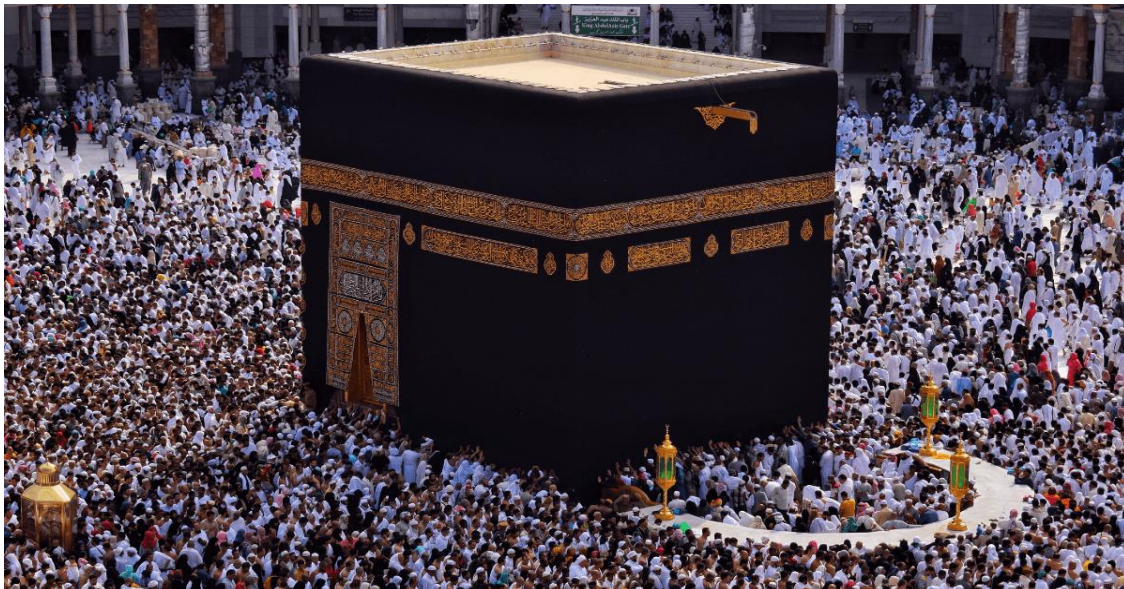


## How to Prepare for Hajj and Umrah

By: Md. Mahmudul Hasan April 29, 2026



Hajj and umrah are once-in-a-life experiences for most of those who perform them. Those who intend to attend these religious observances prepare on multiple fronts—finance, health, and literacy. The rule regarding finance and health is simple—if one is capable financially and physically/psychologically, they will undertake the arduous spiritual journey for performing these two rituals.

Mental and learning preparations vary depending on the individual traits and circumstances of those who intend to carry out these religious activities. In this essay, I shall touch on aspects of hajj-umrah preparation that are not often emphasised.

When preparing for hajj and umrah, most people seek guidance on what to recite for specific manasik (rituals). Since hajj and umrah are not regular practices, a vast majority of Muslims are not familiar with select phrases and invocations that one is supposed to say when performing them.

By the way, hajj and umrah rituals are much simpler and easier to follow compared to those related to, for example, salah or five-time daily prayers. However, since rituals of daily prayers are performed many times a day, consistent with the practice-makes-perfect rationale, they become easy to remember and easy to observe for most Muslims.

There is no hearth of hajj-umrah manuals and guides—in both print and electronic formats. I am sure those who intend to perform hajj and umrah will come by them through various ways. I don't have much to add to those standard expressions for hajj and umrah, such as, talbiyah and other significant, repetitive phrases.

Below I want to discuss certain preparations that will help make hajj and umrah more meaningful, especially for educated Muslims.

## **Reading relevant Qur'anic verses and hadiths**

To understand the significance of hajj and umrah, the first source to consult is the related verses in the Qur'an with their translation and tafsir (exegesis or interpretation). Although the holy book of Islam has a surah (chapter) titled Hajj, extensive discussions on hajj, umrah, and related topics are available mostly in its second chapter, Surah Baqarah. Important relevant subjects such as the building of Ka'aba by Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail (Ishmael)—peace be upon them—and other issues are mentioned in verses 2:124-34 in this surah. Both hajj and umrah are discussed in verse 2:158. Key details of hajj-umrah rituals are explained in verses 2:196-203 of Surah Baqarah.

Other places in the Qur'an that provide hajj-related discussion are Surah Baqarah (2:189), Surah Aale-Imran (3:96-97), Surah Maidah (5:1-2 and 5:94-97), Surah Taubah (9:2-3, 9:19, and 9:36-

37), Surah Hajj ([22:25-37](#)), and Surah Fath ([48:24-27](#)). It is highly advisable for those who plan to perform hajj and umrah to read and understand them to grasp deeper meanings and contextual significance of these two rituals. [Verse 5:3](#) is the last revelation from God to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It was revealed on the afternoon of Friday on 9 Dhu'l-Hijjah 10 AH when the Prophet was in Arafah during his last and only hajj. I also suggest would-be pilgrims read the entire Qur'an with meaning and interpretation before undertaking the journey for hajj and umrah.

The second key reference for understanding hajj and umrah is hadith (prophetic tradition or sayings of the Prophet). All major hadith compilations contain dedicated sections on hajj and umrah which further clarify and elaborate on the procedures of these two rituals. Before one performs hajj and umrah, it is important to know what the primary sources of Islam—Qur'an and hadith—say about these two important acts of worship.

## **Studying the relevance of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)**

As the Qur'an ([22:26-29](#)) states, the ritual of hajj was instituted by Prophet Ibrahim with God's command. He and his son Ismail built the Ka'aba which the pilgrims circumambulate during hajj and umrah. Sai or the ritual of running between the hills of Safa and Marwah commemorates the struggle of Ibrahim's wife Hajar (Hagar) who was in search of water to save her thirsty baby son Ismail. She eventually discovered the well of Zamzam. The well was a major source of sustenance for her and her son, and it brought life into the barren area of Makkah which then gradually became populated. In other words, pilgrims perform Sai in emulation of Hajar's actions. Thus, hajj rituals largely re-enact and honor the legacy of the unwavering devotion, endurance, and profound sacrifices of Ibrahim, Hajar, and Ismail—three pivotal figures in founding the monotheistic faith of Islam.

Therefore, before undertaking the journey for hajj and umrah, it is important that one learns about the lives of Ibrahim, Hajar, and Ismail from reliable sources. The Qur'an ([2:124-134](#), [14:35-41](#),

and 37:83-111) provides the gist of their lives. All major hadith collections feature discussions of earlier prophets including Ibrahim and Ismail. The essay "Prophet Ibrahim: Father of the Prophets" (IslamiCity, September 21, 2018) briefly discusses the life of Ibrahim. For a detailed sketch of his life, one may wish to consult Ali Mohammad Al-Sallabi's book Ibrahim the Father of the Prophets (2023).

## **Reading a good biography of Prophet Muhammad**

With regard to hajj and umrah rituals, Prophet Muhammad famously declared: *Khudhū 'annī manāsikakum* (take your [hajj-umrah] rituals from me). Therefore, while the practices of hajj and umrah date back to the time of Prophet Ibrahim, Muslims follow the way Prophet Muhammad performed them. After the time of Ibrahim and Ismail, many (polytheistic) innovations and deviations—contaminants—were accrued in hajj and umrah practices. Prophet Muhammad brought back the true spiritual meanings of hajj and umrah and restored their initial, pristine pure form practiced by Ibrahim.

All the rituals of hajj and umrah are centered in Makkah and its surrounding areas. However, pilgrims do not miss to visit Madinah which is about 270 miles north of Makkah. Importantly, Prophet Muhammad lived the first 53 years of his life in Makkah and the last ten years in Madinah. Therefore, reading a good biography of the Prophet may make the experience of visiting these two places more impactful and memorable. While reading the Prophet's biography, especial attention should be paid to the detailed description and method of his hajj—and the last sermon he delivered—in 632. In this regard, I recommend British-Syrian scholar Adil Salahi's Muhammad: Man and Prophet (revised edition 2002).

## **Other reading and research**

Two other books that would-be pilgrims may find useful for understanding hajj and umrah are Murad Wilfried

Hofmann's *Journey to Makkah* (1998) and Abu Muneer Ismail Davids's *Getting the Best Out of al-Hajj* (2006). Maryland-based architect Ansar Hasan Burney's one-page hajj chart title "Hajj at a Glance" is also useful (*Islamic Horizons*, July-Aug 2015, p. 24). Malcolm X's hajj experience detailed in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and the letter he wrote from Makkah in April 1964 are breath-taking. For a list of errors and pitfalls that pilgrims must avoid, readers may read my essay "My Complaints to Prophet Muhammad: Muslims Must Cease Inappropriate Behavior During Hajj" (*Islamic Horizons*, March-April 2026, pp. 40-41).

The Day of Arafah on 9 Dhu al-Hijjah marks the culmination of hajj. Pilgrims are required to gather at the plain of Arafah and stay there for at least part of a day. While journeying Mount Arafah, pilgrims will see the remains of 35km long Ain Zubaidah or Nehr Zubaidah (the Canal of Zubaidah) of the early 9th century. Built by the philanthropist Zubaidah bint Ja'far ibn Mansur (d. 831), wife of Caliph Harun ar-Rashid, the canal provided drinking water to locals and pilgrims until 1980—for nearly twelve hundred years. Would-be pilgrims may wish to do some research on this canal before they undertake the hajj-umrah journey.

Lastly, the actual hajj and umrah rituals take about five to six days. However, most pilgrims stay longer—altogether roughly 30-40 days in Makkah and Madinah. During their stay at various places of the two holy cities, pilgrims have ample time for personal acts of worship. Those who have cultivated a good reading habit—avid readers—must bring books, preferably tafsirs, hadith, Islamic books, or hajj-umrah related reading materials. It is also advisable to read the entire Qur'an during their stay in Masjid al-Haram in Makkah and then again in Masjid al-Haram in Madinah.

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