

## Square Roots

Sehnsucht.

“The inconsolable longing in the human heart for we know not what; a yearning for a far, familiar, non-earthly land one can identify as one’s home.”

Some Days, you look at the simplest of things, and it reminds you of a home you know not of; but you feel it deep inside, the yearning for the land heard through the countless memories retold. A land at the heart of which lies a gem worth far more than the childlike dream of a thousand juice boxes. Sometimes, when I look at a square, I do not think of the countless cuboids laying flat in my math book, nor the lone rubix cube left unfinished at the back of my wardrobe.

Some days, I imagine the square as 3D. As a physical object hosting layers upon layers, and dozens upon dozens of red bricks. Simplicity is its definition. No meticulous arches, expensive stained glass, or any sign of voluptuously high pillars. Just a plain, old, cuboid draped in pure silk cloth (Kiswah), made heavy by its intricately woven strands of solid gold. Then I look again and see not the gold trimmed embroidered Arabic, remade annually and hand-stitched with 10 months worth of hard labour. I do not see the surrounding buildings, wrought high through the evolution of modern architecture; acting as a fierce shield of which the harsh winds of the modern world dare not approach. Nor do I imagine anything other than what is in front of me. I look beyond all of this and open my eyes to what is really there. Deeply embedded on these threads, I trace back my lineage through these delicate strands of knowledge, life, and hope, and find it; I find my roots in plain sight for all the world to see in this one square block. Only a fool would refrain from looking twice, or even thrice, upon it.

Many say it traces back to the time of Ibrahim (Abraham) however what matters most is that throughout history, this monument's sole purpose has remained intact. That of which is made by the bare hands of the Prophet Ibrahim, and his son, Ismail (Ishmael) from the divine decree of God thousands of years ago, this sacred place is known to be a sanctuary from preislamic times. The Black Stone is said to be the only object remnant left from the original structure, which is located at the eastern corner of the Ka’aba. Here, in the Holy city of Mecca, they gather in the millions, to the House of God in reverence and mutual desire of cleansing the soul and renewal of faith.

History has rooted itself in this one spot, without it, anyone with eyes could see that it would just be a square brick establishment with no significance whatsoever. But then, we wonder, how is this monument any different from the other shrines of worship? This is the house of God, the same place Muslims direct their five times daily prayers. This is the same place the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) walked in the footsteps of the Prophet Abraham, setting the scene for generations of Muslims to do the same for themselves. This is the fulfillment of the prayers of Abraham and his son Ishmael as they raised the bricks bit by bit, all the while supplicating to God “Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us. Indeed! You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower.”

You ask, what's so special about this square block? Its roots. It's special because of the deep confounded nature of its history and the unique type of faith one has towards the actions performed around it. It's considered as the Taonga of humanity (sacred treasure) as the diversity of spirituality in contemporary times can be celebrated and preserved. This mutual understanding and respect is so important in a global society as it is in a human's nature to want peace and harmony all around. I long for just a small glimpse of the experience said to be like no other. I long to see the looming infrastructures, though very reindustrialized, for they are a sign that I am near to the house of God. My sehnsucht for this small square cannot be compared to others, for when it comes to worship, we are all so very greedy and so, when I close my eyes,

so simple, yet so loud. I can almost hear the words:

Labayk Allah humma labbayk--

(Here are I am, O Lord here I am)

At the heart of the Earth, I imagine the surrounding Thassos marble trembling at the spiritual invocations of praise and gratitude. I imagine the countless women and men alike, circumambulating the Ka'aba, separated by their race and culture but still brought together through faith. These words, no, this calling invokes a feeling, a spark of something not quite reachable. Just yet that is. The silent home to 2 billion Muslims worldwide, made for them, and them only.

I will reach this place one day, spiritually sound, or no matter the mood or occasion. Because I know that, with one step into that small slice of paradise, I will truly feel content. Only then will I take a deep breath and whisper, I'm home.