

Sa'i — between Safa and Marwah

Safa to Marwah is one. Marwah back to Safa is two. The seventh ends at Marwah — and it began with a woman looking for water.



Named in the Qur'an

إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ

"Indeed, Safa and Marwah are among the symbols of Allah. So whoever makes hajj to the House or performs 'umrah — there is no blame upon him for walking between them."

Qur'an 2:158

Why the verse reads so

'Urwah read it as leave to skip sa'i. 'A'ishah corrected him: it came for the Ansar, who had entered ihram for an idol and thought sa'i wrong. "He ﷺ made it sunnah; no one may leave it out."

Sahih al-Bukhari 1643

Begin where Allah began

نَبْدَأُ بِمَا بَدَأَ اللَّهُ بِهِ

Leaving the mosque for Safa, Jabir heard him ﷺ say: "We begin with what Allah began with." Safa is the name mentioned first in the verse.

Sunan an-Nasa'i 2969 · sahih

After the tawaf, not before

He ﷺ completed the seven circuits and the two rak'ahs, returned to the Black Stone, and only then went out of the gate towards Safa.

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Hajj · Sahih al-Bukhari 1616

Seven, counted both ways

Ibn 'Umar, asked about a man who had done tawaf but not sa'i: the Messenger of Allah ﷺ circled the House seven times, prayed two rak'ahs, and went between Safa and Marwah seven times.

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Hajj

Where the quick steps are

Jabir: he climbed Safa facing the Ka'bah and praised Allah; walking down, "when his feet came into the bottom of the valley he ran," and when the ground rose he walked again.

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Hajj

The mother who ran it first

Hajar, left with the infant Isma'il where Zamzam now is, climbed Safa to look for anyone, crossed the valley to Marwah, and did it seven times.

Sahih al-Bukhari 3364

"This is why people run"

He ﷺ said of her crossings: this is the origin of people's walking between the two. At Marwah she heard a voice, and found an angel at the place of Zamzam digging until water came.

Sahih al-Bukhari 3364

Pillar, or obligation

The Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools call sa'i a pillar of the rite; the Hanafi calls it wajib, so that omitting it is covered by a sacrifice. The schools differ, and we leave it there.

Fiqh: the four schools differ