

Forgiveness and Hajj as a source of forgiveness in Islam

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Abstract

This is the part of being human to make mistakes. These mistakes and errors are sometimes by intention and sometimes without deliberation and intention so he always in need of forgiveness. As it is said “to err is human and to forgive is divine”. Forgiveness, tolerance and kindness hold a very special and prominent position in Islamic teachings and edifice. Al Afuw (The pardonar), Al-Ghafoor (The forgiving), Al Ghaffaar (The all forgiving) are three of Asma Al-Husna (The beautiful names of Allah). Thus, forgiving is an eternal attribute of Allah. Allah has decreed some religious duties on every Muslim. Performing these duties is greatly rewarded and regarded as atonement for a Muslim's sins and source of forgiveness. Hajj (Pilgrimage) is one of them as a great mean for attaining forgiveness. It is cause of increasing belief in equality and develops harmony among different ethnic groups and sects as well as leads toward obtain peace, harmony and forgiveness. In this article the researchers aims to analyze the concept of forgiveness, the theological basis, the major means of forgiveness in Islam and Hajj (pilgrimage) as a source or mean of attaining forgiveness. Another part of research is to evaluate that how Hajj (pilgrimage), as a religious belief can promote forgiveness.

Key Words: Attributes of Allah, Ahadith about forgiveness, Forgiveness, Harmony, Islamic pilgrimage Hajj, Peace, Quranic Verses, Social interaction, Theological basis

Concept of forgiveness in Islam:

Mankind is divided on the basis of religious beliefs and the core teachings of every religion based upon moral values and ethics not only for fellow human beings, rather they taught good treatment even toward animals.

Likewise in Islamic teachings it is very much recommended to practice kindness, forgiveness and reconciliation to create harmony between individuals and society.

The root word of Islam is “*salm*” which means “peace”. A common everyday greeting among Muslims is “*Assalamualykum*” means may the peace, mercy and blessings of God be with you. Thus the whole teachings of Islam are based upon peace, kindness, tolerance and forgiveness. The concept of forgiveness given by Islam is very vast and unique. Forgiveness can be taken in the meaning of leaving an account of wrongdoing, offence or evil against God or any of His creation. As stated by renown Islamic scholar Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah that

"Forgiveness is the act of relinquishing the right of avenging while one had the power to do so with the feelings of *ihsan*(excellence of faith)and generosity"¹

The real essence of forgiveness is for the sake of God's forgiveness in hereafter as well as to acquire God's pleasure in both worlds thus this concept is not mere worldly but metaphysical too. However, seeking forgiveness must base on sincerity and determination of not repeating the sin or offense again. A wrongdoing, felony or offense, can be against the God, human, society or other creations of God (animals, plants etc).

Therefore the concept of forgiveness can be categories in two aspects in Islam. The first approach is Allah's forgiveness for His creatures and the other one is human forgiveness for each other. Both of the dimensions are associated with each other.

God's Forgiveness:

God Almighty is the core source of forgiveness and He is the only ultimate authority who can forgive. Furthermore He forgives sins against Him without asking for anything in reward and promises to forgive those who seek His forgiveness:

"Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin Most heinous indeed."
(4:48)

God is considered the most forgiving entity in Islamic edifice as reflects in His many names and particularly in three names. These three names which refer to Allah's forgiveness are occurring almost ninety-eight times in Holy Quran. *Al-Ghāfir* means the forgiver, whereas the names *Al-Ghafūr* (The all forgiving) and *Al-Ghaffār* (The ever forgiving) are more categorical, demonstrating that Allah is most forgiving, oft-forgiving.

There are some other names of God which are indication of His mercy, Kindness and forgiveness and repeatedly mentioned in Quran. For example: *Al-Afuw* (to restore, to release) *Al-Tawwab* (The Acceptor of repentance and forgiveness) *Al-Haleem**Al-Raheem* (The Compassionate) (The Clement) *Al-Raheem* (The Compassionate)*Al Rahman* (Most Merciful).

It is stated in Qur'an that God have the ultimate power of judgment, reward and punish, He has full liberty to not punish or forgive any sinner Nevertheless as His mercy and love is limitless and infinite Thus He loves to forgive.

The Prophet said:

"A slave sinned and said, 'O God, forgive me my sin.' God said: "My servant sinned and knew that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for them". Then he sinned again and said: "O Lord, forgive me my sin". God said: "My servant sinned and knew that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for

them”. Then he sinned again and said: “O Lord, forgive me my sin”. God said: “My servant sinned and knew that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for them. Do what you wish, for I have forgiven you”.²

Another Hadith of Prophet is:

*“God said, “Son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. Son of Adam, were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive you. Son of Adam, were you to come to Me with faults nearly equaling the earth and were you then to meet Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly equaling the earth”.*³

Consequently God is the most forgiving and love to forgive. Once Aisha (one of the wives of Prophet) asked the prophet that if I knew that which night is the night of decree, what I should supplicate in it. He replied, *“you should read: O Allah, You are most forgiving, and you love forgiveness; so forgive me”.*⁴⁵

Human forgiveness:

Islam encourages Muslims to seek forgiveness. According to the Prophet (Pbuh) of Islam this is in the very nature of humans to err and all children of Adam are continually make a mistake But the best of them are those who continuously err repent or ask for forgiveness. The Quran makes a clear relationship between human forgiveness and God’s forgiveness. Muslims understanding of forgiveness is that a crime or sin against the creation of God is an offense or crime against God. It is clearly mentioned in the holy book of Islam:

“Let them forgive and overlook, do you not wish that Allah should forgive you?” (24:22)

Furthermore Quran stresses upon the connection between piety and forgiveness while describing the characteristics of true and pious believer it is said:

“Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men; for Allah loves those who do good” (3:134).

And Islam teaches that the pious servants of God are those who have strength to suppress their anger and possess an immeasurable capacity to forgive others. Prophet of Islam said:

*“Whoever suffers an injury and forgives (the responsible person), God will raise his status to a higher degree and remove one of his sins.”*⁶

God urges His subjects asking for His forgiveness to forgive others in order to be forgiven. If anyone wants to attain His forgiveness, he should know how to forgive others. The best kind of forgiveness according to Islam is answering the oppression with kindness. As said by Prophet:

“God had ordered me to maintain ties with those who sever ties with me and to give to those who deprive me and to forgive those who oppress me”.⁷

Examples of Forgiveness in the life of the Prophet:

The life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is an accurate example of tolerance. He was the most forgiving person. His Kindness was not only for believers but he was ever ready to forgive his enemies as well. The plenty of examples about tolerance, forgiveness and mercy can be found in His life and teachings.

One of his companions narrated: “Once a man came to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked “How much should I forgive my slave?”. He did not answer. The man asked again: “O messenger of Allah, how much should I forgive my slave?” This time the Prophet (pbuh) answered: *“Forgive him seventy times a day”*.⁸

When prophet (pbuh) went to the Valley of Taif to convey divine message to the people, they not only renounce him and mistreated him but they also injured him and harmed him badly. He left the city with shaken heart and wounds. God sent an angel to destroy the people because they mistreated God’s beloved Prophet. When the angel came to him with the message, The Prophet prayed to God to save the people of Taif from His anger because what they did was because of their unawareness and ignorance. He said:

“O Allah, guide these people, because they did not know what they were doing.”⁹

Another most significant event about Prophet’s forgiveness is when he entered the city of Makkah after the conquest; the Prophet declared a general amnesty and forgave all of his enemies. Those people who fought him for many years, and exiled him from His motherland, they persecuted his followers and killed many of them. But when prophet had full power to do whatever he wanted to punish them for their crimes he forgave all of them. It is reported that the Prophet asked them:

“What do you think I shall do to you now” They expected nothing but retaliation and pleaded for mercy. The Prophet said, “Today I shall say to you what Joseph (referring to Prophet Yusuf -peace be upon him- as mentioned in the Qur’an, Yusuf 12:92) said to his brothers: *“No blame on you today. Go, you are all free.”*¹⁰

Conditions to receive forgiveness:

There are some conditions or requirements mentioned in Hadith to receive forgiveness from God. If these conditions are fulfilled, God will surely forgive the sin.

If the sin or offence is committed against God; there are three basic conditions to ask forgiveness:

1. Awareness of the sin itself and its confession in front of God.
2. Assurance of not to go over the sin.
3. Asking for forgiveness from God.

Nonetheless if the wrongdoing was against human being or society, an additional condition is required and that is:

4. Rectification of wrongdoing and pardon from the affronted group.¹¹

Hajj As a source of forgiveness:

The term Hajj linguistically means “To intend, heading for visit, constantly go and visit an important and honorable place.” In Islamic terminology Hajj means to make pilgrimage of Mecca and surrounding area (in Ka’aba, Arafat, Muzdalifa and Mina) in the eleventh month of Islamic calendar “*Dhul-Hijjah*” by accomplishing certain religious rites and acts of worship. Hajj is an obligation on every Muslim who is financially and physically able to do it at least once in life as it is one of the five pillars of Islam.

The Makah is taken as very sacred place in Islamic edifice as God told Prophet Abraham to respect it .The holy Quran states the sacredness of Makkah:

“The first home of worship built for mankind was in Makkah the blessed and source guidance for the whole world. There are clear signs including the place of Ibrahim whoever enters it will be safe” (96-97).

It is considered as a very important source of forgiveness in Islam. As said by Prophet (Pbuh):

*“An Accepted Hajj voids whatever was before it.”*¹²

There is another narration that the Prophet said:

*“He who performs Hajj and doesn’t involve (himself) in a marital relation or a sin (during the Hajj), will return from Hajj in a state just like the one his mother gave birth to him in (i.e., free from sins).”*¹³

Islamic pilgrimage is an occasion which brings Muslims from all over the world, colors, races and school of thoughts at one place .It is an explicit demonstration of Islamic concept of “one humanity” when people from various backgrounds have the same thought, chanting the one prayer and equally dressed without any discrimination of ethnicity, nationality, sect and gender. A famous Muslim explorer of 14th century *Ibn Battuta* wrote:

“As for the Maghrib prayer [performed at sunset] they [the four schools] pray at the same time. This causes mixing of practices,

so that for example you might see a follower of the Maliki school kneeling as a Shafi'i, or a Hanafi kneeling as a Hanbali".¹⁴

Furthermore, this event is from start to end a life changing experience which is proved by many evidences. Before going on Hajj every Muslim in trying to attain self purification, they ask forgiveness from those relatives and fellows with whom they have ever offended. The Hajj is collective activity where over two million pilgrims gathering in Makkah. Hundreds and thousands of pilgrims stands shoulder to shoulder facing toward Ka'aba during daily prayers. Then the specific dress of Hajj "*Ihraam*" is a symbol of purity and equality. It is consist upon two unstitched towels .In addition to this a person should not wear his regular shoes but rather a pair of sandals or something where the heel is exposed. And for women; it has to be a simple garment that is loose and covers the entire body except for the face and hands.

On the second day of Hajj, pilgrims travel to Mount Arafat where they spend the entire day near the Mountain of Mercy, asking God for forgiveness and making supplications. While in the next step during stoning of the devil every Muslim has to recite the praises of God and ask for forgiveness throughout .This is another time where everyone has to be very patient and forbearing as in the largest gathering there are many occasions where one should be very humble and forgiving.It is narrated in Bukhari, the Messenger of God (Pbuh)said:

"Whoever carries out therituals of Hajj without harming another person with his hands or tongue will be forgivenall his previous sins".

Hence pilgrims tries best to stay forbearance and tolerant during this spiritual journey. There are lots of researches indicates that Hajj is an Illustration of tolerance and forgiveness in Islam. A research published at Harvard Kennedy School finds that:

"The Hajj induces a shift from localized beliefs and practices toward global Islamic practice, increases tolerance and peaceful inclinations, and leads to more favorable attitudes toward women. The social psychology literature suggests that the interactions on the Hajj among pilgrims from different countries and backgrounds could lead to more or less positive feelings toward others, depending on whether the interaction is cooperative or competitive. Empirically, Hajjis show more positive views towards other nationalities and social groups, greater tolerance, and are more peacefully inclined. The evidence suggests that the Hajj increases tolerance, which seems to apply not just within the Islamic world, but also beyond it. Hajjis return with more positive views towards people from other countries. Hajjis are also more likely to state that various Pakistani ethnic and Muslim sectarian groups are equal, and that it is possible for such groups to live in harmony. These views of equality and

harmony extend to non-Muslims as well. The feelings of unity and equality brought about by the Hajj extend across gender lines to an extent".¹⁵

During the hajj rituals, a pilgrim meets with people from Muslim respects and accepts the opinions of different juristic schools consequently he learns to accept plurality and diversity. In this way he trains himself to live with peace and forbearance with the people of other faith as well. Thus, hajj rituals prevails forgiveness, respect, tolerance, mercy and kindness. Moreover after returning back from pilgrimage, a Muslim will be able and trained to live in his community in peace with others along with the diversities of sects, language, ethnicity etc.¹⁶

Hajj is great social, experiential, devotional and spiritual activity which enhances forgiveness, tolerance and unity. There are plenty of examples that referred pilgrimage as life changing experience. A vibrant example is by Malcolm X (1925-1965). He was an African-American and human right activist. In 1964 he become a Sunni Muslim and performs the Hajj. Meanwhile He wrote a letter from makkah, and said:

"For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors. There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. We were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and non-white what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions" (Malcolm X with Haley, 1965)¹⁷

In conclusion, the essential part of Hajj for every Muslims is seeking forgiveness. Since it is linked with human behavior and no one can attain Divine forgiveness if he offended or harm any individual. Thus, Hajj become a very important mean to accomplish this purpose because the time before, during and after Hajj easily provide a perfect environment for develop the attitude of forbearance and forgiveness.

Notes

¹Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, MuḥammadbinAbīBakr, *al-Rūḥ* .Bayrut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Imiyyah, 1975, p. 241.

²Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Tawbah

³Sunan al-Tirmidhi

⁴ Ibid

⁵Abu Bakr Jabir Al-Jazairy.*Minhaj Al-Muslim (The Way of the Muslim)*.Riyadh:Darussalaam Publishers,2001.

⁶ Ibid

⁷SunanIbn e Majah

⁸ Abu Dawood

⁹Al.Bukhari

¹⁰M.shahid ,AbdulSamad.*The Prophet of Excellent Moral Values* .Islamabad: DawahAcadmy, 2014.

¹¹AL Bukhari

¹² Muslim

¹³AL Bukhari

¹⁴Ibn Battuta. *Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar*.Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Imiyya,2002.

¹⁵ David, Asim, Micael, *Estimating the Impact of the Hajj: Religion and Tolerance in Islam’s Global Gathering*, Study by Hrvard Kennedy School

¹⁶ <http://www.onislam.net/english/shariah/shariah-and-humanity/shariah-and-life/449598-hajj-a-universal-message-for-peace.html>

¹⁷X, Malcolm with Alex Haley. 1965. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.New York: Grove Press.

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