

up, observing everything” (67:19). Almost immediately after that, we are told, “Then is the one who walks bent on his own design better guided, or the one who walks for a common cause on a straight path?” (67:22). These animals have a common cause, as they move on their linear journeys of rebirth.

The Day of Arafah: Whilst on the Primordial Day of Creation God demonstrated His Boundless Love and Infinite Beauty and our infinite souls all fell in love with Him; on the Day of Accountability He will demonstrate His Infinite Justice and we will be asked to show how we translated this latent love in our lives. God’s Love necessitates His Justice. We cannot do as we please brazenly exploiting people, lying, cheating, swindling and then expect to go scot-free in the Afterlife. For those who forgot Him and His Justice, the Day of Judgment will be a day of Infinite Regret and Infinite Regress into the Abyss. Those who remembered Him and were kind, gentle, truthful, upright, compassionate and loving will earn Eternal Bliss of the Paradise in God’s Presence. Arafah is a Day of Self-Discovery, Self-Recognition, Ego Annihilation and Other-Discovery. It is a day of remorse, regret and seeking God’s forgiveness and it is day of bringing Him **from the periphery of our life to the Center of our lives and living.**

Arafah is Life’s **UNDO** button: Most of us computer users are familiar with the undo button. It is a lifesaver when we have accidentally deleted some text that we have written meticulously, the undo button is a safety net in case we make a mistake. The same is **not** true in our lives. We make mistakes but are seldom able to correct them instantaneously. Arafah is Life’s undo button. We arrive here by dying to the world & after confronting death we confront the reality of the Day of Accountability. The Prophet (p) has told us: “Die before you die & take your account before your account is taken.” In Arafah we rewind our life in our minds with all honesty & take cognizance of where we fell short in our responsibility towards God, responsibility towards people in our lives & try to redress it. Whether we felt short in fulfilling our responsibility to our nuclear family & extended family, responsibility towards our kins, responsibility to our parents, responsibility to our neighbours & to our community or the world, we recommit ourselves to redressing the situation.

On the **Real Day of Judgment** when our account is unfurled there is **no turning back**, there is no

way to relive our lives to redress our mistakes but in this **mock Day of Judgment** we can seek God’s forgiveness as we recount our every mistake, error and sin and then resolve ourselves to change our life’s course and to fix where it is broken. We know greed, lust, injustice, deceit, lying, cruelty, anger, arrogance, backbiting & envy are all distasteful to God and that nothing is more harmful to our relationship with God than seeking help of others beside Him and to arrogate divine powers to anyone beside Him. We now recommit ourselves to put our knowledge in practice and do nothing that will offend God.

The word Arafah means recognition. Here recognition is both self-recognition & other-recognition. In Arafah we seek to go beneath the surface of our life and discover the true meaning of our life or at least get started on this track of self-recognition. In life we are running after a lot of useless things. We have **not** been sent to this life to amass money, possession, power or sexual experiences but to find Him and to make Him the Center of our lives and to be a better person. The one who dies with the most toys does not win but loses miserably if they have neglected their life’s purpose. Our lower self wants to put “I” and “mine” first but there can only be one first love: you cannot have God as your Prime Love and still give primacy to your selfish concerns. By donning ihram we die before we die and are ready to be born again in a New Life where He comes first and is our First Love and our topmost preoccupation.

It is here we realize that 50% of our salvation is in serving mankind. We cannot win our way to God’s Heart by worshipping Him, praising Him, fasting for Him while we cheat, swindle, hurt, deceive and lie to human beings. A rotten person has no right to claim that he is a lover of God. If love of God descends in our life it transforms us wonderfully. If we wear a nice perfume its smell will waft wherever we go. If our spiritual practice is not transforming us then something is wrong with our love and piety and prayer and fasting and pilgrimage.

As we stand in Arafah, we take cognizance of our lives in our coffin. By wearing our death wraps, we ask ourselves, “am I ready to die?” **“If I died right now, will my words, deeds, my behaviour & conduct be righteous enough to win me Eternal Bliss in the Eternal Afterlife.”** Death is something to be feared if we have **not** prepared for the next life but when we have turned our life around and are ready as much as we can be then we have died before we die and have fulfilled the **purpose of Arafah.**

Here I am, O God...I stand up for Your service.



HUMANS...ANIMALS...ON A REBIRTH

The poet W.S. Merwin, upon reflecting on the miraculous migration of the birds, wrote that they are “tracing a memory they did **not** have until they set out to remember it.” God tells us in the Quran, “And if you **forget, remember.**”

The journey of Hajj is remembering what we have forgotten. The Hajj is our sacred journey, and it allows us to gather in spiritual community, in common cause, so we may plead for our wellbeing & spiritual survival.

Nothing is neglected in the Quran, according to God, and we are reminded that God will gather us, by analogy, as animals, like us, are gathered for rebirth. Those who repudiate these signs

are **spiritually blind, deaf & dumb** – in other words, veiled, and unlike divinely guided animals, are unable to find their way back home. For their repudiation, they are led astray, but God places whom God wills on a straight path – a path of linearity, undistracted by the temptations of the world, well provided with spiritual energy for their journeys back to their Lord.

It is a journey we must all take.

**Now that you are standing in
Ibrahim's position
& are going to play his role,
LIVE LIKE HIM.**

**Be the architect of the
Kaaba of your faith.**

There is no animal on earth, nor yet a bird on the wing, but forms communities like you. We have not neglected anything in the Book; and they will ultimately be gathered to their Lord. Those who repudiate Our signs are deaf & dumb, in the dark. God confuses whomever He wills & places whomever He wills on a straight path. Quran, (6:38-39)

Pilgrimage is one of the profound manifestations of humanity, a materialization of our spiritual nature. The word pilgrim is from a Latin term, peregrinatio, which means "to journey about." An early English word peregrine meant "a falcon." Like our feathered friends, human beings also tend to flock, driven by an inner force towards a specific destination. Historically, people have always flocked to places of devotion for spiritual rebirth.

The word Hajj means "to intend a journey," which connotes both the outward act of a journey and the inward act of intentions. In his Mufradat, Raghīb says that Hajj became associated in the sacred text with visiting the House of God. From the same root, we get the derivative hujjah, which means "a proof," and also a mahajjah, which is "a clear path that is straight." Related to this word through the greater derivation is the word hajab, which means "to be prevented from arriving at one's destination." This is important in relation to those who are spiritually veiled (mahjub) by a material hijab from arriving at their true destination.

The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and represents the return to God. Each of us is a pilgrim in this world, wayfarers all. Some of us know the way and are focused on our ultimate destination, while others get easily distracted and flounder. Death is our material destination, and the body returns to the soil from whence it came. But what of the soul that is not of soil?

The spirit that animates us is set free upon death & must journey on to the next stage. Hajj represents a congregation of souls preparing for a meeting with their Lord. Arafah, which is related to ma'rifah (knowledge of God), is the culmination of Hajj. The pilgrim is stripped of all outward decorum, unkempt and disheveled, and abased before his Lord, pleading for acceptance. The inner sense of purpose that took him or her to Mecca is among the mysteries of faith. But what can we learn from the Quranic verse above regarding all of God's creations & their collective journeys to God's House?

All over this planet, there are epic migrations of wildlife taking place each year. The animals have their own Hajj, and we must learn from their journeys, as God has told us to reflect on the signs in the self and on the horizon until the truth is embedded in our soul.

Even as you read these words, multitudes of birds are in flight for their annual peregrinations. In traversing their journey, they overcome immense odds and perform navigational feats that neither evolutionary theories nor modern science can yet explain. This is true of ocean life as well. For instance, scientists don't know why loggerhead sea turtles travel nine thousand miles to return to the small beach where they were born only to lay their own eggs for the cycle to continue. Moreover, they possess navigation skills that rival the most advanced radar systems.

The mysteries of the natural order surround us. We don't know why monarch butterflies migrate south in the winter to one particular location to gather together in a symphony of color, in what can only be termed displays of vertiginous spiritual ecstasy by a human observer. Even the large buffalo make a pilgrimage across the plains of the Northern states; rattlesnakes set out from varied points of departure but are inner directed en masse to a single spot where they mate. There is, of course, scientific research taking place in an attempt to unlock the myriad mysteries of these migratory creatures with their navigational secrets. But there is another phenomenon that is now coming to light: the absolute singularity of purpose with which these creatures go about their journeys.

An article in National Geographic magazine quotes a scientist referring to the "undistractibility" of

these animals on their journeys. "An arctic tern on its way from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska, for instance, will ignore a nice smelly herring offered from a bird-watcher's boat in Monterey Bay. Local gulls will dive voraciously for such handouts, while the tern flies on. Why?" The article's author, David Quammen, attempts an answer, saying "the arctic tern resists distraction because it is driven at that moment by an instinctive sense of something we humans find admirable: larger purpose."

In the same article, biologist Hugh Dingle notes that these migratory patterns reveal five shared characteristics: the journeys take the animals outside their natural habitat; they follow a straight path & do not zigzag; they involve advance preparation, such as overfeeding; they require careful allocations of energy; and finally, "migrating animals maintain a fervid attentiveness to the greater mission, which keeps them undistracted by temptations and undeterred by challenges that would turn other animals aside." In other words, animals are pilgrims with a purpose.

In the case of the arctic tern, whose journey is 28,000 miles, "it senses it can eat later." It can rest later. It can mate later. Its implacable focus is the journey; its singular intent is arrival. Elephants, snakes, sea snakes, sea turtles, myriad species of birds, butterflies, whales, dolphins, bison, bees, insects, antelopes, wildebeests, eels, great white sharks, tree frogs, dragon flies, crabs, Pacific blue tuna, bats, and even microorganisms – all of them have distinct migratory patterns, and all of them congregate in a special place, even if, as individuals, they have never been there before.

In all of this, there are signs for us to reflect upon. Their single-minded sense of mission is one. The care they take in preparing for their journey is another; as the Quran says about Hajj, "Take provision, and the best provision is piety" (2:197). In other words, fatten up your souls with spiritual calories for this sacred journey back to your Lord.

The Quran reminds us, "Have they not seen the birds above them, as they draw in their wings, having spread them – the Merciful alone holds them

TAKE PROVISION & THE BEST PROVISION IS PIETY

QURAN 2:197

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