

# WHITE BOOK - 2012

Spiritual retreat & Cultural quest  
at the sources of Islam



Thanks to the program of  
INIMuslim's network

ISLAM.INCLUSIVE.2012@  
GMAIL.COM

## INCLUSIVE 'UMRAH

A journey to Mecca & Medina

With the *Tawhid 'Omra* inclusive group

Accompanied by Amina Wadud, 8th to 18th of June 2012

« And proclaim unto mankind the Pilgrimage. They will  
come unto thee on foot and on every lean camel; they  
will come from every deep ravine »

(Qur'an: 22.27)



## Sommaire

Presentation .....	5
Mecca – 6th to 12th of June.....	7
Medina – 13th to 16th of June .....	8
F.A.Q. ....	9
Preparation & Recommendation letters .....	13
First recommendation letter - 29 <sup>th</sup> April 2012 .....	14
Second recommendation letter - 7 <sup>th</sup> May 2012 .....	16
Third recommendation letter - 14 <sup>th</sup> May 2012 .....	18
Fourth recommendation letter - 23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2012 .....	21
Travel blog - full texts .....	25





## Presentation



**What is it?**

Let's live together a *spiritual retreat* and a *cultural quest*, at the roots of our Islamic faith, in company of inclusive Muslim brothers and sisters. The aim of this trip is to offer participants a unique experience, filling them of positive energy, at the source of the Islamic culture.

**Who is it?**

the *Tawhid 'Omra* inclusive group 2012 is made of inclusive, progressive, reformist Muslims, supporters of an appeased, egalitarian and non-sexist representation of Islam. We will be accompanied in this quest, inch'Allah, by a great woman of contemporary Islam: *Dr. Amina Wadud - who is an Imam, a theologian and a Hadja<sup>1</sup>*-, that throughout the journey shall embody with us the peaceful share of the Islamic spiritual quest.



This proposal has been done to several inclusive Muslim sisters and brothers around the world; do not hesitate to spread the invitation, discretely, to your close contacts that might be interested.

**When?**

*8th to 18th June 2012 (10 days)?* Exact dates are to be confirmed. The months of April and May were not retained since it is too soon; the exact date will be set according to the return of *Registration forms* available on the last page of this document, which must be returned before February 15th, 2012. *Thank you to tell us before the 31th of January if you are interested in this proposal.*

**How much?**

*Around 1000 euros?* We are now in contact with several travel agencies to obtain the best group rate; the lowest price - as well as the positive energy of our group dynamics - depends on the number of participants.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amina\\_Wadud](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amina_Wadud) - learn more about her motivations and advice on the FAQ (page 5 of this document).



## PROGRAM PREVIEW <sup>2</sup> of the *Tawhid 'Omra* inclusive group 2012

### Mecca – 6th to 12th of June

- arriving at Jeddah airport at 8.50 AM (flying Emirates airways)
- arriving in taxi (10 euros<sup>3</sup>) at the hotel of Mecca<sup>4</sup> (pictures below)
- bathroom, TV, WI-FI and breakfast included (diners not included). For more information consult the FAQ section of this document (page 5).
- visit of the Haram big mosque and accomplishment of the 'Omra as soon as we arrive (about 4 hours: **IHRÂM** then **NIYYAH** then **ISTILAM** then **TAWÂF** then **HATEEM** then **ACHÈVEMENT DU TAWÂF** then **MULTAZAM** then **MAQAM IBRAHIM** then **SAFA ET MARWAH**<sup>5</sup>); diner nearby the hotel.

7

### Daily rhythm

- 5 prayers at the Haram mosque of Mecca / free time in the mornings until lunch (& salat)
- *dhikr* after salat al fajr (optional)
- Reading the Qur'an after 'Asr salat for those who want to (tadjwid in Arabic, then francais & English - bilingual discussion, possible translation); or *halkah* (sharing time): Amina Wadud, sharing the imamat; or writing workshop (alternating with Qur'an readings ou halkah).
- diner between Maghrib and 'Isha



<sup>2</sup> To be confirmed precisely before the 1st of March ; we shall then take the plane tickets.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hajinformation.com/main/t30.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Best quality/price ratio - 3 stars, according to the Saudi standards - chosen among other 100 hotels.

<sup>5</sup> These different stages shall be detailed one after the other and we shall accomplish our pilgrimage all together inch'Allah; more details on the official website of the Saudi ministry of Hadj - <http://www.hajinformation.com/main/e20.htm>





## Cultural visits

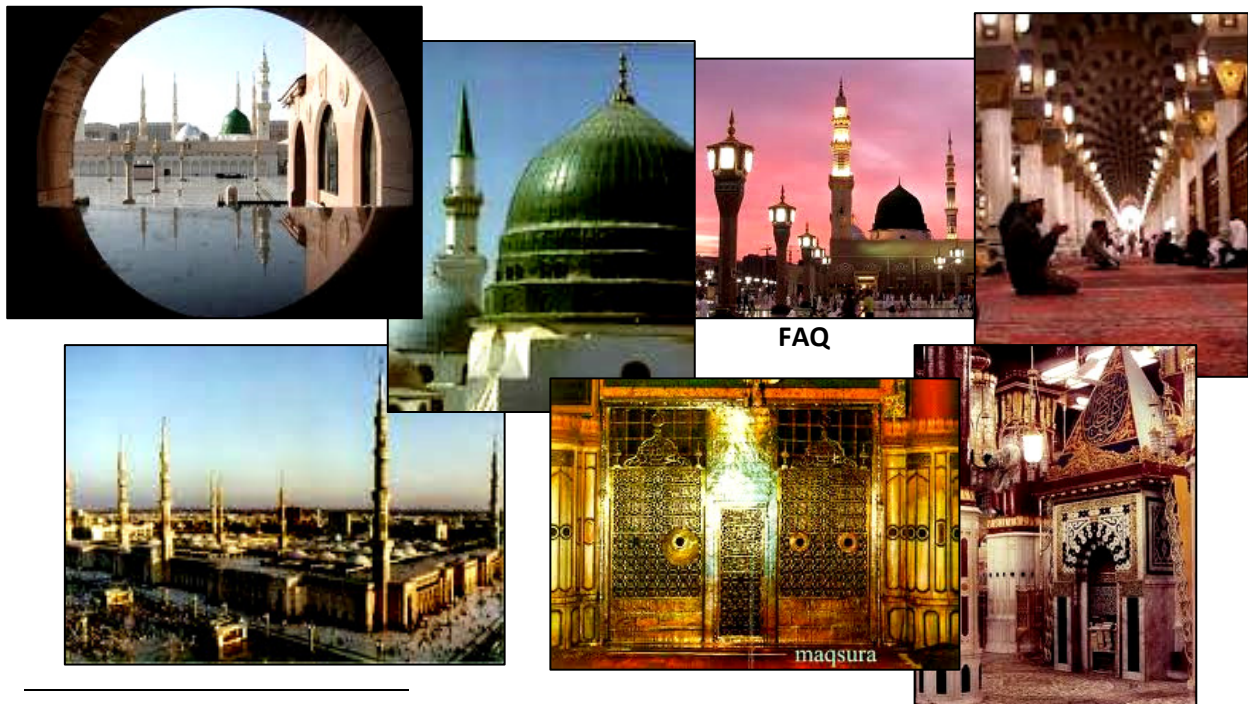
- Mecca souk market and historical sites, for those who want to
- *Hira cave*<sup>6</sup>
- *Baqi'* cimetry<sup>7</sup>
- *Miqat* for a new 'Omra (optional for those who want to do another 'Omra in the name of relatives)<sup>8</sup>



8

## Medina – 13th to 16th of June

- three days in Medina (2h of taxi from Mekkah, around 25 euros)
- same daily rhythm than in Mecca
- *halkah* (sharing time) about islam as a religion of peace and dialogue
- visit of the mosque of the two *Qiblah*<sup>9</sup> (optional)
- return to Jeddah on the 15th of June, then home on the 16th.



<sup>6</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hira>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hajinformation.com/main/h2026.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hajinformation.com/main/e101.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.islamweb.net/ehajj/index.php?page=article&id=161046>





## F.A.Q.



***How close is the hotel to the grand mosque and the Kaaba?***

Walking distance is better, the closer to the grand mosque the better ease we have to make all of our daily prayers there. The hotel we selected is **about 500 meters from the grand mosque**. It is a three star hotel by Saudi Arabia standards. We shall have to confirm the hotel reservation after the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, when we shall receive all the registration forms inch’Allah. That hotel has been selected among 100 other hotel’s descriptions on the following website: <http://www.booking.com>



***If we want to move from Mecca, how close is the hotel from the nearest taxi?***

If we need to go further, taxis are every where, but some times you need Arabic or even Urdu to negotiate. Hotel management can also assist with taxi arrangements if we plan ahead with them. Mecca is a big city with renovation everywhere and they are used to accommodating all kinds of Muslim guests. **Hotels like this one generally are close to the grand mosque and on a main street.** The hotel we selected for us could be the *Ajwad Ajwad* hotel<sup>10</sup> (pictures on the right).



***Is the hotel really so close from the grand mosque’s main doors?***

Several sisters and brothers of our group have already been there for hajj and ‘omra, alone or with their family. There are thousands of hotels and walking distance is the norm. These photos might be dated. But no problem really, generally we want to spend as much time as possible in the mosque.

The ease of returning to the hotel in between is worth it. There is also shopping every where with both small and larger size mall centers close to hotels as well as just in front of the grand mosque - **“King Abdul Aziz” gate**. We can explain more if you want, and will make some general suggestion about what to bring and what it might be better to purchase there, based again on the experience of hajj or ‘omra.

Some generally stay between two salah often, and read Qur'an, made du'a in between and that was all that mattered. The tremendously positive and magnetic energy force that emanates from the Kaaba is generally so strong and enjoyable that it is hard to stay away from it for long when you are there in Mecca.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.booking.com/hotel/sa/ajwad-ajwad.fr.html?aid=324800;label=makkah-IaKjFUFLeOz1lhiTHNgS6199615373;sid=846f274ef24c0c1b8db0f049ef295d3a;dcid=1;checkin=2012-06-04;checkout=2012-06-05;sfid=8ee09f5fede5a299e25697b5614c1414X49>



### ***What time are we arriving exactly in Saudi Arabia?***

If we arrive on Thursday morning the 6<sup>th</sup> of June at around 9 AM in the morning (once again flight tickets as to be confirmed all together, once we shall receive all the registrations, after the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2012 inch'Allah). If we arrive at 9 AM at the Jeddah airport, it means we shall not be in Mecca downtown before 12h (we have to take a taxi between Jeddah and Mecca, around 30 minutes). **We have to do our *tawaf* and *sa'iy* that first day** (which would take 2-3 hour and shall be explained in detail when the time is closer, before we leave home biithniAllah). But it is hot in June and actually better for us to delay this until after night fall when it is cooler. We can do this because technicality the requirement is that it must be performed the first time you visit the grand mosque.

If we arrive in the morning, that first day is better to check into hotel, shower and rest before heading to the mosque. We will keep ihram (the traditional white cloths for a 'omra). These are strenuous ritual activities and it is better to be prepared for them to get the full benefit and to safe guard that the experience is not physically over whelming. In other words, I do not recommend doing them in the mid day heat! The tawaf goes on constantly except for prayer times, so it better for people to rest up from the travel, and prepare consciously for the *tawaf* and the *sa'iy*. It will be an experience like no other!

### ***Are we obliged to assist five prayers and Jumu'a at the grand mosque?***

No one from this group will be forced to complete any activity we plan as a group, but the goal of such a trip is worship or *ibadah*. We will endeavor to bring our group into the best spiritual posture keeping in mind that people are individuals and need alone time as well as down time. All of this will be respected. As your guide, I will also be available to consult with any one on one should they experience any questions, confusions or revelations and wish to share in privately. During prayer time everything closes down and everybody shall be praying. If some one experiences any physical difficulty there are also separate accommodations, which we will share on a one on one basis. The grand mosque is also handicap accessible and wheel chairs are available for those needing it.

However, we do stress, that this is a ***spiritual retreat and cultural quest; not a vacation***. There is enough down time to explore on your own, shop, eat, rest, laugh and reflect.

The next day after our arrival is jumu'ah. To assure that we will be able to pray inside the grand mosque we will need to head to the mosque in late morning to find a cool spot which is also accessible to the *khoutbat* and *salah*. People will also pray in the court yard outside the mosque, but it is our only jumu'ah, how could we miss being *inside* the great mosque?

The grand mosque has three floors. The first floor has open view of the lower court yard with the Kaabah. Anyone who feels strong enough to sit in the lower court yard for the khotbah and salah is welcome and those who want a little less direct sun we will take up the third floor, in the area closest to the saiy which is also covered from the sun, but open to the rest of the mosque and a view of the kaabah. We will decide which location we think is best from our first tawaf and sa'iy the night before.



**What about gender restrictions at the grand mosque?**

There are some gender restrictions: Every one can walk for tawaf around the kaabah and pray on that lower court yard, except for women during menstruation. However, some times women are prevented from praying on the first floor where you can view the Kaabah. These rules changes from one year to another and is stricter during jumu'ah and hajj. **As a mixed group we will be able to do a lot of worship together** but we need to be sensitive to these restrictions to avoid undue conflict around the kaabah

It is also possible to perform *tawaf* from the second and third floor of the grand mosque which is a longer walk around but far less pushing and closeness. Again we must decide individually and as a group which we prefer. At some point, every one will likely be drawn by the magnetism of the kaabah so we must decide if for fard tawaf, or extra tawaf, or just for one of the prayers. We can talk about all this with the group as we get closer inch'Allah.

**What about the precise du'a, dhikr and prescriptions of a 'omra?**

We are preparing some readings and shall suggest places to research for *du'a* to recite, etc. We can always sit together for Qur'an reading. They are - Saudi Muslim authorities there - *not* too friendly with *dhikr* out loud, but we can sit for this silently. We will also create time for *halkah* - sharing and discussion times outside of the grand mosque.

**Why is Dr. Wadud accompanying us as guide?**

I have already performed the hajj and fulfilled my *fard* – mandatory pilgrimage. However, as it happened, I joined a random tour group from the US and no one in the group made any effort to collective and consciously share the experience. I was very disappointed in this, but so in love with Allah, the Prophet and so grateful for the opportunity to visit Mecca and Madinah, I still did my best. The same year, I joined the AIR conference and had a retreat with queer Muslims and their allies. Really the sisters and brothers there put more heart and soul into our worship together, I thought, **this is what community is all about.**

It is thus, my pleasure to combine a visit to the House of Allah with these servants of Allah and will commit myself to help us share this wonderful spiritual experience with the best that is in our hearts, taking away from it the greatest reminder: Allah does NOT look at your outer forms, even your sexuality. And in ihram, we symbolize what is the greatest truth from the notion of tawhid, that we all one: weak, humble servants, crying to our Lord, to forgive our sins, accept our worship, embrace us with His love and accept us into His gardens.

I wish to have this opportunity to share with people I have had the greatest spiritual companion ship with in the place that had the greatest spiritual energy: the two great cities of Islam. **I hope you will consider joining us for this effort**, I am certain it will be one you will always remember with love and devotion. In sha' Allah. "*La bayk Allahuma La bayk* - here I am O Lord, at your worship!"

---

And remember that the sooner you get back to us with the registration form filed; the better shall be the preparation of this blessed spiritual and cultural retreat biithniAllah.

*May Allah be beside each and every one of us - The Tawhid 'Omra inclusive group 2012*

*A special Thank you to Dr. Amina Wadud for her advices and experimented, practical wisdom in the field.*



## Preparation & Recommendation letters <sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Addressed by Amina Wadud, each week before departure during six week, to all the group members / published also on the facebook page dedicated to this event:  
<http://www.facebook.com/events/384603971574017/>





## First recommendation letter - 29<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Dear Sister and Brother Pilgrims,

As-Salaamu Alaykum wa Rahmatu-Lahi wa Barakatuhu

We are well into the preparatory steps for the logistics of our journey to Makkah and Madinah Munawwarah (the enlighten). Sometimes negotiating with the “officials” of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be tedious. It saved me a great deal of head ache, when I traveled for hajj two years ago, that traveling to the Kingdom is not the same as traveling to serve The King, Allah. Thus, there is an inner and an outer journey. Surely Allah has control over both! What frustrations we may face on the outer may well help us to embrace fully the merits of the inner.

Over the next few weeks, I will write a weekly note. It will include some recommendations about those outer logistics but mostly to help us THINK through the purpose of this journey and what we might face in making the most of our time there.

I write with the assumption that this is the first time for many of you. Anyone who has already been there please, make additional recommendations so that we can, altogether have the most beneficial journey. Then, together we can focus on that inner journey. In sha’ Allah.

Why Go to Makkah and Madinah?

Allah is everywhere, at all times and for all persons. Do NOT make the mistake of thinking you will go to these two cities to find God. However, the inner world is aligned with the outer world. From the time of the Prophet Muhammad, (SAW) more than one thousand four hundred years ago, Muslims have turned their hearts and bodies to face the kaabah in prayer and prostration. Since prayer times are dispersed through-out the day across the globe, this really means that for every minute of every day, some one is facing the kaabah in remembrance of Allah.

Few Muslims enter into the court yard in Mekkah, with the simple and rustic cube shaped structure, without being overcome with the sheer energy of this collective remembrance. So, we go to be reminded. To bring all of our struggles and our successes in encountering Allah in our daily lives and in special occasions to this spot. We go to shed all pretenses that matters of the outer world are more important than matters of the heart. We go to bear our hearts to this ultimate truth for ourselves and hopefully for all of our life that is to come afterwards. We hope to bring back something from this raw encounter to our lives once we live the sacred territories.

There are two major rituals we must perform when we are in Makkah. Tawaf: circumambulate the kaabah 7 times, counter clock wise, upon our first entrance into Masjid al-haram and before we leave the city; followed then by sa’iy: walking/running seven times between the two foothills Safa and Marwa. Both of these can be physically challenging, so I will be making some recommendations. It would spoil the whole thing if we are careless about the physical part of it, in our enthusiasm for the spiritual part of it.

My first recommendations are regarding pre-umrah preparations. This journey will center on the performance of salah. There are some historical sites we will probably visit, as well, but mostly our early morning, day and evening will be taking advantage of the opportunity to pray where the



Prophet prayed. There are special barakat to having this opportunity and I will describe these but it helps if we reconnect with our own prayer and bring that with us. Think of it like an athlete who gets ready for the Olympics by getting into shape. If some of us have become a little lax in keeping up our practices, we might want to bring them back into focus.

In addition, the distance between the hills of Safa and Marwa when completed 7 times, is the equivalent of almost 4 kilometers. If any of us is just a little out of shape, it might help to begin walking on a regular basis, so that, again, the outward aspect of the ritual does not prevent us from seeing clearly the inward aspect of the ritual.

Some people prefer to do the tawaf on the second and third floor of the mosque because it is less crowded. We will discuss the merits of tawaf close to the kaabah and tawaf like this a little later. At this juncture I only wish to suggest that we need to get both our spiritual life and our physical life in order BEFORE we leave our homes. There is no better time than the present to get started.

For those who have been completely lax with performing salah, a simple formula: start by choosing one salah that you will not miss, every day. You can add any of the 5 other obligatory salah as opportunity provides but at least look at this as a practice such that you will never miss at least this one salah, over the next week. Then each week add one more to your schedule that you never miss. Our combination-life style sacred and profane sometimes allows us to justify missing or postponing salah. In preparation for the maximum experience at Makkah and Madinah we want to move beyond excuses, real or contrived.

It is easiest for most people to make this one salah, the night prayer, 'isha. Every night before you go to sleep, make your ablutions, or wudu and perform your salah. Working up to performing those day-time salah, especially during the busy work day does have some additional challenges of place and time when we live amongst others who are not Muslim, so I recommend one of the "at-home" prayer times to begin to put your house in order.

Before I check in next week, any who wishes to discuss their progress feel free to send me a note (sorry it must be in English at awadud@vcu.edu). What challenges did you encounter and what was it like to be successful?

As I write, I will also include more details about the lay of the land in Madinah and Makkah, and more mundane things like laundry service, purchasing food and gifts, as well as information about the two mosques, about mosque protocol and some other technical advice on how to have the most moving experience. For example, we will have one Friday in Makkah. Unlike the other 5 daily salah, we will want to find the best place to sit to listen to the khutbah away from the extreme heat at the middle of the day. A little planning ahead will make a big difference!

I look forward to our journey together and to making these weekly updates. If you have particular questions please either send them to me directly or send them through Lotfi (who can translate those in French or Arabic for me if I need him to - [islam.inclusive.2012@gmail.com](mailto:islam.inclusive.2012@gmail.com)).

Your sister before Allah, Amina Wadud



## Second recommendation letter - 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012

Tawhid Umrah group, As-Salaamu alaykum

Our umrah will begin at Madinah. I came to Madinah after Makkah and much prefer this option. For one thing there are required rituals at Makkah and when they are done, it is better to also be done with the visit to Saudi Arabia. I loved Madinah in many ways and there is much more to see as far as historical sites, but I put my heart into the first part of my hajj trip and then was more heart-spent by the time I had still more than a week to go. Three days is just perfect.

Some information about the lay out: The hotels are a better quality with bigger rooms, and much more accessible to the mosque for the same price than in Makkah. In both cities we are staying close enough to walk for each of the five daily prayers. At hajj season it is not uncommon for people to walk a few kilometers to get to the mosque. Indeed, others stay so far away then just camp out in the Haram and only return to their hotel accommodations at night. (see photo below of sleeping hajjis in Haram) It is much more preferable to have the flexibility to move in and out of the mosque.

The layout of the city of Madinah is more serene, cleaner broader avenues. The mosque is pretty much all on one floor (unlike the Haram that has three floors). So it is spread out, giving the hotels more ways to make access. Here you will see signs that strictly separate the women from the men. We will never be able to pray all together as a group in Madinah.

There are distinct entries into the women's section and strict times for the women to visit the grave of the Prophet (alayhi salaam). The two women's sections are cordoned off with guards set up to prevent men from entering, including men who try to assist say an aunt or mother in a wheel chair. The men have doors that lead directly into the grave site. If we are lucky we will first enter at a prescribed prayer time, join the jama'ah and then the men can pass by and give salaams to the Prophet, Abu Bakr and Umar (whose grave sites flank the Prophets). All of this is behind an ornate screen so that is all you will see.

However, the prophet said, "Whoever prays two rak'at on my rawdah it will be as if he/she prayed a thousand salah". The mosque is covered with red carpet except at the rawdah where the carpet is green, so there will be no mistaking it. The rawdah is at the space of the original mosque erected by the Prophet himself. A remainder: the mosque has been expanded in stages through-out Muslim history. The minaret bases are more ornate in the rawdah area and there is the mimbar (stairs used by the khatib, or imam giving khutbah) and the mihrab (niche showing the direction of prayer). This whole area is more ornate and distinct in color from the remainder of the mosque— which is itself quite beautiful.

You will be allowed to make two raka'at here and then to proceed past the grave site. Do not raise your hands in du'a the Saudis will push you. Do not linger too longer, the guards will push you. If you know this before hand, you can maximize your inner experience and minimize the affront due to the outer experience. Where ever you pray two raka't make your du'a while kneeling. It is less likely that someone will push you here, unless it is crowded and then you have to make do because everyone is here for the same experience as you are so tend to get pushy. Be patient. Remember we



do not pray TO the prophet, but we can ask for him to intercede on our behalf. We pray FOR the prophet and TO Allah.

If you walk past, you can raise your right hand and say As-Salaam Alaykum to the Prophet. Perhaps you will hear him respond to you. Listen with your heart not your ears. Stay for as long as they will let you and in fairness to others waiting to proceed and then pass on. There is a sign out front forbidding cameras and smart phones but people bring them in all the time. Use your judgment; you have been alerted to the possibility. In any case, be discreet about photos. Here and elsewhere.

There are special times when the grave site is NOT accessible to the men and these are times made exclusively available for women. After fajr, after 'asr and after 'isha prayer were the designated times when I was at hajj and if I remember correctly at least the after fajr time is regular through-out the year. Then the female guards will walk the women through in groups. The groups are also given a lecture (although the content will vary depending upon the language and is NOT really about history [of the mosque] or even sirah (biography of the Prophet) as I was expecting. It was more about etiquette. Thus we walked and then were seated in increments through a curtained off walkway to the part of the mosque that is open to the sky (although it has moveable domes that slide over when it is the greatest heat of the day), seated again. Then when we were seated outside the rawdah there was more talk until it cleared and they allowed us to proceed in groups of hundreds. The space they gave us then at best could hold 75 people so it was always crowded beyond capacity. Again, pushing and stepping over people were the norm.

I am hoping at this off season they will be allowing women to past by and give salaams to the Prophet. I have made hajj but have not been allowed to do this.

Outside the mosque is a very large court yard with white cooling marble tiles. I was there in November and they were actually too cool. But for the month of June they should be just right. Amazing what we can build. There are huge automatic umbrellas that opened and shut during that season but I suspect they will be open all day against the sun and heat and only shut at night.

More about Madinah and the Prophet's mosque in the next post. For now I hope you are making your ritual preparations. Remember to make du'a for the safety and success of our journey.

I wanted to give you a word about proceeding with regulating the salah, when working, going to school and busy with your day outside your home. It is preferable to lay out your prayer rug and face Makkah when the time comes. However, out of respect for our minority status this should be done discreetly. If you have an office, or can find an empty classroom, it would take only 3-4 minutes. If you cannot find a private space, find a seat alone and do not make the full prostrations. People do this on airplanes in airports, on buses in bus stations or trains. Allah is the Lord of the east and west so can accept your prayer even in this modified formula. The important thing is to teach yourself discipline in your remembrance.

Your sister in Islam Amina wadud



## Third recommendation letter - 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012

Dear fellow Pilgrims As-Salaamu Alaykum,

It is with a heavy heart that I have learned I will not get my wish fulfilled. I had hoped without the throngs of hajj I might be permitted to walk close to the grave site of our beloved Prophet (saw) and say my greetings. I was denied this on my previous visit but now I have learned from a Saudi friend that this is standard all year long: women cannot visit this section of the mosque in Madinah. We will be allowed to pray 2 rak'at on the rawdah at select times each day, but will not be permitted to enter the part that passed in front of his grave.

Let me turn instead to some logistical matters in the city of Madinah and the mosque itself. When the Prophet (saw) was invited to begin the new community of Islam he continued with revelations from Allah for another 10years. During that time, he fought four battles. We can visit the places of these battles, especially Uhud, where the martyrs were buried after the battle was over. So at Uhud there is a major burial ground. There is also a burial ground just beside the main mosque, which can be seen through-out the day through a fenced enclosure. Women are also not allowed to enter this grave site, but we can see it through the fence. At select times men can enter the enclosure. Aishah and several other wives of the Prophet are buried here. Imam Ali is buried here as well. These graves are not marked, so unless there is a guide who knows this history one grave is indistinguishable from another.

We should probably also visit the mosque with two qiblahs (markers for the direction of prayer). Muslims used to pray towards Jerusalem. But by command from Allah the direction of prayer was changed to the direction towards the kaabah in Makkah. When the Companions learned of this, they changed their direction in mid-prayer. Women will enter to a balcony over the main prayer hall and we cannot see below us. But all may enter and pray 2 raka't.

In all these things we can experience walking where the Prophet has walked in his struggles to establish Islam so that even we—more than 14 centuries later—may know the love and light of Allah. Off the path of these particular historical and spiritual memories, the city of Madinah is thoroughly modern with businesses, public transportation and of course the hotels, near the mosque that allow us the comfort of visiting the mosque for prayer. If we linger in the mosque before or after prayer there are copies of the Qur'an on stands set up throughout the mosque. There are also containers with Zam-Zam water, so we can have a drink if we need it. No need to bring cups or water of our own.

If you wish to read translations of the Qur'an you will need to bring your own because these are not provided. In addition, we should sit in contemplation (muraqabah) of the blessings and challenges of fulfilling our own Islam at this time and in the presence of this sacred historical place. As I said, this mosque was expanded throughout Muslim empire and you will notice some of these developments if you take a careful look when you are in the mosque. These days there are even underground parking structures, which coincidentally are also divided by gender. By that I mean, there are some parking for only men and there are some for families. There are few mosques throughout





the rest of Saudi Arabia where women are permitted, so while these measures are somewhat archaic, they also allow for privileges not available to women elsewhere.

Some might wonder why there are even mosques in the general vicinity of the main mosque. Everything stops for salah. Stores do not continue to run their business, but rather shop keepers will close the doors, pull down the guarding rails and join the salah. When the distance is such that return to these businesses is not so convenient then they will also attend to mosques closer to their businesses. As for these businesses, everything you can need or imagine will be available in these shops. I will make a few recommendations here.

It is good to wear some water proof slippers into and out of the mosques, here and in Makkah. They are for sale as cheap as 1 Euro at the shops. That way if you are enjoying some time at the mosque and need to perform wudu, these are the best shoes. You do not want to enter the mosques having more expensive shoes to place on the racks because, yes, these might be taken by others. I do not know if they are just out right stealing or confusing them; so having something you do not mind losing is probably best. In fact, as many slippers look alike you might choose to carry yours in a plastic bag into the mosque with you.

Of course we need to find places to eat our meals and there are endless varieties of foods available and very cheap. No one will have to worry on this account. My hotel before happened to be one half block from the mosque entry that was flanked by gold and essential oil shops and a Starbucks! Many people buy gold when in the two main sacred cities because the quality is good. All shop keepers will have someone who will speak your language, so business can be conducted even if you do not know Arabic. In fact, most shop keepers are not Arab. Even if the shops are owned by Saudis they do not manage the shops but have workers from other parts of the Muslim world.

As some of you know the Prophet (saw) loved essential scented oils and some of the best is available in these two cities. These also make great gifts for those who could not join us. There are endless shops with trinkets of all price ranges. I think I bought a dozen dhikr beads when I was there. New prayer rugs, and books related to the sacred sites the sirah of the prophet and many other topics are available. They also sell clothing items, some of which I would like to recommend. Almost all are made somewhere other than in Arabia, including China but still you get to say you bought it on umrah. Men's jalabiyah, both the peasant ones and the white one popular in the Gulf region are cool and comfortable, making it a good choice in between wearing your western clothes which will be made of heavier fabric and thus not as cool. I bought two abayahs, women's all black dress, because all I needed underneath was a short sleeve shirt and loose pants and I could keep cool yet completely covered., Women must cover their hair in both cities and in addition to what I brought with me there were all sorts of styles available. Likewise headwear for the men is for sale though not required in the mosque or elsewhere.

One thing made in Saudi is a plethora of dates and nuts. If we visit the date market, there are many options of quality (and color) as well as dates stuffed with almonds to enjoy. These make nutritious snacks and in addition to fresh fruit (also not from Saudi) we can store a few in our rooms,



as there is usually a small refrigerator in the rooms. Bottled water is available in the shops near the hotels and we might want to buy a larger container from which we refill smaller bottles as we go outside of the mosque itself for the tours and optional sightseeing. In preparation for the umrah to Makkah if you have not purchased your ihram you can find those here as well. Two un-sewn white cloths about the size of a large beach towel s make up the ihram. I will discuss these in detail later, as they are required. Women can wear anything they wish, but I prefer to wear white, at least for the rituals. Then I return to my own regular clothing or the abayah for convenience.

We might want to purchase an umbrella, as they sell cheap ones near the mosques and it will help with the heat when we venture to see the battle grounds, the date market the mosque with two qiblahs, etc. The less we bring in our bags, the less trouble we have getting those bags on and off for the journey. However, my roommate bought so much stuff when we were at hajj, she had to abandon some things to the hotel workers in order to get her bags closed! So if you do expect to make any purchases think about leaving space for this in your suitcases. In a pinch, yes, you can purchase an additional bag as well. They do sell everything so do not anticipate that somehow you have returned to the Stone Age!

I hope you are continuing with your spiritual practices and polishing up your ritual requirements. You might wish to fast a few days in preparation. Remember I said it is like preparing for an Olympic event. There is both inward and outward preparations necessary. The Prophet used to fast on Mondays and Thursdays and if you like we can all choose a day to fast and observe it together even though we are in different parts of the world, it helps to know that we are preparing TOGETHER. I myself have begun taking long walks to make sure I am ready for completion of the sa'iy which as I said, is a little less than 4 kilometers. I do almost everything in my car, so at my age, I might be a little out of shape, and wish to perform all these rites on my own two feet, in sha' Allah. As you are all considerably younger than I am, I will probably be completing these alone, except the tawaf. But we will talk about Makkah in the next few letters and updates. If you have any further questions what to expect in Madinah please feel free to contact me.

Your sister/aunt Amina Wadud



## Fourth recommendation letter - 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012

### Traveling to Makkah

Dear Brothers and Sisters. Happy month of Rajab! This is the month for our journey to the two most sacred cities in Islamic history and ritual. After our three spiritually rich days in Madinah, we will board a bus to travel to Makkah. The streets in Madinah and the hotel will seem really spacious compared to what we will encounter in Makkah. However, there is vibrancy near the Kaabah that is not found anywhere so we will not mind the conditions at all. Once again, though I am reminded how hot it will be at this time for our journey. Although both the Prophet's mosque and the Haram Mosque are air conditioned, we will see that the lay-out of the Haram mosque will prevent us from enjoying this for all aspects of the rituals in Makkah. I will explain more when we are there and in the next several notes to you.

To go to Makkah for umrah we need to prepare. In this case, both the spiritual focus I am hoping you have been reminded of in my notes and the physical ritual preparations must be more precise. In particular to enter Makkah we have to assume the status of ihram. For the men, this will include dressing in two unsewn clothes. If you have not found any before your journey you can purchase these in Madinah. You can also purchase a money pack, to hold your important documents and actual money. Men become dependent on having pockets in their trousers and for a short time this convenience will need to be forfeit. Other than your own under garments [some people say it is allowed], there is nothing more you are permitted to wear.

There are several designated meeqat before entering Makkah. You must pass one of these to enter into irham fully. For example, if you travel to Makkah first you will arrive at the airport in Jeddah which is inside one meeqat. Technically, you would have to travel outward before entering Makkah. That is one reason that traveling to Madinah first, even for hajj is actually preferable. Otherwise you would have to enter Saudi Arabia in the state of ihram. The way our trip is organized you can enter Saudi Arabia without ihram and then don it before departing from Madinah. We will pass the meeqat on our way from Madinah.

You will need to take a full ritual bath or ghusl. Before the bath you might need to clip your finger nails and your other body hairs as the cutting of either of these is NOT permitted in the state of ihram. You may NOT use soaps or deodorants that have any scent or perfume in them. If you prefer you can buy unscented soap, creams, deodorants, shampoo, or other cosmetics from one of the on-line companies that cater to Muslim pilgrims or again, you will find these in Madinah.

Remember ihram is both an inward and an outward state: a bit like the fetus before it is born. All of your attention should be focused on entering Makkah performing the rituals, which I will describe in more detail (next time) and then clipping your hair or shaving it, removing your ihram garments and then being "new born". Afterwards, you will be able to visit the sacred mosque with more leisure.



It is recommended to take up ihram around the time of one of the main salah. So, for example, if we pray our zhuhr prayer at the Madinah mosque, then, we pray two rak'at to say good bye to that mosque, we must then go and take our shower or ghusul WITH FULL INTENTION of entering ihram. After the shower we make two raka't and make du'a asking Allah to accept our umrah and to have mercy on us. After that all activities must be done in a somber and devoted state NOT to disrupt our ihram until we have completed the umrah. That will include completing the packing of our luggage loading it on the buses, checking out of the hotel and boarding the bus. Along our route, the bus may become hot or cold, depending on the air-condition system. Be prepared because you are dressed for umrah. You may use a shawl to cover you if it gets too cold, but your dress will not change.

The natural terrain crossing the desert into Makkah is really bleak. Rocky and vast sands, with mountain ranges in the distance, along the way. It is a few hours journey; we may need to stop for food, water, to use the toilets or to pray 'asr along the way. I found myself much closer to the Prophet as we traveled during hajj because I was in an air-conditioned bus with comfortable seats while he was out in the elements on a camel. We may see a few camels along the side of the road, as well as a few monkeys.

Otherwise, there is very little else to see beyond rocks and sand. There are few developments along this route and a few rest stops with a mosque, toilets and café. Bring your own toilet paper and maybe a hand towel as these are not provided at the rest stops. It is worthwhile to make dhikr, out loud together and silently alone. Otherwise, it is worth it to rest up and sleep—for our night will be full of the prescribed ritual after we settle in to the hotel in Makkah.

The requirement for completing umrah is to perform the tawaf around the kaabah, pray two raka'ts at miqam-Ibrahim, make du'a LIKE YOUR LIFE DEPENDED upon it once the tawaf is done, then walk sa'iy commemorating our Mother Hajar. (again details will follow) This time I emphasize the logistics.

Once we arrive in Makkah we must check in, carry our luggage to our rooms and all of this we do while keeping the state of ihram. This means patience and LOVE. No loud voices, no unpure thoughts. Once we are checked in, put our bags in the room, depending on the time, we still need to rest up, perhaps to eat dinner and even take another shower before heading to the mosque. We may NOT enter the mosque unless we are ready to perform the umrah. That is we may not enter for a salah and then exit. This will break your ihram. Once you enter, be prepared to perform the umrah.

As I said, this is physically strenuous. It is better that we do not approach the mosque then until isha' prayer. If maghrib comes in, we can perform it in our rooms, although the space is pretty small. Then we can perform the tawaf and sa'iy in the cooler part of the night. However, no matter when it is we actually approach the mosque, we are in the state of ihram from the time we shower in Madinah until we complete the rituals. Thus, we must be on our best behavior and with our utmost focused concentration on Allah in the footsteps of our Prophet (saw).

The state of ihram is like a spiritual nakedness and at the same time the most subtle concealment. Making the garments (for men) exactly the same erases everything in the material



world that might separate us: race, class, nationality, sexuality. In a way, we become NOTHING but servants of Allah. To do this, we must also erase from our minds those things we ordinarily attach to our ego.

Although there is no prescribed garment for women, I will be wearing white. However, white is not a requirement. It is only required that you determine what you will wear as your ihram if a woman, then, take your ritual bath, washing your hair and then make your niyyah or intention du'a before and after praying two raka't.

Upon entering the mosque at Makkah, and even when you see it between the building, it is no doubt that your heart will swell, so be prepared to open to the beauty of this sacred encounter. Please note unless you are in one of the high rise hotels you will NOT see the Kaabah itself until you enter the mosque. The kaabah is located in the lower most point in a valley. The hills surrounding it are now dotted with hotels. The mosque itself was built around the kaabah so there is no way to view the actual kaabah until you approach it for the rituals. Next time I will give details about these rituals.

Salaam Amina







## Travel blog - full texts <sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.calem.eu/Tawheed-Umrah\\_islamic-pilgrimage-Mecca-Madinah-June2012-Radjab1433\\_with-Amina-Wadud-&-inclusive-progressive-secular-Muslims.html](http://www.calem.eu/Tawheed-Umrah_islamic-pilgrimage-Mecca-Madinah-June2012-Radjab1433_with-Amina-Wadud-&-inclusive-progressive-secular-Muslims.html)



*We were several individual who wanted to live together a spiritual retreat and a cultural quest, at the roots of our Islamic faith, in company of inclusive Muslim brothers and sisters. The aim of this trip was to offer participants a unique experience, filling them of positive energy, at the source of the Islamic culture.*

*Our inclusive group of "Umrah of Tawheed 2012" was made up of Muslims from Europe, North Africa and North America; inclusive, progressive, reformist Muslims, supporting an appeased, egalitarian and gender-neutral representation of Islam. We were accompanied in this quest, alhamdulillah, by a great woman of contemporary Islam: Dr. Amina Wadud - who is an Imam, a theologian and a Hadja -, that throughout this journey embodied with us the peaceful share of the Islamic spiritual quest. Such was the history of our inclusive pilgrimage to the sources of Islamic Liberation...*

---

***We hope that this token of our spiritual quest to the sources of Islamic Liberation, shall inspire those who fear to do their pilgrimage, not to be reluctant anymore to accomplish this path toward Allah.***

We are Thursday, June 7, 2012; it is the eighteenth day of the lunar month of peace: *Radjab*, year 1433. Amina Wadud arrived this morning in Paris, from San Francisco. She will spend the night with us, so we could all leave together from Paris to Medina, Saudi Arabia. After a short nap to recover from jetlag between North America and Europe, Amina and the rest of our group met with some of our Friends and our loved ones for share a traditional dinner and to celebrate our imminent departure for the Holy Land. Farida prepared some North African dishes. The atmosphere is full swing; we spend the evening discussing about this and that. After evening prayers done together, our friends eventually return home. We fall asleep bearing in mind the unique night that separates us now from our meeting with the *Ka'aba*: this historical relic, the square, dark room, which symbolizes all that is most sacred in the hopes and ideals of our humanity.

The next morning, after the dawn prayer and a light breakfast, our group sat around Amina Wadud to pray together on the doorstep. Then we go by train to Charles De Gaulle airport, which is located nearby. A few hours later, we take our mid day flight with the Jordanian towards Amman. The flight went smoothly; we fly over Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean sea, then Palestine and the Jordanian desert. We finally fly over the Dead Sea, before landing at Amman airport. After the usual identity security checks for all passengers in transit - travelers of North African nationalities do not pay any visitor's visa fee - we are out-licensed to visit the capital. We pray in the airport mosque before sunset and then we take the 8am o'clock bus to the city center. There, some of us who already know the place, advise us a restaurant among the best in town: *Al-Quds* ("Palestine"). We eat delicious traditional dishes, such as some *mansaf*: a dish consisting of yellow rice coating of butter, beef and curd milk... Are there any takers? We taste some *oriental* pastries, before settling at an outdoor cafe overlooking the city center, smoking a *shisha* while listening to an orchestra of Arab music. After a few hours of well deserved relaxation, to forget about the months of stress preparing for this inclusive pilgrimage and to get discreetly our visas without problems with the Saudi authorities - remember that Saudi Arabia is still one of the seven Muslim countries in the world that condemns homosexuality of the death penalty -, we return to the airport where our planes takes off at 2am.





[All photos before departure, please click here](#)<sup>13</sup>

After a two hour flight, we arrive at the airport of *Medina* exhausted as well as tremendously excited by the discoveries that are waiting for us. Moreover, although some of us have already done one or even several pilgrimages - some are accomplishing here their fifth pilgrimage -, it is the first time we participate in such an adventure among a group as diverse and motivated. On our descent from the aircraft, after performing the dawn prayer, a minibus that was booked by our agency in Paris leads us to our downtown hotel. The establishment *Ishraq Al Madinah* is located a few hundred meters from one of the main gates of the *Haram al-Madani* - a term that refers simultaneously to the *sin* and the *sanctuary*. The *Haram* in Medina, the Holy Mosque, encompasses the tomb of our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, built on the site of his former residence and one of the first mosque of Islam. At the hotel we find spacious rooms with all comforts to spend four days dedicated to worship and meditation. After a nap that lasted until shortly before midday praying, we take a shower, put on our white robes of pilgrims and all together we leave for the *Haram*. We go through the majestic doors of the grand Mosque, under a scorching heat, and discover a sparsely decorated interior, worthy of the finest monuments in the world: the pillars are adorned with gold, ceilings are ornamented with stucco, walls are covered with marble... A most delicate debauchery of luxury that is criticized by many Muslims who come to visit these holy places by abnegation, to meditate at the sources of the Islamic liturgical tradition. We have to say that the air conditioning of all the holy places is a luxury that would be hard to dispense with in the desert of Saudi Arabia. After *zuhr* prayers, we go in the closest mall in front of the Mosque to share a lunch. Again, we appreciate the local cuisine, usually made of meat and varied salads. Then some decide to return to the Mosque to pray, others return to the hotel to freshen up, while others decide to finally start now to do their shopping: Medina is known for centuries for its flourishing trade, importing from the four corners of the world's most valuable Islamic fabrics and more expensive jewelry.



[All pictures of outside the main Madinah Haram mosque, please click here](#)<sup>14</sup>

In the late afternoon, since the visit to the tomb of the Prophet ﷺ is governed by rules of strict segregation of the sexes, the men in our group decided to take this afternoon to pay tribute to our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the more faithful companions, Abu Bakr and 'Umar Allah be pleased with them, buried in these drawings:

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/69784551@N04/sets/72157630977188106/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/69784551@N04/sets/72157630979613622/>



اللهم صل على محمد وعلى آل محمد كما صليت على ابراهيم وعلى آل ابراهيم وبارك على محمد وآل محمد كما باركت على ابراهيم وعلى آل ابراهيم في العالمين انك حميد مجيد

*"O Allah, Confer blessing upon Muhammad and the Folk of Muhammad, as You conferred blessing upon Abraham and the Folk of Abraham. O Allah, confer bounty upon Muhammad and the Folk of Muhammad, as You conferred blessing upon Abraham and the Folk of Abraham. Lo! You are Praiseworthy, Glorious!"*

28



[All pictures of Madinah main Haram mosque, please click here](#)<sup>15</sup>

Between evening prayer, *al-Maghrib*, and that of the night, *al-'isha*, most of us spend their free time at the *Haram*, usually to read verses from the Qur'an. Some of our group helps those who have the biggest difficulties to decipher Arabic. These are special moments, unforgettable, a brotherhood and an unparalleled devotion. After a frugal meal, we return to the hotel to sleep: drunken with sleep after so many efforts. The next morning at around 4am, we go back to the Mosque. It's amazing to see we are thousands to converge towards the *Haram*, in this early hour, to prostrate ourselves at the same time before the Lord our God, at the rhythm of *allahu akbar* chanted by the crowd of believers in communion. We spend three days and four nights in Medina, where daily life is punctuated by prayers, meals together, meditation, and for some a bit of shopping. Before leaving the Holy City of the Prophet ﷺ, we also visit the market with dates and the "mosque of two qibla" - direction to which we pray - : *Masjid al-Qiblatain*. Indeed, the first qibla was not towards Mecca but *al-Quds* - Jerusalem; the direction in which Bilal the African - may Allah be satisfied of him -, Prophet's companion and the first muezzin of the Islamic history, called on Muslims to prayer. Then, after more than ten years of prayer turned to Al-Quds, Allah - the Exalted - ordered in the second year of the *Hegira*, to change direction to the one we know today, Mecca:

فَدَرَى نَقْلَبَ وَجْهَكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُؤَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِعَافٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ

*"Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind. and that the messenger may be a witness against you. And We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed only that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels. In truth it was a hard (test) save for those whom Allah guided. But it was not Allah's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allah is full of pity, Merciful toward mankind."* (Qur'an: 2.144).

On Monday, June 11 of 2012, it is the last time we pray at the *Haram* of Medina, before returning to the hotel to take our clothes of pilgrims to accomplish, in Mecca, specific acts which are the heart of the of the 'Umrah pilgrimage rites. Men of our group coat the two traditional white sails:

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/69784551@N04/sets/72157630978548316/>

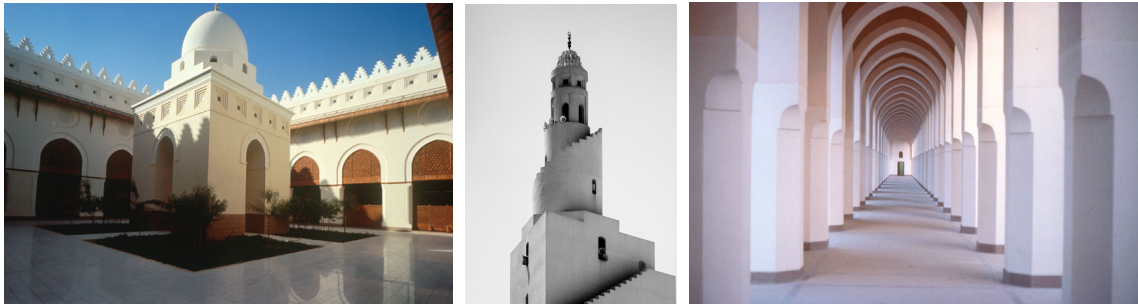




*al-Rida* and *al-izar*, with nothing else to wear but a belt and sandals, to symbolize the deprivation of human existence in this face of the majesty of Allah; and women in our group dress all in white. Earlier this afternoon, we drive towards Mecca under a heat of about fifty degrees Celsius in the shade, surrounded by a moonscape made of dust and rocks. Our minibus takes us first of all, on our way to the holiest cities of Islam, to the *Abyar 'Ali* - "Ali wells" - mosque at *Dhul Hulayfa*; which is the *miqat* - the starting point of the pilgrimage to Mecca, strictly speaking - for those who come from Medina; on the way we start praying like it is advised to do so on the way to Mecca:

لبيك اللهم لبيك لبيك لا شريك لك لبيك ان الحمد والنعمة لك والملك لا شريك لك

*"I obey Thee, O Lord, I obey; You have no associate, I surely obey Thee, praise and well come from You, and sovereignty is Thine, You did not partner."*



*Abyar 'Ali mosque (miqat Dhul Hulayfa - [click here for a 3D video tour of the mosque](http://www.3dmekanlar.com/en/dhul-hulayfah-masjid.html))*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.3dmekanlar.com/en/dhul-hulayfah-masjid.html>



After a short prayer of two *rak'at* - prostrations - in this beautiful mosque, we take again the road to Mecca, where we arrived shortly after sunset. In this crowded city because of the pilgrims, especially during the Hajj pilgrimage that we will not make this year, the *Al-Mohadjireen* hotel is located farther from the *Haram al-Meqi*: the holiest mosques of Islam. We also find that the rooms are cramped and less clean. But we do not linger: after a quick shower, our group left for the *Haram* to respond to the call to prayer. O Lord, we will soon respond to your universal call:

وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ

“And proclaim unto mankind the Pilgrimage. They will come unto thee on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine.” (Qur’an: 22.27).

On the road, we must bypass many streets sentenced for work; due to the huge influx of pilgrims in recent decades, Mecca is indeed a work in progress: the entire historic districts are unfortunately razed to build new grandest hotels. Once you're finally on the main square facing the *Haram*, we feel an atmosphere which incredibly borrowed of meditation, despite the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims; we enter the holy of holy through the closest monumental gate to our hotel.



[All pictures of Mecca main Haram mosque, please click here](#)<sup>17</sup>

We walk along the aisles of the mosque, before seeing at the end of the path the central courtyard where the Kaaba is; we do not yet see it clearly from here. Our hearts are accelerating; the emotion is palpable in our group. We finally see the House of God! We are moving in the central square, by following each other in single file and being careful not to get lost amidst this sea of people performing, at the same time that we, the seven ritual convolutions - *tawaf* - around of the Kaaba. To each of our tours, we salute with our right hand the Black Stone: This meteorite which felt from the sky and was millennia ago, they say, the symbol of the gift of Allah to the Arab tribes. During the *tawaf* around the Kaaba, we feel the strong magnetism of this historic relic, now completely empty, stripped of ancestral superstitions. Once indeed, the Kaaba was used to store more than three hundred statues of the Arabic pantheon gods. Today the intentions of Muslims are, in principle, purified, as in the testimony given by every Muslim, *la ilaha illa Allah* - "there is no God... but Allah"! It is this void that allows a physical yet full of spiritual sacrifice; the sacrifice of giving up a part of our human superstition, for the love of God.

Once our convolutions completed, we pray briefly behind the monument dedicated to a prophet, father of all the Semitic traditions: *Ibrahim*, which would have left his footprints in the clay

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/69784551@N04/sets/72157630986430618/>



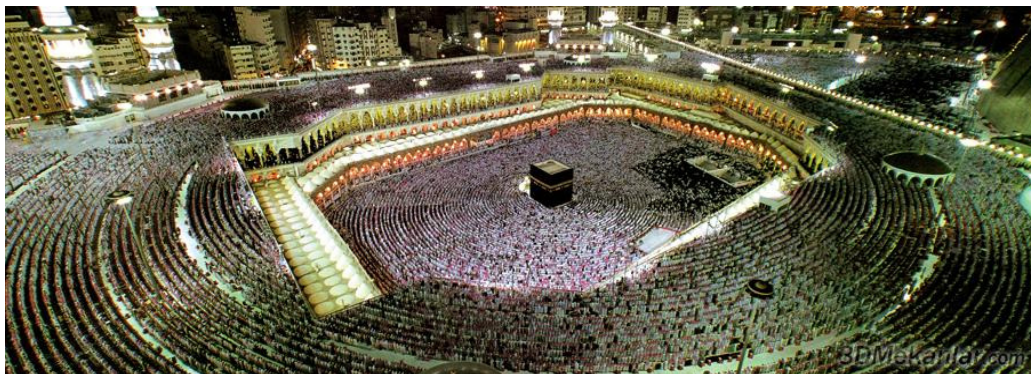
when he built the Kaaba with his son Ishmael. Then we run between the famous two hills, now integral parts of the holy places: the hillocks of Safa and Marwa, or what's left of them. We run just like Ishmael's mother did in hopes of finding help from a caravanserai which would have gone off. The slave who wanted to save her son from the horrors of the desert, after his lover and master Abraham abandoned them, obedient to the will of Sarah his wife, not to leave a half-brother to his legitimate son, Isaac. We drink water from the well of Zamzam: the miraculous spring, the *Lourdes* of Muslims. It appeared according to the tradition after the archangel Gabriel hit the sand with his heel to provide to the slave and her son what quench their thirst. Water supposed to cure all diseases. Our pilgrimage is now done in the tradition of the Prophet ﷺ. Bloodless, we return to the hotel to refresh ourselves. Before enjoying a few hours of sleep in the morning, we return to the *Haram*, in time for the dawn prayer as we are advised by the Qur'an:

فَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا وَمِنْ آنَاءِ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضَىٰ

*“Therefor (O Muhammad), bear with what they say, and celebrate the praises of thy Lord ere the rising of the sun and ere the going down thereof. And glorify Him some hours of the night and at the two ends of the day, that thou mayst find acceptance.” (Qur’an: 20.130).*



[All pictures of the Kaaba, please click here](#)<sup>18</sup>



['Kaaba & Mecca Haram mosque \(click here for the 3D tour\)](#)<sup>19</sup>

In general, our days are punctuated in Mecca, as in Medina, by prayer, meals and shopping. Some of us are like the Peripatetic philosophers of ancient times, walking in the teeming streets of the holy city - *Umm al-Qura*, "the mother of all cities" - between the *Haram* and our hotel, while discussing metaphysical and Islamic exegesis. Some are talking about verses of the Qur'an regarding

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/69784551@N04/sets/72157630985392682/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.3dmekanlar.com/en/masjid-al-haram--kaaba.html>





the status of women in Islam, they heard several times during their prayer led by the imam, or passing a shop selling audio CDs of the Qur'an: "Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made men the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women)..." (Qur'an: 4.34). That is not a coincidence that we heard this verse repeatedly during our 'Umrah of Tawheed, as this is a verse that is often used to demean wrongly women to an inferior status and sometimes to lead some dogmatic Muslims to justify physical violence against women, while other interpretations are possible. We also speak of this term often used in the Qur'an, *Amina* has crossed several times at random from these readings from the Qur'an during our 'Umrah. Namely the term *fahisha* - فحش - which appears six times in the Qur'an; this term can be translated as "abomination" or "serious transgression of social rules" but is invariably translated by the dogmatic Muslims by "homosexuality" or "sodomy", when it comes to describing the extent of all rapes, robberies, and crimes of piracy committed by the people of Lut. Again, we all agree on the fact that the prejudices of scholars too heavily influence the representation, which should be soothed and universally inclusive, we develop freely of our, cultural and spiritual Islamic heritage.

Anyway here in Mecca, during our free times, we took our habits in the huge shopping center, topped by a luxury condominium over a hundred floors high, newly built just in front of Mecca; an enormous building among the highest in the world, dominated by a clock of a garish taste only a few of us really appreciated. But this is probably a sign of a mandatory modernization, against which we can do nothing. Some of us escape as much as possible these crowded spaces to meditate facing the Ka'aba. We try hard to always pray together, usually at the rear of the Grand Mosque and on the second floor; since the *mutawwa* - religious police - strictly forbid, and sometimes violently, to the men and women to pray together. This is a *bid'ah* - an innovation in Islam - against which our group tries several times to resist: we try to pray the sunset prayer over the central courtyard facing the Ka'aba, men and women in our group all mixed. Unfortunately, we were driven out and some have even been pushed aggressively by the conservatives who have no respect for human dignity. Indeed, the religious police deploy incredible energies to impose its sectarian and dogmatic patriarchy at the heart of the Islamic holy of holies. It seems thought that some form of violence is now authorized to maintain strict gender segregation, that still a few years - those who already came on pilgrimage to Mecca told us - had never been applied in Mecca.

Conservatives' violence does not forbid us to stay there sometimes for hours, rocked by this tremendously positive magnetism from the Ka'aba, thanks to millennia of worship and prayer invoked by generations of men and women of goodwill; we will spend six extraordinary days here in Mecca. Not far from the center of the city, we will also visit the Hira cave on *djabal Noor* - "Mount of Light" - where the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used to isolate himself from the bustling city to meditate. This is where our beloved Prophet ﷺ received the 17 of Ramadan 611 AD the first Qur'anic revelation that leads him to direct, from that time and for over twenty years, these human brothers and sisters to knowledge:

أَفْرَأُ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ  
خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ  
أَفْرَأُ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ  
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ  
عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ



“Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth, Createth man from a clot. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not.” (Qur’an: 96.1-5).



*HIRA cave on MOUNT NOOR ([click here for a 3D tour](#))<sup>20</sup>*

In Mecca either, Amina Wadud was invited even before we left by family and friends of the famous Saudi feminist: Dr. Ajwad Hatoun al-Fassi. The father of Dr. Hatoun, Sheik al-Fassi, is one of the foremost masters of Saudi Arabian Sufism; his family was persecuted for years by the totalitarian regime of the Wahhabis. Amina, on his return, will share with us very warm story of these two days she spent in company of Saudi intellectuals who who still believe that a better, enlightened future, far from the macho and patriarchal myths and superstitions, will ever be possible for Saudi Arabia and all Muslims.



*Cheikh al-Fassi & Amina Wadud in Mecca during our Pilgrimage (left picture); Hatoun al-Fassi & Amina Wadudf at a Stanford university conference (right picture).*

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.3dmekanlar.com/en/mount-hira.html>



Moreover, a member of our group, Mustapha, decided shortly before we left to dedicate a second 'Umra pilgrimage to his late mother, may God welcome her soul in His infinite mercy. We follow him until the miqat for people of Mecca; it is the beautiful mosque of 'Aisha, the favorite wives of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The corbels interiors are beautifully decorated of finely carved precious woods.



34

*'Aisha mosque ([click here for the 3D tour](#))*<sup>21</sup>

After our ablutions, we pray there before we return to Mecca where we arrive once again just in time for the sunset prayer. Mustapha accomplishes once again the rites for this 'Umrah to his mother: seven convolutions around the Ka'ba, the salute to the black stone, the prayer behind the mausoleum of Abraham, the running between Safa and Marwa, the visit to the waters of Zamzam. Then the next day, on the 18 June - 28 Radjab 1433 Hejira -, after performing *tawaf al-wada'* - "the convolutions of the farewell to the Ka'aba" - we leave Mecca by the Jeddah International Airport, located less than fifty kilometers away, by the flight of 7am for Paris. Once at the airport Charles De Gaulle, most of us separate, the feeling of having experienced a mystical, human experience, beyond our most positive expectations. Amina Wadud will be leaving the next day to return home to San Francisco, California. Some of us share thereafter the fact that they now carry in their heart, when they pray at home facing the Kaaba, the vision of warm brotherly love lavished on each other by all members of the first 'Umrah of Tawheed.

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.3dmekanlar.com/en/masjid-al-aisha.html>







Thanks to Amina Wadud and the [INIMUslim](#) networking program towards inclusive Muslims



Texts by Amina Wadud & L.Zahed  
Pictures taken by Mustapha & L.Zahed  
E-mail: [islam.inclusive.2012@gmail.com](mailto:islam.inclusive.2012@gmail.com)

