

History of Islam

An encyclopedia of Islamic history

The Significance of the Hijrah (622 CE)

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The Hijrah kindled the light of hope in the hearts of the early Muslims who set a shining example for all Muslims, in every generation, to emulate.

God says in the Quran:

“Those who believe, and have emigrated, and have struggled in the way of God with their possessions and their lives are greater in degree with God; and those, they are the triumphant.

Their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him and beatitude; for them shall be gardens wherein is enduring bliss, therein they shall abide forever. Surely with God is a tremendous reward.” (At-Tawbah 9: 20-2)

The significance of *hijrah* (the migration of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from Mecca to Madinah in 622 CE) is not limited to Islamic history or to Muslims. The *hijrah* not only reshaped – socially and politically – the Arab Peninsula, but also had its impact on worldwide civilizations.

Throughout the history of Islam, the migration was a transitional line between the two major eras, regarding to the message of Islam; the era of Makkah and the era of Madinah. **In its essence, this signified a transition from one phase to another**, as follows:

– Transition, which is most significantly for early Muslims, to the phase in which Islam was not only the act of worship, but a way of life. This was encompassing (surrounding) politics, economy, social interactions and every other aspect of life. This was the first time when Islam was looked upon as a comprehensive religion.

– Transition from a position where Muslims represented a small group of people, surrounded by enemies and threatened by death, to the position of a regional power with a strong central leadership. This was one that was surrounded by a large number of followers and allies.

– Transition from being a simple Islamic group of believers, to being the Islamic nation. This was an organized Islamic state, with a central leadership and other organizations.

Transition of Da'wah from regionalism, in which the focus was only on Quraysh and the tribes surrounding Makkah, to the phase of universalism. This is where the Muslim State began reaching out to Persia, Egypt, and the Byzantine Empire.

– Transition from the position of weakness, where the non-believers of Makkah – particularly the people of Quraysh- humiliated, tortured and killed Muslims, to the position of security. This is where Muslims were allowed to defend themselves and were able to defeat their adversaries.

– Transition from spreading Islam through individual Da'wah (inviting others to Islam) to the spreading of Islam through institutionalized Da'wah, initiated the state.



Hijrah, the Turning Point in Islamic History

Hijrah (Immigration to Madinah), no doubt, kindled the light of hope in the hearts of the early Muslims who set a shining example for all Muslims, in every generation, to emulate.

Hijrah, in essence, is a process of transfer to a better situation. It is not meant to find a comfortable place where one would relax and stop endeavor (attempt). Rather, it is a search for an environment more favorable to continuous and constructive effort. Immediately after reaching Madinah, the Prophet undertook an all-embracing process to establish a faithful and strong society. This is a significant aspect and important lesson to learn from hijrah.

Hijrah was one of the most important events in the history of Islam. It is for this reason the Caliph Omar adopted hijrah date to calculate years. Muslims chose hijrah as the focal point to reckon their chronology.

In physical terms, hijrah was a journey between two cities about 200 miles apart, but in its grand significance it marked the beginning of an era, a civilization, a culture and a history for the whole mankind. Islam progressed not only from the physical hijrah, but because Muslims took hijrah seriously in all its aspects and dimensions.

When Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) immigrated from Makkah to Madinah, he did not just transfer his residence or take shelter in another city, but as soon as he arrived in Madinah he began the transformation of that city in every aspect:

– **Masjid (Mosque):** The Prophet first established a Mosque to worship God. He himself worked in carrying the stones and building that small, humble but most powerful structure. That was the beginning, but soon other mosques were established in Madinah.

– **Brotherhood:** He established brotherly relations between the Muslims who migrated from Makkah and the residents of Madinah who helped the Prophet and his companions. What was important was to have good relations between Muslims. They should have their brotherhood on the basis of faith, not on the basis of tribes as they used to have prior to Islam.

– **Intercommunity and Interfaith Relations:** Prophet Muhammad also established good relations with other communities living in Madinah. There was a large Jewish community as well as some other Arab tribes who had not accepted Islam. The Prophet prepared a covenant for relations between these communities.

– **Water System in the City:** The Prophet asked the companions to dig wells in different parts of the city. It is mentioned that more than 50 wells were opened in the city of Madinah and there was enough clean water for everyone.

– **Agriculture and Gardening:** The Prophet encouraged the companions to cultivate the land and make gardens. He told them that anyone who would cultivate any dead land, would own it. Many people started working and cultivating and soon there was enough food for everyone.

– **Poverty Eradication:** In a short period of time it happened that there were no poor people in Madinah. Everyone had enough food and shelter and the Prophet used to give gifts to coming delegations.

– **Safety, Security, Law and Order:** Madinah became the safest city in the world. There were very few incidents of theft, rape, drunkenness or murder and they were immediately taken care of.

In short, the hijrah teaches that wherever Muslims go, they should bring goodness to that land. Muslims should work for both moral and material goodness of the society.

Did Other Prophets Perform Hijrah?

A hijrah was not something special for Prophet Muhammad. Rather, other Prophets emigrated before Prophet Muhammad. Yet, the hijrah of Prophet Muhammad differed from those of other Prophets because it was not intended as a flight from torture but as the beginning of the Islamic state. The eminent Muslim scholar, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, states the following:

Most of Allah’s Messengers, if not all, emigrated. However, their emigrations differed from that of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For example, Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) emigrated, as related in the Quran: **{And Lot believed him, and said: Lo! I am a fugitive unto my Lord. Lo! He, only He, is the Mighty, the Wise}** (Al-`Ankabut 29: 26). In another verse, God says: **{And he said: Lo! I am going unto my Lord Who will guide me}** (As-Saffat 37: 99). So, Prophet Abraham migrated from place to place till he settled at a town in Palestine, where he was then buried. That town, Al-Khalil Ibrahim, (Hebron) is now named after him.

Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) also emigrated before he was assigned with the divine mission. He fled from Egypt after he had mistakenly killed an Egyptian. He sought God’s forgiveness for that, and a man advised him to get out of Egypt in order to escape people’s revenge. God says: **{And a man came from the uttermost part of the city, running. He said: O Moses! Lo! the chiefs take counsel against thee to slay thee; therefore escape. Lo! I am of those who give thee good advice. So he escaped from thence, fearing, vigilant. He said: My Lord! Deliver me from the wrongdoing folk}** (Al-Qasas 28: 20-1)



Then Prophet Moses went to a country called Madyan, where he married the daughter of a righteous man (Prophet Shu`aib, peace be upon him) and stayed with him for ten years. Throughout that period, Moses had no divine mission. He lived as a righteous man, a good husband, and a generous son-in-law; however, he had no prominent role to perform. That is to say, Prophet Moses had emigrated for fear of revenge. He said, as related in the Quran: **{Then I fled from you when I feared you, and my Lord vouchsafed me a command and appointed me (of the number) of those sent (by Him)}** (Ash-Shu'ara' 42: 21).

On the other hand, the hijrah of Prophet Muhammad was not only to escape temptation and torture of his people. It was the starting point to establish the Muslim nation, a new Muslim community based on Islam, the universal divine message that calls for morality and human rights. That was the very purpose of Prophet Muhammad's hijrah to Madinah, and he performed his role as best as possible. He put the foundation of a sound Muslim community and established the best nation ever created.

What Is the Hijrah Calendar?

Muslims measure the passage of time using the Islamic (hijrah) calendar. This calendar has twelve lunar months, the beginnings and endings of which are determined by the sighting of the crescent moon. Years are counted since the hijrah, which is when the Prophet Muhammad migrated from Makkah to Madinah (approximately July 622 CE).

The Islamic calendar was first introduced by the close companion of the Prophet, Omar ibn Al-Khattab. During his leadership of the Muslim community, in approximately 638 CE, he consulted with his advisors in order to come to a decision regarding the various dating systems used at that time. It was agreed that the most appropriate reference point for the Islamic calendar was the hijrah, since it was an important turning point for the Muslim community.

After the emigration to Madinah, the Muslims were able to organize and establish the first real Muslim "community," with social, political, and economic independence. Life in Madinah allowed the Muslim community to mature and strengthen, and the people developed an entire society based on Islamic principles.

The Islamic calendar is the official calendar in many Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia. Other Muslim countries use the Gregorian calendar for civil purposes and only turn to the Islamic calendar for religious purposes.

– Lunar Months Each Year

The Islamic year has twelve months that are based on a lunar cycle. God says in the Quran: **{The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve (in a year) – so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth....}** (At-Tawbah, 9:36).

{It is He Who made the sun to be a shining glory, and the moon to be a light of beauty, and measured out stages for it, that you might know the number of years and the count of time. Allah did not create this except in truth and righteousness. And He explains His signs in detail, for those who understand} (Yunus, 10: 5)

And in his final sermon before his death, the Prophet Muhammad said, among other things: "With Allah the months are twelve; four of them are holy; three of these are successive and one occurs singly between the months of Jumada and Sha'ban." (Al Bukhari)

Islamic months begin at sunset of the first day, the day when the lunar crescent is visually sighted. The lunar year is approximately 354 days long, so the months rotate backward through the seasons and are not fixed to the Gregorian calendar.

The months of the Islamic year are:

1. **Muharram** (“Forbidden” – it is one of the four months during which it is forbidden to wage war or fight)
2. **Safar** (“Empty” or “Yellow”)
3. **Rabi’ Awal** (“First spring”)
4. **Rabi’ Thani** (“Second spring”)
5. **Jumada Awal** (“First freeze”)
6. **Jumada Thani** (“Second freeze”)
7. **Rajab** (“To respect” – this is another holy month when fighting is prohibited)
8. **Sha’ban** (“To spread and distribute”)
9. **Ramadan** (“Parched thirst” – this is the month of daytime fasting)
10. **Shawwal** (“To be light and vigorous”)
11. **Dhul-Qi’dah** (“The month of rest” – another month when no warfare or fighting is allowed)
12. **Dhul-Hijjah** (“The month of Hajj” – this is the month of the annual pilgrimage to Makkah, again when no warfare or fighting is allowed).

Source: Islamic Research Foundation International – <http://www.irfi.org> (<http://www.irfi.org>).

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