

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

THE SEVEN CIRCUITS OF THE KA'ABA

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Those Muslims that have experienced Hajj and Umrah will no doubt have noted (especially during Hajj) the severe congestion whilst performing their anti-clockwise circuits around the Ka'aba (circumambulation). The congestion usually gets more intense the closer one moves towards the Ka'aba. Due to the fear of being crushed, suffocated or even injured, the most vulnerable members of society which often include the weak, elderly, disabled and families with small children are often forced away from the congestion. Sadly, this causes them to end up making the longest circuits as they circumambulate from the extreme peripheries of the sacred mosque whilst the strongest and most able, force themselves towards the centre and end up making the shortest circuits.

The distance covered between the two extremities between the shortest and the longest circuits can be quite considerable.

Muslims believe that **seven ritualised circuits** must be completed and this has become enshrined in Muslim practice.

However, the most sacred text of the Muslims, the Quran, makes absolutely **no mention of any particular number of circuits**. Instead, the Quran instructs believers as part of the original call made by Prophet Abraham (22:27) at the sacred house (bil-bayti-l-atiqi) to make circuits without prescribing a number to it and with the sole intention of worshipping and remembering God.

022:029

"Then let them accomplish their prescribed duties, and let them fulfil their vows and let them go round (Arabic: yatawwafu - circumambulate) the Ancient House (Arabic: bil-bayti-l-atiqi)"

022.031

"Being true / upright in faith to God, and never assigning partners to Him: if anyone assigns partners

to God, is as if he had fallen from sky and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had thrown him into a far-distant place"

Note: The same Arabic verb (form V) 'yatawwafa' is incidentally also used for the circumambulation of Safa and Marwa (2:158) where again no number is prescribed.

002.158

"Indeed! **Safa and Marwa** are among the Symbols of God. So whoever performs Hajj of the house or performs Umrah it is no blame on him that he **circumambulates (Arabic: Tawaafa)** both of them (**Arabic: Bihima**). And whoever performs his own impulse to good, then indeed God is He Who is All-Appreciative and All-Knowing"

WHERE DOES THE INFORMATION WITH REGARDS THE NUMBER OF CIRCUITS REQUIRED COME FROM?

Islamic secondary sources

Islamic secondary sources are not contemporaneous sources to the Quran. Though they claim to capture the sayings and practices of the Prophetic and early caliphate era, they have been canonised much later. These narrations have been purportedly passed down orally through successive generations sometimes over centuries removed from the time of the Prophet. Whether these sayings have been faithfully captured is a judgment dependant on the trust one places on the veracity of these sources.

Whether the number of circuits was a practice that originated from the Pagans of Arabia, one instituted as part of monotheistic faith by the Prophet or indeed, a practice that was introduced after the demise of the Prophet (later Sunnah) and later given credence by Islamic secondary sources is difficult to conclude.

It suffices to say however, the most contemporaneous record of the Prophet's ministry, the Quran, makes absolutely no mention of a number, neither does it prescribe the number of circuits to be made around the Ka'aba.

However, we do note 7 circuits in quite a different capacity from earlier scriptures, that of the Old Testament.

Joshua Chapter 6

- 1 Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.-- {S}
- 2 And the LORD said unto Joshua: 'See, I have given into thy hand Jericho, and the king thereof, even the mighty men of valour.
- 3 And ye shall compass the city, all the men of war, going about the city once. Thus shalt

thou do six days.

4 And **seven** priests shall bear **seven** rams' horns before the ark; and the **seventh day** ye shall compass the city **seven times**, and the priests shall blow with the horns.

15 And it came to pass on the **seventh day**, that they rose early at the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner **seven times**; only on that day they compassed the city **seven times**.

16 And it came to pass at the **seventh time**, when the priests blew with the horns, that Joshua said unto the people: 'Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

In fact, the number 'seven' appears quite frequently in the Bible and is one of the most significant numbers to appear.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Quran assigns no particular numbers to the amount of times one circuits the Ka'aba. Rather, the intent of such a practice has been emphasized as an act of worship and a remembrance of God.

002:125

"And when We made the House a place of return / resort for mankind and sanctuary, (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). And We imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ishmael, (saying): **Purify My house for those who go around / make the circuit (circumambulate) and those who meditate in it and those who bow down and prostrate themselves (in worship)**"

022:026

"And when We assigned to Abraham the place / site of the House (saying): **Do not associate anything with Me, and purify My House for those who make the circuit (circumambulate) and those who stand and those who bow and make prostration**"

As with many practices and rituals, many worshippers get unnecessarily focused with numbers and details for which the Quran gives no warrant. In this way, often the true spirit of the act is compromised by the automation of the ritual and attention to unwarranted details.

The purpose and one's true intent of the circuit of the Ka'aba is far more important than any number. An elderly who may only be able to complete one circuit with complete devotion is possibly far better than a youth who selfishly ploughs through a crowd of pilgrims with little or no regard for those around and with little self reflection.

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REFERENCES

[1] A Hebrew - English Bible, According to the Masoretic Text and the JPS 1917 Edition, [online] <http://www.mechonmamre.org/p/pt/pt0606.htm> [Accessed 5th August 2011]

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