Mecca: Finding the *Centre of the Self*

From the stillness of Medina to the first glimpse of the Kaaba — a journey into the meaning of intention, equality and belonging.



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The Haram and the Kaaba, the destination of the journey from Medina.

Soon it was time to leave Medina. We set off from our hotel for the five-hour journey to Mecca. The landscape outside shifted continuously, from green valleys to open desert, herds of camels grazing under a changing sky, as if the land itself was preparing us for a different kind of encounter.

> *Leaving Medina did not feel like departure so much as carrying its stillness forward into what came next.*

Our first stop was Dhul-Hulayfah, the miqat mosque, one of the designated points where pilgrims enter the sacred state of ihram, once visited by the Prophet and his companions for the same purpose. Surrounded by lush date palms, this mosque of stone and mud brick serves as both a resting place for pilgrims and a station for entering ihram and preparing for worship.

Ihram, the special garments worn to enter the act of worship, symbolises both humility and equality, a spiritual process in which worldly status dissolves. Men wear plain white unstitched sheets, women modest attire, and all stand equal before the Creator.

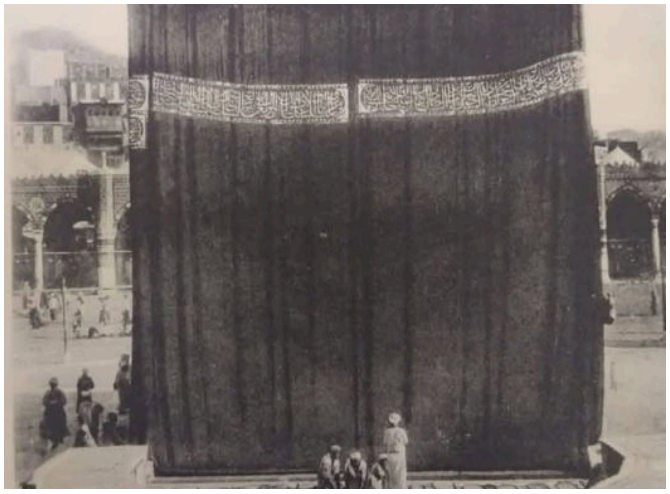
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>
> ON ENTERING IHRAM

At this moment, we verbalised our intention. Islam teaches that acts of worship gain meaning only when combined with sincere intention:

> *"Labbayk, Allahumma labbayk! Labbayk, la shareeka laka, labbayk! Innal-hamda, wan-ni'mata, laka walmulk. La shareeka lak."*

These words echo the prayers of Prophet Ibrahim as he first shaped the holy structure, looking to the sky while carving the stones: "Here I am, my Lord. Truly, You have no partner..."

Repeating the talbiyah, we approached Mecca, each repetition reinforcing devotion and surrender.



The Kaaba, the fixed point around which pilgrims walk the seven circuits of tawaf.

Then, finally, the Kaaba.

At first, it revealed itself only partially, glimpsed between the columns beneath the King Fahd Gate. The emotion I felt was unlike anything I had anticipated. With its form half hidden and half revealed, **the first impression it left on me was that of a dark pearl emerging from its shell.**

As I examined its simple geometry and still presence, I could think of nothing else. With a mixture of awe and humility, I repeated silently within myself: Labbayk, here I am.

To perform the tawaf, we walked around the Kaaba seven times, keeping it on our left side, close to our hearts.

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This ritual, conducted through movement and repetition, carries meanings that guide the soul through experience rather than explanation. Perhaps our understanding of the infinite is limited, and God speaks to us through forms that meet the senses.

The Kaaba stands as a fixed point amid shifting identities. Each encounter with it reveals something new.

After completing tawaf, we moved to sa'y between Safa and Marwa.

Trusting in God's promise, Prophet Ibrahim left Hajar and Ishmael in a barren valley. Hajar, searching for water for her child, ran between the two hills seven times, refusing despair. Eventually, water sprang forth beneath the feet of Ishmael: the well of Zamzam.

For centuries, Muslims have retraced her steps.

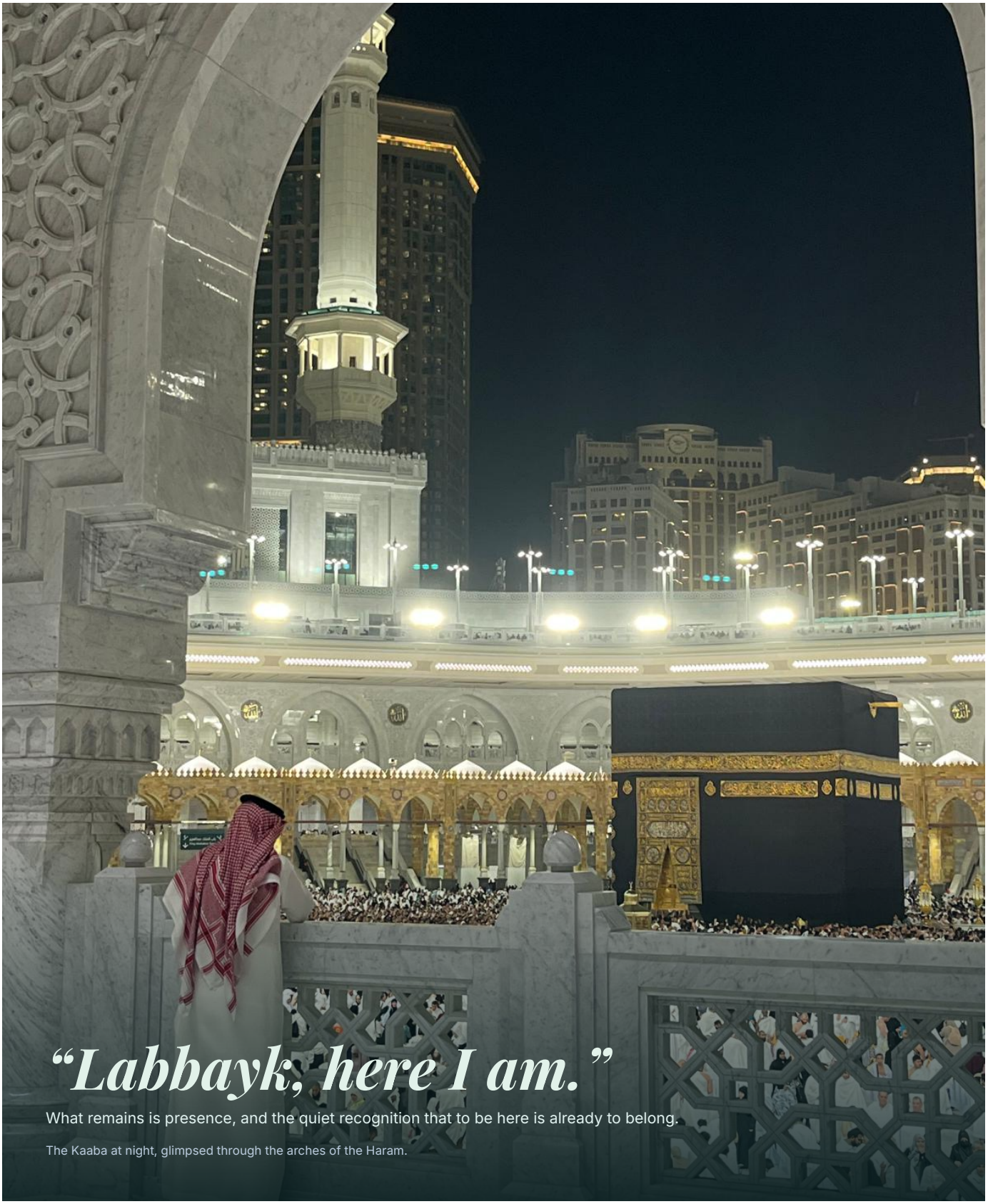
This was not merely physical movement for me. It raised questions that had no simple answers: why this repetition, why this memory embodied in action? Hajar did not act as ritual, but out of necessity and trust. And yet her effort became the foundation of remembrance for millions.

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>
> SAFA AND MARWA

Umrah, in this sense, is both deeply personal and profoundly collective. It gathers people from every nation into the same rhythm of motion and devotion.

Watching the crowds around the Kaaba, I saw every form of life folded into the same circle: prayer, silence, recitation, stillness.

In this sacred space, worldly ambition loses its measure. What remains is presence, and the quiet recognition that **to be here is already to belong.** ■



“Labbayk, here I am.”

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The Kaaba at night, glimpsed through the arches of the Haram.