

# Commemorating the Islamic New Year: Timeless Lessons from the Greatest Migration in History

The *Hijra* is not only one of the greatest events in the history of Islam, but it is arguably a historic milestone whose impact forever changed the course of history for all of humanity at large. The migration of the Muslims from Mecca to Medina set the



foundations for ensuring that the religion of Islam would become established in the Arabian Peninsula, the effects of which would reverberate from East to West as the realm of Islam spread. This is why the rank of the great *Muhājirūn*, who left all that was dear to them in their homeland of Mecca for the sake of the freedom to worship and practice their faith in Medina is immeasurable. All that the world has inherited today from the vast and rich Islamic tradition is owed to the sincere sacrifice of a few who undertook this momentous journey. On the first day of the month of Muḥarram, we not only remember this great occasion that marks the first day of the Islamic calendar, but we are also reminded of its timeless lessons.

## Sacrifice

The most important lesson imparted by the *Hijra*, is the importance of sacrifice in everything that is dear and beloved to us for the sake of maintaining our beliefs and the freedom to practice them. When the *Muhājirūn* left Mecca, there was nothing in the world dearer to them than this city which was the place of their birth and the source of their culture, social status, family, and wealth. The pain of migration over 1400 years ago to a new land is often difficult for the modern mind to grasp, since the efficiency of travel and the globalization of culture has made the prospect of

migration today as nothing more than a simple transfer from one space to another. But if we examine the circumstances of the pre-modern era we see that in leaving Mecca, the *Muhājirūn* were prepared to relinquish all that they knew of the comforts and joys of this world for the sake of the next. As much as Mecca had been dear to these early Muslims, God was far dearer to their hearts.

In the commitment and sacrifice undertaken by the *Muhājirūn*, is also a profound demonstration of the power of *‘aqīda* or faith to empower individuals with the strength to achieve what was previously beyond their capacity. As a result of their perseverance and sacrifice, Medina became the first organized Islamic community and would pave the path for the eventual victory of the Muslims in their struggle against pagan Arabia.

### **Setting Priorities Straight**

The *Hijra* also teaches us that when there is a conflict between worldly interests and the best interest of our souls, we must prefer what will preserve our faith and bring us close to God. For truly, it is the latter which will last long after the world has perished. It is reported in a hadith, “A servant [of God] does not abandon a matter solely for the sake of God, except that God replaces it with what is better for him in his religion and in his [material] world.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, who prefers the interests of the next life over the worldly one will find himself profiting in both worlds. Likewise, the one who gives precedence to the interests of the worldly realm at the expense of the heavenly one will find himself as nothing short of bankrupt in both worlds.

### **The Essence of the Reliance on God**

The *Hijra* has also taught us that the essence of *tawakkul* or the reliance on God consists of taking into consideration the means of fulfilling ends in the world and only then submitting one’s affairs to God. We see that the Messenger of God ﷺ had a strategic path from which he migrated while he maintained his plans a secret. When he came to the residence of Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه to inform him that the time of migration had arrived, he asked him to dismiss all those who were present in his house other than his own family. This is a profound lesson on the importance of being discrete about one’s affairs. The Messenger of God ﷺ said, “Facilitate the success of your affairs through

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Jāmi‘ al-sagħīr*, vol.ii/p.144.

keeping silent.”<sup>2</sup> The Prophet ﷺ also hired a skilled guide to steer them through the desert and then took a misleading path away from Medina to hide in the cave of Thawr to divert those who were pursuing him ﷺ. He also delegated tasks to those around him. He had one person for reporting events, another to destroy his trail, another to arrange provisions, and he designated ‘Alī ﷺ to wear his mantle and lie in his bed to delude the band of the pagans who were set to assassinate him ﷺ.

It was while taking all the necessary precautions and planning his route strategically that the Prophet ﷺ placed his reliance on the Lord of the heavens and the earth. He ﷺ taught us through his example that if we wish to succeed in our affairs it is essential to plan ahead and perform all the conditions necessary to fulfill the desired outcome to the best of our ability. This is indeed, a cornerstone of the courtesies (*ādāb*) that must accompany the reliance on God.

It might be asked, why the Prophet ﷺ took such meticulous measures to ensure discretion in his migration, while ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ﷺ migrated openly in rebellion to the pagans of Quraysh. Surely, ‘Umar ﷺ could not have been braver than the Prophet ﷺ? Indeed, it is without a doubt that the Prophet’s ﷺ bravery was unmatched, even by the mighty ‘Umar ﷺ. However, the Prophet ﷺ represented not only himself but the entire Islamic mission whose success depended on his not taking unnecessary risks that might endanger it. In addition, when the Prophet ﷺ acted, unlike ‘Umar ﷺ he did not act as an independent person but rather as a divinely sent Messenger whose actions would be a source of legislation and a model for those who will emulate his example after him ﷺ.

## Steadfastness in Facing Tribulations

We learn from the *Hijra* the recurring nature of struggle between the forces of truth and falsehood, justice and oppression, and the path to guidance and misguidance. God has determined for this tension to exist in order to try His servants in the sincerity of their faith and distinguish those who desire the distractions of the world from those who desire proximity to the Divine. For truly, the nature of the world is that of difficulty and tribulation and a believer is but a diamond in the rough whose true potential is revealed through enduring these tests. The way we deal with

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<sup>2</sup> *Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḡhīr*: vol.i/p.40

tribulations reveals our true nature both to ourselves and those around us. We see the amount of our steadfastness in our beliefs, our perseverance in our striving to please God, the extent of our love for Him, our strength to withstand temptations, and how much we are willing to sacrifice what is valuable and dear to us in order to do what will benefit us in the hereafter. The Qur'an says, "And We will surely test you until We make evident those who strive among you and the patient, and We will test your affairs [*Muhammad*: 31]."

## The Obligations of Fraternity Among Muslims

The same way we learn the lesson of sacrifice from the *Muhājirūn* who abandoned everything for the sake of their faith, we also learn a poignant lesson about the obligations of generosity and brotherhood among Muslims through their counterparts, the *Anṣār*. In the example of the *Anṣār*, we see a model of selflessness and abundance in giving to their fellow brethren in the Muslim community. When the *Muhājirūn* came to Medina with little more than the clothes on their backs, the *Anṣār* were profusely generous to a point that they were willing to share the entirety of their wealth with their brothers for the sake of God. Their altruism and self-sacrifice were a reflection of the depth of their faith in the Prophet's ﷺ message and their refined character. Hence, God purified their hearts and immortalized the memory of their great service to Islam through mentioning them in the Qur'an, "And [also for] those who were settled in al-Madinah and [adopted] the faith before them. They love those who emigrated to them and find not any want in their breasts of what the emigrants were given but give [them] preference over themselves, even though they are in privation. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul - it is those who will be the successful [*Hashr*: 9]."