**The Semiotics of the Mosque – Friday Prayers and the Ka’abah in Islam**

Communal prayers in the mosque are held on Fridays, the holy day of the week in Islam, although there is no prohibition to work on this day as in Judaism. Men are obliged to take part in these prayers, which generally require a quorum of forty males. The prayers are held anywhere in the great Al-Jum’ah Mosque. There is no fundamental difference between communal prayers and regular personal prayers, the main distinction being the addition of two communal *rak’ats*, as well as the need to listen to the sermon prior to them. The communal prayer is led by the *Imam* or prayer leader (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1984, p. 96). He stands in front of the *mihrab* and his body movements are a silent signal to the entire congregation behind him to follow his lead. The great mosques were built crosswise so that the broad rows of people praying there would be able to see the *Imam*. In later mosques, which were not built in the form of a simple rectangle, they built a specially elevated position for the deputy *Imam*, who is clearly visible from a distance to all those praying, and he would convey to them the movements of the head *Imam*. The preacher or *Khatib* delivers the double sermon prior to the Friday prayers and does so while standing on the steps of the *minbar* or pulpit (according to the custom – he leans on a bow, sword or cane), and he then returns to his seat in the interval between the two sermons. Blessings to Allah, the Prophet, the rulers, and believers take pride of place in the sermon, accompanied by quotes from the *Qur’an* according to a set formula. On occasions it also includes a discussion on current affairs, and this often develops into religious, political incitement (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1984, p. 96).

In medieval times, omission of the name of the *Khatib* or the ruler from the Friday sermon was one of the most prevalent ways of declaring disloyalty to them. The sermon is mainly delivered in rhymed prose, and it is replete with encouragement for the believers to adhere to the religious commandments alongside vivid descriptions of the terrible repercussions of Judgment Day in order to urge the sinners to repent. It was customary to compile the most famous sermons in a book, and some of these books have been widely published (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1984, pp. 96–97).

Every year the *Hajj* brings millions of Muslims from all over the world to the holy sites in Mecca – the city where the Prophet Muhammad was born and where he experienced his first revelations. The order of rites and ceremonies conducted during the pilgrimage – known as “*Manasik*” – was prescribed by the Prophet himself. In these ritual actions, the Muslims in effect retrace the steps of Muhammad. He took part in his first and only *Hajj* in 630 CE, shortly prior to his death. It is noteworthy that according to tradition, Adam himself performed the rite of *Tawaf*, encircling the *Ka'abah* seven times, and touched its four corners as the rules mandate, which signifies the holiness of the *Ka’abah* since the time of Adam. None of the generations since Adam have ever failed to visit the *Ka’abah* (Rubin, 2019, pp. 179–180).

It is no coincidence that Al-Hajjaj climbed up to the *minbar* and delivered his speech during the Friday sermon, as this sermon was the central media platform in his day. Just as the preacher encourages the believers to perform the commandments by his graphic descriptions of the harrowing events of Judgment Day to spur the sinners to repent, thus too, Al-Hajjaj persuades the rebellious residents of Kufa to obey the authorities with vivid descriptions of the disastrous consequences of rebelling against them, while relying on the rhetoric of intimidation and deterrence, with a view to urging them to atone and see the error of their ways, as should they continue with their rebellious behavior during Al-Hajjaj’s rule, they would be cruelly tortured and mercilessly put to death.

**How is Al-Hajjaj’s attitude to the holy religious symbols of Islam portrayed?**