

The Spiritual Aspects of Hajj (Revised Edition)

The Spiritual Aspects of Hajj, Imam Zayn al-Abidin's Discourse with al-Shibli



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Article

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The Spiritual Aspects of Hajj, A Translation of Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin's (ʿA) Discourse on Hajj with al-Shibl (Revised Edition)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Introduction to the Tradition

The *Tradition of al-Shibl* is reported in *Mustadrak al-Wasʿil* by Merzʿusayn al-Ner, who reports it from *Sharʿ al-Nukbah* by al-Sayyid ʿAbd Allah i. Ner al-Din i. Niʿmat Allah al-Masaw. ¹ The hadith is in the form of a conversation that takes place between Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (ʿA) – who has recently returned from hajj – and another pilgrim called al-Shibl. During the course of this intriguing discourse, the Imam succinctly explains the spiritual dimensions of the hajj rituals, and as we see at the end of the tradition, the Imam's words have a profound effect on al-Shibl.

Most works written by Shia scholars on the spiritual aspects of hajj mention this tradition to some extent. ² In his seminal work *ʿahb-y-i ʿajj*, Ayatullah Jawʿd ʿmul draws upon this tradition in several places, describing its text as 'lofty and radiant' and at one stage quoting it in its entirety. ³ The Ayatullah also mentions a number of useful points relating to the reliability and usability of the tradition; the remainder of this introduction incorporates the points he raises.

The exact identity of al-Shibl is unclear. A number of people called al-Shibl are mentioned in the traditions, and from among them, the mystic Ab Bakr Dulf i. Juʿdar al-Shibl lived nearest to the time of the Imams (ʿA). However, he was born approximately two centuries after the martyrdom of Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidin (ʿA), and so he could not have reported this tradition directly from him.

The reliability of the tradition has sometimes been questioned as it is a *mursal* (hurried) hadith, i.e. some of the narrators are not mentioned in the chain of transmission. Furthermore, the style of speech attributed to Imam Zayn al-ʿAbidīn (ʿA) in the tradition is somewhat different to the style found in other sayings of the Imams; it has therefore been suggested that the words may have originated from some mystics and were falsely attributed to the Imam over the course of time.⁴ Another point of contention is the fact that some of the hajj rituals mentioned in the hadith are not stated in the order that pilgrims normally perform them.

However, none of these criticisms provide solid grounds for disregarding the tradition, because firstly, the tradition does not concern what is lawful and unlawful, and is therefore not subject to the same high standard of reliability as traditions of that category. Furthermore, simply because the immediate addressee of the saying is unknown, or because the tradition is *mursal*, or because the style of speech is somewhat different to that of other sayings of the Imams, does not mean one cannot benefit from it. As for the different order in which some of the hajj rituals are mentioned, perhaps this is because the Imam did not intend to talk about the ‘outer’ dimensions of hajj at all; in other words, at that particular moment in time, he was not concerned with explaining any jurisprudential rulings on hajj. Finally, as this tradition is compliant with established teachings and does not contradict the Qur’an, sunnah, or the intellect, there is no problem in using it, and it can certainly help pilgrims to attain a deeper understanding of the hajj rituals and make their pilgrimage more meaningful.

Translation of the Tradition

Al-Sayyid ʿAbd Allah, the grandson of al-Muʿaddith al-Jazʿirī, says in *Sharḥ al-Nukbah*: I found this *mursal* (hurried) tradition in a number of sources, the most reliable of which was written in the hand of some scholars who were our contemporaries:

When our master [Imam] Zayn al-ʿAbidīn (ʿA) returned from hajj, [a pilgrim called] al-Shiblī went to meet him.

The Imam (ʿA) asked him, ‘Have you performed hajj, O Shiblī?’

He replied, ‘Yes, O Son of the Messenger of Allah.’

Then the Imam (ʿA) asked him, ‘Did you arrive at the *mḥqḥt*, remove your sewn clothes, and perform *ghusl*?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ʿA) asked him, ‘So when you arrived at the *mḥqḥt*, did you intend to take off the clothes of disobedience and to put on the clothes of obedience?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you removed your sewn clothes, did you intend to remove showmanship and hypocrisy and [to avoid] engaging in mistaken beliefs?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you performed *ghusl*, did you intend to wash off [your] mistakes and sins?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not arrive at the *mḥqḥt*, nor did you remove your sewn clothes, nor did you perform *ghusl*!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you clean yourself, put on *iḥrḥm*, and tie the knot for hajj?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘So when you cleansed yourself, put on *iḥrḥm*, and tied the knot for hajj, did you intend that you were becoming cleansed by the light of sincere repentance to Allah, The Exalted?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you put on *iḥrḥm*, did you intend to forbid for yourself all that Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, has forbidden?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you tied the knot for hajj, did you intend to untie every knot that is not for Allah?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not clean yourself, nor did you put on *iḥrḥm*, nor did you tie the knot for hajj!’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you enter the *mḥqḥt*, perform the two *rakḥah* prayer of *iḥrḥm*, and say *talbiyah*?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘So when you entered the *mḥqḥt*, did you intend to perform a [spiritual] visitation?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you performed the two *rak‘ah* prayer, did you intend to get close to Allah by means of the best of actions and the greatest of virtuous deeds of [His] servants, that is, *‘ala/h*?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you said *talbiyah*, did you intend to say it for the sake of Allah, Glory be to Him, in perfect obedience, and to refrain from every disobedience?’

He replied ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not enter the *m‘aq‘at*, nor did you perform prayers, nor did you say *talbiyah*!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you enter the ‘aram, see the Ka‘bah, and perform prayers?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘So when you entered the ‘aram, did you intend to forbid backbiting of all Muslims – the people of the nation of Islam – for yourself?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you reached Makkah, did you intend with your heart that your purpose is [to seek closeness to] Allah?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not enter the ‘aram, nor did you see the Ka‘bah, nor did you perform prayers!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you circumambulate the House [of Allah], touch its corners, and perform *sa‘‘* [between ‘af and Marwah]?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘So when you performed *sa‘‘*, did you intend to escape to Allah, and that the Absolute Knower Of The Unseen knows this about you?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not circumambulate the House, nor did you touch its corners, nor did you perform *sa‘‘*!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you give your hand [in allegiance] to the Black Stone, stand at

Maqam Ibrāhīm (ﷺ), and perform two *rak'ah* prayers there?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

[Upon hearing this,] the Imam (ﷺ) let out a cry as if he were about to part from this world and then said, ‘Ah! Ah!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Whoever gives his hand to the Black Stone, [it is as if] he has given his hand to Allah, The Exalted; so look, O poor one! Do not waste the reward of what is great in sanctity, and do not invalidate this giving of your hand with insubordination and by taking what is unlawful like the transgressors.’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘When you stood at Maqam Ibrāhīm (ﷺ), did you intend to stand for every act of obedience and to turn your back on every act of disobedience?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you performed two *rak'ah* prayers there, did you intend to perform the prayer of Ibrāhīm (ﷺ) and to rub the nose of Shayṭān in the dirt by your prayer?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not give your hand to the Black Stone, nor did you stand at the Maqam, nor did you perform two *rak'ah* prayers there!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you look upon the well of Zamzam and drink its water?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you intend to look upon obedience and to disregard disobedience?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not look upon it, nor did you drink its water!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you perform *saḥḥ* between Ḥafḥ and Marwah and walk to and fro between them?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you intend that you were between hope and fear?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not perform *saḥḥ*, nor did you walk to and fro between Ḥafḥ

and Marwah!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you leave for Min?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you intend to keep people safe from your tongue, heart, and hands?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not leave for Min!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you stop at ʿArafah, climb the Mountain of Mercy, know the [reality of the] Valley of Namirah, and pray to Allah, Glory be to Him, at the sign and Jamar?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘During your stay at ʿArafah, did you have the recognition of Allah’s, Glory be to Him, knowledge of all affairs and of all branches of knowledge? And did you know of Allah’s possession of your Book of Deeds and His knowledge about your inner self and heart?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you intend by your ascension upon the Mountain of Mercy that Allah is Merciful to every believing man and woman, and that He takes care of every Muslim man and woman?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And did you intend at Namirah that you will not command [others to do something] unless you have commanded yourself [to do it], and that you will not prohibit [others from doing something] unless you have prohibited yourself [from doing it]?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘And when you stood at the sign and Namirah, did you intend that they are a witness for you for acts of obedience and a protection for you along with the Recording Angels, by the command of the Lord of the Heavens?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ﷺ) said to him, ‘Then you did not stay at ʿArafah, nor did you climb the Mountain of Mercy, nor did you know [the reality of] Namirah, nor did you pray, nor did you stay at Namirah!’

Then the Imam (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Did you pass between the two signs, perform two *rakah* prayers before you passed, walk in Muzdalifah, pick up stones from there, and pass through al-Mashar al-

‘ar?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (A) asked him, ‘So when you performed the two *rakah* prayer, did you intend that it was the prayer of thanks on the eve of the tenth day, so that every difficulty is warded off and every ease is made possible?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (A) asked him, ‘And when you walked between the two signs without wavering right or left of them, did you intend to not waver right or left of the religion of truth, neither by your heart, nor by your tongue, nor by your limbs?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (A) asked him, ‘And when you walked in Muzdalifah and picked up stones from there, did you intend to remove all disobedience and ignorance from yourself, and to attain all [beneficial] knowledge and [to perform] all [good] deeds?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (A) asked him, ‘And when you passed through al-Mashar al-‘ar, did you intend to make your heart realise the realisation of the people of piety and fear of Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (A) said to him, ‘Then you did not pass the two signs, nor did you perform two *rakah* prayers, nor did you walk in Muzdalifah, nor did you pick up stones from there, nor did you pass through al-Mashar al-‘ar!’

Then the Imam (A) asked him, ‘Did you reach Min, throw [stones] at Jamarah, shave your head, slaughter your animal of sacrifice, perform prayers in Masjid al-Khif, return to Makkah, and perform the final circumambulation?’

He replied, ‘Yes.’

The Imam (A) asked him, ‘So when you reached Min and threw [stones] at the Jamarat, did you intend that you have achieved your purpose and that your Lord has fulfilled all your wishes for you?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (A) asked him, ‘And when you threw at the Jamarat, did you intend to throw at your enemy

Iblīs and to anger him by completing your valuable hajj?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ع) asked him, ‘And when you shaved your head, did you intend to be purified from all dirt and the consequences of transgression upon others, and that you have left all sins behind [and are just as you were] when your mother gave birth to you?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ع) asked him, ‘And when you performed prayers in Masjid al-Khif, did you intend to not fear [anyone] except Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, and your sins, and to not have hope except in the mercy of Allah, The Exalted?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ع) asked him, ‘And when you slaughtered your sacrificial animal, did you intend to cut the throat of greed by what you adhere to the reality of piety with, and that you are following the tradition of Ibrahim (ع) [in the matter of the] slaughtering of his son – the fruit and fragrant flower of his heart – and that you are keeping his tradition alive for those after him, and that he [Ibrahim (ع)] brought him [his son Isma‘īl (ع)] close to Allah, The Exalted, [as an example] for those after him?’

He replied, ‘No.’

The Imam (ع) asked him, ‘And when you returned to Makkah and performed the final circumambulation, did you intend to proceed from the Mercy of Allah, The Exalted, and to return to His obedience, adhere to His love, perform His obligations, and get close to Allah, The Exalted?’

He replied, ‘No.’

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (ع) said to him, ‘Then you did not reach Minā, nor did you throw at the Jamarāt, nor did you shave your head, nor did you perform your worship, nor did you perform prayers in Masjid al-Khif, nor did you perform the final circumambulation, nor did you get close [to Allah]! Go back, for you did not perform hajj!’

Al-Shiblī began to weep over what he had neglected in his hajj, and he continued to learn until he performed hajj the following year with knowledge and conviction.

1. Al-Nawwā, M. (1987). *Mustadrak al-Wasīl wa Mustanba‘ al-Mas‘ūl*. Qum: Mu‘assasah al-Bayt ‘Alayhim al-Salām. v. 10, pp. 166–172.

2. In *Nawmih-hā wa Barnāmih-hā* (1994, Qum: Qiyām), Ayatullah ‘Asanzādih ‘umul describes the content of the tradition as ‘most excellent, and a model for authors and composers of prose and poetry on the secrets of hajj’ (p. 132). He goes on to mention works of poetry composed by Nā‘ir Khusraw (d. 1088 CE) and by his teacher Mīrzā Mahdī Ilāhī Qumshihī (d. 1973 CE) that are based on this tradition (p. 138). An example of an excellent prose work that uses the hadith in a number of places is *Farhang Nawmih-i Asrār-i wa Ma‘rif-i Hajj* by Ma‘winat-i Umūr-i Rā‘nīyān (published in Qum by

Dir al-ʿadith).

3. Jawādī ʿmulī, A. (1998). ʿahbī-i ʿajj. Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isrāʿīl. pp.343–347.

4. Al-Rayshahrī, M. (1997). Al-ʿajj wa al-ʿUmrah fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah. Qum: Dir al-ʿadith. p.264.

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