

Zamzam water: Healing and Spiritual Experiences for Muslim Pilgrims

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Abstract

Muslim believes that Zamzam water has special healing power because of its special properties. Drinking Zamzam water is a part of Hajj and Umrah rituals. The study will deal with the relation between Zamzam water and healing as it is presented and explained in the Islamic teachings.

Zamzam is a well in Mecca that has been providing water to pilgrims for thousands of years now. Over the last 4000 years, Millions of Muslims have performed Hajj and Umrah and sought the blessing of Zamzam water which has never ceased to flow ever since. The Qur'an has declared 'and we have made of water everything living, will they not then believe' Q21:30. Zamzam is an immortal, non-recurrent miracle, and hundreds of millions of Muslims have used this blessed water through the ages. Because of its religious nature, Zamzam possesses an unmatched identity and it stands out as holy and sacred in the eyes of Muslims all over the Islamic World.

This paper introduces the Islamic approach to life following the Islamic life and thoughts. The study then investigates the scientific facts of Zamzam water and the benefits of drinking its water by pilgrims visiting Mecca. Finally, the paper will discuss what makes Zamzam water special and different from any other kind of water. The study holds it has been proved medically and chemically that the water of Zamzam contains elements that are valuable for organs in the body such as the stomach, liver, intestines and kidneys.

Key Words: Prophet Muhammad, religious tourism, pilgrims, sacred, corporal, Zamzam, Hajj, Umrah.

Introduction

People almost always seek comfort, tranquility, cure of all diseases apparently because of their love of life. Narrated Anas bin Malik: Allah's Messenger said,

"The son of Adam (i.e. man) grows old and so also two (desires) grow old with him, i.e., love for wealth and (a wish for) a long life." (Al-Bukhari, 2003).

People take the pain of going to the furthest place on earth to fulfill their quest for life or search for remedies. Religious tourism is often related to the quest for tranquility and comfort. Amir Abdullah et al. (2020) hold tranquility reflects Islamic tourism as it renders and maintains joyful and entertaining activities. Besides, religious tourism offers both worldly and heavenly pleasure by relating the beauty of nature to the Creator. Religious tourism helps overcome stress, pressure of everyday life routine. It provides a space where humans wonder, meditate, relax, and activate their self-realization. Love for better life, free of sickness and ailment add to the legitimate motives of religious tourism. Here comes the Zamzam episode. The paper attempts to identify the healing properties of zamzam water and investigate the claims that the consumption of Zamzam water works as natural health medicine.

Millions of Muslims visit Mecca to perform Hajj during Hajj time, however, they can perform Umrah all the year round. Visitors keep drinking Zamzam water for its holy and healing power during their visit and even carry it back home. The theme of sacredness and holiness relates to the nature of man since Prophet Adam (PBUH). Seeking the sacred, the immortal, the metaphysical, the soul nourishment, the healing power, the elixir of life, are some of the driving forces beyond pilgrimage and this has always been the case throughout the history of mankind and religions.

Religions and Tourism

Pilgrimage destinations are numerous, spread across the globe, and are identified with various beliefs. Jafari (2000: 498) has the following to add: "Religious tourism most often appears in three forms: as a pilgrimage, a continuous group and individual visit to religious shrines; as large-scale gatherings on the occasion of significant religious dates and anniversaries; and as tours of and visits to important religious places and buildings within the framework of a tourist itinerary, regardless of the time of the tour."

The most famous Christian pilgrimage destinations in the world are Rome, Lourdes, Compostela, Loretto, Fatima, Einsiedeln, Medjugorje, Czestochowa, Guadeloupe, and many others, as a matter of course. The most famous for Muslims are Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. As that for Buddhists and Hindus they are Varanasi

(Benares), Allahabad, Lumbina, Leshan and Mandalay; Lhasa for believers in Tibetan Buddhism. al-Quds city (Jerusalem) has the holy sites of all faiths and remains the one pilgrimage destination for the followers of three religions Christians, Jews and Muslims.

Humans have almost experienced certain kinds of religious journeys in their constant endeavor to look for the sacred and achieve this always sought peaceful state of mind and soul. Jafari (2000) states that there is some kind of connection between the religions and tourism and that connection can be seen in pilgrimages, the religiously motivated journeys which have been an important part of most religions.

Cousineau (1998) pictures the pilgrim as a curious soul who walks beyond known boundaries, crosses fields, and touches the earth with a destination in mind and a purpose in heart. Cousineau confirms the idea of finding the sacred when he claims that any traveler can transform any journey into pilgrimage with a kind of commitment to finding something sacred along the road. This sacred can take different forms and shapes, it can be rivers, running waters, hot springs, mountains, hills, forests, etc.

It is human to look for the sacred upon disembarkation on religious journeys; it has always been, and it will always be the case. Themes such as emigration and exploration of the earth have been dealt with in both Qur'an and Islamic traditions.

(O Mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made people and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is Knowing and Acquainted.) (Q 49:13).

(It is He who made the earth tame for you – so walk among its slopes and eat of His provision – and to Him is the Resurrection.) (Q67:15).

(Was not the earth of God spacious enough for you to emigrate therein?) (Q4:97).

It is apparent that the word 'emigration' in the following hadith entails some forms of a journey, and we can safely say it is a form of religious tourism. The theme of intention as it is explained below has something to do with Zamzam water as it is always taken with certain intentions in mind as it will be discussed below.

On the authority of Omar bin Al-Khattab said: I heard the Messenger of God, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, saying:

Actions are judged by intentions. So each person will be held accountable for what he has intended. Whoever emigrated for God and His Messenger, then his emigration is for God and His Messenger. And whoever emigrates for some worldly interest he might get or a woman to marry, his emigration is for what he has emigrated for, (Al-Bukhari, 2003).

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said three supplications, of which there is no doubt: The supplication of the oppressed and the supplication of the traveler and the supplication of the father for his child. (Tirmidhi)

The previous hadith is closely related to religious tourism as it introduces its motives and incentives; the consistent planned and constant movement of man on earth and how it echoes the steady movement of the universe with all of what Allah has created.

And it is He who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon; all [heavenly bodies] in an orbit are swimming. Q21:33.

The River of Jordan passes through the land and history of the Bible, which gives its water a spiritual importance that distinguishes it from other rivers. This is important for Christians because John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the waters of the Jordan River, (Peppard, C.Z.,2013). It is less than 10 meters (30 feet) wide and about 2 meters (6 feet) deep. However, this cane-lined water is flooded with spiritual importance that makes it a valuable resource. At present, about half a million visitors a year, mostly Christian pilgrims, flock to competing baptism sites on the opposite banks of the river a few miles north of the Dead Sea - one side in the occupied West Bank, the other in Jordan, (Bader, M., 2012). It is interesting here to mention that the famous Lebanese singer, Fairuz, has sung for the River of Jordan in her famous song, the City of Prayer, in which she sings: O River of Jordan, wash my face with your Holy water!

Methodology

Bernard (2006) presented the comprehensive research approach, and the study follows this ethnographic approach to gain a better and deeper understanding of the healing properties of Zamzam water as a natural health medicine. The authors used this ethnographic method in conducting a literature review by searching

related materials presented in books, magazines, newspaper articles, online magazines, and the Internet. This process was necessary to develop awareness of the current state of knowledge on the topic and how the proposed research would add to what is already known (Gill & Johnson, 2002).

This approach responds to Veal's (2006) suggestions on how to apply theoretical knowledge to primary research. It was important for the researcher that the chosen field of research be contemporary to ensure sound results that could be referenced in future research. For the sake of correctness, the selected Qur'anic verses lend themselves to a straightforward exegesis that hardly offers different interpretations. Moreover, the mentioned Islamic teachings are from the most authentic hadith books and are the most popular among Muslim scholars.

Origin of Zamzam

During the Hajj season Muslims follow the Islamic rituals by fulfilling one of its components which is drinking the water of Zamzam and supplicates Allah to grant them whatever they need for this life and the hereafter. When Zamzam water is mentioned Muslims immediately think of Prophets Ibrahim, Ismail and Muhammad, as well as Ismail's mother Hajar. The Holy Qur'an (Q3:96-97 and Q14:37) has pointed at the sacredness of the Holy Shrine in Mecca and its surroundings which has Zamzam well as a part of it, as a matter of fact. It is obvious that Zamzam water was implied in Prophet Ibrahim prayer when he left Hajar and Ismail at a deserted place in Mecca.

(Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Makkah - blessed and a guidance for the worlds. In it are clear signs [such as] the standing place of Abraham. And whoever enters it shall be safe. And [due] to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House - for whoever is able to find thereto a way. But whoever disbelieves - then indeed, Allah is free from need of the worlds.) (Q3:96-97)

(Our Lord! I have settled a part of my offspring in an uncultivable valley by Your Sacred House. Our Lord! May they keep up the prayer. Make the hearts of some people incline towards them and provide them with crops; so that they may be grateful.) (Q14:37).

It goes without saying that Zamzam water is related in the first place with the annual Muslim pilgrimage as drinking its water is part of the pilgrimage rituals. The same rituals apply as well to the recurrent Muslim visits to Mecca on their Umrah that can be undertaken at any time of the year. In the same connection, Emoto (2005) states that the quality/purity of Zamzam water will not be found anywhere else in the water on this earth.

According to Saudi Geological Survey, 2021 and as stated by Arab historians, the Zamzam well, except for a few periods when it became dry or buried under the sand, has been in use for nearly 4000 years. The well marks the location of a spring that was miraculously gushed from the uninhabited and abandoned valley (non-permanent stream) where the Prophet Ibrahim, under the command of God, had left his wife, Hajar, and their young son Ismail.

(O our Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy sacred House, our Lord! That they may keep up prayer; therefore, make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful.) (Q14:37)

Armstrong (2006:29) explains that Zamzam has made life possible for the Bedouin of that time as their life revolved around sources of water in such a barren, deserted regions in the Arabian Peninsula. Bedouin of that time considered Zamzam a holy source of life long before the development of a city in Mecca. Pilgrims from all over the Arabian Peninsula used to visit Mecca to perform Hajj and Zamzam made their pilgrimage more pleasant, as a matter of fact. During the fifth and sixth centuries, Zamzam and the Holy shrine were controlled by a succession of different nomadic tribes: Jurham, Khuza'ah, and finally in the early sixth century by the Quraysh, Muhammad's tribe, (ibid:29).

Nauman et al. (2014:662) contend that "brief anecdotes that mention Zamzam are described in holy books of various religions, including the Tawrah (Old Testament/Torah), the Bible, and the Qur'an." When Prophet Ibrahim left his wife Hajar and baby Ismail in a forsaken place in the desert near Mecca he asked God to help, protect, and provide them with sustenance. Hence was Zamzam well which had miraculously been gushed in the desert as a result of Prophet Ibrahim's supplication. Prophet Ibrahim looked at the Holy Shrine (Kaaba) then said those words which had been mentioned in Q14:37 below:

(Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful.) (Q14:37)

Ibn Abbas said: the Prophet said when Hajr reached Al-Marwa (for the last time) she heard a voice and she asked herself to be quiet and listened attentively. She heard the voice again and said, 'O, (Whoever you may be)! You have made me hear your voice; have you got something to help me?' And behold! She saw an angel at the place of Zamzam, digging the earth with his heel (or his wing) till water flowed from that place, (Al-Bukhari, 2003).

Among the interesting related topics to Zamzam are its names, Ibrahim (1996:05) holds that "Many names have been given to the water of Zamzam: among them are Zamzam, Zumazim, Shuba'a, Hazmat al-Malik and Rakdat Jibril." He adds more names like, "the Sealed, That Which is Clung to, the Watering, the Quenching, the Impulse of Jibril, the Kick of Jibril, the Repletion, the Healer of Sickness, the Satisfier of Hunger, and the Well of Abd al-Muttalib."

One of the names and descriptions of the Well of Zamzam with the Arabs is 'the inexhaustible'. The meaning of inexhaustible: (never-ending), meaning: (its water is not run out by excessive consumption).

Zamzam was, has been and still is - one of the greatest blessings that God Almighty gave to his Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) in response to his prayers (Q14:37) which made this blessed water a primary reason for the architecture of Mecca. The emergence of life in Mecca and its prosperity over the years had relied in the first place on Zamzam well. The architecture of the Sacred House lies at the core of Mecca's prosperity. The ensuing coming of people from every deep rudiment to witness benefits for them in this world and the hereafter is a proof of God's response to Ibrahim's supplication:

(Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful.) (Q14:37)

Virtues and Benefits of Zamzam Water

There is always a great wisdom behind God's creation. Nothing is left to chance in this universe. There is always a hidden insight.

(Surely We have created everything according to a measure.) (Q54:49)

Zamzam is the first block in building the sacred land; rather, it is the first means to achieve this building, and to attract people to this blessed place. Bekdash (2008) states that the beholder in the Well of Zamzam finds that the level of water in it does not change, as it is on one level, it does not diminish or increase, no matter how much was taken from it. It does not spring so much that it flows on the face of the earth, and it does not decrease so that nothing remains of it.

One of the greatest benefits witnessed by pilgrims in the Holy Shrine: the benefit of Zamzam water, where they drink its water and obtain its blessings. Muslim believe as mentioned earlier that Allah will respond to their supplications when they drink Zamzam water.

Zamzam water is a miracle in its blessing, goodliness, advantages, its immortality, its constant gushing and flowing. Millions of Muslims in Mecca and the neighboring have benefited from its water, in addition to, millions of pilgrims every year in the annual pilgrimage and Umrah. Therefore, Zamzam is not merely a well from which water emanates, but rather a true story of faith for those who are confident of the mercy of their Lord.

There are hadiths which indicate that Zamzam water is noble and blessed. The Prophet said about Zamzam water: "Indeed it is blessed, and that like food, it fills and a cure for illness." (Muslim).

So this hadith proves Zamzam virtues that it is a filling food, a cure for illness, and that it is blessed. Both Bukhari and Muslim confirm that the Prophet drank of Zamzam water, and said, it is blessed (water); it is food for the hungry, and a healing for the sick.

The Prophet said, the water of Zamzam is (good) for whatever it is intended. (Ibn Majah).

Ibn Abbas reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said, the water of Zamzam is good for whatever one intends (while drinking it). If you drink it seeking healing, Allah will give you healing. If you drink it to satisfy your hunger, Allah will satisfy your hunger. If you drink it to quench your thirst, Allah will quench your thirst.

Zamzam is a well dug by the angel Gabriel by which Allah quenched the thirst of Ismail. This was reported by Al-Daraqutni who added, and if you drink it seeking refuge with Allah, Allah will give you refuge. (Al-Daraqutni).

The Prophet said: "The best water on the face of the earth is the water of Zamzam; it is a kind of food and a healing from sickness." (Muslim).

Ibn al-Qayyim (1998: 4/319-320) said: I and others tried seeking healing with Zamzam water and saw wondrous things. I sought healing with it from a number of illnesses, and I was healed by the permission of Allah. I saw someone who nourished himself with it for a number of days, half a month or more, and he did not feel hunger; he performed Tawaaf along with the other people just as they did.

Nauman et al. (2014:671) state that Zamzam is unique in its normal characteristics because it is "hard carbonated type water" in nature. It has been proven that there is no microbial growth in the water from Zamzam well. They confirmed (ibid: 671) that "Zamzam water provides a defense against several diseases, such as congenital contracts, nephrogenic problems, and diabetes. Such phenomenon was confirmed through various techniques including radioimmunoassay (a test procedure to measure the minute quantities of a substance), nanotechnology, crystalline electro-microscopy, specific refractive index, number single oscillator, and optical parameters assay."

Electrical Characteristics

Zidan Hamdi et al. have presented the following research in the 16th Scientific Symposium for Hajj, Umrah & Madinah Visit – Scientific Portal for 1437 AH.

Electrical characteristics of Zamzam water were studied experimentally in the Electrical Power laboratory of College of Engineering, AlJouf University, Saudi Arabia, and the results can be concluded as:

- Experimental results show that Zamzam water has conductivity greater than that found in marketing samples.
- A sample of Holy Zamzam water from Haram Mosque has high conductivity than Zamzam bottled water in markets.
- For any other sample of water, if we found its voltage current (V-I) characteristics, if its curve is close to Zamzam water, it means that water is drinkable. Also, if the curve is too far away from Zamzam water curve, this means that water is undrinkable.

Effect on Diseases

Muslims almost always observe the specialty and sacredness of Zamzam water in their pilgrimage and Umrah rituals. The uniqueness of the characteristics of Zamzam water has always given this pride over any other kind of water throughout history. We Muslim always go on this holy journey to Mecca and experience this sacredness ourselves. I have personally observed and experienced that in my pilgrimage and Umrah journeys and so have many Muslims. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the effect of Zamzam water on certain diseases, such as cancer, dental caries, (Nauman et al. and Al-Zuhair et al. 2006). Nauman et al. conclude that "Studies involving human, plant, and animal research have shown great potential benefits from Zamzam in fighting various human ailments and developed cancerous growth. The review confirms the balanced mineral and nutritional composition of Zamzam water."

For the sake of completeness, Muslims believe that Allah is the Great Curer. Aisha reported: When the Prophet (PBUH) visited any ailing member of his family, he would touch the sick person with his right hand and would supplicate: O Allah! the Rubb of mankind! Remove this disease and cure (him or her)! You are the Great Curer. There is no cure but through You, which leaves behind no disease. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

Muslims strongly believe that Allah is the Great Curer, and they follow Qur'an guidance and perform Umrah and Haj as shown below in Q2:196, drink Zamzam water as part of hajj rituals, and ask Allah for whatever ails them as recommended in Islamic teachings. When they drink Zamzam water for the sake of healing they know deep at heart that it is the belief in Allah the Curer which matters!

And complete the Hajj and Umrah for Allah, (Q2:196).

Normally Muslim follow the rituals mentioned in Islamic teachings when they perform Umrah, and one of these rituals is drinking Zamzam water and pray to God and ask Him forgiveness and ask Him for anything else worldly or heavenly. I have personally suffered from a chronic disease in 2017, and I decided to go on Umrah,

perform rituals, drink Zamzam water and supplicate that Allah my grant me His cure. I believe in the blessing of Zamzam water and its healing power. As a Muslim I do believe that there is no healing except by Him and no removing of harm except by Him. Thanks to God, I have enjoyed good health ever since! In the same connection, I have come to know about many inspiring episodes which echoes what I personally experienced as mentioned earlier while going through the following website, Islamic Remedies, (2020). The following Qur'anic verses explain how Muslim believe that Allah is the Great Curer and believe at the same time in what Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) informed us about the healing power and blessing of Zamzam water. (Who created me, and He [it is who] guides me. And it is He who feeds me and gives me drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me.) (Q26: 78-80).

Shehadeh, Hussein (2001) mentions "Zamzam's healing effects are well known, and the water is used extensively by Muslims against stomach aches, skin infections and eye ailments. There are even some holy savants in Mecca who use the waters from Zamzam as their only medicine."

Time and again, we have been hearing in mosques, while performing *wudu* ablution in preparation for aggregated prayers, Muslim wish each other they had their ablution in Zamzam: "*men Zamzam*" which means "may you experience having wudu from Zamzam water".

Over and over again, the theme of sacredness and grandeur of Zamzam water has been deeply rooted in the Islamic literature, accompanied and proved by numerous episodes of people getting their prayers answered whether it is for cure, good health, success in life, just to name a few!

Bekdash (2008) holds that there are countless sick people whom God has honored by healing them with the blessing of Zamzam water, from incurable diseases which was way beyond the capabilities and wisdom of physicians and doctors.

Muslims believe and trust that the water of Zamzam fulfills the purpose for which it has been drunk. Muslims always achieve what they want because they are confident of and had deep faith in the saying of the Prophet, "The water of Zamzam fulfils the purpose for which it has been drunk" (Ibn Majah). They are also confident and have deep belief in the Qur'anic verse in which Allah says, ("When my servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.) (Q2:186).

Malti-Douglas (2001) also mentions an anecdote of a lady who has been cured from cancer by drinking the holy water of Zamzam. Malti-Douglas elaborates on the issue of power of belief in God, supplication to Him and accompanying supplications with drinking Zamzam water. She (ibid.:99) mentioned an anecdote of *Leila* who was afflicted by a dangerous illness, a cancer, against which physicians have been powerless. Leila embodied the sacred combination of resorting to the Almighty the Great Curer to seek His mercy and cure, and drinking Zamzam water believing in its healing power. This direct appeal to the ultimate religious authority links God directly to the world of medicine. Leila follows a diet of nothing but some bread, an egg, and water from Zamzam. On the fifth day of her pilgrimage journey, Leila senses a great power pushing her to feel the lumps on her body; however, she ignores this impulse and returns to drinking the water of Zamzam. To cut a long story short, Allah has bestowed His cure on Leila at the end. Drinking is, of course, a corporal activity. However, drinking the holy water of Zamzam is a corporal activity that partakes of the spiritual as well. Thus, the study has explored the realm of the sacred and its relation to the lives of people in all religions with special reference to the Holy water of Zamzam and its consumption by Muslim for the sake of healing.

Conclusion

Zamzam entails miraculous background as it has been flowed for more than 4000 years. There have been various anecdotes that relate healing to the Holy water of Zamzam. Scientific research has proved the excellence of Zamzam water over any other water on earth in terms of balanced mineral consistency, nutritional composition, higher electrical conductivity, power of thwarting cancerous tumors, and curing many other diseases such as nephrogenic problems, stomach aches, skin infections and eye ailments, and diabetes. The paper has attempted to explore the intrigue complexity of interjection of corporality, spirituality and religious tourism. It has related the sacred to the wander, inner peace to religious tourism, healing to miraculous Holy (water). The paper extends a call for further research endeavors to delve more into religious

tourism for the sake of discussing the claims that religious tourism has emerged as one of the most appealing types of tourism.

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