of Hajj was viewed as a trust and a duty, aimed at enabling the greatest possible number of Muslims to fulfill this obligation in safety and dignity.

Today, however, many Muslims look at the state of Hajj with a sense of sadness and disappointment. Despite the tremendous advances in technology, modern transportation, and the vastly expanded capabilities of contemporary states, one might have expected access to Hajj to become easier and more accessible than it was during the era of the Khilafah. Yet the reality presents a more complex picture, as millions of Muslims face administrative, financial, and political barriers that make Hajj a difficult aspiration to fulfill.

In many countries, Hajj has become associated with lengthy procedures, limited quotas, and waiting periods that can extend for years. Added to this are the substantial costs that place a heavy burden on the poor and those with modest incomes. As a result, some Muslims spend their entire lives longing to visit the Sacred House of Allah (swt), only to find themselves prevented by high fees, bureaucratic complexities, or political restrictions.

Many have come to feel that Hajj has shifted from being an act of Shariah worship open to the Ummah as a whole, to becoming a privilege accessible primarily to those who possess sufficient financial means or the necessary influence. This perception stands in stark contrast to the Islamic ideal that the affairs of Hajj should be organized in a manner that facilitates, rather than hinders, the fulfillment of this sacred obligation for all who are able to undertake it.

There is no doubt that managing Hajj in the modern era presents enormous challenges that did not exist in the past. Today, the number of pilgrims reaches into the millions, the risks of overcrowding and large-scale accidents remain ever present, and ensuring the safety and

movement of such vast crowds requires sophisticated planning, extensive resources, and highly complex organization.

While the authorities have undertaken significant efforts in administrative management and infrastructure development including the construction of bridges, rail systems, and modern facilities that serve millions of pilgrims, many Muslims feel that these measures remain insufficient and fall short of what could be achieved given the resources and capabilities available.

The concern expressed by many Muslims, however, is not limited to matters of organization alone. Rather, it relates to the spirit and philosophy through which Hajj is administered. The difference, as they perceive it, between the approach of the early Khulafaa' and that of many contemporary regimes lies in the underlying motivation. The Khulafaa' viewed themselves as religiously accountable for facilitating worship and easing the path of obedience to Allah (swt) for the people. In contrast, many believe that a more commercial and exploitative approach increasingly dominates the administration of Hajj today.

As a result, some Muslims feel that the Hajj pilgrim has been reduced to a mere number within a vast bureaucratic system, and that political and financial considerations have, at times, come to take precedence over the values of compassion, service, and facilitation that should characterize the care of the guests of Allah (swt).

In Islamic history, the Khaleefah feared being held accountable if even a single Hajj pilgrim stumbled or suffered hardship on the road to Hajj. Today, however, many regimes often deal with hujjaj through the lens of rigid procedures and regulations, without always reflecting the spirit of compassion and facilitation that Islam strongly encourages.

It was narrated by Aisha (ra) that the Prophet (saw) said, «اللَّهُمَّ مَنْ وَلِيَ مِنْ أَمْرِ أُمَّتِي شَيْئًا فَشَقَّ عَلَيْهِمْ فَاشْفُقْ عَلَيْهِ، وَمَنْ وَلِيَ مِنْ أَمْرِ أُمَّتِي شَيْئًا فَرَفَقَ بِهِمْ فَارْفُقْ بِهِ» **“O Allah, whoever is entrusted with any affair of my Ummah and makes things difficult for them, make things difficult for him; and whoever is entrusted with any affair of my Ummah and treats them with kindness and gentleness, treat him with kindness and gentleness”** [Sahih Muslim].

This hadith establishes a profound principle of ruling governance and administration: that the foundation of leadership is mercy, compassion, and easing people's burdens not imposing hardship, unnecessary restrictions, or exhaustion upon them.

It is also painful that some Muslims have come to feel that reaching the Sacred House has become more difficult for them than traveling to many other parts of the world, despite the fact that Hajj is one of the pillars of Islam and that its original principle is ease and accessibility for those who are able to undertake it. While capability (istita'ah) is indeed a legitimate condition established by the Shariah, there is a significant difference between a natural inability caused by poverty or illness, and an inability created by complex bureaucratic systems, burdensome fees, and restrictive policies.

Moreover, one of the greatest threats to the spirit of Hajj in the modern era is the prioritization of political considerations over the unity of the Ummah in this sacred rite. Hajj, in its essence, is a unifying act of worship in which Muslims gather upon the foundation of Tawhid (monotheism), devoting themselves to Allah (swt) and transcending national, ethnic, and political divisions. Yet contemporary realities often leave Hajj affected by regional conflicts and international disputes, causing some pilgrims to become victims of political tensions between states.

As a result, a journey that was intended to symbolize the unity of the Muslim Ummah and its complete submission to Allah (swt) can at times become entangled in considerations that are unrelated to the spiritual purpose for which this great Shariah obligation was prescribed.

What is required is the restoration of the genuine Islamic understanding of a ruler's responsibility toward the pilgrims not merely the construction of more hotels, bridges, and electronic systems, but the revival of the spirit of ri'ayah (رعاية) caring guardianship) that prevailed during many periods of the history of the Khilafah. In those times, the ruler regarded himself as personally responsible for the comfort, dignity, and safety of every Hajj pilgrim, above all other considerations.

The true measure of success in serving the hujjaj is not limited to administrative efficiency or physical infrastructure, important as these may be. Instead, it lies in ensuring that every Hajj pilgrim feels protected, honored, and facilitated in fulfilling this sacred obligation. Such an approach reflects the Islamic concept of governance, in which authority is viewed as a trust and a responsibility toward the people, not merely a matter of management and control.

Today, the Islamic Ummah is in need of restoring a proper balance between the necessities of modern organization and the Shariah objective of Hajj as an act of worship that is meant to be facilitated, not transformed into an elite privilege or a system of selective allocation. Hajj is not an economic enterprise, nor is it an occasion for the display of power and control. Instead, it is a divinely ordained Shariah right for Muslims who possess the ability to undertake it. The fundamental principle is that authority should return to its rightful custodians from among the Muslims, rather than remain in the hands of those who have submitted to the influence of the disbelieving West and have turned this sacred season into an opportunity to impose restrictions, constrain Muslims, and subject them to humiliating procedures for which Allah (swt) has revealed no authority.

For centuries, the Honored Kaaba has remained the symbol of Muslim unity and the destination toward which their hearts yearn. Muslims will continue to long for it regardless of the obstacles and restrictions placed in their path. Yet history will always distinguish between a ruler who regarded himself as a servant of the guests of Ar-Rahman (swt) and therefore strove to alleviate their hardships, and one who filled the road to the Sacred House with barriers, costs, and complexities.

In Islam, authority is not merely an honor or a position of prestige. It is a weighty trust and a profound responsibility. Among the greatest manifestations of this trust is helping Muslims obey their Lord and fulfill their acts of worship, instead of burdening them in their efforts to reach and perform them.

This serves as yet another example of the poor care and mismanagement of those who have assumed authority over the affairs of the Muslims, making their power a means of exploitation and an opportunity to show disregard for the lives and wealth of the believers. In light of such realities, the Ummah today should stand against injustice and division, striving earnestly to unify its lands under one state, one banner, and one Khaleefah, just as this great act of worship gathers Muslims together as a single Ummah before their Lord.

O Allah (swt), employ us in the service of Your Deen and do not replace us with others. Unify our Ummah under a single Khaleefah who will care for our affairs and strive for what is good among us. O Allah (swt), answer our Du'aa'. Ameen, Ameen, O Lord of the Worlds. And may Allah's peace and blessings be upon the trustworthy leader, Muhammad (saw), and upon his family (ra) and all of his Companions (ra).