

DAY 17

ANSWER: Şafā and Marwah

SŪRAH AL-BAQARAH: VERSE 158

Indeed the Şafā and the Marwah are among the marks from Allah. So whoever comes to the House for Ḥajj or performs the 'Umrah, there is no sin for him if he makes rounds between them; whoever comes up on his own with good, so Allah is Appreciating, All-Knowing. (Verse 158)

COMMENTARY

The subject of the Ka'bah, as we would do well to recollect, started all the way back from **Verse 124:** '**And when his Lord put Ibrāhīm to a test**', later opening with the statement that the Ka'bah was made a place for repeated convergence, a sanctuary, and a centre of divine worship as ordained (**125**). Then came the famous prayer of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm 'alayhis salām in which he requested Allah Almighty that he and his people be initiated into the correct method of performing the *manāsik*, the required rites, or acts of worship (**126 - 129**); which is inclusive of the Ḥajj and 'Umrah. We can now see that the centrality of the House of Allah as the place of worship has been expressed manifestly when it was declared to be the Qiblah, the direction and orientation of all *Ṣalāh*, no matter where it is performed; while at the same time, the importance of the House of Allah was established when it was made the objective in the performance of the Ḥajj and 'Umrah.

The present verse opens with the solemn declaration that the two hills, *Şafā* and *Marwah* adjoining the Ka'bah in Makkah, are tangible signs from Allah. Pilgrims walk briskly between them after they have made the *tawāf* of the Holy Ka'bah. This act of walking briskly or "making rounds" between them, as the Qur'an elects to call it, is known as *Sa'y*: a practice which was there even in the *Jāhiliyyah* and which made Muslims doubt its propriety. It is exactly this doubt Allah Almighty aims to remove here.

So, there it was in the earlier treatment of the subject that Allah Almighty eliminated the objection raised by disbelievers against the instituting of the Ka'bah as the Qiblah of Muslim *Ṣalāh* and here, through a correlated assertion, the doubt of Muslims themselves as to the propriety of *Sa'y* in the Ḥajj and 'Umrah, of which the Ka'bah is the desired hub, has been removed.

That the text is closely bound together by this reason is not difficult to see.

Some terms and their meanings

1. The term, *Sha'ā'ir* in ***Sha'ā'ir Allah*** is the plural form of *Sha'īrah* which means a sign, mark or token. So, the "**Sha'ā'ir of Allah**" signify what He has determined to be the marks of Islamic faith.
2. Lexically, Ḥajj means to aim, to intend; while, in the terminology of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, the act of deciding to go solely on a pilgrimage of the House of Allah and performing required rites while there,

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is called the Ḥajj.

3. Lexically, 'Umrah means *ziyārah* or pilgrimage; while, in the terminology of the Sharī'ah, the visit to *al-Masjid al-Ḥaram* and the doing of *tawāf* and *sa'y* there is called 'Umrah.

Sa'y between Ṣafā and Marwah is Obligatory

Details of the method that governs the performance of the Hajj, 'Umrah and *Sa'y* are easily available in books of *Fiqh*. It may be noted that *Sa'y* is a *mustahabb* (desirable or commendable) practice of the Holy Prophet ﷺ according to Imām Aḥmad; a *farḍ* (absolute obligation) according to Imāms Mālik and Shāfi'ī and a *wājib* (necessity) according to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, which means, one who abandons it would have to slaughter a goat in compensation.

It is advisable to guard against a possible doubt that may arise while reading the words used in the verse under study. One may think that the Qur'ān simply says that making *Sa'y* between Ṣafā and Marwah is 'no sin'; at the most, it proves that it is one of the many 'allowed' acts. This approach can be corrected by looking at the leading expression: '**no sin**' which has been used here in relation to a question. The question related to all those idols sitting on top of the Ṣafā and Marwah hills and it was to show their devotion to them that the people of the *Jāhiliyyah* used to do *sa'y* between Ṣafā and Marwah, and in which case, this practice should be *ḥaram* (forbidden). It is in answer to this doubt that it was declared, "there is no sin" in it. This being the real and authentic Abrahamic Tradition, there is no reason why it should be considered tainted with 'sin'? The 'malpractice' of a pagan band of people in this intervening period does not end up making a 'sin' of what is 'good' in the sight of Allah. The use of the expression '**no sin**', therefore, does not go against its being *wājib* or necessary.

This concludes the commentary for Day 17.