

## Journeys Within the Journey

### *A Muslim Traveller's Chronicle of Earthly Paths and Eternal Signs*

This section collects my travel journals—stories, reflections, and lessons from journeys across the world and within the heart.

We are all travellers on this transient earth, each step bringing us closer to our eternal home. Along this greater journey, we are blessed with smaller voyages; these micro journeys that collectively become our life's story. The world has undeniably become more accessible through globalization and modern travel conveniences. How effortless travel feels today compared to the arduous journeys of Ibn Batuta and Ibn Jubayr, whose travelogues I have studied with deep admiration. Their paths were fraught with uncertainties and dangers we can scarcely imagine, while we set forth armed with reviews, vlogs, and abundant information about our destinations. Yet travel remains essential not just for exploration, but for expansion of the heart. As one poem reminds us:

#### Travel, or Your Heart Will Stagnate

Travel, or your heart may harden,  
Like stone untouched by *zamzam's* grace,  
And you'll whisper, foolishly certain,  
That your skin holds the only face

Worthy of dawn's first light,  
That your tongue shapes the truest word,  
Forgetting Allah made all colours bright,  
And every language's cry heard.

Travel—  
Or your mind will wither, weak and thin,  
Fed only by screens and invented foes,  
While the *umma's* threads unravel within,  
And fear, like Shaytan, endlessly grows.

Travel,  
For it teaches you to greet with *salam*  
Every soul, no matter their rising sun—  
The vendor, the orphan, the lost, the calm—

Each one a trust from the Rabb of everyone.

Travel,  
Travel schools the heart in seeing  
What maps can never show:  
That every stranger bears His mark,  
And mercy makes all pathways glow.

This truth has guided me, that every journey is an opportunity to shed assumptions and rediscover our shared humanity.

For many years now (with the exception of the Covid period), I have been blessed to visit approximately ten countries annually. My passion for travel began early. My first international trip was at age six in 1980 when my father took me to India to visit our ancestral village. There I met my paternal grandparents, and remarkably, both my great paternal grandmother and great maternal grandfather. That formative experience likely planted the seed for my lifelong wanderlust.

My subsequent travels included Edinburgh for Tarawih prayers in 1991, followed by studies at Madrasa Falahe Darain in Tadkeshwar, India in 1992. Many Ramadan journeys followed, and after graduating in early 1997, I spent three years traveling for studies in South Africa, Syria, and India. Then my eight years in California opened opportunities to explore throughout the United States.

I suspect this love of travel is part of my inheritance from my beloved father. Though family responsibilities limited his journeys, he documented his travels beautifully in Gujarati, publishing them in the Vohra Samachar magazine. Whatever the roots of this passion, I remain endlessly fascinated by travel and profoundly grateful to Allah for granting me these opportunities.

Many have asked about my travels over the years. I previously wrote accounts of journeys to Norway, the Balkans, and Danube countries, though these remained unpublished. My 2012 trip to Mauritania and Senegal resulted in a vlog that has proven unexpectedly valuable to those seeking information about scholarship in those lands. This positive response, along with encouragement from friends who said they could experience these places through my words, inspired me to finally share my travel writings.

*Alhamdulillah*, through Allah's mercy I have visited many lands that once existed only in my imagination from books, both in Muslim and non-Muslim regions. There is an indescribable joy in finally witnessing in reality what one has long read about. My travels have served various purposes—religious invitations, lecture tours,

business, and personal exploration—often blending these objectives. My deepest gratitude goes first to Allah, then to my generous hosts, and the many acquaintances who facilitated these journeys.

These travelogues serve multiple purposes. They allow me to research the places I have visited and their notable figures. Like the accounts of scholars past and present, they create historical records of people and places that may benefit future generations. But beyond records, these journeys leave their mark on the traveller's heart:

### How Travel Changes Us

Each journey kneads the soul like dough—  
Not by miles, but by the weight  
Of all you thought you knew  
Meeting what you've yet to learn.

The mosques stand firm in foreign stone,  
Their *mihrrabs* facing the same *qibla*;  
The tongues may shape their words anew,  
But the *tasbeih* beads still whisper  
The Names they've always known.

You set out to map the world,  
Until you found it mapping you—  
Counting your patience at delayed borders,  
Your awe in unfamiliar dawns,  
Your *salam* to strangers who felt like kin.

Allah does not change a people  
Until they change what's in themselves.  
And sometimes, the change begins  
Where the road bends toward His mercy,  
And you kneel on a mat you've never seen,  
Homesick for a Home you've always known.

Beyond typical tourist sites, I particularly document mosques and the worshippers they serve—always seeking to understand the local Muslim communities, their scholars, and their circumstances and challenges. These insights have proven invaluable in my work, helping me communicate more effectively with diverse audiences across the world.

Having travelled extensively for decades, many of these accounts are written years

after the actual journeys, based on contemporaneous notes and recollections. I typically note the writing date at the end so readers understand the time elapsed. Accuracy matters greatly to me—I try to verify details meticulously, especially for older travels. I consult locals from visited countries and travel companions to review my accounts, correct errors, and provide updates.

Out of respect for privacy, I do not always name those I have encountered unless certain they would not mind or when there's clear benefit in doing so. These are not exhaustive records of every person met or action taken; only what seems most noteworthy or beneficial to share. I sincerely apologize for any inadvertent factual errors that may remain despite my verification efforts.

There is a particular magic in travel; how it heightens our senses, making even small details shimmer with significance. Like many travellers, I have often described my journeys in almost reverent terms. Yet with frequent travel comes a paradox: the extraordinary gradually becomes ordinary. I became acutely aware of this when noticing how new travellers marvelled at sights I had begun to overlook—sunsets I barely glanced at, alleyways I hurried past. It made me wonder: how many wonders had I missed through familiarity? Yet travel continues to offer its quiet revelations, much like these words express:

### **The Sacred Road**

Every time you leave home,  
Another path unfolds—  
a map Allah wrote before your name was known.

When you travel, you meet yourself  
As a stranger too—  
Your soul laid bare like Fajr light,  
Your habits foreign in this air.  
Watch how the self you packed so carefully  
Unfurls unexpectedly

O traveller, make your journey *'ibada*:  
Bless your departure with *Bismillah*,  
Your arrivals with *Alhamdulillah*.  
For every road is Sunna—  
Ibrahim's exile, Musa's flight,  
The Prophet's ﷺ night journey  
Teaching us: movement is worship  
When the heart travels toward Him.

Return as the moon returns:  
Wider-eyed, lighter,  
Carrying fragments of the world's soul  
To mend the unseen cracks in your own.  
Until the final journey comes—  
And may your path till then be  
A thousand blessed crossroads,  
Each step a *sajda*,  
Each horizon whispering *Rabbishrahli sadri...*

These lines capture what I strive to remember—that each journey, no matter how routine, holds potential to startle us awake.

In sharing these accounts, I hope to preserve not just places and experiences, but the lessons they have taught me. May these travelogues serve as both record and inspiration, and may all praise be to Allah who makes such journeys possible.

#### A Traveller's Prayer

May your road rise with Allah's ease,  
May His winds whisper peace at your back.  
May His sun warm you like a Makkan dawn,  
May His rains bless you like Zamzam's grace.

And until we meet again,  
May the Most Merciful cradle you  
In the shade of His endless mercy.  
*Amin.*

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17 June 2025 | 11 Dhu 'l-Hijja 1446

#### The Return

No traveller truly comes back the same.  
We return as rain returns to earth—  
Changed,  
Carrying the scent of other skies,  
Until home itself remembers:  
We are both pilgrim and story now.

*Alhamdulillah* for the leaving,

*Alhamdulillah* for the return,  
*Alhamdulillah* for the One  
Who wrote all our journeys  
Before we took a single step.