



Every year millions of Muslims travel to Makkah during the last month of the Islamic calendar, Dhul Hajj, to perform a pilgrimage known as Hajj. The pilgrimage lasts around five days, from the 8th to the 13th of Dhul Hajj (this year coinciding with 7th-12th July 2022). Performing Hajj is mandatory for all Muslims at least once in their life. The shorter and optional version of Hajj is Umrah. This pilgrimage can take place any time of the year. Earlier this year Ahmed Zaidi travelled to Makkah to perform Umrah.

Dear Woolf Friends,

Wearing just two pieces of unstitched white cloth held together with an uncomfortably tight belt, I walk towards the arrivals taxi stand at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah. I am in the state of *ihram*, the sacred state required when performing pilgrimage in Islam. When in *ihram*, there are various rules you must follow including refraining from wearing perfume (a rather big deal for me), wearing unstitched cloth if you're a man, ensuring your face is uncovered if you're a women, or anything that might allude to your social and financial position in society. The purpose of *ihram* is to remind us that we are all equal in the eyes of God.

As I exit the airport, my *ihram* attire immediately alerts a frenzy of drivers waiting near the taxi rank. "*Hajji, hajji, Makkah?*" they ask. *Hajji* is the Arabic word for one who has made a pilgrimage to Makkah. After haggling with one of the taxi drivers, I get in his car and make the one hour journey from Jeddah to Makkah.

As I approach the city, I am reminded of the historical significance of Makkah. From the stories of Prophet Abraham, to the elephant army of Abraha, to the birthplace of Prophet Mohammed. Even the story of Islam begins in Makkah where Prophet Mohammed received his first revelation from the angel Gabriel in the cave of Hira.

As someone who was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, I have had the privilege of visiting Makkah more times than I can remember. And over the years, I have seen the city of Makkah and the Grand Mosque (Masjid Al-Haram) expand and transform. The historical sites dating back to the days of early Islam have been replaced with high rising hotels and an imposing clock tower. From the house of Abu Bakr and Khadija, to the Ajyad Fortress, which once protected the Ka'ba from invaders. Countless sites have been demolished. As a Muslim, I cannot help but feel sad by the disappearance of Islamic history.

As I walk towards the hotel in my *ihram*, I cross a Starbucks, a KFC and a Baskin Robbins. For all of the city's greatness and significance, I cannot help but feel disconnected from the spiritual essence of Makkah. This feeling of spiritual absence remains until I finally set my gaze on the Holy Ka'ba once again.

Despite having visited the Ka'ba several times, the feeling of awe never escapes me when I visit it again. Being in the presence of the Ka'ba, I am immediately transported to the early days of Islam. I imagine all the personalities that have sat where I sit and prayed where I pray. I drink water from the Zamzam well, which according to Islamic traditions, has been flowing since the time of Abraham. For those few hours that I sit and face the structure that billions of Muslims around the world pray towards every day, I forget about my day-to-day problems and reflect on my character.

Sitting in front of the Ka'ba, wearing unstitched cloth resembling the cloth Muslims wear at their time of burial, reminds me of my mortality. It is this reminder that forces me to think about what matters in life and what doesn't.

With very best wishes,

Dr Ahmed Zaidi
Member of the Development Council, Woolf Institute

Upcoming Events

13 - 15 October

Musicians and Artists in Exile: Preserving, Creating or Eulogizing Syrian Culture?



19 October

@18:00

The Islamic Movement in Israel by Tilde Rosmer



15 - 16

November

Woolf Institute Conference



16 November

Woolf Institute Research Afternoon



17 November

Living in Harmony with Teachers' Seminar



23 November

Interfaith Mixer



1 December

William Kessler Essay Prize Competition



30 March

Iftar



6 June

Woolf Institute Garden Party



Dr Ahmed Zaid is a Research Associate at the Cambridge Institute of Automated Language Teaching and Assessment and a member of the Development Council of the Woolf Institute.



THIS WEEK AT WOOLF

This Week At Woolf

AHMED ZAIDI

MEMBER OF THE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL



WATCH: SHTICK! HUMOUR, SATIRE AND RELIGION 5 - CONCLUDING REMARKS

PODCAST: GET RICH QUICK!



Living in Harmony at Cambourne Village College

On Monday the Living in Harmony team visited Cambourne Village College to teach workshops which are part of the Living in Harmony project.

Would you like us to come to your school to teach a workshop? Please email us on Fm547@cam.ac.uk.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT](#)

SANCTUARY

Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute

MANY FAMILIES IN THE UK OPEN THEIR HOMES TO PROVIDE REFUGE FOR FLEEING UKRAINIANS. WHAT IS THE HISTORY AND THE FUTURE OF SANCTUARY?



PODCAST: SANCTUARY

Many families in the UK open their homes to provide refuge for fleeing Ukrainians. What is the history and the future of sanctuary?

The idea of sanctuary for the oppressed individual or for groups of people fleeing persecution or war is an ancient and noble one. In biblical times there were even designated sanctuary cities for those under threat. In these gender conscious times, the Women's Refuge provides another sort of sanctuary. Sara Trewitt and Beth Phillips discuss sanctuary...

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#)

COMING SOON

Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute

MEMORY AND MEMORISING

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)



EID AL-ADHA

The Woolf Institute wishes all our Muslim friends celebrating this week Eid Mubarak

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EID EL-ADCHA](#)

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